Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Sanford Wilbur
Date of Interview: March 14, 2008
Location of Interview: Portland, Oregon
Interviewer: John Cornely

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 1960-1994

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Student Trainee, Stillwater Refuge (Nevada) and Sacramento Refuge (California), 1960-1962; Assistant Manager, Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge, Idaho, 1963-1964; biologist at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, California; Region 1 Office as coordinator for the Wilderness Act studies, 1965-1968; Regional Refuge Biologist in Region 4 out of Atlanta, 1968-1969; worked in California for California condor research under Patuxent Research Center1970-1981; Chief of the Endangered Species for the western states out of the Region 1 Office in Portland, 1981-1984; District Refuge Supervisor for Oregon, Washington, Idaho, 1984-1994.

Most Important Projects: California Condor research; Wilderness Act evaluations, Endangered Species Act administration

Colleagues and Mentors: Dave (David B.) Marshall, Vern Ekedahl, Bob (Robert G.) Nelson, Ken McDonald, George Wiseman, John Sincock, Winston Banko, Larry Givens, Danny Hayes, Dean Carrier (Forest Service), Lloyd Kiff, Ray Erickson, Roy Tomlinson

Most Important Issues: California condor, Hawaiian birds

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Wilbur talks about various refuges he worked at and shares some interesting stories from his time working at them. He spent time in Hawaii to work on bird issues, and he worked on brochures about the Hawaiian bird problem. He also mentions working with the Wilderness Act, Endangered Species Act, and the California Condor Program. Mr. Wilbur has written several books, *Vulture Biology and Management*, *Birds of Baja California, Nine Feet from Tip to Tip: the California Condor through History,* and *Condor Tales*, and spent several years doing book tours.

SW: As I say Ken McDonald was the type of fellow who came out to refuges on his inspections and he really seemed to care about the people out there as well as the refuge. And he'd come over and chat with the wives and really make you feel like you were part of a family at that time; some of the other folks that came out on inspections, not quite so good. Sally still remembers a certain assistant supervisor at the time who came out to Minidoka when we were there and asked her a question about something and as she started to answer, he walked off and that was the last we saw of him. It was always nice to have Mac come out, and his main assistant at that time and the one who became refuge supervisor after Mac's retirement, Vern Ekedahl was really one of my favorites in the service. He was my direct boss later when I went into the regional office, and he was the kind of person who really did mentor you. And if he thought you were doing good you were rewarded, if he thought you were doing bad he really talked to you about it and tried to figure out ways to do other things. I really, really give an awful lot of credit to George Wiseman and Vern Ekedahl, who has really helped me formulate my career early on.

JC: So how long were you at Minidoka?

SW: I was at Minidoka about a year and a half. I was the first assistant manager at Minidoka. Bob Nelson was the manager there at that time. Bob had been at a couple of refuges before. He worked Ninepipe, up in Montana; seemed like he worked another one before he got there. Anyway Bob was fairly new in the refuge system, his second or third assignment; he'd been at Minidoka about a year, I think, when I got there, and we were kind of learning it together in some ways. Although it was a nineteen thousand acre refuge, it was a reservoir type refuge and mostly Bureau of Reclamation who managed the water levels and such and so we didn't have much we could do so as far as management and such, so we just kind of had a general refuge; had cattle grazing on the. There was a big park right at refuge headquarters, Walcott Park, which was put in by the Civilian Conservation Corps. And it was a true oasis out in the Snake River Desert, one of the only big areas of trees anywhere and it was just a real siphon, you might say, for dicky birds coming through on migration. And I was in seventh heaven being right there in the midst of those trees when the waves, particularly in the spring migrations, came in, the trees would just be alive; you just think the trees were moving, there were so many because that was the main place where all the warblers and vireos and everything coming across the Snake River Plain ended up. And because nobody had really been there looking at birds. We had a bird list but in the year and a half I was there, I added over fifty birds to the refuge list and added I think three birds to the state of Idaho list just essentially out of my front door there I like Minidoka quite well; I came from sunny California and that was my first time really living in the snow country and that took a little getting used to particularly in Idaho where they never had any money to do anything with the roads and so if snow or ice built up on the roads, it was pretty much there until spring. And then in spring you developed ice pot holes in the roads six inches deep. Even going into town to do the grocery shopping was quite different for me. Never have really been a winter

person even yet even though I've lived places like that, but again a good overall job. Bob Nelson was a good fellow to work for, we pretty much just shared the duties. We didn't have any clerks or anything like that, it was Bob and I and two seasonal maintenance men, who'd been there quite a long time who'd worked the Sugar Beet campaigns half the year and worked with us the other half. Bob just kind of made me the clerk and the biologist and he was the crew boss, and it worked pretty good; we had a lot of fun. One of the things about Minidoka was it's the one refuge and the one reservoir on the Snake River system where they maintain a constant water level. It was the one that kind of regulated the whole system and so even though it was a reclamation reservoir, the water levels were really stable. And so the development of horned pond weed and single-leaf pond weed and such in the lake was really tremendous at times and so it was a pretty good duck production area and quite a good waterfowl migration area too. And one other thing, in some of the side bays, again because the water level was so stable, there was quite a population of nesting water birds besides ducks and geese. There were grebes, terns, and white-faced ibis and some other things up there. One of the interesting things, Bob Nelson and I had gone out in what they called the Bullrush Islands up in this bay, which was essentially just an area where it was shallow enough that the bullrushes grew up above the water level in this bay and created a substrate where a lot of terns and the ibis and that nested. It was at the time when Tom Burleigh, who was one of the old Biological Survey ornithologists, was writing the first real book on the birds of Idaho. And Tom was of the school that believed if you hadn't shot the bird and had it in your hand, it didn't exist. And Bob and I sent him pictures of white-faced ibis on their nest, and (unintelligible, laughing) and all kinds of other records for them, and Tom never put them in the *Birds of Idaho* as a nesting species. (Unintelligible, laughing). One of the odd stories about the Bullrush Islands is some years later when I became refuge supervisor for the Idaho refuges, I was over on an inspection tour on Minidoka with Chuck Peck, and Terry Gladwin. And I said, "Why don't we go up around Bullrush Islands on the boat?" And Terry said, "What are the Bullrush Islands?" And they weren't there anymore, that whole nesting colony area is just open water now, and nobody really knows what happened. It was during the period when there was this kind of a caretaker for the refuge. And whether they changed the water levels a lot or whether there was a big ice scouring at some time or what, but there was just no bird colony up in that end of the bay anymore. It's really strange because it was quite an active tern colony and as I recall there were some Franklin's gulls in there, and grebes and a few other things too. But to go back and have it just completely gone ten years later was really something.

JC: So where did you go from there?

SW: So as I said we were at Minidoka about a year and a half, a year and three quarters maybe. Dave Marshall was the regional biologist at that time for refuges in Portland, and Dave had taken an interest in me; there just weren't that many people in Fish and Wildlife Service who were interested in non-game birds. An awful lot of people in

refuges at that time were farm boys and hunters and fisherman who'd come in for the outdoor jobs more anything. And the colleges, although they were teaching more research than management by that time, in a lot of ways they were still going strongly for the game species and so there really were not a very many people in all of Fish and Wildlife Service who were very interested in non-game birds. And it was before the Endangered Species Act so there weren't any mandates that way or anything. But Region 1 had had Gene Kridler, who'd been around for a long time and one of the real dicky birders. And then Dave Marshall had followed him up and then I'd been kind of the third one in the region who really had a strong non-game interest, and we kind of banded together and shared our experiences and having Dave as the regional biologist, I often found I got some pretty good assignments along the way too. The biologist position opened at Sacramento Refuge and Baine Cater was still there as Refuge manager. I wanted a biologist position really, really bad but my experience with Baine as a student trainee made me really wonder if I wanted to go down there to work with him again, but I finally convinced myself I did. And I got down there and Baine had, either he or I had mellowed quite a lot in a couple of years' time, and we hit it off just fine. And I worked with him for about a year before he left and went somewhere else, and Bun (Newell B.) Morgan came in from Desert Game Range, I guess at that time, and took over as manager. And Bun and I did real well together; I enjoyed working for him. Being the biologist at Sacramento rather than the student trainee was quite a difference and it was a lot of fun but you had a lot of leeway to kind of do what you thought you needed to be doing.

At that time we were still really heavy into a farming program in the Sacramento Refuge Complex.

[Break in tape]

SW: At that time, rice growing was prevalent in the Sacramento Valley and, as it is grown in water, it is very attractive to the ducks and geese arriving in the area just at harvest time. The damage to farmers' crops could be severe, and the farmers were very angry about the crop depredations. The Sacramento Refuges were really managed strongly for waterfowl depredations control, and we had a farming program that was just as intensive as the farmers around us. We grew quality rice, and so for that time the budget of the Sacramento Refuges was just amazing for a refuge complex and the number of seasonal people and the amount of heavy equipment we had and those kinds of things were just really different than much of anything else in the system at that particular time. And it was a time when you really could believe the early talk about the skies being darkened by waterfowl; the number of waterfowl that we packed into the state and federal areas and all the hunting clubs along through the Sacramento River area there was just phenomenal. I stop by Sacramento Refuge now every year or so and drive around the visitors route and watch the ducks and geese and it's great, but if you weren't there before you don't understand how the waterfowl situation in the Central Valley has changed in such time.

JC: Yeah.

SW: We, with the state, every two weeks we'd try to fly the whole Sacramento/San Joaquin Valley and count the ducks and geese. And sort of by tradition, the Fish and Wildlife Service would take the Sacramento Valley and Cal. Fish and Game would take the San Joaquin and we'd put our figures together. And I think we, you know, we really did get pretty good at it. I'd get to the point where somebody would throw an aerial photo of a group of geese out and ask me how many there were and I really knew a lot of times. One time, John Chattin was Flyway Rep. at that time in Portland and I was, I don't know if I was working up there at that time or if I was just up on an assignment, but John had spent all morning pin-pricking a photo of snow geese, trying to make a pin prick for each individual goose. He'd just finished counting this great big mass of them. He tossed the photo out in front of me and says, "How many snow geese are there?" And I said twenty thousand and John's jaw just kind of dropped open, "How'd you know?" I said, "Snow geese are always in flocks of twenty thousand." (Which wasn't true, but they often formed flocks of about that size.)

On aerial surveys, obviously you didn't count every duck, but if you did it regularly you really did get pretty good at identifying species from the air and estimating numbers. We would count just in the Sacramento Valley, and we'd count a million, a million and a half waterfowl, and most of them were on the federal and state wildlife areas at that time. Later in the year if the Yolo Bypass flooded or something, then it got a little more awkward 'cause the birds disperse. But there were a gang of birds at that time and you'd go out to the various water units on the refuge and they would just be black from side to side with pintails and other species (unintelligible, sounds like someone vacuuming).

[Break in tape]

SW: Ray Glahn was our regional pilot at refuges at that time, and Ray was actually coming down from Portland every other week during the wintertime and flying there and of course also servicing a lot of the other refuges at various times of years too. It was putting a lot of miles on his plane, but Ray was the best person you could ever fly with anywhere, he was just so calm and collected and knew exactly what he was doing all the time. We were up in some weather that no sane person would ever be up in and we probably didn't get a good count either, it was kind of silly in some ways but since he was down there you kind of did it anyway. But we never had any trouble. The only time in the surveys where I really felt not at ease in flying and counting was flying with the state fish and game one time where we were flying over the Gray Lodge State Wildlife area near Gridley and the wind was blowing so hard that the pilot could hardly keep the plane in the air. And we got down okay but I think it was only the matter of a week or so later that that same pilot actually did hit a tree, and they got down alright too but it was one of those things. Had some interesting pilots that I flew with during the time, Ray of course was the one everybody wanted to fly with 'cause he was such a good pilot and he knew what he was doing and he was a good waterfowl counter in his own right and such. I flew a lot in the valley with Al Weinrich who was a federal agent and just getting his

pilot's license. And Al did real well except landing, and we landed several times every time we landed I think (laughing). Jumping back to Minidoka, when I couldn't get Ray Glahn over, I'd often use the Predator and Rodent Control trapper/pilot over there to fly with, can't say his name right now, Don—but Don used to fly in his little super cub so you could shoot coyotes out of it, and he was a scary ride sometimes. One time we were flying over the ice on Lake Walcott at Minidoka and halfway up the lake there were some warm springs in the lake and they'd stay open when the rest of the lake froze and there were usually some trumpeter swans and a bunch of ducks even in the dead of winter up there. But the Predator and Rodent control people would also fly over the lake and they'd shoot coyotes out on the ice over the lake. And one day when we were flying, Don says "Do you want to see what it looks like to go after coyote?" There was a coyote running across the lake and Don came swooping down and it was a white ice and a white sky, and I had hardly any idea of where the surface of the ice really was. And he was down there with his wheels almost skidding and the coyote looking over his shoulder and his tongue hanging out running like mad; I'd rather fly with Ray Glahn!

Well I stayed at Sacramento Refuge a couple of years and not that I didn't like it there, I liked the job really well; living at Sacramento at that time out in the middle of the rice fields was not good family living in a lot of ways. Our local mosquito control agent said he'd never let his family go outside after dark period because of the mosquitoes and of course we were right, at that time, in the middle of the rice fields at refuge headquarters and of course the rice was growing in water until they drained them just prior to harvest, so we had every species of mosquito that you could imagine and we had them year round too. There were some other places like Malheur, where the little salt marsh mosquitos are worse, in a lot of ways, when they're there, but they're not there forever, like at Sacramento. Stillwater, again, had the Malheur type mosquitoes that just really drive you up the walls for the short period of time when they were out. But the year round situation at Sacramento, living right out in the middle of the water with the mosquitoes like that, and the black gnats in the spring, could be intolerable. Reading old CCC reports from Sacramento, the black gnats were just so venomous that they'd send people to the hospital who had been working out there 'cause they got so many gnat bites. And one of the things I can still see in my mind is Sally with two little kids out in the yard hanging up clothes wearing my hip boots just to keep the black gnats off her legs while she was outside. So even though I really liked the job, after two years we started looking around and that was just after the passage of The 1964 Wilderness Act. And George Wiseman was one of the supervisors in Portland at that time and George said he really needed somebody to come into Portland and coordinate the Wilderness Act studies at that time. So we didn't have to think too long, we didn't really want to move into the big city yet but it seemed like an interesting opportunity so we moved up to, we moved up to Portland in '66, I guess. It was really kind of the start of a big change in my career because for the first time I wasn't really dealing directly with the ducks and geese. I was getting into some of the

other kinds of things the Fish and Wildlife Service did.

JC: Now at that point, you went to the regional office and, what was Region 1 at that point? Was Alaska part of Region 1?

SW: Region 1 had Alaska, and it still had Montana too, so it was Montana, Nevada, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, California, Hawaii, and Alaska. And presumably I was the coordinator for all of the Wilderness Act studies in the region. But in reality we had almost no travel money and it was just too big of a job anyway, so Will Troyer up in Alaska really did all of the Wilderness Act stuff in Alaska while I was taking care of the down below states, and we worked well together.

The Wilderness Act studies at that time were in some ways in shambles, it was a real learning experience The Wilderness Act had essentially been written for the Forest Service. And the National Park Service was in because obviously a lot of the parks were wilderness defacto anyway. And somebody said, "And by the way why don't we throw Fish and Wildlife Service in there too." And there was no specific enabling direction for Fish and Wildlife Service. No real regulations had been written as to how it was to be administered; nothing to really clarify what Congress presumably meant by some of the things that they said under the Wilderness Act. And it was just changing daily as to what we thought we were doing. BLM, of course, had lots and lots of land and they had been conveniently left out of Wilderness Act all together, mainly for economic reasons I think at that time because of the grazing and the mining, and such. We were suddenly on a really fast schedule to study and then recommend areas for wilderness designation. And some of our areas were sort of natural and they were wilderness for all intents and purposes, but we were "managing" them with service roads, water control structures, cattle grazing, etc. Reading the Wilderness Act made it sound like you wouldn't be able to have cattle grazing and you couldn't take a jeep across Hart Mountain. Although some of our areas were "wilderness" and we fully intended to treat them as wilderness, we really saw problems as far as the management of some of those areas since we thought we had mandates in addition to the Wilderness Act. Nevertheless, some of the designations went really easy; we did public hearings on the Oregon Islands and the Washington Islands, and a number of the Alaska islands refuges that were essentially just sea bird rocks and they qualified as road less islands and so we held a public hearing and a bunch of people came in from the Sierra Club and read the same statement over and over again; we made our recommendation and that was it. I personally thought some of them were questionable. I guess I've always been kind of a purist, and look, for instance, at one you're [meaning John Cornely] familiar with, Three Arch Rocks. When you're out there, even though it's a road less island or road less rocks, when the little town is right there in front of you and all the lights are there and the boats are all around the island, you really have to wonder if that's really what Congress had in mind when they talked about a road less island. But it didn't hurt us any as far as that went because we intended to keep them the way they were anyway. But some of the hearings were silly in a

way because you never really got to the heart of what you were dealing with; any of the refuges that really had true wilderness like Hart Mountain or Malheur or Sheldon or some of those areas, well they've never been designated as wilderness because the mineral surveys had never been completed. Although certainly the National Wildlife Refuge System as a whole has some good natural wildernesses in it, a lot of the areas that should be in it have just never, never been followed through with just because the economics of the situation were such. So there were a lot of futilities for some of that, and we were getting such mixed signals from day to day on how things were going to be handled. I remember one time that probably the only reason I didn't get fired was because probably everybody was too drunk to remember what had been said. But I was at a meeting, Wilderness Society type meeting I think it was, with a bunch of higher level folks and one of them was Stan Cain, who was Assistant Secretary of Interior at that time. And—Stan Cain had taken a position on some of these things, like virtually anything could be wilderness and don't worry about whether you need an airboat out there, or don't worry about whether you need a jeep trail or whatever, "It'll work, it'll work," type thing. And of course it wouldn't as far as what a lot of people were looking for in wilderness - even cattle grazing for instance on the game ranges. We of course, in some cases, we would have liked some help to get grazing if not taken off, at least regulated for better use but we didn't want to give up our management options on some of these things. But Stan Cain was there and I was feeling a little rebellious, I guess which I had been known to be at times, and we got into discussion and finally I told him, "Under your definition, I could designate Sacramento Refuge as a wilderness area even though every pond had a road around it because they were all administrative use roads." (Laughing) Some of my calmer associates, like my boss at that time, Vern Ekedahl and John Finley the regional director, thought maybe I should cool my rhetoric a little bit; but it was, I say it was so frustrating at that time. Harry Crandall was the coordinator for all the Wilderness Act stuff in D.C. at that time. And Harry was just at his wits end because he'd get new directives every day that he'd have to pass on to us in the field, and Harry finally left and went to work for the Wilderness Society where he could really work on wilderness. But we were having to do things so fast, presumably because of this mandate we had to catch up with Congress and get all this done and as I say even today, this is '64, '74, '84, '94, 2004 and beyond; most of the big ones still are not designated and nobody's even working on them. But we were pushed and pushed and pushed, so we did all these little ones and some really odd things resulted. One of them that I learned about years later, is the Oregon Islands, for instance, seemed pretty straight forward and I knew the area pretty well and so we pushed that one through fairly quickly and nobody really objected or cared really one way or another. The Washington Islands, we kind of did the same thing on and pushed them through. Mel Nail was the manager for Willapa Refuge at that time, and Mel had sort of jurisdiction over the Washington Islands but, at that time, it was not really certain that he'd even seen them because they were bird rocks and we just didn't, we didn't have the

time or resources to get out to them very much. So we went through the process and had our public hearing and everything and got the Quillayute Needles and Flattery Rocks, and Copalis all designated as National Wildernesses and it wasn't until years later when I came back as refuge supervisor for the Washington refuges that I found out that during the time that Mel and I had been doing this study, that the U.S. Navy was using the Washington Island rocks as a bombing range and they still were when I came back on the job in 1981 or 1983. So a lot of things kind of slipped by at that time, we did not have a really good research capabilities on refuges at that time.

One of the things about refuges, overall just something I've thought about an awful lot over the years, is the refuge system as such just really had no sense of history; that's why some of these oral history things are really interesting now and really worthwhile, while some people are still alive. If you wanted to find out something and you were working for refuges, it was before the days of computers and you weren't very close to libraries and we had no resources in the office to help you out, we had no library services, we had no real files in there. [NOTE: I'm not sure what we were saying here. I've restated what I think was said, below.] And in the field, you couldn't even look in your refuge files, necessarily, back twenty years and find out what's going because we were constantly having to reduce the size of our files. Every so often, we'd get a directive through the Regional Office from Washington that we had to pare down the size of our file material (part of the Paperwork Reduction Act, I think, but it may have been more informal before that). If a clerk got the memo and didn't consult with the biologist, for example, he might just throw out the oldest things in the file. Those oldest things might just be old memos, but might be some important report. I remember one case in particular...

[Break in tape]

JC: So you were making a kind of general comment about the lack of resources, library resources and history.

SW: And sort of a lack of a sense of history at that particular time. And as I said this one report that I salvaged and eventually sent a copy back to the refuge, which I hoped they saved, this time around was a really detailed report put together in the 1930's or early 1940's on the whole waterfowl depredation program and just the whole history of it, and the Civilian Conservation Corps involvement and all the rest. And just a priceless type thing, and maybe there's another copy somewhere around but not necessarily. And if somebody hadn't been on hand just to grab that particular one; that would be information just completely lost.

JC: Do you still have a copy?

SW: I have a copy and as I say I did send a copy back to the Sacramento Refuge.

JC: You should send a copy of that for Mark Madison too, because…

SW: That would be a good idea.

JC: …he would catalog that and put it in the archive. And that's one of the things as a heritage committee person I've tried

to do, is identify things like that and often what they offer to do is archive that copy and send it back and keep a copy. And I've always told them, "No you keep the original (unintelligible), and then send a copy back to the field."

SW: Yeah I think having Mark and that group back there now has really made a difference in my hope. And now some of those things that happened in just a matter of course in the '60's and '70's are not happening as much anymore.

JC: Not as much but it's still…

SW: Because there's so much history that is just lost, I think now. And we're getting to the point now where a lot of the old timers are gone and a lot of the youngsters like us are in our 60's and 70's. (Laughing)

Well we were talking about my time with the Wilderness Act, even though everything was kind of hectic with the Wilderness Act and even though it was a big job, there was still time when you couldn't do it all the time. And Dave Marshall was the regional refuge biologist at that time, and whenever I had free time Dave got other projects for me to do that were really good, both for my career and things I liked to do and things I was good at doing. And some of the things during that first stint in the regional office, of course I worked as the refuge ascertainment biologist part-time during that period going out and making reports on proposed wildlife refuges. I made the, well I won't say I made the first reports because Leo Couch had been our regional ascertainment biologist back 10, 20 years before that and Leo, I think, had looked at every place in Region 1 that had any value as a refuge at all and done preliminary reports on them. But I did the first really comprehensive ascertainment report on Humboldt Bay, did the first really comprehensive report on both south and north San Francisco Bay; did Franklin Lake over in Nevada, north of Ruby Lake. And miscellaneous other ones, but that was a nice break from the Wilderness Act stuff and again something that I thought I could do. Something, also, that was cooking at that time was that the first Endangered Species Act had been passed. And that of course was Dave Marshall's real cup of tea finally for the Service to take some responsibility for non-game things. And at that time, before much else was going, the Fish and Wildlife Service had what they called the Red Book Committee before there was a real official legal list of endangered species. A group of people had been working really hard to put together a list of endangered birds and Dave was on the group, and John Aldrich at the National Museum was kind of heading it up in a lot of ways; Harry Goodwin from the Washington office was working in there. As kind of Dave's part-time assistant, I got to do a lot on that with him in putting together the Red Book. And from my contacts with Cal. Fish and Game, Bill Anderson the old waterfowl biologist down there and one of Cal. Fish and Game's real non-game people before there were such things. He recommended both clapper rails and terns as things we should look at in California and so Dave sent me on a trek all the way down the California coast one time just looking at every salt marsh and sandbar that I could find pretty much from San Francisco south and doing a preliminary study of, not really a study of rails and terns, but just where rails or terns might be. And of course

while I was with Research in later years, I followed up on what I had done for refuges at that point. Another thing that was really one of the highlights of my early career is that Dave was working really hard to get Hawaii Fish and Game interested in their endangered birds, which of course were really endangered, they were disappearing; some of them people hadn't seen for many, many years. The Endangered Wildlife Research Program out of Patuxent was getting going at about the same time, and Ray Erickson who headed up the program was quite interested in Hawaii. But the Region had essentially one person in Hawaii at that time, Gene Kridler, an old refuge biologist from Region 1, was kind of doing everything for the service in Hawaii at that time. And Dave sent me over for two weeks with Gene Kridler to start talking to the state about how we were going to handle the Endangered Species Program.–Ray Erickson had just appointed two research biologists for Hawaii, John Sincock on the Island of Kauai and Winston Banko on the Big Island. So between Gene Kridler, who'd been there a couple of years, and John Sincock and Win Banko, who'd just arrived shortly before, I got really the tour of the back country of the Hawaii Islands not that many people see. I actually ended up seeing a number of the really rare Hawaiian birds over there. We backpacked into the Alakai Swamp on Kauai and went on the Big Island; Kilauea Volcano was in the midst of one of its real eruptions at the time; that was quite a trip. And it turned out that Hawaii Fish and Game, like most Fish and Games at that time, was not real interested but they had a couple of people on their staff who were quite interested. And we kind of took the lead in drawing up some brochures on the Hawaiian bird problem. I did the Hawaiian water birds with Danny Hayes, who worked in engineering at that time and was our illustrator and draftsman, kind of all the EPIC (the group that later did much of the planning of public facilities on refuges) program put together in one person at that time. And Danny and I turned out the first, the big brochure on Hawaii water birds and then I started the Hawaii forest birds and I transferred to Atlanta and John Van den Akker finished that one up after I left but that was, besides getting a program started, that was a neat assignment too; spend two weeks in the wilder parts of Hawaii.

JC: Do you know if any of those birds you saw then are totally gone or extinct now?

SW: I'm not sure, of the ones I saw; I saw two Ou's spelled just like I said it, Ou, on the Big Island and nobody had seen either of those in some years. Of course Sincock and Banko had just got there so they hadn't really been looking too much. I don't know their status now. Some of the birds have certainly become a lot rarer even since I was there, I don't know if any have become completely extinct. Just after I was over there, John Sincock rediscovered the Kauai oo, or o'o a'a another name for it, and it hadn't been seen in 50 years or something and John found some of those, but I think that one they do consider is extinct for good now. But one group of them held on for so long, I don't know.

I had enjoyed all of my career up to that point but I was really needing back over into the side of things that were really what I thought working with birds meant while I was in junior high school.

So that was fun. And again that seemed to be my usual thing, I'd spend about 2 years in the regional office and then we would, not for any particular reason just thinking about a change and they established a regional refuge biologist position for Region 4, out of the Atlanta Regional Office. And I don't know that I really thought I'd get it, but I did and we went down to Atlanta.

JC: Who was the regional director at this time?

SW: The regional director at the time was Ed Carlson, I think. Larry Givens was head of refuges at the time. One reason I went down there, I'm sure, is because shortly before I went down George Wiseman had gone down there. And George told me about the job and I think George helped me get the job too. It was fun, I had never been in the southeast before even on my own for any reason, I'd never been in that part of the country at all. It was, as far as adding to my life list of birds, it was a wonderful vacation while I down there; never seen any of those birds before. As far as an education otherwise, again, the refuges down there, there's such a variety of them and there's a lot of waterfowl work, but there's a lot of other bird life and mammal life and other kind of life too. In the time I was there, I wasn't there long enough to really help them too much, I don't think, but I sure learned a lot myself, just traveling around the region.

JC: Were they focused, like most places, pretty much on game species as well or because of their biological diversity did they have little bit more interest in it?

SW: Region 4 was, in some ways, even more strongly focused on game because every refuge had its squirrel hunting, its rabbit hunting, it's this hunting, and it's that hunting. An awful lot of the time went into game species down there and one of the big things that took a lot of my time was the Canada goose reintroduction and redistribution project. I spent awful lot of my time in meetings with state fish and game people and refuge people on all of the new flocks of Canada geese that were being established accidentally and on purpose. There was a strong interest on that all through the southeast and there was also a strong emphasis on economic uses of the refuges too. George Wiseman and I, as I say, went down there pretty much the same time. George got down before I did, but we were both in our purest state, a little bit appalled at some of the management down there. For instance we had a regional forester who had no wildlife management background at all and who had quite a timber cutting program going on refuges that had nothing at all to do with wildlife in any way, and we had things like red-cockaded woodpecker on refuges that required very specific timber management. It was kind of like I found in the Forest Service later when I did a lot of work with them on the condor project: one group would write a timber management plan, and one would write a fire management plan, and one would write a waterfowl management plan, and one would write a recreation plan. And it didn't matter if they meshed it all; you just had all these plans. George and I were newcomers to the South, but we were pretty sure that the timber programs on some of the refuges were not really in the best interest of the wildlife on the refuge. So it was a little

culture shock in that way I was only in Atlanta a year because the job came up in research to go to work for Ray Erickson on the California condor project, but I enjoyed it. But the south was a real culture shock. The south was still, no matter what you said, was still segregated. Everybody went to church in the south, but everybody talked about colored people behind their back and in front of their back and everything else, and they were still fighting the Civil War down there, and it was just really an awkward social situation. We had been going to church regularly when we were in Portland and we just didn't go down there because it just seemed like (unintelligible) church was a social institution of some kind that didn't have too much to do with morality or values or anything else and we just didn't feel comfortable with it. There were lots of really neat people down there, we had a good time, made some lasting friends down there but it was an odd culture, particularly from California the land of fruits and nuts where I grew up. So I certainly would have stayed in Atlanta, probably a long time, if I had not had a chance to go to research at that point. And that was, of course, is what really turned my career at that time. Again at about the same time that Ray Erickson had selected the folks for the Hawaii Endangered Species Program, He selected Fred Sibley to be the California condor research biologist, the first time in the whole history of the condor program that the service had really taken an active role of trying to do something other than poison them with our Animal Control Program. And Fred had stayed on the job from '66 through spring of '69 and then he resigned from the service and went back to Peabody Museum at Yale, and that job came open and that was, even though we had only been in Atlanta a year, that was too choice of a thing not to at least apply for and see what happened. I applied for that job and I got it. In November '69 we finished our lap around the United States and ended back in southern California again. And then I spent 12 years working out of Ojai, California for Patuxent Research Center mainly on California condor research but also did quite a bit on clapper rails and least terns and Bell's vireo. I worked with Roy Tomlinson over on the Colorado River because we shared the Yuma clapper rail along that area, and then I had the two subspecies on the coast. And I spent quite bit of time in Baja California both looking for condors, and also completing the surveys on rails, terns, and vireos.

JC: I was about to ask you, it seemed like that would be about the time that you developed an interest in Baja birds. So it connected both to the condors and to rails.

SW: Yeah it started with the condors because there hadn't been any positive records of condors in Baja after the 1920's, early 1930's, probably started getting rumors as more and more birders went down into Baja, of big birds anyway. So we started thinking about, at least looking at down there because we knew there had been condors historically in the higher mountain ranges. The southern California Mountains extend down into Baja in kind of two different ranges, the Sierra Juarez in the north, just south of the San Diego County line. And then the Sierra San Pedro Mártir, a little farther down, which gets up to elevations of just over 10,000 feet and that's where the Mexican National Observatory is way up

there on top; it's a national park by their standards. I was working, at that time, closely with Lloyd Kiff who was the curator of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, a big egg collection; Ed Harrison's private collection really. And Ed had worked with Carl Koford back in the 1930's when Carl had done the first big study of California condors and Ed had been one his compadres who went out at that time. And Ed had always maintained a real interest, so when Lloyd and I started getting interested in Baja California, Ed financed quite a bit of the work down there. And Lloyd made several trips down before I did with a bunch of people; with John Borneman from National Audubon Society and Roland Clement from National Audubon, and Dean Carrier from the Forest Service. And then we started organizing so that we'd go at different times of year to different places. On the big trip down there we had about 20 different volunteers down and we took them down and did a real condor survey; sat people on hilltops all the way around the whole San Pedro Mártir (unintelligible) with everybody just counting all day long, of course we didn't count any condors, because we didn't find any. But we counted all the turkey vultures and golden eagles and everything, but after doing that for several years we just came to the conclusion that there were no condors left in Baja at that time. But while I was down there, of course I'd been making bird lists and studying the literature of the area, and I was getting into the rail and tern work north of the border so I decided I'd extend it down and do some work in the Baja lowlands at that time. One of my friends, actually a graphic artist, graphic designer from Southern California, Keith Axelson was somebody who could kind of manage his time the way he wanted to and so Keith and I went down quite a bit on our own and studied some of the marsh and shore birds and also a little later the Least Bell's vireo, which had people concerned that it might want to be listed as endangered at that time. So I spent, not a lot of time, but quite a few trips into Baja California and it eventually came out that I did write a book on the birds of Baja California which the University of California Press published just after I left the condor project.

There are lots of things to say about the years with the condor project, it was fascinating of course to be studying a bird that really was on its last legs in every sense of the word and the frustrations of doing all kinds of things and not seeing any real changes. A lot of sociopolitics involved, it was an exhilarating 12 years in a lot of ways. And just recently, just a few years ago, I put that all in a book called *Condor Tales*; Mark has a copy back in the archives there too. But one of the big things of that time was, we just really felt that we had done everything that we could do in the wild for the condor and it was still going downhill really quickly. And it was just a matter of not one thing being the big problem at that time, but just it was a bird with extremely low reproductive potential and not use adapted to any mortality of any kind, and so every bird that flew into a power line or every bird that was shot, every time one bird was lost from any cause, it was really kind of a major shock to the population. There was no way to really to get the productivity up above what had become almost natural mortality 'cause so many things could happen to them. And so my last couple of years on the job, most of that was trying to get a

captive breeding program going, and we finally did that. It was at that time we were finally getting close to the real approval of the project and it was looking like a good time to bring in some new people to handle the actual captive population in that part of the program. So I was thinking about leaving anyway, and I was going to take a job as the coordinator of the condor program; get out of the research side of it and bring some new researchers in and then just be kind of the liaison for the service on the overall condor project. And that just got really complicated with politics and people and that and it finally turned out that after a year in that job that I came back to the Portland Office as Chief of the Endangered Species for the western states, and that was in '81.

JC: So during the time you were working with condors, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 was passed?

SW: Right.

JC: And we talk about a lot of things being threatened and endangered or whatever before that but legally we did have and we didn't have the law, and we didn't have the act. Since you started working with them a little bit before that, did you notice any major changes, impact on your research…?

SW: …well, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 really made it possible, you might say, for Fish and Wildlife Service to get involved with endangered species management. The two previous pieces of Federal endangered species legislation in 1966 and 1969 had authorized the Fish and Wildlife Service to investigate the status of species, and recommend them for endangered or threatened status. We wouldn't have had a condor researcher or the Hawaii researchers in there at all had it not been for the earlier Endangered Species Acts One could argue that the Service already had responsibility for -migratory birds besides ducks and geese that we never exercised. But with condors and other non-migratory birds, with mammals, and plants, we really did not have clear authority. In particular, we did not have the money authorization from Congress to go ahead and actually get going. So my project really couldn't have occurred without the Endangered Species Act, and in most cases the Endangered Species Act was a really positive thing. Now like when we started with the Wilderness Act, there were lots fits and starts with it because people really didn't know how far they could go or what they could do. And the Service was not really prepared with people who were willing to deal with not just the biological aspects of birds, but with almost all endangered species; the sociopolitical aspects of it too. And we got into a lot of jack pots in the Service just generally because we leapt into things, you know trying to do our job. Yet, if a species became endangered, if it was officially listed, then it seemed suddenly we had to defend it at all costs against everything and there was no leeway. And some kind of silly, funny things came up during that time just because we were all trying so hard to get in it. And of course at the regional levels, the Endangered Species Programs were very new, the administrative and management parts of them, and a lot of Ecological Services people were handling them a lot of times. I can remember one case in which critical habitat had been

designated for the condor. Now under the Endangered Species Act, I forget which (unintelligible) the second or third amendment, but they introduced the concept of critical habitat. And said that no federal agency could do anything to an endangered species or its critical habitat that would further endanger the species. And so the first thing was you had to decide what critical habitat was, and for some species that might be its whole range, and for some species, it was for whatever reason, some part of it that you felt the bird, or the mammal, or the fish, couldn't get along without. But with the condor, its range covered hundreds of square miles for feeding and very little of it under government control; a lot of it private range lands; there wasn't any way you could really say that a third of California is critical habitat! So we came up with some general things We made big blocks of nesting area critical habitat and areas that had been used traditionally, for as long as anybody knew, and for overnight roosting for big groups of birds, we had roosting critical habitat. And then for the range land, all we could really say is that if all the range land in central California disappears, there won't be any condors but what part of it is really "critical," we don't really know. So our critical habitat that we wrote up for the condor was just a certain amount of good range land in this particular region and this particular region; it was a designation but a particular section line didn't mean anything really. And critical habitat, I think people still have trouble with it today, but all it says is federal agencies can't knowingly do anything to harm endangered species; it doesn't apply to private land owners or states or anybody else really, unless it's a federal funded project. Critical habitat doesn't of itself shut down anything or open up anything or anything else; it's just a warning line, you might say. And in those early days, I can remember one time in particular, we had the condor experts, which were really me and Dean Carrier from the Forest Service and all kinds of administrative and biological personal from Forest Service and from our Fish and Wildlife Service Sacramento office standing around because somebody wanted to drill a new oil well just within the boundary of the National Forest down there and it fell within our critical habitat line. Well it also was about from me to you to an avocado grove, but it was (on the map) within "critical habitat" (unintelligible, laughing). And so we had one of the youngsters from the Sacramento Office of Fish and Wildlife Service come down and adamantly tell all of us, including me as the condor expert, that that was going to harm the condor because it was in critical habitat. And unfortunately that was kind of an extreme, silly example and in the long run we straightened it out, but it was that kind of thing that we had to deal with early in the Endangered Species Program. We had a tremendous number of people come into the program for the first time, who were ornithologists, and mammalogists, and ichthyologists, and botanists or oologists, and such, and who didn't know the government ways. And a lot of them were really good scientists and yet they had no experience at all in working in the system. And it was tough for a long time, trying to get them integrated, but it had also got the Service into working on things that we just never would have done on our own before, both because we didn't lean that way as an agency, and because we didn't have

the money or the authorization even if we did lean that way as an agency.

JC: So before we go on to your Endangered Species time in Portland, any other interesting or things that you would think that would be of interest in your years in the condor program?

SW: Well it was all a great way to spend your time. I mean to work with a species just critically endangered at the time, and to have the whole world really watching you. And after a while, to really be the world expert on something is kind of a heady thing, no matter how you look at it, and it was a wonderful job in a lot of ways. On the other hand, it was really a tough job because each one of us who was out there developing themselves as an endangered species world expert on something. We had just really nobody out there to keep us on track or get us off anything else; we really were on our own. I worked for Ray Erickson at Patuxent 3500 miles away and at least now on this job I had an excellent library, and I had staff support at the Patuxent level. If I needed somebody to do something on pesticides or needed to do something on statistics or whatever, at least I was working with a group of people now. But on the day to day things, I worked in the Forest Service District Ranger's station; I never saw a Fish and Wildlife Service person from month to month. I talked to Ray Erickson on the phone every week or so, but I was really the Fish and Wildlife Service down there. And one of the really hard things, and I'm sure it is in any job like that, we had what was originally called the California Condor Technical Committee, which was a group of us from State Fish and Game, and Forest Service, and BLM, and Audubon Society, and others who were most interested in the condor; who got together a couple of times a year and hashed out things and decided what we wanted to do various ways, either management or ideas for research and that. But everybody but me and to some extent Dean Carrier, who was the Forest Service Condor Management Biologist, it was all just another assignment for all the other people. And the expertise they had really was the expertise that Dean and I gave them in that sense of the word. And so I think we developed a really good working relationship and they had a lot of trust in what we said, but when it came right down to it we were the only ones who knew. And to just have a sounding board for your ideas sometime just to keep you on track is really a tough thing in a situation like that. Dean was a good one to have working for the Forest Service there, 'cause Dean and I had gone to school together at Humboldt and had been not just classmates, but had been really good friends. And so when we ended up in the same office, that was really neat; I mean he would tell me if I was full of it too. But Dean eventually transferred out to somewhere else, and suddenly here we were trying to revise the whole condor program, trying to get people to think about a captive breeding program, and taking condors into captivity. And I was the only one who really knew in that sense, The only one I had who really understood what I was doing was Ray Erickson at Patuxent who had the Andean Condor Captive Breeding Program going as a corollary to what I was doing and such. But it really came down to really building trust that I knew what I was talking about and that all the bases were covered. Some of the problems that developed, when I

eventually left the condor program, were because the whole spirit of cooperation and trust (unintelligible) had broken down and people were getting impatient. And I thought that the new people weren't going through the necessary hoops of treating the condors as a sociopolitical issue as well as a biological issue. And as it turned out, I was more right than wrong in the sense that after I left, just almost immediately after I left, a new biologist killed a condor and the program was essentially shutdown for about four years. And when they finally got back to it, they were about to where we should have been at the time I left. It all turned out fine, and now, in some ways, it's succeeded my expectations for the number of birds that we've been able to produce in captivity and have the start of reestablishing them, but a lot of it was just because people were not willing to really understand that almost all endangered species programs are more than just the biology of the species itself.

JC: Well I think we're better, but I think there's still issues there.

SW: Well I do too.

JC: You mentioned and started to talk about, I was going to ask you about now quite a few years later, and having some birds in Arizona and in other places, what your feelings were towards condor recovery and where we're at?

SW: (Sounds like a skip in tape) I mean when I left the program we had about 25 birds and we have 300 birds now. It's been from '81 to 2008, seems like a long time in some ways but for a bird with the low reproductive potential of a condor, that's just amazing really. And the fact that we do have them out in the wild, the fact that after some fits and starts getting the birds acclimated from a zoo situation to a wild situation, most of the releases are going quite well with kind of minimum mortality now. And the first birds, first zoo hatched and reared birds actually have formed pairs and are attempting to nest. They're certainly not saved yet, but it's very encouraging. (skip in tape)

Since I wrote my book on the program a few years back, I've been on a sort of ~~an~~ extended book selling tour, talking about condors to Audubon groups and others just over, and over, from coast to coast. I've got some more scheduled next week up in eastern Washington, and so I've kind of reintegrated into the program in some ways. (Skips in tape.)

JC: You left the condor program in 1981.

SW: Eighty-one we came back up to Portland as chief of the regional endangered species program. Dave Marshall been in that job first, then had gone into the Washington office for a while. I filled in behind Clint Lostetter. My Deputy, I guess he was called at that time, was Phil Lehenbauer. I can't really call him my assistant because he was really my equal partner, with considerably more administrative experience than I had. Phil had come up through the refuge program, worked in places like Columbia Refuge (sound like tape skips) early on, then had come over to the Predator and Rodent Control program, when they were becoming a little more respectable and they were starting to work with Indian tribes and things like that. He eventually gravitated over and worked with Dave and the Endangered Species Program because he

had a lot of varying experience, and then, when I took the job, between us I think we made a very good team. And we had some good biologists, again they were some of these folks who didn't have much government experience yet and didn't really know much about laws and about how the government and the Endangered Species Act worked; they were often impatient about how long it took for the Government to do things. But we had some good strong people in the regional office and also in the area offices too. The regional office did not directly supervise the field Endangered Species Program, in fact I had my office biologists and then coordinated with the area managers at that time on the jobs and the field. And of course we got involved in writing a lot of recovery plans and working through legislation on getting species listed. It was a good job overall. We got a lot done with some things, some worked better than others. The service at the time was really trying to figure out how to be a little more cooperative in endangered species so that everything wasn't a confrontation right off the bat. If a species really needed a 100% protection, yes, but it there were ways that we could do things that would fit into the great scheme of things better. So we were working with habitat management plans with other organizations and agencies and some of them worked really well, some of them were not thought out very well and were really more self-serving for the developers~~,~~ than they were helpful for the species. Again that's the growing pains of having that kind of a program too, and having so much political light on it too (unintelligible, tape skips.)

JC: So, you didn't have direct supervision over the endangered species field staffs. Did they have district endangered species supervisors, like we have refuge district supervisors?

SW: Yes, each district office in Sacramento, Boise, and Olympia had an endangered species supervisor and one or more district biologists. As Chief of the regional endangered species program, I coordinated closely with the district staffs but, as I said, I didn't supervise them; the Area Managers did.

JC: Speaking of district supervisors, you went from regional chief of endangered species to refuge district supervisor, right?

SW: Yes, in 1984 I transferred back to Refuges as one of the district supervisors. At the time, we had three districts: California (which included the Oregon part of the Klamath Basin complex), Idaho and Nevada, and Oregon and Washington. I had the Oregon-Washington district. Hawaii was handled a little differently; they had an administrator who reported to the Regional Director, rather than to the individual regional programs. Because I had quite a bit of involvement in the Hawaii programs, I got Hawaii as part of my "district," but just on a coordination basis, like I had with the field units in endangered species.

Part way through my time as refuge supervisor, the Service had a personnel shake-up, and the number of district supervisors in Refuges was reduced to two. Bob Fields was given the California-Nevada district but, in Director Dunkle's effort to get "new blood" into the program, neither Jack Waddell (who had been Idaho-Nevada

supervisor) nor I were selected for the new Oregon-Washington-Idaho position. I appealed the decision, because of what I considered clear irregularities in the selection process, and eventually won the position. Jack Waddell took a position in our Federal Aid branch.

I think the last few years of my career went well for the refuge program, overall, but it was awkward because my new supervisor, John Doebel, had been one of the principal movers in denying Jack and me fair competition for the position. I was not unhappy to leave Fish and Wildlife Service when one of the "reduction in forces" moves gave me the opportunity to retire a couple years early. I left in May 1994.

JC: So, how many years did you work for Fish and Wildlife Service, overall?

SW: Counting my three summers in the Student Trainee program, which began in 1960 and counted as full years toward retirement credit (even though I only actually worked 3 months each year), I put in 34 years - 1960-1969 with Refuges, 1970-1980 with Research, 1981-1984 with Endangered Species, and 1984-1994 back with Refuges.

[End of interview.]