Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Joe Piehuta

Date of Interview: June 25, 2008

Location of Interview: NCTC

Interviewer: Mark Madison and Flavia Rutkosky

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 30+

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Office of the Secretary- Supervisory Training, Fish and Wildlife Services- Director of Training, Fish and Wildlife service's Arlington Office

Most Important Projects: Eco-System approach, Ocean and Coast initiative

Colleagues and Mentors: Dr.Fineburg, Murray Bowen, John Kamesta, Frank Peckeridge, Mona Wolmack, Dale Hall, Rick Lemon, Dr. Sayle

Keywords: Wildlife impacts, Eco-system, Training, Organizational management, Traveling, Wildlife refuges, Coastal Restoration, Conservation, Environmental Education, Environments

Brief Summary of Interview: first generation American from Polish parents; school in small town in PA; attended a prep-school in California run by Catholic brothers; various jobs and schools until joining the Department of Interior and eventually the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Mark Madison – Alright. Today is June 25th 2008. We're at NCTC at Shepherdstown, West Virginia. And we have Mark Madison and Flavia Rutkosky doing the interview. And the interview subject is Joe Piehuta. And we're just going to go around and spell our names – say our name and spell our name.

Joe Piehuta – Joe – J O E, of course, and then Piehuta – P I E H U T A.

Flavia Rutkosky – Flavia Rutkosky – F L A V, as in Victor, I A. Rutkosky – R U T K O S K Y.

Mark Madison – And Mark Madison – M A R K M A D I S O N. And Flavia, we'll let you ask the first question, since you go back the furthest.

Flavia Rutkosky – Joe, when you and I traveled from NCTC to Arlington, I was mesmerized at the story you told me. You began telling me about growing up in Sheffield, which is in Warren County, Pennsylvania. Begin there for us.

Joe Piehuta – Okay. I was born back there in 1935. It's a very interesting town, 'cause it… during the… it probably at the turn of the century… very much of a lumbering town, 'cause it's in the heart of the Allegheny national forest. and growing up around all that natural resources, and woods and trees and so forth, I think probably had a deep impact on me, in what I'm doing today. Born of parents… I consider myself to be first generation American, in a sense, 'cause my father was born in Poland and came over here at 14 years of age. And my mother's family was born and raised and so forth in Poland. They had four kids, and then the year they moved over here, my mother was then the first person born, first child born in the United States. So I… basically, she was very much Polish. So I consider myself the first generation Polish in this country. And what else did you ask? I forgot. Just….

Flavia Rutkosky – That's it. Tell me about what you did when you were growing up in that town.

Joe Piehuta – Well, that town is very interesting to me. A very small town, only 1800 people. Wasn't an awful lot to do. And of course, being born in '35, I remember the end of the War a little bit – '43, '44, '45 – very strongly. And I can

honestly remember, not Pearl Harbor, but I can remember the day after Pearl Harbor, that my mother was hanging clothes in the yard talking to the lady next door. And she was hanging clothes… they were talking about war, and people fighting. And I was… can remember asking them about – how could people hurt one another, or kill one another. To me that was a real mysterious thing. And I guess, at six years of age, that was probably very mysterious to me as a child. But, anyhow, growing up, the only thing that town was noted for, after being a lumbering town, was being a glass factory in that town. But then, I went on to high school there. Graduated. And… end up at the bottom of my high school class. [Indecipherable] didn't do much studying. I barely made it through school. Had to change to… [chuckles]… I had to change to industrial arts, because, for the guys who weren't performing in high school, they were like D- students, C+ students…. I had to change to industrial arts to get enough credits. See, you got twice the amount of credits if you took industrial arts. So I got out of high school… pretty much without reading a book or anything, 'cause I copied everything. And I… when you're in a small town like that, you sit next to the same person for 12 years. So you could develop all kinds of signals about how to cheat on test. And I was real good on that. This lady could just move her fingers… and she got me through grade school and high school. Little Sylvia. So, anyway, I graduated from there, and then went on… and because I had a little bit of drafting experience, I was able to work for an oil… fabrication… made fabricated steel tanks, and so forth, for refineries. I got a job with them as an apprentice draftsman. And so I stayed with them for several years and moved on from there.

Flavia Rutkosky – Where did you move on to?

Joe Piehuta – Well, I had two friends in high school, and both of those guys went on to… one went to Notre Dame in engineering, and one went to Penn State in electrical engineering. And they used to come back from college and talk to me about... oh, my god, what were they doing, and where they were going to go that summer for, you know, for a job, and what they were going to do. And I began to see that I really had to go to college, or do something. And so, there were two old ladies in town who… and one was a school teacher, said that, you know, they knew of some brothers, you know, religious… I'm catholic… and so they know of

some religious brothers who could maybe… have a little prep school. I could go there for a prep school. So, in preparation of that, I went and knocked on the doors of the old former principal and math teacher and literature teacher, and I… for about a year or so, I just asked them to review some high school subjects with me. That's before I went. And then I left when I was about 21, 22, and joined up with these brothers. And became very much really, interested in religious life, at that time. I guess it was probably the influence of the brothers, maybe some things that were happening in my own life. I really started thinking a lot about religion at that time. But, anyhow, to make a long story short, the brothers ended up… I ended up moving to California 'cause they had a little prep school out in California. So I stayed a year with them in California. And it was really a prep school… turned out to be almost sort of a little novitiate kind of stuff. So when I came back, I came back to Kings College… in what, '57 I guess, or something like that. And went to Kings College. And I got to tell you, I went there for the first two years, and I had a really difficult time. I was always at the mercy of my professors to give me a C or… just pass. So, I was just able to make it through those two years of college. and then I transferred down, and I got more involved with the religious people at that time, I transferred down to Catholic University. And then… that was the… everybody was taking philosophy at that group. So, took philosophy with 'em. And I had one hell of a time understanding philosophy. It was very abstract. And some of the courses were in Latin and so forth. And I just had a terrible time. And so, I barely made it through college. You want to keep going?

Flavia Rutkosky – And that led to your first job after college, which….

Joe Piehuta – My first job after college… when I was looking for a job after college, I didn't have any money at that time, and so forth, a friend of mine I was staying with, an older guy who was a psychologist, said hey, a friend of his was conducting some sleep and dream studies, down at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, in Washington. And so, to make a long story short, I was able to get a job down there as an EEG technician. And… an EEG technician, basically, was on sleep and dream studies. and that was… if I look back on my career, that was probably the most interesting job I've ever had, because, there are only two places in the

world… three places in the world that were doing sleep and dream studies at that time, 'cause it was really early in that… in the phases of understanding sleep… studies. One was in Chicago, and one was in Paris. And then the third was here in Washington. And I work with a Doctor Fineburg. And I was actually employed by the division of pharmacology, psycho-pharmacology, at NIH. And so, we were doing studies on sleep and dream. And, we were… most of the studies before that had only been done just for an overnight or something, but, because they had a full time young guy like me, very anxious to spend long hours, we started doing recordings, all night recordings with people [indecipherable] longitudinal studies. And so we and… there were three or four psychiatrists and psychologists, and myself, we started developing all kinds of ideas about what happened when you dream, you know. And one of the things we came up with was, going back to… I guess, Aristotle or somebody, Aristotle apparently had said that a person who hallucinated, or was schizophrenic, might be just dreaming while they were awake. Well, that's a plausible kind of explanation. So… tested that out and it wasn't true at all.

[General laughter]

Joe Piehuta – But, anyhow, so, make a long story short, over all that period of time we did longitudinal studies with patients. You know, by longitudinal study we mean a five week study of giving those drugs and placebos and everything else, to see how they record. And we were interested, in that time, not in interpreting dreams at all. We were just interested in the pure biology of dreaming: how much did you dream; when did you dream; what were the dream cycles like; and so forth. And so then, after that, I got out of that profession and went on… spent time… I was very much interested in theology. So I went into… up to east aurora, New York, and studied theology up there – Saint John Vianney.* And then, during the summers, I came back and worked in Washington for a year or two, doing these sleep and dream studies. I even came home at certain times on short vacations, two or three weeks, and did sleep and dream studies. But then, I moved to… down state medical center, in Brooklyn, and continued studies there – sleep and dream studies. And there's where we started recording the whole life cycles of people. Putting small babies to bed – two, three

years old – all the way through different, you know, normal people now, we're talking about normal people. And we'd do different ages, right up to old people who were in their '90s. 'Cause we were interested in the whole sleep and dream cycle. How that may change over a long period of time as a person got… younger to older, and so forth.

Flavia Rutkosky – Hmm. And finally you got out of that profession…

Joe Piehuta – That's right. Moved on, and went into the ministry for several years and…. Ahh, make a long story short on that, just lost interest in becoming a minister, you know. And… but, in the meantime, because of my background, I ended up back at St. Elizabeth's Hospital again, and they asked me to head up a clinical pastor training program. And so we trained… it was a unique kind of program, because… in the program, there were not only ministers and priests and psychologist and social workers and – everybody. It was called an interdisciplinary approach… to mental health. And so, I went through that program for one year. And that was a very powerful program for me, because it turned out to be, in the long run, a program on groups. And how to run groups. So the program was basically divided. A third of the day you studied group dynamics, and all different kinds of groups. A third of the day you were in groups. You were in, you know, heart therapy groups or analytic groups or vocational education groups… vocational groups or whatever happened to be. And then a third of the day you actually ran groups. And you were supervised by a, you know, a group of people. And a part of that – being in those groups – you had to be in sensitivity groups. And so you were in sensitivity groups four to six hours a week. And that had a big impact on me, I think, that whole time, because, I had always been interested in psychology, and I'd taken a lot of psychology course in the meantime… had about the equivalent of a masters degree in psychology, in the sense of courses, but I never got a degree or anything like that. I'm great for doing that. Getting a lot of courses and not getting the degree. So, I ended up being on the faculty down there, because I was really interested in that. And at the time, I was also going to the department of psychiatry in Georgetown for two years, 'cause starting… during this period, you know, I'm talking about the early… late '60s early '70s now… I went there for two years and studied under a… it was

pretty much a renowned army therapist named Murray Bowen. And Murray Bowen had his family's systems approach to families. And Murray Bowen was a really interesting kind of guy, 'cause he was anti-Freudian. And my early education in psychology and so forth was very Freudian. And Murray Bowen said that mental illness was really embedded in families, you know. He said… it's what he called the multi-generational transmission process. That, if you really charted families… and that's what he did, his therapy was basically looking, and bringing people in, and charting their whole family history, of who talked to who, who didn't talk to who, who was born, when did baptisms occur, who died under what conditions, when did you fall down and break your arm, and all that stuff, and you begin to get all those patterns of, you know, neurotic people in the system. So, you begin to look at all that, you could then chart what the next generation was going to be. 'cause he thought there was a family system here, and a family system here, and when you brought those family systems together… there were two systems, and out of that system became another system, when a husband and wife got married and had children. And then these children, in that system, were part of this multi-generational transmission process of mental illness, and how you acted, and your value system, and everything else. It was really an interesting approach. And that had a big impact on me. And that's when I thought 'man, I really want to be a family therapist.' Of course, like, if you're going to be a therapist, you got to go into therapy, you know. You went into therapy, you begin to see – this is not the business for me.

[General laughter]

Joe Piehuta – Anyway, I'm just talking. Ask me some other questions.

Flavia Rutkosky – And then that has led you to your… the beginning of your career with the federal government?

Joe Piehuta – I'm doing all these things simultaneously. I had a lot of energy then. And so, I got a job, part time, and I decided that the training aspect really interested me. so I ended up taking some time and getting the one degree I did get, beyond a bachelors, a degree in… basically training… human resource development through the George Washington University. And, again, I was

running short of money, living with somebody and things like that. So, I got a job, part time, with a contracting firm in town, and they were doing supervisory training with NASA. They had a contract with NASA. And I hooked up with a guy named John [indecipherable – 'Kamesta' ?] and he was really a dynamic kind of guy, and learned everything from him. And then, after teaching some courses there, I figured, hey, I got to get a job, you know, somewhere. So I ended up coming to Interior -- by luck. And I worked at the Office of the Secretary. And, at that time, I worked where all… the policy people were in the hallway up there. And… but they had one operational position, one operational position. And that one position was to conduct supervisory training. So, for the next five, six years, I was a stand up trainer. And, if you recall back in roughly '72, '73, that's when the 48 hours of training was becoming very popular. I mean, people were just… loved that 48 hours of training. So my job was, for 35 weeks a year, to travel around the country… and this is for Interior… and conduct supervisory training. And so, I would publish my schedule ahead of time. Say, you know, I'm going to Denver, and then to Phoenix, and then to Albuquerque… 'cause I went out in three weeks at a time. I went out three weeks; and then come back a week; and then go out for three weeks. And when I went to Denver, you know, you'd have 25 or 30 people there. Went to Albuquerque -- 25 / 30 people. And those people… it was really interesting, 'cause those people were from Fish and Wildlife Service, they're from BIA, they're from Minerals Management. Not Minerals Management… they weren't there at the time. But then Mines, or Park Service, or whoever happens to be. So, like, four or five people in each class, from these different Bureaus, so you really had a feel for what Interior was like as a Bureau, and the diversity of it. So I did that until about '78 or so. And then they… oh, what do you call it? They cut out the position. You know, it always comes back to funding. They cut out the position. I was left out in the lurch. But it turns out that there was a job opening up at Fish and Wildlife Service, as the Director of Training. So… 'cause of my connections there, they said hey, you got the job. I moved to Fish and Wildlife Service in '78, and stayed there for about 10 years, as the training officer. One person operation. Sounds like a big job, but basically all you did… is you were concerned about training forms and make sure training forms were right. but on the other hand, what I also learned, and got involved with a lot in the later days,

when I was doing the 48 hours supervisory training, I worked a lot with a guy named Frank Peckeridge, from Bureau of Reclamation. And we were doing, at that time, I helped Frank do that, a lot of large scale organization development projects. And Frank… Frank was able to get 80 managers, three or four times a year, in a room, and conduct this managerial grid approach to organization development. And I was quite impressed with that. And I became a big organization development guru, at that time. That organizations… if you conducted organization development… that was sort of the messianic approach to organizational problems. And if you could do organizational development, you could solve all the problems. And I became a big believer in that. So, ended up doing a lot of team building and organization development work. So, when I was working with Fish and Wildlife during those ten years, I was not only concerned about training forms, but I found myself being asked more and more to do team building sessions, or retreats, for managers, in the Fish and Wildlife Service. And I guess, I look back over my career there, I guess maybe I did do a lot of that stuff. I was able to travel to all of the Regions. Did it with, probably, all the Regional Directors. And I'd say well, we called the Directorate today, to get a lot of Division Chiefs on the road, as well as different offices in Washington. So I did that 'till '88. And then, at that time, I heard that they were starting to build this… this… they weren't building it, they were… the concept of the new training center was coming about. And a position opened up. And I hadn't worked with some other Bureaus, so I was very much interested in leaving Fish and Wildlife at that time, and then moving over and working with the Bureau of Land Management. So I went over there for three years. And then after a couple three years there, I went over for two years to the Bureau of Mines. That was sort of a… the death throes… the last days of Bureau of Mines, you know. They died about a year after that. The Bureau of Mines was in the dying stage for years. So, one day, I was working at Mines when I got a phone call, and it was from Mona Wolmack , who I had worked for, and with, in the past. And Mona says, 'hey, we're implementing this ecosystem approach at the Fish and Wildlife Service, and that's going to involve a lot of team work and things like that, and you do a lot of teams. Hey, how about you coming back to the Fish and Wildlife Service?' So I said 'okay.' And I was really looking forward to that, 'cause I was looking forward to getting out of

Mines. So I came back. That was when the ecosystem approach was becoming very popular in the Fish and Wildlife Service. So then I spent, really the next year, year and a half, helping them in three Regions -- basically Region One Two and Four, in implementing the ecosystem approach. I remember it being Dale Hall. And I had met Dale prior to that, but I also met Dale in Region One when we were doing that that ecosystem approach in Region One. And so I came back, and have pretty much been with the Fish and Wildlife Service since about '94. This is 2008, so that's 14 years. And it has worked out; I was able to stay on in Washington as NCTC liaison, you know, whatever that means. Still do a lot of… I don't do a lot of liaison work, but I do a lot of retreats and managers… retreats for managers. Still doing some organization development. But it's really just team building and so forth, with Fish and Wildlife, but also with organizations outside of Fish and Wildlife.

Flavia Rutkosky – You described yourself to me as the 'Great Scheduler'. Tell me more about that.

Joe Piehuta – 'Great Scheduler'?

Flavia Rutkosky – Yeah.

Joe Piehuta – I'm more of the agenda….

[General laughter]

Flavia Rutkosky – Well, agenda / scheduler….

Joe Piehuta – Well, I talked to people recently, down in the job, and I says, you know, do you think about… when you get to be my age, you think about dying. And you think about, oh, my god, if you had a write up in the Washington Post, what would be, you know, the category under you, like…. And I think it would be: "Joe Piehuta – Agenda Man", 'cause that's what… people are calling me more and more for agendas these days. you know, they're going to have a meeting, and I'm talking about ordinary staff meeting sometime, or, you know, a big weeklong meeting with hundreds of people or whatever, and they call me and ask me to just… talk about the agenda. How do you go about forming an agenda? And what

do you do? And do we need an agenda? And all that kind of stuff. is that what you were thinking about?

Flavia Rutkosky – Oh, that sounds like a great new superhero -- Agenda Man.

[General laughter]

Joe Piehuta – Well it's… it's a… it's a unique title, 'cause no one else is interested in doing it. It's a low level job, but in the… in the world, when you look at it, you know , you spend so much time in meetings… managers spend so much time….

Flavia Rutkosky – I want to move back...

Joe Piehuta – Yeah.

Flavia Rutkosky – … and pick up on something that you said. At some point, you talked about having been with the Fish and Wildlife Service and you were looking for an opportunity to leave the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Joe Piehuta – Uh-hmm.

Flavia Rutkosky – And what was that about?

Joe Piehuta – Well, you know, I guess when you… when you're… it's almost like… what's the old thing, when you get a… smelly socks, after a while get in the… something to do… it begins to smell after you stay around too long. I thought that it was time for me to leave and get other experiences. But I got to tell you, my heart has always been with the Fish and Wildlife Service. So, and, I knew Rick Lemon. Rick was coming in at that time. He had gone through a management development program.

Flavia Rutkosky – You had met Rick.

Joe Piehuta – Oh, yeah, I'd met Rick. Yeah. I'd met Rick… [indecipherable – too low to hear] probably early '80s, probably early '80s. Rick was… was out in Region One and I used to help with hunter education programs. And Rick was sort of… among his many duties he was hunter education contact in Region One. And I used to run the departmental manager development program for the Fish and

Wildlife Service during the '80s. And that… and people like Rick would always come to me and say, 'hey, I'm interested in getting that program. Tell me a little bit about that program. How do I get in?' And things like that. So, I was just sort of the coordinator of the program. And that's where I first met Rick. He said he was very much interested in the program. And then when he came back into the program, then I got to know him better. And then he hung around after the program, starting to develop these things with, you know, leading up to this conservation training center here. So I've always been in contact with Rick, on and off, throughout the years.

Flavia Rutkosky – Uh-huh.

Mark Madison – What about when you worked in Interior…?

Joe Piehuta – Yeah.

Mark Madison – That first training thing. What was training like back then? Obviously it was different in the '70s than, probably, anything were doing out here.

Joe Piehuta – Yeah. You know, I thought a little bit about that Mark, and it was sort of a routine, pro-forma kind of thing. You had a very defined kind of schedule, and everything was sort of internal to your job, to the organization. Things like that. And I think about training today; training is like a lot of things that are going on today. It's more permeable. You have to be… your more… it's more than just your job, you know, the skills and your competency in the job. It's now dealing with people. And the whole thing of being people oriented was a new thing. I think it started to occur, maybe a little bit in the '70s, but I think it's more in the '80s and now in the '90s, and going into the 2000s. I guess I envisioned fish and wildlife service as, in the past, like a lot of organizations. You had a defined boundary around what you did, and what it was about. But now, over the years, that boundary has come… become more permeable. And we have to deal with states, and people, and NGOs, and we're contracting things out. So sometimes it's hard to define where the boundary is these days. And that's my perception, too, I guess of organizations. And Fish and Wildlife is really an

interesting organization, 'cause it's… it's a conglomeration of different organizational styles. You still have the old machine bureaucracy - with one person at the top and people reporting down the line. But then you also have programmatic areas, you know, program and matrix organizations kind of stuff, where people are reporting more horizontally, and having two different bosses, or three different bosses. It's still a conglomeration. And then, what's occurred of last several years is, we're moving more into a network organizational structure. And I guess the network we often think of is computers, but it's much more than that it's… it's a… a whole horizontal kind of structure. What do they call them – micro-rhizome or something to that effect.

[General laughter]

Joe Piehuta – Roots are going horizontally, but there's also roots going vertically, at the same time. And I think, if you looked under a microscope, you could probably find three or four different kinds of organizational structures in fish and wildlife service. And they're all operating simultaneously. And that's what makes it so confusing, to find out what the organization's like. But the organizations of fish and wildlife, for being a small organization, are very complex organization. Its… you know, it has many different many different things -- it has to be concerned about… it's not just single focus, like the park service, its multi-focused. And we could be a centralized agency at one time, maybe we were, you know, back in the '40s '50s and '60s. But now, a centralized organization is just one more way of operating. But it's really more decentralized, 'cause we have to become closer to the customer, the people, what's happening in the regions, and on the ground. And there's a pro and con to all of it. There's a pro to being centralized. And there's a pro and con to being a decentralized. I think the con of… one of the problems of having a centralized structure's, one of the… yeah, one of the cons of having a centralized structure is you're not close to what's happening on the ground, where the people are. And where the mission of the organization is. Yet, on the other hand, if you become too decentralized, you can't get major movements going, because everybody has an and / if and buts, when it becomes decentralized. I can talk for a long time on that.

Mark Madison – Well, let's go back to one other thing in that area. You mentioned that in the '70s you were traveling 35 weeks a year. Travel was quite different.

[General laughter]

Mark Madison – How did you handle 35 weeks a year of travel?

Joe Piehuta – It was much… believe me, I guess I had a lot energy back then or something, but it was easier, I think, traveling then than it would be now. It was easier getting on planes, and you just went from one town to another town. And you just… I don't know, you just sort of somehow absorbed it all, and it was part of your job. I don't know if I'd be able to do that today. Like, I'm going to Portland next month… two months from now, and I'm always thinking about it. I don't want to go.

[General laughter]

Joe Piehuta – I'm already thinking about it. I don't want to go to Portland, you know.

[General laughter]

Mark Madison – And there you were, a road warrior 35 weeks a year. I mean, how do you even maintain an apartment or anything?

[General laughter]

Joe Piehuta – I got married to Miss Duvall… that, too. So, yeah. Yeah. It was hard. I think… I guess, you lived out of a suitcase and things were just easier, somehow. And, you know, I prepared most of the materials, ran off the materials, and sent the materials, and everything, so we were a long time… and I came back and that week… man I was working 12 14 16 hours a day in Interior, and at night, packing up the notebooks to get… sent them to Albuquerque, or Tucson, or wherever, it was where I would be going. I guess, in retrospect, I probably… you

look at Interior, I'm probably one of the people been to more installations, you know, in a generic sense, across the Interior, than most.

Mark Madison – What was it like working in Interior? I mean, it's a….

Joe Piehuta – Depends on what level you worked at.

Mark Madison – At the level you worked at.

Joe Piehuta – Well, interesting…. I was very fortunate to have… because I was an operational person back in the '70s, and I had some really good bosses, it was much easier doing those things. Right now, because of the job I'm in, you know I conducted a big ocean / coast meeting out here couple of months ago, and, you know, had like a 120 people in… and some of them were high level people from Interior, I find myself, in the last several months, becoming very involved in the aftereffects of that meeting. And so, we have five… what do you call it… teams… out there now -- education teams, technical teams, and outreach teams, and science teams. All implementing… what's going to be this new ocean / coast kind of thrust in Interior. and so I find myself, not only involved with all those teams, you know, either developing an agenda, you know -- Agenda Man Piehuta, but I'm also now involved in developing departmental manuals, and probably a Secretarial Order, and policy and strategic plans, and so forth. There's where you get into all the politics. 'Cause everything you do, the simplest thing has to be cleared through all these little political shenanigans out there… and it takes forever to do the smallest thing. So, I'm… where I'm working now, and working with Interior right now, it's… you really get into the politics of it. Where, way back in the '70s, you were sort of an operational, almost a project level kind of thing. So I didn't really appreciate how complicated it was, I guess, at that stage.

Mark Madison – Another thing Flavia brought up in her questions was you were there at the beginning of the eco-system approach to management…

Joe Piehuta – Um hmm.

Mark Madison – Why don't you talk a little about where that idea came from, and what it meant. 'Cause, actually, that's going to be an historical artifact, to a certain extent, to people looking at this ten 20 years from now.

Joe Piehuta – Yeah, I've never thought about where did the concept really come from. You go back in the Fish and Wildlife Service, they say, 'well, oh hell, we've been doing that back since the 1940s, with the River Basin Studies.' But I'd like to know, where did that concept of an eco-system really come from? Yesterday, I attended a briefing in Washington by Doctor Sayle, I think that's S A Y L E, and he's a geographer, making maps and so forth for USGS, and he talked about eco-system geography. And of course, he talked about the 'Bailey Approach', you know, with the systems, and eco-systems and… eco-regions and eco-systems and all that kind of stuff. And I guess, in the back of my mind, I'm beginning to wonder, how do we conceptualize eco-systems, or vertebrae systems, or any kind of flora and fauna systems, out there. Because what we're sort of been doing… you have the objective reality, which is sort of out there, but we only have our interpretation of how to… of how to conceptualize that reality. And that's what… I kidded you a little bit Mark about, you know, symbolic interpretation or something back… that came about back in the 1920s and '30s. But sometimes I… that's made an impact on me, 'cause I think it's all interpretation of… how do you interpret what is a reality out there? How do we interpret this eco-system, or this eco-region, or this organizational structure? It's very interpretative. It's very subjective in a way, but yet, there's still a reality which is out there, that we're trying to locate. I'm wandering. I didn't really….

Mark Madison – [Laughter] And how did people approach it… when you went out to… how did new management strategies usually…?

Joe Piehuta – I think… the eco-system approach… you got a lot of resistance from different things, you know. It's interesting, 'cause I remember when I met Dale… I had barely known Dale, but I got out to Region 1 and Dale was the… what would be comparable to an ARD for… the ES person out there at the time. And Dale come right up to my face and… 'cause, you know, he always talked right to the face… and he said 'Piehuta, you get the hell out of here with this eco-system

approach. It's not going to work.' And yet, Dale was really the biggest supporter I had, you know. I think you got a lot of… you got a lot of resistance, because… I think people began to see that it involved sort of a matrix kind of structure. That people were managing things according to what was on the ground, in that eco-system, or the eco-region. But it also meant that we're going to have a lot more team approach. And a team approach, in that region, we're going to have fisheries people and refuge people and ES people, and they were going to be reporting to sort of an eco-system manager. But then, the refuge person was going to be reporting to that person, but also that refuge person was going to be reporting to their refuge supervisor, and the Regional Office. And you just got a lot of resistance, I think, about the complexity… the organizational complexity, of carrying on an ecosystem approach. And yet, everybody sort of agreed at the same time, that we had to go to the ecosystem approach. That that made sense. So I think a lot of people felt a double bind, in that sense, about what to do. And that… that… a couple of years ago, I was down in Region 4, and a project leaders approach, and this comes up to my mind, about, you know, sort of the synthesize… one of the sub-themes that people talked a lot about in that project leaders meeting was… were… the project leaders were saying 'we're no longer biologists damn it; we're public administrators.' And that… and that's a real bind, I think, for our supervisors on the ground. They have to fill out these multiplicity of reports, that take all their time, and that's public administration. That's administration. That's not taking care of the resource. And yet, I think at the same time, they see that… it is taking care of the resource. Because that's going to depend upon funding and all that other kind of stuff out that way. And yet, they see what's going on, you know, in their backyard, with the birds and the fish and soforth.

Mark Madison – Joe, were you involved when this place was being built and …

Joe Piehuta – No, not really. I was sort of… when the real ground swell was starting to come together here, and the real concept, and when they were starting to actually, you know, put the machines out here, I was not that much involved. No. I was… I was down in Washington… in '94 to '96… those two years or so, where Rick was down there. And then he moved out here, and, you know,

just down the road for a while… a few months. But, I was not directly involved in that at all. No. I was so taken up with this eco-system approach, and doing the team stuff, for that year of two, my focus was basically on that, you know. But, I tell you, it was like… coming out here, I saw when all the dirt… and there was hardly any roads out here. I… I guess I thought I was seeing a mirage, because I knew that this was not Fish and Wildlife Service, you know… their mindset… the…. You've heard it a hundred times, when you look at these buildings out here, and how things are done out here, it's just… it's not government; it's not Fish and Wildlife Service. It's a mirage, what's actually happening, and that… I guess I feel so… so much gratitude, and so lucky, or whatever you want to call it, to be part of this NCTC training center out here. Even though I'm located far away in Washington, where I can't do any damage to this place. But, really, I just… using the very fact that I do report out here, I feel so very fortunate.

Mark Madison – There's another historical legacy that your part of. You mentioned the setting agendas and so on, and you're frequently called upon for facilitation. And so… those jobs didn't really exist, as far as I know. I mean, you didn't regularly have facilitators and so on. How did that emerge and…?

Joe Piehuta – That's interesting. I'm… I… that would be an interesting project, to write, sort of the history of how the [indecipherable] of facilitation came across….

Mark Madison – And even in your own career, I mean…

Joe Piehuta – Yeah.

Mark Madison – You probably didn't have a facilitator when you did your trainings .

Joe Piehuta – You know, in retrospect, I think sometimes… I think I sort of sub-marketed myself, maybe, in doing that, like, we need a team building session - what are the issues. And even what I do today, I go talk to managers a lot about what are their issues. And just talk about it over a cup of coffee. And a lot of times you walk away, and you know there's no business there at all. And other times, you find yourself… it's a continuing conversation. You get a call a week later and say 'hey, we'd like to do something, you know, could you come and talk

to us more.' And you end up 'would you facilitate it' and things like that. I think it probably grew out of the need that… managers began to see that, in group dynamics, there was a lot going on, and that if managers wanted to manage, they had to hear what was going on in the session, and not be involved in, you know, are we going to beg for toilet time now, or are we going to have coffee, or are we going to be taking notes, or, you know, who's going to speak next. I think they began to see there's probably a role that was best given to like a subordinate, or a deputy, or to a third person. And I think, especially to a third person, if the issues are very emotional, you know, or they want more… not necessarily objective, they want a different point of view, or that person can tell me to shut up and… and point to somebody else , you know.

Overlapping voices

Joe Piehuta – It would be interesting to see how that facilitation role occurred.

Mark Madison – Earlier on, you talked about organizational management. I know that's an area that's of interest to you -- how organizations are organized and function. And you've been in the Service for a long time, you know, what… have you seen things that have worked, that have improved, and other things that have become less functional over time. Because you have a unique perspective. In some ways, you're an anthropologist here, in that you're looking at it with different eyes than the majority of our employees, who are biologists or scientists.

Joe Piehuta – I think… I think about the there's a term that has come up in the last what about 30 years or so in organizational management called integration and differentiation. Differentiation means you do… you're responsible for a particular job kind of or… you think like NASA. You know, when you're going to the moon you not only had engineers, you had space scientists, you had people who swept the floors, and worked in the cafeteria, you know, contractors. Those are all differentiated kind of professions. You know differentiated kind of jobs. But if you want to go to the moon, you have to integrate all that, and focus all that, on going to the moon. And that's the integration / differentiation kind of thing they talk about. I think in the Fish and Wildlife Service you have a lot of differentiation

occurring. You have the fishery biologist, you know, the refuge biologist, and all these different professions, down to the person who sweeps the floor, and finance people, and the human resource people, and when you put that all together you integrate that. That's the job of management: to integrate all those different people to go forward to a particular mission, or focus, or whatever it is. And if you follow that concept, that's what's occurring right now down at the branch level all across the Fish and Wildlife Service. The different jobs in that branch, and sometimes they're all fishery biologists or something, they all are integrated into a common goal or objective by that Branch Chief. But then you have four or five branches. And those branches all become differentiated advocates that have to go up and be integrated by the Division Chief. And then you go all the way up to the Regional Director and so forth. And what I'm getting at is, I think the problem with differentiation and integration is a problem that the Fish and Wildlife Service is continually facing. And I'm not sure how it's going to manage that, because you see that… it goes right up to Dale, for example, that he is… becomes differentiated, although he is an integrator... he is differentiated and becomes an advocate for the Fish and Wildlife Service among bureau directors to the Secretary of Interior. And then the Interior Secretary is differentiated by, but also integrator, when he goes into … you follow what I am saying. I think were becoming conscience of that differentiation/integration concept. And I think, with our new network organizational structure, I think our managers are doing better at understanding that differentiation/integration approach. And that has to be taken into account. And now, what's mudding the waters is, we're… a more permeable boundary, we're having to be talking about NGOs, and partners, and what the states think, and so forth. I think that the job of the manager is much more complex today, but I think we're doing a fairly decent job of that. Whereas, the old days, I think there was… a simpler kind of job, we were more biologists or something. Maybe we are becoming more public administrators. I'm not sure if I'm answering your question.

Mark Madison – No, that was a good answer.

Joe Piehuta – In the sense that there's just some theoretical things that went through my mind… thinking theory and not reality… and what's changed.

General laughter

Mark Madison – Flavia, do you have any more questions?

Flavia Rutkosky – I do. I want to ask you to talk a little bit more about the ocean and coast initiative that you mentioned. I'm aware of an existing coastal program, but now, when you talk about this ocean and coast initiative, this is something new.

Joe Piehuta – Yeah. You find different bureaus have little ocean and coastal kind of programs going. But what's happened at the departmental level… and this is Piehuta's interpretation… over the last year or two, there's been two initiatives going on at the Department – the one has been sort of the climate change initiative, and then this ocean and coastal thing. And I think they were sort of big initiatives, but what's happened recently now, I think, this ocean and coastal thing is sort of sliding back and because of… whatever… politics… the climate change is more on the radar screen. But what I'm finding, in my particular job, is… and maybe that's because of a lot of influence I've had on other people, we're more organized infrastructure-wise on the ocean and coast kind of thing. Because we have not only a leadership committee, we have a senior policy committee, and a proposed ocean and coast office, and we're trying to step down that right to the bureaus, and right down to the project leader level, right within each of the bureaus. So the infrastructure's there, but the money and the visibility of the oceans and coasts isn't there yet. Let me say one thing about that. If you look very closely at all the bills that are sort of hanging around Congress right now, we get a new Administration and then the new Administration is partial towards ocean and coastal issues, you see a lot of bills go through Congress very quickly. And you can see this whole ocean and coastal kind of thing really picking up a lot of steam in the bureaus in Interior. The problem that Interior has is that if you talk to the senior staffers on the Hill, the common question they ask is what role does DOI got… Department of Interior got in oceans? That's not them: that's NOAA. See NOAA has been very good at capturing the whole image of what oceans are about. And we… because if you look at any conservation books, you very seldom see anything in a conservation book about oceans or coastal issues;

it's almost all interior kind of issues, inside the United States issues. So, I think it's a conceptual thing, to a great degree. I think… I guess I see a bright future for oceans and coast, because after all it's 70 percent of the earth or whatever you want to call it.

Overlapping voices

Joe Piehuta – And were going to have to define Interiors role, refuges roles, fisheries roles, what… on that coastal period, about what really is NOAA and what really is Department of Interior. That has to be negotiated. I've been pushing real hard that you've got to get senior NOAA people and senior DOI people to come together soon, to start defining what's that role of that coastal zone. Because we can't even define the coastal zone, at the present time. And the coastal zone… I guess depends on who you talk to. It's this wide or it's that wide. Sometimes it's miles and miles inland and miles out. Other times it's where the water meets the sand.

Flavia Rutkosky – There may be an important role for the Fish and Wildlife Service to play in this, since the Service has had a costal program…

Joe Piehuta – Very much so.

Flavia Rutkosky – …for many, many years.

Joe Piehuta – Yeah, and that's why we're going to wake up to something now….

Flavia Rutkosky – Well, I want to say thank you…

Joe Piehuta – Okay.

Flavia Rutkosky – … for the time that you have given us. And I want to close this session by saying, I want to be just like you when I grow up.

General laughter

Joe Piehuta – Thank you.

Mark Madison – And Joe, we usually do ask the narrators is there anything else you want to say in your oral history that you weren't asked a question about, you didn't have an opportunity to say?

Joe Piehuta – I guess, again, just gratitude to the Fish and Wildlife Service for… for being employed really. Because, I think I tend to always look at the empty half of the glass, and I guess I look at myself not having a lot of competencies and not a lot to give the Service in what's going on out there. And yet, I feel that somehow they've kept me on. And I'm just thankful for that. You know, if I could work another ten years for the Service that would be nice. I'm not sure if I can, but I'd really like to do it if I could.

Flavia Rutkosky – Looking forward to it.

Joe Piehuta – Hey, thank you.

Mark Madison – Thank you, Joe.

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