

Oral History of Dr. Robert J. Shallenberger

Interviewed by:
Jerry C. Grover



Years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 22 years

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:

- Refuge Manager, Hawaiian and Pacific Islands NWR Complex, Honolulu, HI
- Departmental Manager Development Program, Washington, D.C.
- Wildlife Biologist, Division of Migratory Birds, Washington, D.C.
- Wildlife Biologist, Division of Refuges, Washington, D.C.
- Deputy Assistant Director, Refuges and Wildlife, Portland, OR
- Deputy Assistant Director, Refuges and Wildlife, Albuquerque, NM
- Chief, Division of Refuges, Washington, D.C.
- Refuge Manager, Midway Atoll NWR, Hawaii
- Deputy Refuge Manager, Hawaiian and Pacific Islands NWR Complex, Honolulu, HI

Most Important Projects: Midway Atoll, establishing the CARE Group; Refuges 2003.

Colleagues and Mentors:

Dick Smith, Jim Gillette, Marv Plenert, Dave Olsen, Dale Coggeshall, Joe Mazzoni, Robert Smith, John Doebel, Mollie Beattie, Jerry Leinecke, Bob Streeter, Don Berry, Dan Ashe, John Rogers, Rollie Sparrowe, Ken Grannemann, Dick Myshak.

Most Important Issues:

Habitats on Midway, Refuge System organic legislation

Brief Summary of Interview: Dr. Shallenberger talks about early life, going to college, and figuring out what he wanted to do after he graduated from Whitman College. After deciding to go to graduate school at UCLA, he started his own company, consulted on various projects, and the Corps of Engineers before joining the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1980, which he would retire from in 2002. He held many different positions with the Service and would become Chief of Refuges before returning to the field to work on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. After retiring from Fish and Wildlife, he worked for the Nature Conservancy, and currently spends time with two Friends' Groups. He says the two constants in his life have been flying and photography, and feels that he wouldn't have gotten certain jobs without the support of various Fish and Wildlife colleagues.



Dr. Rob Shallenberger, February 2016

Oral History Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Conservation Training Center
Shepherdstown, West Virginia

THE INTERVIEW

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Jerry: This is Jerry Grover, a retired Ecological Services & Fishery supervisor in the Portland Regional Office and representing the *Association of Retired Fish & Wildlife Service Employees*. I am at the home of Dr. Rob Shallenberger on Kamuela, Hawaii to do an oral history on his career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The purpose of this interview is part of a program to preserve the history, heritage and culture of the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) through the eyes of its employees. Joining me today is my wife Judy, also a FWS career retiree.

Rob, could you start off with your full name, when, where you were born

Rob: I was born Robert J. Shallenberger on May 14, 1945 in Worchester, Massachusetts. We moved to the west coast when I was two, so I'm a west coast boy growing up; lived in Palo Alto, California.

Dad was a professor at Stanford and so we spent a lot of time around the campus; he was an avid striped bass fisherman, which is how I got into the critter kind of thing.

I have three brothers and two of us really got into natural history and two of us didn't. So I did a lot of camping in the Sierras with my dad and one brother.

Jerry: For the record, when did you retire and what was your position; where were you?

Rob: I retired in 2002, and I was in Honolulu. My position scenario is a little convoluted, but I started with the Fish and Wildlife Service in Honolulu as a refuge manager in Hawaiian and Pacific Islands

Refuge Complex. Spent four years in Honolulu in that job and somebody convinced me to go to Washington D.C., which is a story in and of itself because my wife was born and raised in Hawaii and she had no desire to go to D.C.

Jerry: We can get into that. So what was your position at retirement and your grade?

Rob: My grade was GS 15 and I was the refuge manager at, or assistant; see at that time they called it Deputy Refuge Manager for the Hawaiian Complex.

Jerry: Okay, and then your boss was the Pacific Island Administrator?

Rob: Yes.

Jerry: Okay, that's good. Let's go back to your Palo Alto days that led you to go to school where?

Rob: I went to school at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, where I had visited the area because my grandfather was a rancher in Washington state. And also I had heard that Whitman had better pheasant hunting than the other schools I was looking at, which makes me not a very credible source of guidance for my kids on where to go to school.

Jerry: Did you get your Ph.D. there?

Rob: I got my PhD at UCLA. When I got to UCLA with its 25,000 students after leaving Whitman with about 900; it was culture shock!

Bad enough to go to L.A. but I did it because I followed a major professor who I had worked with at various projects and he helped me get in. So I did my doctorate on seabirds in Hawaii.

Jerry: After UCLA, where was your first assignment? It was here in Hawaii with the refuge system?

Rob: Actually, I got my PhD in 1973, and I started a natural history film company. I did consulting

work on various construction projects and highways. My first federal job was with the Corps of Engineers, believe it or not, as an ecologist in the Pacific. I traveled all over the Pacific. It wasn't until 1980 that I actually took a job with the Fish and Wildlife Service. I think I was able to do that because I got on the Federal Register for the Corps job and that made it possible for me to be selected for the refuge manager position in Hawaii. I stayed in that job for four years.

Jerry: What did they hire you as?

Rob: Refuge manager.

Jerry: Refuge manager, not a refuge biologist?

Rob: No.

Jerry: Okay, and what grade?

Rob: I started as a 12. I didn't have a lot of history with the Service prior to taking that job but I had hunted on a few refuges and I'd done a lot of birding and photography but frankly the idea of being able to work on the land was exciting to me.

When I had done that for four years, I began getting a lot of pressure from within the Service to go into Washington and go to the *Departmental Manager Development Program (DMDP)*. And it was an interesting decision because we were perfectly happy in Hawai'i. My wife's father was a cattle rancher, so I had free meat. My brother was a fisherman so I had free fish. And I lived in a house that I had paid off the mortgage and so it was real hard to pull me out of here, but I did it.

So I went into the DMDP Program, a year-long program, and a really good opportunity to find out not only what's going on in the Service but other agencies and on the Hill and so on.

I did that for a year, and then I did a position in Migratory Birds in D.C. for a year and then I did a year in the Refuge Division; Jim Gillette was the Chief at the time. With the help of some people well established in a position including Marv

Plenert and Dave Olsen and Jim, I was able to get the Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Refuges and Wildlife position in Portland

Jerry: Let's go back one moment. When you were going through the DMDP Program, some of your assignments that you had, what were they?

Rob: When I was in the DMDP, I did three or four months on the Hill with the Environment and Public Works Committee. Then I did an assignment with the Audubon Society working on their Adopt a Refuge Program. And I did assignments in Endangered Species, and I can't remember what else.

Jerry: Who was your mentor in D.C. for that?

Rob: Dick Smith. Dick was really interesting. I appreciated his candor and we worked really well throughout my whole career. And we fished a lot together, were in a car pool together and so I got to know him well and he was a big help.

Jerry: That's interesting because you came out of refuges as a refuge candidate back with the DMDP, and Dick Smith was head of the Research.

Rob: That's right. Well, I had been doing research in the Wildlife Management Branch for that year before I worked, after the DMDP and before I worked in Portland. Yeah, Dick was a big help.

Jerry: Let's go back one other step. When you were hired into the federal position, who hired you here in Honolulu?

Rob: That was Dale Coggeshall.

Jerry: Dale, okay. Let's go back, the connection with D.C. and the Flemming Award.

Rob: Dale had encouraged me to sort of broaden my sights; I would have been perfectly happy to stay in Hawaii, my wife wanted to be there, I was having it good, making a lot of progress, but he put me in for the *Arthur S. Flemming Award*, which is

given to ten government employees under the age of 40.

Jerry: Is this an Interior award or is it government wide?

Rob: No, it's government wide. And I went back for a big ceremony and it was just kind of a big deal for me; I had never even heard of it. I think I was the first Fish and Wildlife Service person to ever get it, so it gave me an excuse to get back there and meet some people and I could be a little more objective in terms of what my options were. The Departmental Management Program has changed over years, as you know, but it's still a great opportunity to get out. Dick was insistent that I take on projects outside the agency.

Jerry: Okay, that's good but then you ended up back as the Deputy Assistant in Portland for Refuges, and if I recall, you lived up on Bull Mountain.

Rob: I did, in Tigard.

Jerry: How long were you in Portland?

Rob: Three years. Including a bit of time going out to Malheur NWR to deal with the Hammonds.

JUDY: Guess who's back?

Rob: I know, it was interesting to see that happen. I can recall being asked to do some tough assignments including holding a meeting at Bonners Ferry about listing the Selkirk caribou. But the Hammond one, everyone got to know; "Rob, it's your turn, you go try to do something."

Jerry: Who was manager at Malheur NWR at that time?

Rob: Well, Forrest was there, Forrest Cameron for a while.

Jerry: Yeah, but that would have been before Forrest.

Rob: Yeah, it was before Forrest.

Jerry: The guy with the Italian sounding name.

Rob: Oh, Mazzoni.

Jerry: Was Joe Mazzoni there?

Rob: Mazzoni, yeah. When I left Portland, I went to Albuquerque as Joe's Deputy. I remember this Hammond thing; I called him before I went out there because I knew he had had experience with it. And I remember walking through the Hammond's living room and seeing all the elk heads on the wall wondering if there was room on the wall for mine, because nobody made any real progress with them.

Jerry: Dealing with the Hammonds, what was that particular issue; was it all grazing or was it land issue?

Rob: It all had to do with grazing a portion of the refuge when they move their cattle from their ranch to the BLM areas, and they were just leaving their cattle on areas too long and just being ornery.

Jerry: Were they the only ranchers that had permits that were leaving their animals on? What about the other?

Rob: No, as I recall, the other ones were setting a good example, but they weren't following it.

Jerry: The Hammonds weren't.

Rob: Yeah.

Jerry: How interesting, giving today's situation with the refuge, and there's still four of them left there.

Rob: Really? I haven't followed it in the last few days.

[Break in tape]

Rob:because the job I really wanted, the Chief of Refuges, came up when Bob Karges retired.

Jerry: Chief of Refuges, D.C.?

Rob: Yeah. So I went from Albuquerque to that Regional Chief of Refuges job and stayed there for seven years.

Jerry: Wow, okay, I guess you bought a home and settled down?

Rob: Yeah.

Jerry: Did you have any family, Rob, any kids.

Rob: Well, I had two kids that were living with my ex-wife in California. And then my son, Matthew, was living with us and so he went from school to school and ultimately wound up at the end of my D.C. stint getting into William and Mary, so he stayed.

Jerry: So you were seven years as Chief of Refuges, then what? You were still a 15 then?

Rob: Yeah. And then I came up to a tough choice, because I had a chance to sort of put together a project on Midway Atoll. And then actually go out and be the first official refuge manager at this closed Navy base. That was a challenge because we established a partnership with a private company to run the operation jointly - the Midway Phoenix Corporation.

Jerry: Midway Phoenix, and they built the Captain Brooks house and some of the newer facilities out there?

Rob: Yes. That was a tough thing, and you'll hear about it, I'm sure, when you talk to Robert Smith because he was my supervisor; he and John Doebel were sort of jointly supervising me at that time and they both were behind the selection and knew I had a lot of experience out there and could make this project work. But it didn't work as well as anybody expected and ultimately they were kicked off the island. But the project was terrific in terms of what we were trying to accomplish and opportunity for people to visit and dealing with the environmental issues and dealing with the Navy.

Jerry: Some of those environmental issues were what? I know about the lead paint on the buildings and there were batteries that were just dumped into the ocean there.

Rob: The military spent a lot of money trying to leave that place in a better state than it was when they closed it in 1993. So the estimates were they spent over 90 million dollars, I never really documented that but in terms of the number of people and the kind of equipment and the barge trips and all that sort of stuff, I'm sure it was a lot of money. The deal with Midway Phoenix was, and it was in the agreement, that they would operate the facility at no cost to the government. Well, that didn't turn out to be very realistic, even though everybody, I think, gave it a try; it ultimately didn't work.

Jerry: What year are we talking then?

Rob: In '93 there was an executive order that closed the base, or the Naval Air Facility. In '96, the executive order transferred it from the Navy to the Interior Department, that's when we officially got it. The agreement with Phoenix was also signed in '96.

Jerry: And the reason that Phoenix did not operate this at no cost to the government was what, just lack of people coming out there? I understand they were offering expeditions or trips through National Geographic or what?

Rob: Well, they had a number of angles, but the ultimate issue was unless they could fill an airplane, and a big airplane; they started with a small one, but unless they could fill it and dependably fill it, they couldn't earn money off that visitor program to compensate for the expenses of running the facility. A lot of things turned out to be more expensive than they anticipated.

Jerry: Did they also, in the agreement, were they also responsible for the power plant, and sewage, and maintenance of the roads, and buildings?

Rob: Yes!. And they sent some engineers out there to look at the facility before they signed the co-op agreement, so it wasn't as if they didn't know, couldn't anticipate all the unforeseen expenses, but we knew it was going to be spendy. And they did put a lot of money into it, but they would have liked to amortize that expense over a longer period of time, but the relationship just deteriorated and ultimately they left.

After the Midway project....[break in tape]....project as a refuge manager. And here after Midway, after being the Chief of Refuges, I wound up going back to the field as a refuge manager at Midway.

Jerry: But as a GS-15.

Rob: Yeah, but the only reason it's a 15 is I said I wouldn't take the job unless they guaranteed I keep my grade. It was funny. I have a file somewhere of all the emails and letters that people sent me when I made the decision to go from the Chief's job to the field. About half of them lined up saying, "What were you smoking? What a stupid thing to do, you work your whole career to move forward, and then you go backward." Well, if you knew what other people said, "You have the guts to do that and be really happy that you could do it," which is really what the Park Service does a lot. People come into the Park system and they work up through several parks and then they go to Washington for four or five years and they come out as a superintendent at Yosemite or Yellowstone.

Jerry: Yeah, but Yosemite is an SES.

Rob: Well, it wasn't at the time, but it is now. But there was no great equity in those manager levels, well, you know that. But Midway was a fascinating place for me; I'd been out there several times as a student and as a researcher and when I first got the refuge job in Honolulu.

Jerry: But your focus was solely on Midway, you didn't have rest of the refuge or the Hawaiian Complex, Johnston Atoll or any of the others?

Rob: Well, I didn't until I came off Midway, and then I moved back out into the Deputy Refuge Complex Manager.

Jerry: Okay, let's back up. When you were on Midway, who was the one that signed your performance evaluation?

Rob: Robert Smith.

Jerry: Robert Smith, and he reported to?

Rob: John Doebel.

Jerry: And then you went back to Honolulu as a Deputy to—?

Rob: Jerry Lienecke! He had filled my job when I left in 1984, so he had been there forever. So frankly, this has a lot to do with why two years after I got off Midway and got back into Honolulu and found myself doing what I did 20 years before that I decided to take a job with the Nature Conservancy.

Jerry: How old were you at the time then? Were you able to draw your retirement or was that something you postponed?

Rob: Yeah, I did when I went to the Conservancy; that was in 2002.

Jerry: So you retired as opposed to resigning?

Rob: Right.

Jerry: And how old were you then?

Rob: Well I'm 70 now, do the math [chuckling].

Jerry: Okay, we can work that out later. So now you're on another career after Fish and Wildlife Service, you have one with the Conservancy.

Rob: Yes, I was the Director of Programs on the Big Island, and I did that for seven years and then retired from that.

Jerry: Retired from them, when did you retire from them?

Rob: Let's see, it would have been 2012.

Jerry: Okay, so you've been three years without anything to do.

Rob: Well, the irony of that, as you probably know from most of your interviews, is it's hard to stop doing what you were doing.

Jerry: So you're doing TNC things?

Rob: Well, I've done a little contract work for TNC and the Kamuela schools and so on, but most of my time is spent working two friends groups. I'm on the board of the *Friends of Midway Atoll* and *Friends of Hakalau Forest*. And I'm, at least according to my wife, much too busy, not playing enough. But those are both projects that I was intimately involved in their evolution, so it's fun to still stay involved but not have the responsibility on a day to day basis; you get along real well with the managers and so we have, what I consider, to be very effective and hard-working people trying to support these two refuges.

Jerry: Yeah, I see that the Friends of Midway Atoll, there is another Fish and Wildlife retiree; Bob Fields is on that group isn't he?

Rob: He is, he was the director or president for a few years; just came off that.

Jerry: Are there other Fish and Wildlife folks on the friends group?

Rob: Linda Watters is on the Midway one, and at Hakalau Forest, Dick Wass and Jack Jeffrey are both on the board. Yeah Dick, he retired many years before that. When I first was in D.C. we were trying to wrap our arms around how these friends groups have evolved and in some cases they were just terrific relationships and they found a nice niche where they could provide financial or other help. Other cases, they weren't so friendly, it was just a ruse for getting into the board room to

make decisions for the Fish and Wildlife Service. So I ran into managers with bad experiences and others that had great experiences. Ours, the ones we have now, are really quite good. We just started an endowment funding refuge projects on the Hakalau Forest refuge to deal with the vagaries of funding that go up and down, up and down.

Jerry: Were any of your people in these friends groups, did they attend the friends training session back in West Virginia last week, the week before?

Rob: Yes, they did.

Jerry: So they got stuck in the snow - from Hawaii to the snow.

Rob: Yeah, it was funny because we had some people visiting from New York, who were here; they had left New York the day before it stormed. So it works both ways. [break in interview.]

It was all about trying to effectively manage the northwestern Hawaiian Island and trying to create protective regulations and some of that would really improve the way that area's managed and the results. And we were pretty successful and I think we did ultimately lead to the establishment of the Marine National Monument that is unique.

Jerry: That's the one that I can't even begin to pronounce.

Rob: Papahānaumokuākea. It helped to clarify responsibilities of three agencies - NOAA, Interior and the state. And so that was satisfying because we made a lot of progress on it. It's one of those things where you get a bunch of work done, but the event itself doesn't happen until five, ten, fifteen years down the road. My most interesting work in D.C., at least most compelling work, was on Refuges 2003 when I first started; Bob Karges had already made a lot of progress on that. It turned out to be my most frustrating experience too because after all the money and staff time that went into it, the program was killed with the stroke of a pen. Actually it didn't even involve writing, just a decision on the part of Secretary Babbitt's Chief of

Staff that we were not going to publish The *Refuges 2003* plan (EIS). And here we had had dozens of meetings and reports and drafts.

Jerry: A lot of man hours and a lot of people involved in that.

Rob: Oh, a lot of people involved and it started before I got into the division but I worked on it for three or four years.

Jerry: Who was the person that did that?

Rob: His name was Tom Collier and he was the Chief of Staff under Babbitt. Mollie Beattie was the Director and she and I went up to meet with him. He asked Mollie, he said, "Is this going to be controversial?" And Mollie said something truthful like, "Of course it is, every issue involving refuge management at this level is controversial." And this guy in like a ten minute meeting was, "Well, the last thing the Secretary needs now is more controversy. Kill it!"

Jerry: Just like that, after all that work re: the Monument?

Rob: Kill it. I didn't even want to go back to the office, I didn't go back to the office that afternoon and everyone was kind of on pins and needles on that after having worked on it so hard. Now there were pieces of it that came after is refuge policy guidance and so on where we sort of pulled stuff out of various pieces, so it wasn't like the whole thing disappeared, but the idea of having a plan and an EIS at the 100th anniversary was the objective and that didn't happen. What did happen and tested all my negotiation skills, was the refuge legislation that was passed in 1996.

Jerry: The Organic Act?

Rob: Yes.

Jerry: Did you work on that?

Rob: Oh God, did I work on it. It was Don Berry and I and Dan Ashe. I had gone to Midway before

the thing had been signed off and that was in April, and I was back in Washington for something else six months later when it was signed by the President, so that was pretty satisfying.

Jerry: Yeah, you lose one, but then all a sudden you gain one; Ying and Yang.

Rob: Yeah, that was a good one because in the negotiation process we kept the critical stuff and it's now sort of made it possible to do all the compatibility determination and planning, although there's a few managers that don't like; we had kind of a short fuse on getting the plans done, that wasn't negotiated. Every refuge had to have the plan in place, I think it was by ten years, it might have been twelve, but you tell a manager that, "You've got ten years to get it done." They think, "That's great" until they start doing it in addition to everything else.

Jerry: Because they put it off until the ninth year before they started really.

Rob: We did some other things in the division - put out a report on *Banking on Nature*, which has since been improved. The whole idea, or whole premise, was to document what is the economic effect of expanding or establishing a refuge. And you know, we, they, get a lot of heat on the Hill from a legislature who say they don't need any more refuges and but we can now make a good case or want help. Most refuges went up in land values and generated interpretative funds and all sorts of other sources of money, and that's been an important tool.

And then kind of a, seems like a silly thing, but it was apparent to me very soon after I got in Washington, that there wasn't much communication between the division and the people, managers and staff in the field. So what we started was like a two-page email called *Refuge Update*, it became a really nice color thing that comes out every, at least every six months; I think it's every three months.

Jerry: I think it's quarterly, what they call NWR News now or something. And now they're going

to stop publishing that. They're going to stop putting out hard copies, if you want to look at it, you're going to have pull it up on line and read it through your Apple.

Rob: Well, as long as there's an alternative that probably makes good sense.

Jerry: But that was the beginning of the NWR News, was just trying to keep the communication between the Division of Refuges in D.C. with the field managers.

And the regions didn't complain about you communicating directly with their managers or did you route it through the regional offices?

Rob: They did a little; I remember that. There was a time, pretty soon before I left in 2002, when we had a Directorate meeting in Tucson, you know at those meetings usually there's a lot of the same sort of crap but there's always a section of the discussion is going to be on a particular issue. And this particular was - where was the refuge system headed in terms of major direction now that the law had been passed? At that time, that's incorrect, the law wasn't signed until after I left. So it was our turn in refuges to put on the meeting, or that section of the meeting, and it got a little testy because frankly we were more candid than we might have been. And we said, "We see serious problems with the fact that not one," and everybody on the Directorate was sitting around this table, "not one Director or Regional Director in this room has ever worked a day on a refuge."

Jerry: That was a different makeup; I wonder what group that was.

Rob: Well, it was true, I mean there were good people. I remember John Rogers took me aside after that session and said, "You might have talked to me before you did that."

Jerry: And who's John Rogers in relation to you then?

Rob: I think John was the Deputy Director, but he qualified it by saying, "I don't disagree with you,

but I would have done it differently." "Well, that's fair." But the reality was they were making decisions about priorities and so on that weren't based on realities of what happens on the ground. And asking people do to things that were inappropriate.

So I think in the end, I think it was good that it happened because there were changes after that; I don't know their cause and effect, but I'm sure there wasn't anybody at that meeting that doesn't remember. Yeah, one thing I would like, I take some credit for or at least I'm really pleased with the outcome was having spent the three years in Washington, which I was in the DMDP and Migratory Birds and Refuges, really reinforcing how important it was for the managers, in particular in the field, to understand what was going on there and when they said they needed it by this afternoon, why they needed by this afternoon; whatever the relationship was with particular congressmen and senators and stuff.

But at that time, trying to go out in the field and get somebody to apply for a job in Washington when he's sitting at Gray's Lake watching cranes flying by his office. They know its cost of living, they know it's a pain in the ass for their kids, they know it's the wife losing her job; it's all sort of reasons why it's problematic to move and so why in the hell would you expect people to come in where there's a vacancy in Pest Management or whatever. So I started doing these details, I started bringing people in for a month or more and was really pleased when I left Washington. I don't remember the exact statistics, but several of the people moving up in really good jobs had done that detail and were now willing to come into D.C.

Jerry: Well, this isn't necessarily just a refuge issue, because I was Chief of Fish Hatcheries for a while.

And it was the same thing, and the same pay, and the only reason I ended up going to D.C. and hired into the Chief's job was I was promised that in three years—

Rob: You'd get out.

Jerry: Well, wouldn't have my old job back, but if I wanted to get out, they'd get me out somewhere.

Rob: Well, we did send people, worked with people on arrangements like that, but it was still real upsetting and you're always uncomfortable about whether or not the next person in line would follow through on that commitment. So that's when I opened it up for people in two or three month details, because they can come back there, they can get to know some of the division branch chiefs and so on and really make their own assessment about, this isn't so bad.

Frankly. I think D.C. gets a bad rap. As a goose hunter, duck hunter, and a small mouth bass fisherman, I had a ball in D.C. You had to do things a little bit differently, but if you come there and complain about not being able to hunt or fish, then you got your head in the sand because there's quite a few opportunities, and Dick Smith was the first one to turn me onto that. All I'm saying is when I left D.C., the stats were looking pretty good for people who had come in, in a detail and then two years later took a job, that's really what we were trying to accomplish.

Jerry: But you know pieces of legislation, like that, that were just kibosh after all that hard work.

Rob: You just reminded me of one project that was both problematic and terrific, and that was the evolution of what is currently called the CARE Group. And I attribute the value of that project and the person who really helped get it started were Rollie Sparrowe and Ken Grannemann. And the reason Ken got involved is because I wanted to get all the warring parties, the Audubon, Safari Club, NRA, and Defenders, wanted to get them around a table to talk about one issue, put the other stuff on the back burner. We wanted to talk about the refuge system budget and current funding available and what the consequences of that are. And everybody, believe it or not, eighteen groups said, "We can agree on one thing, the refuge system is underfunded. Now what are we going to do about

it." And what was anticipated and really worked was the visibility of a list of cooperators that ranged from all ends of the spectrum in terms of what they're trying to achieve and how much they're fighting with the Service on other issues or whatever. We literally put them on a one page paper and we listed them so the contrast between something on the left and something on the right was so optically obvious; like NRA and Audubon or something like that. And the CARE Group, we wanted an acronym what would work and the people could identify with, so the ultimate name was Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement.

And so once we had that one page pitch with all the names on the back, everybody went out and marketed it everywhere they could. We can't get specific credit for it, but there was; what we did, in part with Ken's help and others, was call attention at the highest levels to these specific issues and the refuge funding has gone up dramatically since that time.

Jerry: Who chaired the group?

Rob: I did. Rollie Sparrowe participated in that role as well, he was with Wildlife Management; kind of co-chaired it.

Jerry: And your view, you've been kind of instrumental then because you've had some groups on there that don't see eye to eye.

Rob: No, and as long as you leave your guns at the door and focus only on this one issue. And it's very hard in these meetings because it, as soon as somebody says something off to the side like a snide remark about somebody not doing maintenance issues or whatever, and, "Whoa! Stop! We promised." My frustration overall was similar to the Tom Collier decision to kill *Refuge 2003*. Also, I didn't get any support internally with the exception of Dan Ashe; Dan was at least willing to let it happen.

Jerry: And was he on the Hill committee?

Rob: No, he was in the Service. I think they sort of indulged me, you know, I come back and say, “We had a really successful meeting,” or “We could use your help on a letter,” or something like that, or “Would you sign this?” There was never really overwhelming support for it.

Jerry: So ‘they’ you’re talking about was Mollie and John Rogers? And who was Chief of Refuges at the time?

Rob: John was, yeah, this was after Mollie left. I think they would just sort of humor me, “Go do your thing and if it produces results, great, but can’t see why it would.” There just wasn’t much endorsement. I remember Bob Streeter thought it was a waste of time, don’t recall who else; I didn’t spend much time in that corridor because I wasn’t getting much help.

At every point in my career, there was somebody that was really looking out for me, and looking for opportunities and I think it started with Dale and the Flemming Award.

Jerry: Dale Coggeshall. Was that a position called PIA or Pacific Island Administer?

Rob: Yeah, that was it. Well, he actually hired me the first time, and then after that wanted me to get the Washington experience and put me in for the award, so he was looking out for me. Jerry Lienecke has always been a great friend and he filled my position when I left Hawaii. But then I came, after that whole circle, I ended up working for him and he was really supportive of pretty much everybody but he was very good to me. I feel like, I’m not sure if I didn’t have these connections whether I would have gotten a lot of jobs and when you think about it, I got my first job in the Fish and Wildlife Service refuge system with the support of Dale. I got the into DMDP thing with Dick Myshak’s support largely.

Jerry: And Myshak was?

Rob: He was the Regional Director. I got the job in Albuquerque because of Mazzoni, I got the job

in Portland because of Plenert and Dave Olsen, I got the Division Chief having never taken a wildlife management course in my life and I think that was largely Dave. The only time I didn’t get a job that I wanted was when I applied for Refuges and Wildlife Assistant Director position that Streeter got, and probably just as well because I wouldn’t have been able to go to Midway.

Jerry: Yeah, there’s always something. Did you ever have some battles that you had to deal with people that seemed like you had to talk knock them on the head with a two by four to get their attention, to try to work things through? Did you ever run into those kind of people?

Rob: I had people that I disagreed with. I worked with Don Berry a lot on refuge legislation and we didn’t agree on everything, but I knew I needed his support to get the job done. I think I was too young and naïve enough that when we lost the Refuge 2003 thing, I didn’t feel like I had a lot of support to stick my neck out on that one; he’d probably advised that I didn’t. I had a great relationship with Mollie, as short as it was. She was, I think, she was terrific and I worked with her on refuge issues before she even started. But no, I didn’t really have anybody that was a real problem for me to deal with.

Jerry: What is the biggest change that you saw in the Fish and Wildlife Service from the time that you became a part of it until you retired? Do you think it was pretty much same old organization?

Rob: No, I think over time they were able to break down this division between refuges and other parts of the program. My problem was I started on refuges as a manager; I had no idea what the Fish and Wildlife Service was outside of the land manager role; I mean, I knew there was a hatchery program.

Jerry: And an environmental program, Habitat Conservation.

Rob: And I think that’s why Dick wanted me to do some stuff in other programs during the DMDP. I

did an International Program thing that often would spawn some neat trips. I did an endangered species issue, researched it and came out with recommendations. But as a career employee, I never really had much interest in any other part of the Service than refuges.

Jerry: Even when you're in Hawaii, they had a fairly substantial Ecological Services program dealing with endangered species.

Rob: Yes, but they were all on refuges, or most of the issues were on the lands and that's what interested me the most. And when I didn't get the job that Streeter got, it was probably because I wasn't as enthusiastic as I could have been because I wasn't looking forward to supervising law enforcement or migratory birds. And so I probably didn't make a very compelling applicant.

Jerry: What about the Federal Aid Program, Ernie Kosaka was an institution in Honolulu. Did you get to work with him in partners with state?

Rob: Actually, I think I worked with Ernie a little bit more when I was working with the Corps of Engineers in the Pacific. The only time I really worked with Ernie had to do with joint agencies projects.

I probably can't overstate this, my focus was on refuges. And when I didn't get that job that Streeter got, my first reaction was, "Well, then I don't have to worry about the fact I don't want to supervise law enforcement and migratory birds." I was pleased to have the highest job in the Service beyond which you've got to do other stuff. I mean the highest totally refuge job, it wasn't ARD or Regional Director where they had to split their time and portion of which would go towards refuges.

Jerry: But you know many of the refuge managers, at least have Refuge Officers dealing with law enforcement.

Rob: Oh yeah, I worked on projects at FLETC but never became a Refuge Officer.

Jerry: You went to FLETC, but you didn't have LE on the Hawaii staff?

Rob: Every job I had involved supervision of Refuge Officers. I see the trend now in trying to cut back on that. One of the reasons I was at FLETC is I was troubled with, what I read in the curriculum anyway, to avoid getting in a position of jeopardy; not so much how good a shot you were or how far you could drive but how to avoid being attacked or shot or whatever, not really putting people in harm's way. In particular refuge officers or officer managers with the LE authority who hadn't practiced it in five, ten, fifteen, twenty years, just because now they had credentials and a badge, they go on these joint operations. You know you've got to be on the tip of your toes to be effective and safe in those kind of jobs and I didn't like the role that the managers were in, in trying to supervise them.

I sent people to FLETC, and one guy I sent over from the Kīlaue Point refuge came back like Wyatt Earp. I mean it was scary. All of a sudden he didn't trust anybody, he packed his pistol around everywhere, and he wouldn't let anybody get away with anything even if there were circumstances. I mean give me a break.

Jerry: That's an interesting observation. Are there other things that you like to bring up that I haven't asked about, or that you want to share with on your career with the Service?

Rob: At this point I am always amazed at how things that you do in your career are so unpredictable and could have gone in so many different directions along the way. The one constant in my, maybe two constants, in my whole life, adult life, have been photography and flying, and it always has been other thing I like to do; if I can wrap it into my work, wonderful. But I always know that I love to fly and work on airplanes and I love to shoot pictures. It almost became a conflict when Gene Hester was about ready to publish his policy, he may have done it in draft, saying "Any pictures you shoot while you're wearing a uniform belong to the Service."

Jerry: I think that ended up as policy. It seems like I remember that.

Rob: I tell you, they never really enforced it once they saw what kind of backlash they got.

Jerry: At one time, well, I still have it. I didn't bring it with me, but there was a book on the birds of Hawaii and it seemed like every other picture in there, the credit was to Rob Shallenberger. And that was what, before Fish and Wildlife, that Corps time?

JUDY: That's where we first knew you, your name at the bottom of a bird picture.

Rob: Well, I did this one a couple years ago. [showing Jerry a book]

Jerry: Yeah, I'm not aware of that one.

Rob: Mostly I did it for magazines and stuff, but mostly I do it for fun.

Jerry: But somehow or another somebody got a hold of your pictures and they were good enough to get printed and give you credit in a bird guide.

Rob: The point is those were constants. What was not so constant was the decisions about where I was going work. It just reminded me, I sat down with Bill Shake early in my career, I think it was when I was doing an Endangered Species project.

Jerry: Yeah, I think he was the ARD for Endangered Species and Federal Aid or something like that.

Rob: Yes, and when I did that assignment under the DMDP, I did it in his office. He became bit of a mentor in the early stage by showing me his work plan. He had a one page work plan on where you plan to be at each stage of your career. I haven't talked to him about since, since I retired, but I'm curious how well that panned out; "How's that working for you?"

Jerry: Well, you know he's here in Hawaii right now, he's over on Oahu up there on the north shore, he's renting a house for a week, he and his wife.

JUDY: A couple weeks.

Rob: Well, if you see him, say hello to him.

Jerry: We live next door almost to him, we see him quite often.

Rob: Oh, great. He probably didn't even remember he did that, but it made an impression on me and I made plans, which I modified a lot along the way. Who would have thought I'd gone to the refuge division job and then go back out to the refuge. I don't feel like I made any serious errors along the way in that regard. But the first choice was, I'm sitting at Whitman College in the spring of 1967 and in one week I got an acceptance to Navy OCS, grad school, and Peace Corps.

Jerry & JUDY: Wow!

Rob: And I'm sitting here flipping coins and asking advice from people and it ultimately came down to if I went into the Navy I'd probably wind up in Vietnam. If I went in the Peace Corps, I'd probably have fun, in fact, I was going to teach biology in the Philippines, but where would it lead from there? And if I went, let's see what I say Navy, Peace Corps; and graduate school, UCLA. And my mentor at that time was a dolphin biologist who was at UCLA and I'm not kidding around, he really made a difference in me getting into that school, and so I went to UCLA and did that route. But it makes you wonder sometimes, how easy it would have been to take a different turn and how things substantially would have been different.

Jerry: I'm sure, and not everybody knows that when you come to a fork in the road, take it; you just never know which one.

Lets step back to Midway NWR, your relationship with the Navy - issues?

Rob: In the colonies, in a lot of the open areas didn't have any birds in it because they were mowing the lawns every two days, and it was crazy. We tried to negotiate an overlay refuge arrangement where the Navy would still retain jurisdiction but we would have responsibility for the bird life. And it took a decade before they came around to that, and I think it was in anticipation of them ultimately putting it on a base closure list.

Jerry: Yeah, because when we were there during nesting season, there was just solid Laysans and they were just two neck lengths apart.

JUDY: But we had a lot of petrels.

Jerry: And we had a few black-footed Albatross; oh and the petrels in some areas, I mean the burrows were—.

Rob: Well, here's an example of why these people were tough to deal with. I got a call one day from the manager for the Midway Phoenix, "Come on, I want to show something, we've got a problem." And we go over to where the water tower is and he said, "Look, birds are burrowing all over here. They hadn't been there before." I said, "What's your point? That's great." He says, "But now we won't be able to take the mower in there." "So what? I mean if it's better habitat."

It's funny because that, well it wasn't funny, it was sad, about a month after that I got another call from him, "Come over to Charlie barracks." Got over to the barracks and looked at this tree, this ironwood tree came down overnight; it fell right in the middle of the petrel colony.

And he said, "We've got to get this thing out of here."

I said, "Why is that?" "Because it looks ugly and all our visitors are going to think we don't take care of this place."

I reply, "The way you would take it is the problem here. You would kill hundreds of birds trying to

pull that tree out there. We'll pull it out in three months when the petrels are gone."

JUDY: Petrels would love it.

Jerry: So the ironwood tree stayed?

Rob: Yeah, of course it stayed.

JUDY: That's good.

Jerry: I understand you've been pretty instrumental about removing a lot of those dense growths of ironwood, even got the Laysan duck back.

Rob: It was interesting because there were just enough birds in there for the Phoenix guys to say, "Listen, we'll destroy this habitat if you get rid of these trees." I said, "Well, look at the other areas that used to have trees and see what habitat they have." Look at what the ironwoods are doing to the runways, historic runways on Easter Island where the root structure is destroyed. We just butt heads every step of the way.

Robert Smith characterizes that experience, because quite candidly he and John Doebel were so supportive of this guy that they would bend over to allow him to make it work. The owner would complain to them about spending too much money they shouldn't need to spend and they were assured that when they came on board.

Jerry: Weren't their headquarters on the east coast somewhere, I was thinking that's where; I thought there was some pressure coming out of D.C. on this too, that you guys worked to make this happen because this may be the way we work in the future.

Rob: Well that sounds logical. It was Jesse Helms and a couple other ranking members of the Congress, were very supportive of us keeping this project alive. And one of the reasons why, they were led to believe we would make accommodations for doing things differently than we would on other refuges. And John and Robert, in fairness, were largely interested in making this

thing work, come to me when there was a conflict and say, "You find a way to resolve this." Usually I did and sometimes I didn't depending upon what the consequences were of the decision.

It's a difficult situation when there's personalities involved. In terms of the impact from the Hill, a year ago last November one of the committees on the House side, held a hearing. They invited Fish and Wildlife Service and Kevin Foerster went to testify for the Service, plus they invited people from International Midway Memorial Foundation and Midway Phoenix. And at the end of the hearing, the result was a direction to the GAO to do an investigation on whether or not the Fish and Wildlife Service is appropriately managing this. Well, it's supposed to have been completed by the end of the year, it just ended a month ago and we don't have the draft report yet, but I'm sure it's going to be the same old stuff; the Service is not managing right and as a result, no partner can make it financially. So ask Robert what it was like.

Jerry: Yeah, I'll bet. Did you ever hear the 'teflon John' referring to Doebl.

Rob: Yeah, I also heard one person describe it as the last one in the room. We got five guys that want to convince him of five different opinions, be the last guy and you'll get your way. John and Robert, I'm sure had many sessions where they were frustrated at me for getting in the way of the agreement.

Jerry: One of the things you have not mentioned so far, we've talked the Marine sanctuary, we've talked about refuges, we've discussed Midway. I haven't heard you mention one thing about Palmyra. Were you involved on that at all?

Rob: Yes, I was. Actually I was involved both in Fish and Wildlife and from the Nature Conservancy.

Jerry: While you were working and after?

Rob: Yeah. So when I was still working for the Service I went down there a couple times and

wrote some plans and met with Conservancy people and actually met with scientists representing several different research interests and how they were going to participate.

Then I changed jobs, but one of the earlier tasks even though I was supposed to just work on the big island, was to help. The Conservancy started to put its plans together because they have jurisdiction or responsibility for most of the land base and the Fish and Wildlife Service has the water and the reef. They have been raising a lot of money through that project and have accomplished quite a bit. I think it's a good project and a terrific place.

Jerry: Is it something the Service is supportive of or does it feel like it's a donut hung around their neck or what?

Rob: No, I think most of the people that need to be are supportive of it. I think they're less supportive of Midway than Palmyra. The only reason, in my mind, Midway is still operational is because of the runway.

Jerry: Yeah, we haven't mentioned anything about having the air tower there and the emergency landing field.

Rob: Well it's proven its value already in terms of military aircraft and commercial aircrafts that have landed.

Jerry: Yeah, when we were there, a triple 7 going from Tokyo from Houston landed there. And they had a hell of a time trying to accommodate all these people for a couple days.

Rob: Well, the only thing that, as I say, that's keeping it afloat is the runway. And I'm fearful, or suspect that at some point in the not too distant future, the regulations relating to ETOPS, the over water regulations, will change in such a way that the equipment that flies that route will not have to fly as far on one engine as they do today. And there's a point at which they'll be close enough to Adak or a southern route that they have relaxed their regulations and they will be able to fly—

Jerry: They would be able to abandon Midway then is the point. Here you are living up in Kamuela at 2700 feet elevation.

Jerry: Thank you Rob for taking the time. I think this has been a particularly good interview. Wish you well in your continued retirement.

Rob: Well, I'm stuck here because this ten acres was originally part of a hundred acres that Annarie's father had when he was a cattle rancher. So that sign down there says Carl Myer Ranch, it really was his ranch plus he had three or four thousand acres of leased lands. I knew fairly early on that, I think it was probably at gun point when Annarie said, "If we go to D.C. or wherever, we're going to wind up back here." So when I came back off Midway, we bought a house in Waikoloa, and we built a house down by the beach, and then we built a house here, so I don't think we're doing anymore building. Of course I said that before the barn went up too.

Jerry: Contract work, you're still available?

Rob: Yeah, it didn't take too much time making your own schedule before you figure out it's fun. But I'm very active in the photo side of things and I think those two friends groups are taking about half my time, so I'll continue to do projects like that. Probably won't be flying much longer, my vision is becoming an issue.

Jerry: You actually were in the International Sailplane Association? You own a sailplane?

Rob: Yes and No!

Yes, but its not here. It's funny, I don't know if you saw the news last night or this morning.

Well, some guy in one of these push/pull Cessnas landed in the water over, right by the Honolulu airport; he couldn't get his gear down. Which reminded me very quickly, I had a similar thing about four years ago and couldn't get my gear down; I came in on the runway, he came in on the water, which I thought was a dumb decision. We didn't get any attention at all, I mean, they had the fire trucks and everything out there, but I didn't get on the six o'clock news.