Oral History
of
Robert P. Smith
by
Jerry Grover

Date of Interview: February 3, 2016
Location of Interview: Ahualoa, Hawaii
Years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:
26 years [1978 – 2004]

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:

- Fish and Wildlife Biologist,GS-7, Ecological Services, Cookeville, TN
- Fishery Biologist, GS-9, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, TN
- Colorado River Fishery Project GS-9/11, Grand Junction, Colorado
- Field Supervisor, Western Colorado Ecological Services Field Office, CO
- Departmental Manager Developmental Program (DMDP); GS-12, D.C.
- Deputy Assistant Director, GS-12, Fish and Wildlife Enhancement, Washington D.C.;
- Chief of Division of Endangered Species and Habitat Conservation, D.C.
- Deputy Assistant Director, ES, GM-14, D.C.
- Assistant Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Enhancement, GM-15 Portland, Oregon;
- - Chief of the Office of Ecological Services, Honolulu, Hawaii;
- Pacific Island Manager in charge of ES, Realty & NWR's Pacific Islands, Hawaii
- Administrator, NW Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, Department of Commerce, Honolulu, HW

Most Important projects: Colorado River Fishery Project; establishing national wildlife refuges such as Midway Atoll, Matagorda, Guam, Hakalau, Kealia Pond, Palmyra Atoll.

Colleagues and Mentors: Parker Benton Smith, Tom Talley, Pete Crittenden, Don Berry, Frank Dunkle, Ralph Morgenweck, Mike Spear, Marvin Plenert, Judy Grover, John Doebel

Most Important Issues: Endangered species such as the northern spotted owl, Concho water snake, desert tortoise, Bruno Hot Springs snail, ʻalala.

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Smith's interest of living creatures started at an early age and was influenced greatly by his uncle, Parker Benton Smith, who also worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service years before. He shares how he came to work for the Service, the places he worked and the issues he worked on, and stories from each. Mr. Smith had a successful career, not only helping protect endangered species and establishing refuges, but also helping to get people to understand why it was being done.

THE INTERVIEW

Jerry: Good morning. I'm Jerry Grover, a retired Ecological Services & Fishery supervisor in the Portland Regional Office and representing the Association of Retired Fish & Wildlife Service Employees and also the Fish and Wildlife Service's Heritage Committee. My wife Judy, also a career Service retiree, is joining us today.

I'm in Ahualoa, Hawai'i at the home of Robert Smith to do an oral history with him 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. Robert, would you please state your full name, where and when you born.

Robert: I'm Robert P. Smith, born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, April 4, 1951.

Jerry: When you retired, where, when and what grade were you?

Robert: That is almost another story. When I actually retired I was working with Department of Commerce. When I left the Fish & Wildlife Service, I was a GM-15, the Pacific Island Manager in charge of Ecological Services, Realty Division, and Refuge Division for Pacific Islands, Hawaii from January 1990 through November 2000. I was in Hawaii with USFWS from January 1990 through November of 2000. In December of 2000 I was asked by President Clinton to head up the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve as its first employee and manager. So, I was Pacific Islands Manager for USFWS from roughly 1992 through 2000--about 8 years. From 1990 to 1992 I was simply the head of the Ecological Services Division in the insular Pacific.

Jerry: Robert, as a young boy, what led you, what interested you to end up doing the career that you did?

Robert: Well, Jerry, I bet my story is very similar to that of others. As a young boy, I was always interested in anything alive, snakes, tortoises, frogs. My uncle, my dad's brother, was Parker Benton Smith. And Parker Smith was a fixture around our home and an entertaining guy and he was also one of the first special agents for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Parker started his career with the Bureau of Biological Surveys and I believe in 1936, and later he was a waterfowl biologist for the Tennessee Game and Fish Commission. And then even later in his career, he was one of those dual duty biologist/enforcement officers for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, back then, of course, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. So when he would come over and I was a little boy, he would take his pipe apart and make a turkey call and all those things that fascinated little boys. I think I already had the biologist in me and the interest in living diversity and like that, but Uncle Parker sure made all that come out in me.

So as long as I can remember as a young kid, I was always up to something having to do with living creatures. I kept lizards in the house; we had these little store bought green anoles that would turn brown if they crawled on something dark. And one day my mother came in my room and both the lizards were gone out of the cage and she asked me where they were and I told her I didn't know. So we started looking and it got warmer and warmer as we looked, and finally mom reached over and turned the portable fan on and that's where they were. So we had pieces of lizard all over my room, just one of those early stories that let you know that I had this stuff everywhere and enjoyed it everywhere.

When I was in junior high school, I won a science award for a really extensive butterfly and moth collection I had, where I'd actually go out and find the adults, either butterflies or moths, find them laying eggs and get the food plant and allow the egg to hatch and the larva to grow in the food plant, and ultimately see the thing pupate or form a chrysalis and get to see the complete metamorphosis. The real purpose, of course, was to get a perfect specimen of the adult. So I did that a couple years and to give you an idea of how things go with a guy man like me anyway. Along about the ninth grade the whole bugs and bunnies things started to fade; I began to understand there were girls out there and cars and I mean—

Jerry: Motorcycles.

Robert: I was not allowed a motorcycle because one of my dad's brothers had been killed on one, but it's the first thing I bought when I went off to college, so you're astute in that observation. Anyway, just a quick story, in the ninth grade in junior high, girls were discovered and I had some choice moth pupa cocoons actually in a cigar

box in my locker and, of course, at the end of the school year I found the cigar box and opened it up and the moths had hatched out and beat themselves to death. So it's kind of like that's the demise of wildlife for a little while.

So my high school days were spent working hard at school and those were also rather odd times socially. I don't think it was even different in Chattanooga, Tennessee, than anyplace else. The Vietnam War was raging, I was seeing young boys that may have been a class or two ahead of me go off to war and either not come back or come back completely different people. And we were struggling through the late '60's, peace, love, drugs, alcohol, you name it. It wasn't all unpleasant; it was just all sort of confusing and hard to keep up with. And finally my parents convinced me that what I should really focus on was getting good grades in high school so that we could get me into college.

I ended up going to college on academic scholarship, so their advice, high school grades did come through. And when I entered college, my dad said, "Okay, do something that you like and money will take care of itself." So I thought, maybe I wanted to be a veterinarian because I knew you could work with living things and the clients would pay your bills, that kind of was what I knew. So I entered college as a pre-veterinarian medicine student, went to work in a vet clinic for a couple of summers, found out what that was about and that I really wasn't too interested in that.

Jerry: Which college, you ended up going to school?

Robert: The school that I went to was the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. It was a school that was within a hundred miles of home and I was able to get an academic scholarship for my undergraduate work, so that's where I went. And I was lucky the University of Tennessee at the time had some terrific professors, Michael Pelton in Wildlife, Ralf Dimmick in Waterfowl, Larry Wilson in Fisheries, et cetera, et cetera. And just at that time I was in need of deciding on what my major was going to be. I entered school as a pre-veterinarian medicine student, I worked in a vet clinic for several summers, and sort of decided that wasn't for me. So University of Tennessee started a Wildlife and Fisheries Science major, and by the time I got my first degree in animal science, I was able to enter into that Wildlife and Fisheries Science Program and ended up with a master's degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences.

Jerry: And that first degree was what?

Robert: The first degree was in Animal Science.

Jerry: And that's 1976?

Robert: 1973. And my Wildlife and Fisheries Science master's was in 1976.

Jerry: Okay, you have your degrees now, Robert, and out to the big world.

Robert: Right. And before I entered the big world, let me tell you one quick story from my school world. My major professor in graduate school was Dr. David Etnier, who is the fellow who at the time discovered the snail darter, a small species of perch, in the Little Tennessee River. I had a friend from Chattanooga who was in law school at the time, his name was Hank Hill. And Hank and I would get together after school or whenever we could and drink beer and do what you do after class in college. Hank commiserated with me one day that he had to write a paper on environmental law for his professor Zyg Plater. And I was giddy that day because my professor, David Etnier, had discovered this rare, new fish in the Little Tennessee River. Well, from that discussion, Hank decided to write his paper on the Endangered Species Act and took that idea to Zyg Plater, his professor. And as it turned out, Plater ended up getting with David Etnier over the subject of the snail darter. And to make a long story short, that chance introduction turned out to be Hill vs TVA, the famous lawsuit in which the U.S. Government was challenged over building the Little Tennessee Dam, Tellico Dam, and destroying the habitat of the snail darter. Those years in dealing with the snail darter issue, really were years that put the term, or the phrase, endangered species onto the lips of the average American.

Those of us who were in wildlife biology, of course, knew of the red book list deal and the new Endangered Species Act and were very excited about it, but your average person didn't know anything about it until all the news reporting over the tiny 3 inch fish stop, say, I think at that time a hundred million dollar dam. And that endangered species then became not only a national phrase on the tip of people's tongues but a world phrase as well. So in my post graduate work, I worked with Dave Etnier; I did some consulting with him. And my first job was at Buffalo Springs Fish Hatchery, which was a state fish hatchery in Tennessee. But the story I have for you there is, I also went and did some with the Erwin National Fish Hatchery in Tennessee. And I was there one day, I think delivering a truck load of large trout to

Erwin. And I saw in the hatchery manager's office a picture of an elephant hanging by a chain from a railroad trestle and I just wanted; I'll never forget that. And I inquired about the picture, and the old crusty federal fishery manager at that time said, "Well, the elephant was in town here in Erwin as part of a circus, and it accidentally stepped on a man and killed him. And the town's folk herded the elephant out on the trestle and put a chain around its neck and dumped it off the trestle; hung it." And that was an impactful story and I wish I had asked for a copy of that picture. And years later, I was working with the Office of Management Authority on issues like the African Elephant and I thought about that picture.

After my fish hatchery work, I went to work in 1976 in western Tennessee as an environmental biologist, that's what they termed the job.

Jerry: Who was signing your paycheck at that time?

Robert: A fellow named Gary Myers, and Gary was the Director of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, awfully good guy. My job was mainly to look into matters of the Clean Water Act, the Rivers and Harbors Act, and I also did some work with black bass because my master's degree was comparing the two subspecies of largemouth bass, so when the state of Tennessee did black bass work, they asked me to come along. It was really good work; one of the things I did there was I started flying western Tennessee and literally drawing on USGS maps, sites where it looked like there was something going on in the waterways that shouldn't be going on, whether it was dredge and fill or what-have-you. And I was able to present some of those maps to federal authorities, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and EPA, in particular, the Corps of Engineers, as well. And it was really quite an interest in how many different things were going on in western Tennessee in those river basins, the Wolf River, the Hatchie, Loosahatchie, Obion, Forked Deer, and a lot of stuff was going on without permit or authority.

And so one day my boss found out about it, not Gary Myers, he was my big boss, but a fellow named Wilbur Vaughn, who was the regional manager. And he was livid; what had happened was one of his constituents had called to say that there was a young fellow in his office that was stirring it up and this guy had to stop his channelization project. And anyway, so I got my butt chewed out and my immediate supervisor said, "I want you to go to Congressman Ed Jones's father's home. He's got some catfish ponds, he says his catfish aren't doing too good. On the way, stop at the grocery and get some dye," he said, "I want you to take some test tubes and put some pond water in the test tube then pour yellow dye in and blue dye in when the test tube turns green, you tell that old man everything's all right." And he said, "Oh, by the way, you get a week off, paid, and I'll see you in two weeks."

So I left and rattled the door when I shut it, and instead of going to the grocery store to get food coloring, I went to our local fish hatchery and got a Hach kit along with some help and went out to Congressman Jones's father's farm and we seined his catfish ponds and it turns out they were way overcrowded. So we stretched some burlap across the ponds and poisoned half of each pond with rotenone and the old man about had a heart attack when some of those catfish started coming up different sizes and dead as a doornail. And anyway, we cleaned up his fish feeders and really did a first class job restoring his catfish ponds. And it took a couple of days, and then I got back and packed up my belongings for a week-long time and I went to Atlanta and started shaking hands at the regional office of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Jerry: So you're shaking hands in Atlanta in the Fish and Wildlife Service. This is what year now?

Robert: This would be 1978. After my trip to the woodshed, so to speak, with my boss with Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency, I was left with distaste and as I mentioned I'd been working with many of the federal folks on Clean Water Act, and Rivers and Harbors Act violations in west Tennessee. So I drove myself to Atlanta and basically walked into the regional office cold, and started shaking hands and introducing myself. There were two people there that were in from the field that showed some interest in me; one fellow's name was Joe Hardy from Mississippi, from the Vicksburg Ecological Services Field Office, and the other fellow was Tom Talley from the Cookeville, Tennessee Field Office. And to make a long story short, there were two of us boys at that time, young men, in close competition for an Ecological Services job; one of the young men was named Dale Hall. And Dale and I ended up basically in the same interview for a job in Vicksburg, Mississippi. And Joe Hardy ended up hiring Dale, which left me open for the interest of Tom Talley at the Cookeville, Tennessee Field Office, so I went to work for Tom.

One of the, I guess, one of the most interesting things about that job, no longer with the state, now with the

feds, got a little more resources. And I was working basically the same issues that had caused me to get my butt chewed out with the state: I was working 404 and Section 7 violations; I'm sorry, 404 and Section 10 violations and also working on large Corps of Engineer reviews under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act. And it was those Coordination Act large-scale projects that pushed us to try to capture a wetlands delineation scheme for the entirety of west Tennessee. And we ended up using low level, aerial, black and white photography, which was readily available from the Soil Conservation Service. And we were able to discover enough signatures from that photography taken at a thousand feet elevation, and fairly crisp, to come up with a wetland determination for every significant acre that we could find in west Tennessee. And we transposed that aerial photography, wetland delineation, onto USGS Quads and it was that information that we used in Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, discussions with the Corps of Engineers, and with discussions with others like some of the drainage districts there, to get proper mitigation for Fish and Wildlife due to all the channelization and other things that were on the deck at that time.

Jerry: That's pretty heady stuff, Robert. What grade were you hired in and what was your job series?

Robert: I was hired on as a GS-7, Fish and Wildlife Biologist.

By the way, anecdotally, this country in west Tennessee and all the river basins that we were mapping at the time for the wetlands, were the same places where my uncle, Parker Smith, many decades before, had purchased wetlands for waterfowl management areas. So it was kind of fun being able to cross paths with my uncle's work that happened decades before.

Jerry: Did any of those lands, by chance, turn out to be a refuge like Hatchie Refuge?

Robert: Absolutely.

Jerry: Wapanocca?

Robert: Uncle Benton bought much of the Hatchie River bottom and was later transferred to the feds and become the Hatchie River Refuge; yeah, that's fun stuff.

Jerry: You know what a small a world it is, as you and I are talking, you're talking west Tennessee; our next Fish and Wildlife Reunion is going to be in Memphis, and our day trip is going to be out to Hatchie Refuge.

Robert: Oh neat, wow!

Judy: Better come!

Robert: It's a beautiful place. My tour with Ecological Services was a reasonably brief because at that time, the promotion opportunities, I was young, promotion opportunities were pretty slim. And I got a chance to go work in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park as a fishery biologist. It was a two- person field office, and I entered that position in 1979. And I went to work for a fellow named Pete Crittenden and Pete was one of the old school fish biologists at that time.

Jerry: Did you get a promotion out of that?

Robert: I did, I think I went to a GS-9, And we managed fishes in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, along with Blue Ridge Parkway, and a number of military bases both in Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina. And I also got to have a group of young people that worked directly for me, the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC). And we did some awfully fun things; feral pig control in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, black bear surveys. A lot of this work was done on horseback; it was just fabulous.

And also, we did some fishery work, rediscovered a species of catfish that lives up in those cold streams called the Smoky Madtom and some other things. If you all, that are listening, remember those days of the fishery aid stations, we lived on a shoestring budget. And often times we would have to do things that were a little bit out of the realm of the fisheries station in order to make the budget work. And so one of the assignments I had was to go up into the Clinch and Powell River Basin, and this would be Kentucky and Virginia Appalachia; Hatfield and McCoy country, and do an economic assessment on the proposal to list critical habitat for a number of fresh water river mussels, mollusks. And I'll tell this quick story. I was in an Economic Development Office in Kentucky, eastern Kentucky. And I went in to meet the gentleman and his office was overlooking a stream, one of the streams that we had interest in and I could see a coal tipple in the background where the coal was being staged to load onto trains. And I explained to the gentleman what I was there for and just trying to understand what sort of economic implications may come if the federal government declared critical habitat in the

river system for endangered mussels. And he took a pause and he said to me, he said, "Son, you see that bridge out there, out the window, the one crossing that little creek?" And I looked out and there was a wooden bridge, suitable for automobiles, no rails on it. And I said, "Yes sir, I see that." And he said, "There was an old boy through here several months ago, reminded me a lot of you, a lot." And he said, "That old boy stayed awhile and he took a house up that road, had to cross that bridge every night." He said, "You know, one night it was long about dusk and he's crossing that bridge and there was a whole carton of cigarettes on the bridge, laying on the bridge." And he said, "You know what, they were his brand. And that old boy got out to pick up that carton of cigarettes, you know what happened? Somebody picked him off with a high power, dropped him right in the river." And I, of course, I said to the gentleman, "You know, I think I have the information I need from you and I appreciate our interview." I may have left some papers in his office, if you know what I mean; I was in a rush to get out of there.

But those were the days when these environmental laws were just hitting the books and the folks in the hinterlands had not quite got in the spirit. Not because of that experience, but because that fisheries station was just a poor little station. It was slated to be downsized, and I was given an offer by the Service to go out to Grand Junction, Colorado, and join the Colorado River Fishery Project, and I took the offer. As I recall it was an upgrade, or maybe I had to spend one year as a 9, but ended up getting an 11, which was part of my career track.

So in 1981, I moved to Grand Junction, Colorado, and became part of the Colorado River Fishery Project. This was a group of, I'm going to say,25 or 30 fishery biologists, stationed in four or five little towns in the Colorado River Basin. And what we were doing, we were taking rafts and Jon boats and jet boats and we were using electroshocking techniques to physically handle rare fishes of the Colorado River system including the humpback chub, the bonytail chub, and the Colorado squawfish, and there was another rare fish called the razorback sucker. And what we would do using both electroshocking and setting nets when appropriate. We were trying to discover their habitat requirements, both in stream flow, depth, basically all those things that the fishes needed, places where young fishes would use as nursery areas and like that. And the end result of those studies were to come up with some good numbers on end stream flow and the kinds of habitats needed to perpetuate those species into the future because they were listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. And I will tell just one quick story and then move on, because this is, to make a bad pun, this part of my career really starts to flow at this point.

One day we were up in a helicopter and we were tracking Colorado squawfish; squawfish is a species of minnow, but it's the largest minnow native to North America. And there have been records of squawfish in the category of 60, 70, 80 pounds. We had put some sonic tags in squawfish, uppers of 25 or 30 pounds and several of the fish we lost, we couldn't find them so we hired a helicopter and we were flying the upper Colorado at low level and trying to pick the acoustic sounds up from the fish tags. And we were in the Butte Canyon and someone had built a home on one side of the river and had done a, sort of a jack-legged power hook up to their home and stretched 400 or 500 feet of power cable from the nearest pole across the river into their home. It wasn't on the helicopter's pilot map and lo and behold, we hit that wire dead on, and I can recall the black insulation coming up over the windshield, it hit the thermometer and the windshield broke out in our laps. And luckily the wire caught on the little pedestal just before the rotor and the forward motion of the bird broke the wire. And so the helicopter kept flying and the pilot set it down on a sandbar; we took the glass from the cockpit out of the bird and sort of got reorganized and cleaned out our britches and all that. And the pilot said, "Hey, would you guys mind flying out of here," he said, "it's really going to be a hassle if I call this in as an air accident. And I'll report to OAS exactly what happened."

So we flew out of there with no windshield on the helicopter and he was a good pilot, he went slow and dropped us off at the airport like nothing happened. But the end of that story is, that same day, a crew of Colorado River Fishery project personnel were flying the Yampa River, this pilot hit a full on 500 KV power line, it was on his map, he just didn't see it. And the helicopter augured into a sandbar, it was a bad accident; flames, everybody got out, minor injuries, except for one guy and he was still in the helicopter and his name was Ed Wick and apparently the field crew was going "Ed, Ed get out!" So finally Ed came crawling out of the helicopter and crawled over with everybody, everybody accounted for, everybody safe. Ed was missing a leg, it was a prosthetic leg; he had lost his leg in Vietnam. And it took him awhile in that wreck, his leg had been pinned in the wreckage, it took him a while to unlace it and get it off his body.

So flowing on down the Colorado River then, this work that we did with the Colorado River Fishery Project, did in fact give us a real good idea of what these endangered fishes needed. And that idea was put into practical application right away because there were people who wanted to build major water projects on the upper river that would result in depletions of water from the Colorado River system, net depletions. And so the Service came up with something called the Windy Gap Formula; that was a formula based on what it would cost to purchase water rights for instream flow purposes and the first project that had to pay up due to this formula was a project called Windy Gap and it was way up in trout country, it wasn't anywhere near the endangered Colorado River fishes, but it caused a net depletion of water to this critical habitat for these rare fishes and they agreed to pay according to the Windy Gap Formula. And from then on, as far as I know, new water projects that got their water through bona fide appropriation water rights, still had to pay this extra charge to build their projects and the extra charge was used to keep water flowing in the lower Colorado River system for these fishes.

So that's kind of the story how basic research into the needs of rare fishes can translate into kind of pragmatic approach to how you deal with the use of water for future generations. That work that I did got some people's attention in the regional office and I was able to apply for and was ultimately the field supervisor for the Western Colorado Ecological Services Field Office; it was a new field office and to my knowledge I was the first Field Supervisor for this new ES office. We had a variety of issues to deal with besides rare Colorado River fishes, including endangered plants and the black-footed ferret. One biologist who worked for me, Bob Leachman, spent years looking for the black-footed ferret, and finally spotted one at night--a discovery that ultimately lead to the partial recovery of the species.

By the way, those of you who are listening and you probably already know this, but it seemed that the more controversial issues a young person was exposed to within the Fish and Wildlife Service, the more opportunities that were thrown your way, unless, of course, you blew the controversial issue. But I had a lot of high profile water projects that I dealt with in western Colorado and got a chance to deal with folks both from the Denver Regional Office and from the Washington Office and was encouraged to apply for the Department of Interior Manager Development Program, which I did two years running and I was finally accepted the second year. At that time, I think Don Hodel was Secretary of the Interior, Frank Dunkle had been appointed as a special assistant to the regional director in Denver. And so I knew Frank and we had worked together on some water issues and oil shale issues. And it was sort of coincidental that when I was finally accepted as a DMDP trainee, during early in my trainee process, Frank Dunkle was appointed as Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. So he and I kind of arrived in town at the same time.

Those of you who remember the DMDP, Departmental Manager Development Program, you were required to go on special assignment for the one-year program. And the person that I was able to get on my special assignment was Don Berry. Don was a young attorney working for Walter Jones of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. And it was a terrific assignment; I got to actually have a small office on the Hill near the Merchant Marine and Fisheries hearing room and got to enjoy the Hill back in the day when you could pretty much travel unfettered from one side of The Capitol to the other. I do recall that the main topic that Don had me working on during that year had to do with the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Don was expecting word from on high that we were going to have to okay some sort of reasonable oil and gas exploration project on ANWR, because that was just the politics of the day. We worked really hard, got all of our facts straight and somehow were able to escape that period of time without a lot having to happen at the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. But I got to go there, I got to go to Kaktovik Village on the North Slope and to Prudhoe Bay and it was really quite an education process for me. I will tell one quick story about my DMDP days.

One of the persons I got to shadow was Frank Dunkle, who was the Director at the time. And Frank called me one day and said, "Let's go to the Hill, Senator McClure, Jim McClure from Idaho has some questions about a proposal to list," I think this is probably Frank's words, "some kind of little snail, you can fill me in." So it turned out to be a snail called the Bruno Hot Springs Snail and the type locality was a rock feature along a stream where Native Americans used to come and swim and bathe and the rock feature was called Indian Bath Tub. And I got to go to Idaho and look at that and was familiar with it. We walked into Senator Symms's office and there was a young newly elected congressman there with Jim McClure and his name was Steve Symms. And we all sat down and introduced one another and Senator McClure basically broached this subject of, "So Mr.

Director, you're fixing to put this snail on the Endangered Species List, can you tell us about it?" And Steve Symms hopped up out of his chair, went over and got in Director Dunkle's face, I mean inches, and said something like, "Dunkle, we can send a man to the moon, we can explore the deepest depths of the oceans, we can spend good money after good endeavors and you're fixing to put this blankety blank snail on the Endangered Species List." And my narrative here cannot express how wound up this guy was, he was wound up; red in the face, slobbering, slathering mastiff. And Dunkle, to his credit, sat there pretty much cool as a cucumber. McClure said, "Now, Steve, this is a preeminent piece of federal legislation, we need to hear these people out, have them answer our questions." And finally, Symms took a valium or something, got calmed down. And Senator McClure spoke and said, "Well, Frank, I think I understand the issue here and here's what I want you to understand. I see two choices here, one is that you can go ahead and put this little snail on the Endangered Species List, with some information gaps I might point out, and if you do that, I will use every fiber of my power in office to block the reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act. The other choice is, given the fact that we're not sure that agricultural irrigation projects are causing the water levels to drop and the snail to become endangered, I could authorize three or four million dollars to USGS and they can really study this thing and make sure that we're basing the listing on the very best scientific information available. In that case, I would be inclined to say that the Endangered Species Act process is working and I would wholeheartedly support a reauthorization." Dunkle looked at McClure and said these words, "Yes, sir." And the meeting was over, he didn't, Dunkle gave no indication as to what the decision was, gave McClure no, just said, "Yes sir, come on, Robert." And we got up and left.

Now later, it was revealed that the Director had decided to take on USGS as a partner and to the agricultural pumping study, and that reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act, and you might check the notes on this, but it was roughly in 1988; I think that's the last time the Act was ever reauthorized. So just a quick story, that was kind of a *Mr. Smith goes to Washington* story; it sure had my eyes open and I don't think I've ever heard as many profanities as Steve Symms assigned to the Bruno Hot Springs Snail.

I finished and I did graduate, believe or not, from DMDP in 1987 and I was assigned a new position as the Assistant Director, I'm sorry, Deputy Assistant Director for, at that time it was Fish and Wildlife Enhancement; it was really the old Ecological Services Program, in Washington. My office was in the Main Interior building and my director boss was Ralph Morgenweck. Dr. Ralph Morgenweck was a super guy to work for, small office, he had one office for the deputy and it was an unbelievable variety of issues that we dealt with. There was a point there when there was a Division Chief vacancy and I actually left the Deputy Assistant Director job and went over and was Chief of the Division of Endangered Species and Habitat Conservation for a while, and then I came back and worked in Main Interior.

Jerry: And what was your grade at this time, you were a GS-12 to begin?

Robert: I was a 12 coming into Washington and I left Washington as a GS-14. So I got 13 and a 14 in this period of time after leaving DMDP for a year. I'd done my one year of GS-12 in- grade, got a 13, and then when I finally left Ralph Morgenweck and the Deputy a Assistant Director job, I was a 14. And I'll basically say that with the huge variety of issues in this Assistant Director, Ecological Services office. I got exposed to environmental containment issues, the selenium in our refuge waters and other places in the western states. I got involved in the purchase of Matagorda Island Refuge, I can't quite remember the details but basically they needed a Washington office figure to help broker the deal between the private land owner, Toddie Lee Wynne, and The Nature Conservancy, so I got to go down there and worked on that.

I also worked on a dam, an irrigation dam project called the Stacy Dam in Texas and worked with Mike Spear and his group. This was an issue where there was an endangered snake, the Concho Water Snake, was holding up the construction of the Stacy Dam on the Concho River. And boy, you talk about something unpopular down in that part of Texas, Midland-Odessa, it was really unpopular to have to do anything on behalf of a snake, other than kill it. And so we structured a habitat conservation plan and got in-stream flows below the dam to suit the snake, constructed habitat areas for it, and the dam was approved. And Senator Phil Gramm was the congressional contact at that time, so I got invited down to a Texas barbeque celebrating the completion of the process for Stacy Dam. And I thought I was just going to sit on the stage, but Senator Gramm got up and was looking out over this meadow full of Texans and their barbeque, and in part of his speech he said, "Now I want you know Mr. Smith here, helped quite a good little bit

with this snake thing." He said, "Yeah, we had a little snake thing, but Mr. Smith here from Washington, you get that ha ha ha," and, of course, the crowd laughed. And he said, "He helped quite a bit, having straightened this out." And he said, "Stand up." And of course I stood up, and got rabbit clapped, and then Gramm said, "And we appreciate the Fish and Wildlife Service and all of its Directors in helping us wade through this." And he said, "I'll tell you what, next year this time, the dam will be started, the ground will be broken, we'll be under construction; we're going to have another barbeque here and I'm going to serve Concho water snake barbequed!" And, of course, the whole crowd got up and cheered, so you know that's kind of the way it is in Texas, I guess.

But these issues were tons of fun; one of the issues that came through while I was in that position was the petition to list the northern spotted owl. And the quick story on this is it was done by a very small environmental group, in fact, I think just one person made up the group at that time. And the story, the folklore was, he worked out of his van and wrote his petition in the back of a van and like that. The truth was when you read this document, it made a lot of sense; he pushed all the right buttons, the fellow followed all the procedure, and biologically, it had a good argument. But these were the years, the rumor was that somebody up near the Secretary's office had a bunch of stock in Weyerhaeuser and so he was going to make darn sure the owl didn't get on the list because it would hurt his economic interests; now that was the rumor. And so we all got to have a fair say into what the Service's finding on this petition would be, and, in fact, the Director, Director Dunkle, invited several of us into his office when it came time for the final decision, and we were all able to have our say. And Dunkle went around the room and asked us what we would do and almost everyone that was in the biological cadre said, "Well, we need find the petition warranted, but we can say it's precluded because we're plenty busy with other stuff and we are, and during this precluded waiting period, we'll figure out something." So it got back around to the Director and the Director said, "Well, the decision is not warranted." He said, "Now, I'm going to go back around the room again and I want your reaction." And I was pretty disgusted, I'd done a lot of work on it and was in one of those don't care moods. And I told Director Dunkle and the Deputy and everyone else that was there, I said, "The environmental community is going to wad our decision up into a tight little cylinder and put it where the sun don't shine, we're going to get sued big time and we're not going to look very good." And if you ever knew Dunkle, he laughed his little chuckle and went on around the room to everybody else, he was clearly amused at the passion that came out of that meeting, but it didn't change his mind.

JUDY: No, he's going to do what he's going to do.

ROBERT: So, sure enough, the lawsuit came and Dunkle called me and said, "Well, since you're so knowledge about this owl now, I want you to handle the suit." And I said, "Oh Christ, Frank, I've got all these other things going on; it's like a full time job." He said, "That's right, you're going to Portland." And I said, "You're kidding me!" And he said, "No, pack your bags." So now Marv Plenert tells a different story. Marv said that when he was appointed regional director in Portland, he was choosing his assistants and that he chose Dale Hall as his assistant regional director for Ecological Services. And Dale went, Dale went and was assistant director for the years that I was in Washington. And then, I think I got this right, and then for some reason, oh, Dale was going on to be, I think, to be a Regional Director, maybe Region 4.

JUDY: Yeah, he was going to Albuquerque.

ROBERT: Albuquerque, yeah. So he vacated that job and just like in that Cookeville and Vicksburg office decision, I came in second place, but that was okay. And I went out to Portland as assistant regional director for Ecological Services; they called it Fish and Wildlife Enhancement, but same thing.

JERRY: I thought Dale Hall came in after you, because I retired in '97 and Dale Hall; that was back in those guard/pard days, meaning both geographic and Programmatic responsibilities.. When they reorganized Dale had the ES Program and was the supervisor for the geographic California and Nevada Klamath Basin. I thought you had left.

ROBERT: You might be right. I think I mentioned earlier, my spotted owl work earned me some recognition in Washington and I was asked to go to Portland, and among other things, handle the upcoming lawsuit where the Service was being sued non-warranted decision on the spotted petition. And so I went to Portland as Marvin Plenert's Assistant Regional Director for Fish and Wildlife Enhancement (Ecological Services). And walked into Marv's office and said, "I'm here." And he was sitting at his desk and he looked up and he said, "Well, you weren't my first choice." And I said, "Marv, wow, what a confidence builder. Thanks for that

comment." He said, "Well, I'm going to be honest with you, you weren't, Dale Hall was my first choice." And I said to myself, man, I've seen this play before. And Marv said, "Dale's not going to leave Washington yet, so we'll get by."

JERRY: And you got your 15 out of this too, by the way?

ROBERT: Correct. So I worked with Marv, and, of course, Judy Grover was his secretary, and we had a lot of issues, I mean a lot of Fish and Wildlife issues. And Marvin Plenert was a lot of fun to work for, let me tell you. He was a great guy to me, a good friend, and also supported me quite a bit when I would get in my share of hot water. I'm just hitting some of the high spots as ARD, so just like the rest of the Assistant Directors, I had responsibility for six western states; Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, California, Hawaii, and the Pacific territories, which were a variety of oddball U.S. possessions in the Pacific. The spotted owl lawsuit and sort of re-decision on the part of the Fish and Wildlife Service probably took up most of my time, but, you know, maybe 51%, but that was a super interesting about-face that the Service did. We got the services of a fellow that worked for the Forest Service named Jack Ward Thomas, and he did a thorough study of the spotted owl based on its habitat requirements and based on the principles of conservation biology. And ultimately, the Service did propose the spotted owl for listing as a threatened species and we got 22,000 public comments, which back then was a huge number; anymore that's just getting started, but back then it was kind of before people were really using the computer to respond to federal register notices and there were a lot of comments like, "I can't make the payments on my Bronco if the is listed" and a lot of other comments.. Many of the public comments did not address the science behind the owl proposal, but rather people's fears about what would happen if the owl was listed.

JERRY: Where did the Forest Plan Office come in; were you instrumental in the establishing what became the Forest Plan Office?

ROBERT: Yeah, the Forest Plan Office sprang from the results of the Jack Ward Thomas study and also of the need of the Service to declare critical habitat for the owl as well as simply put it on the list. But when I was there, the big thing for me was placing it on the endangered species list, critical habitat was put off. So as I was leaving, the critical habitat requirement was just coming hot on the burner and that's where the Forest Plan came in.

JERRY: Ok, and that's when Clinton came out and hosted the Forest Conference?

ROBERT: Yeah, and I was already gone.

JERRY: You were gone by then.

ROBERT: I was gone. But nevertheless, the listing was a real challenge, "getting the science right." And just one quick story on the spotted owl. I had a public hearing in Forks, Washington, and I got in, I think, the government car and drove from Portland to Forks. And as I pulled up to the venue, there was a full-size cross, as in crucifixion cross. And from each end of the horizontal on the cross, was hanging a real spotted owl. And at the base of the cross were various things that people had placed there, almost like a Christmas tree, including boxes of spotted owl helper and some of the prank jokes that were done back in the day when the spotted owl was a hot topic. But there was a sign at the base of the cross that kind of eclipsed in size everything else, and the sign read, "Here lays the hopes and dreams of our children." And that was my welcome to the venue and the public hearing that night.

And Marvin Plenert was there and a number of other congressmen representing the area, maybe senators; I can't quite remember, but it was one of those kind of like things where you get that sort of introduction and you go, "Okay, this is either going to go really well, or really badly; one of the two." And for some reason that night, that I was hitting on all cylinders and was able to explain things to the crowd and tell it what it really meant as opposed to what they feared it meant and not pull any punches, but not act like a bureaucrat either and it all worked. And so at the end of that hearing, Marvin was very pleased and it was sort of a beginning for me in terms of the management of some of these bigger, broader issues.

During the spotted owl controversy, we also placed the desert tortoise on the endangered species list under an emergency listing. And it was almost like there was this huge spotlight on the spotted owl and we kind of winked the flashlight down in the Mojave Desert. The desert tortoise really encompassed many more acres of management need than the spotted owl. And one story I remember from that listing was that we had the emergency rule on the street, the desert tortoise species

was suffering from a disease called upper respiratory syndrome; the acronym was URS, or people didn't like the whole thing would call it Tortoise Upper Respiratory Syndrome. Anyway, Marvin called me from my office, I think Judy actually called my secretary girl and she came and said, "The RD wants you up in his place pronto." And I went scurrying upstairs, and Judy was sitting there meekly at her desk and at Marvin's office door there were two guys standing there in suits that I promise you a fly could not land on without slipping and falling. And they introduced themselves to me and both of their last names ended in a vowel, and I walked into Marvin's office and there was a slight, gray haired gentleman there, older gentleman, sitting very close to Marvin and speaking in very soft tones and I walked in. And it turned out this guy was a huge casino owner down in Las Vegas, and so his thing was, "I want you to explain to me about this turtle and what it's going to mean to my gambling operation." And Guido and his other brother Guido were his body guards. And so Marv wasn't necessarily a 100% up on the topic, and so he says, "Okay, Robert, tell Mr. So and So." Let Robert eat it. So I had the opportunity to explain about conservation planning and how we would take a close look at places in the Mojave Desert that needed to be preserved for the desert tortoise and how we intended on building a veterinary grade facility to actually try to treat some of these ancient animals that had the upper respiratory disease. And how people who needed to disturb occupied tortoise habitat would have the opportunity to pay into a fund that would buy some of these desert areas and pay for the veterinary clinic and the staffing and like that. And at the end of that spiel, the gentleman says, "So, I plan my new casino, I pay the tortoise fee, and I go ahead, right?" And Marv said, "Right." So that was the end of that meeting, but as it turned out, that sort of thing was what we actually did with the tortoise. We helped it along its upper respiratory problems and we were able to either purchase or get committed through BLM, or other federal land managers, a whole lot of country where they hopefully still live. Just a few more things Jerry, unless you remember some things from my ARD days.

JERRY: Well, I know Marv, when you start talking about the Endangered Species Act, he was strange, "You're going to list a mussel." You wait until the flowering loving fly petition hit his desk, but anyhow he said, "I'm going to list a bug?"

ROBERT: And it was a bug from California too and that was a double whammy. Again, the further away you get from Washington, the more real the issues are not only in terms of you being able to actually get out and see these critters, but also get out and meet the people that are impacted by the government's actions, and that part of it for me was super interesting and fairly challenging. These spotted owl days were six and half day weeks for me with the other half day eating popcorn and watching a movie if I was lucky. But just as I was leaving Portland, oh I need to tell the story about leaving. There was a big spotted owl confab and I think it was in western Oregon, and all of the senators and congressmen associated with the issue were there. And Marvin was there and he was nervous, I mean it was right at appropriation time and our budget could have been impacted one way or the other. John Turner was there, our new Director in the Washington office. And that was another one of those times when I sort of had the responsibility of explaining things to everyone and everything kind of clicked and sort of like the Forks, Washington meeting. It went fine and people were sort of put at ease and they didn't have to tar and feather anyone. And after the meeting, Marv said, "[making noise], Robert, that was great!" And John Turner came up and shook my hand and said, "Robert, real nice job." And both of them said, "What do you want, man, anything, what do you want?" And I already thought about that and I told them both, "I want to go to the Pacific Islands; I want to go to Honolulu." And John Turner said, "Well, we asked you, and you told us." And he looked at Marv and said, "Make it happen." So that was the beginning of my trip further west to Honolulu.

JERRY: Now on your way to Hawaii.

ROBERT: Oh, yes, thank you. So yes, I had done a little homework and found that the supervisor in Hawaii, Al Marmelstein, was about ready to leave and I was starting to burn out. My blood pressure numbers were a hundred plus in both figures, so I asked for a transfer to Honolulu, and about six months later it came through. So I went to the Honolulu office New Year's Eve of 1990 and I spent the next ten years in the Pacific Islands, and it was a great decade for me, my last decade with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

JERRY: What was your job, what was the title?

ROBERT: When I first moved to Honolulu, I was the Chief of the Office of Ecological Services. We had a small office there, I think five or six people and a big work load, but it wasn't much more than a year or two that Marv Plenert, our RD, decided that he wanted one person out there as a go-to person for all the issues. And I don't think it was really a formal reorganization, I think it

was just the regional director's preference to have a one-stop shopping in the Pacific. So I was basically given an increase of duties and my duties were then to supervise not only Ecological Services but also the Refuge Division and the Realty Division having to do with Pacific Islands operations. So my new title at that time, let's call it about 1992, was Pacific Islands Manager.

JERRY: Okay, I hadn't heard of this PIA Administrator.

ROBERT: PIA was what Marmelstein was, and when I first went out there, I was not the PIA but again after two years, Plenert made this change and with an increase of duties, I was the Pacific Islands Manager.

JERRY: See that also coincides, about that time we had the reorganization too when the ARD then only had program functions. Like Dale Hall supervised Refuges, Fisheries, and ES and John Doebel had the same for Interior and the Islands. So that was just extended down to you then?

ROBERT: Right.

JERRY: And Ernie Kosaka would have been the only odd man out and he's still State and Federal Aid.

ROBERT: Just to be clear, when I first went out, Ernie was an Ecological Services employee. And during, I think, my first year there, he was able to go full time with Federal Aid and again, I'm guessing, a year or two made Pacific Islands manager and for a while I worked directly for the RD. And then, as you mentioned, there was a reorganization and my direct supervisor ended up being John Doebel; remember now, I'm supervising three different functions and so I guess the lion's share of those functions had to do with refuges. So these were great years for me, I had some experience with the creation of refuges, particularly Matagorda Island and some others working out of the Washington office. But the Pacific was really sort of kid in the candy store in terms of refuge establishment. When I got there, Hakalau Refuge on the big island, the Forest Bird Refuge, was already established but I was able to help with the addition of both the Pau Akala Unit, which is adjacent to the main Hakalau Refuge Unit, and the Kona Forest Unit, which is on a completely different side of the Island than the original Hakalau Refuge, so that was fun. I also helped to really brain storm and establish the Guam National Wildlife Refuge; that started out as a petition to Fish and Wildlife to declare critical habitat for a number of species of rare forest birds on Guam, and also the fruit bat. And the reason those species were declaring, and in some cases already extinct, was because of the brown tree snake. The U.S. Military had a huge presence on Guam and as you listeners know, the establishment of critical habitat has a much more severe impact on federal agencies than it does the private sector. So they were mustarding all of their lobbying capability to try to sway the Service away from critical habitat destination; we did do an economic assessment and it looked pretty grim.

And at that time the Navy Admiral on Guam was a fellow named Jim Perkins and Jim called me into his office one day and said, "Hey, I've got to get out a submarine listening base that we've had here for years in northern Guam. It's got some beautiful country associated with it, what would you think if somehow or other we tried to make that a refuge?" He didn't know what he was talking about, but if he was to abandon that area under BRCA, he didn't want a hotel out there; he wanted the beauty of the place to persist. And what we were able to work out then was essentially a trade of the need to declare critical habitat for Guam species for an actual fee simple refuge that came to us under the Base Relocation and Closure Act. So that was a real stroke of business.

Quick story, Guam is a heck of a place to work. The people out there tend to see the best and the worst. My saying was, they want everything the U.S. has to offer in terms of our economic contract, but they want nothing of the social contract. And so I got a call one day from a newspaper and the reporter said, "Mr. Smith, we have it on good authority, good sources, that you are establishing this Guam Refuge so that you will have a place to retire. And that you've already located a lot adjacent to the refuge that you're going to purchase and build your rancho on and retire." And I was, it was one of those days, I was in that kind of mood and I said to the reporter, "You know, mister, if I had the choice between hell and Guam, I'd have to think about it." And, of course, that was the headline of the newspaper, and I got chewed out for that too, but it's an example, especially on Guam and with these valuable properties, that people will do anything; the territory of Guam sued the Service ten times over this Guam National Wildlife Refuge. They were frivolous suits, every one of them, cost the territory huge amounts of money, but in the territories, spending the money that way was politically correct for what was going on politics-wise. I leave Guam, by the way, it's a fabulous place now, the people love it now and it's one of the few places on Guam that you can go and see what the island actually looked like years ago.

I helped with the establishment of Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge on Maui, that program was almost done when I got there but we reconfigured the amount of acreage and made the amount of acreage larger before the final acquisition. Similarly, when I got to Hawaii, there were discussions already underway regarding Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge; we had an overlay arrangement with the Navy that dated back to the late '80's and the Navy was going to subject Midway to the base relocation and closure. There were a number of people who applied for the ability to be the Midway Custodian including the International Midway Memorial Fund; one party wanted to build a prison there, one party wanted to make it a golf course, et cetera. But the Fish and Wildlife Service, in discussions with Admiral Nash, was able to prevail and when the Navy finally did its closure decision, the Fish and Wildlife Service were the recipients of Midway.

Palmyra and Kingman Reef, quick story on this. I was in my office one day in Honolulu and a fellow came in, his name was Mark Collins, and he had just gotten out of jail in Kiribati where he was caught and charged with illegally fishing in Kiribati waters. And so he lent his boat to Palmyra and was eventually thrown off Palmyra by the land owners, and he was asking me whether they really had the right to prevent his boat from entering the lagoon. And it was more of a concerned citizen type inquiry coming to the closest office he knew to come. But we talked and he said, "Yeah, the fishing there is great," and he said, "Man, that lagoon is just full of bonefish." And I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah, I've got a video tape, you want to see?" So I called Beth Flint, the biologist from remote islands and a few other people down, and Collins played this video of the bonefish tailing at Palmyra. And it was breathtaking, even on the old VH8 or whatever it was, as far as you could see, these tails up in the air and the wind and, of course, the fishes were feeding vertically and like that. So Collins left, he didn't really want anything other than to see if we could go to bat on his behalf.

He left and I called my friend, Chuck Cook with The Nature Conservancy who was in Guam at the time on business, and I said, "Chuck, you want to go after Palmyra again?" Because there'd been several attempts to make Palmyra a special area in the past and they'd all failed. And he said, "What'd I want with Palmyra?" And I said, "Man, you wouldn't believe the bonefish." He goes, "Oh really?" "Yeah." So in 1998, we made a sailing expedition to Palmyra, confirmed the presence of bonefish, checked the whole island atoll out, the owners were down there. And long story short is the place was eventually made into a National Wildlife Refuge, the Nature Conservancy paid thirty million dollars for Palmyra to the Fullard-Leo family and the Fish and Wildlife Service, in an out year, an out appropriation year, bought most of the islets from The Nature Conservancy and the Conservancy kept the main island there, Cooper.

One more Palmyra story, there was a fellow who came as a Johnny Come Lately, a friend of Mark Collins, and here's how small the world is. There's an airplane on short-final into Sea-Tac, there's a guy sitting there, his name's Frank Sorba, and there's a young lady sitting next to Frank Sorba. And they hadn't spoken the whole way from their departure, and the fellow started making chit-chat to the young lady, and Frank Sorba says, "Yeah, I'm in the fishery business." And the young lady, "Oh, my dad's a fisherman." Well, her dad is Mark Collins, and they start talking about Palmyra. And Sorba starts hearing about all these fish, not necessarily bonefish, but all the other fish that Collins reported from the area. Sorba contacted the owners of Palmyra and was able to get a "fishing license" from them, It's a permission that the family gave for him to fish down there commercially. He attempted to jack the price up on the island on behalf of the land owners, and this was done after we were already in firm negotiations on purchasing the property. So what the landowners were doing was using Sorba to do a value added at Palmyra to see if they could get more money when the final purchase was made. Sorba, on the other hand, was really trying to establish a fishery and he was both flying fish off at Palmyra and putting them in iced containers and sending ships back to Honolulu. It wasn't working out economically and we kind of knew it, but Sorba then said to a lot of federal officials and his congressman, the congressman from Washington, Norm—

JERRY: Norm Dicks.

ROBERT: Norm Dicks and others, "The Fish and Wildlife Service is taking my property. I have a fishing license up there, I have facilities up there, they're going to make it a refuge, and I need to be compensated just like the land owners are going to be compensated." So there was a big meeting up in Norm Dick's office in Washington and Dan Ashe showed up from Fish and Wildlife and Chuck Cook and they had a plan already to go. And so Sorba's complaint was, "You guys are taking my property from me, you're going to prevent me from being a commercial fisherman at Palmyra and that's

worth something." So he laid all that out at the big meeting, and Dan and Chuck, apparently with some work out, and of course Norm Dick said, "What are you going to do about my constituent here?" It's all [unintelligible#22@00:16:26] right. And Dan said, "Well, I don't know. God, it sounds like you're going to be out a bunch of money if you can't fish." And Chuck said, "Yeah, I'm kind of sympathetic with that too." And Dan said, "You know, I think we can work something out, Norm, where Mr. Sorba can keep on fishing down there and keep on pursuing his dream." And, of course, Sorba's jaw dropped about a foot because he wanted a buyout, he didn't want to continue to fish there. And anyway, long story short is Sorba went away, went bankrupt, I think, and that was just one of the many ways that refuge establishment impediments are removed; I thought it was a pretty crafty piece of business.

O'ahu Forest was established during my reign, but I'm not going to claim much credit for that; it was on the way before I got there. In terms of Ecological Services, we placed three hundred rare plant species on the endangered species list and of course the state as well as many private land owners were not happy about that, but we worked through it and we ended up designating critical habitat for a lot of those plant species and kind of in a deliberate way, using the best science available and the parts of the law that were explicable in terms of conservation planning and other things, were able to get through it.

Perhaps one of my biggest projects there was the recovery of the 'alala. The Fish and Wildlife Service, the Interior Department, was sued over our failure to go on private land and carry out recovery actions for the Hawaiian crow or 'alala. And the lawsuit was filed, an attorney was assigned to the case, Charlie Shockey. And we went to court and David Ezra was the judge, so we filed into the court room and it was me and Charlie Shockey representing the government. It was the Audubon Society, Donna Kokubun, and some other Audubon types and it was the private land owners, the McCandless family. And we all like in church, sitting on opposite sides of the pew and Judge Ezra put his glasses on his nose and he said, "Mr. Shockey, for the government." And Shockey raised his hand and he said, "You and Mr. Smith sit right here." And he put us right in the center. And he said, "McCandless people." "Here." "Sit on my right. Audubon Society, sit on my left." And then he said, " I arranged you this way because we all know that none of you have the same position here, even though the government has thrown in with the McCandless folks, the landowners, in this suit, we know your positions are vastly different. And if you think I'm going to rule in a manner that suits any of you, you're wrong." It was kind of astonishing that this judge would sort of tell of what his thinking was going to be about some future ruling. And he said, "My suggestion for you all is settle this thing. I'm going to assign a retired federal judge and I want you guys to work hard and do your mediation and see if you can settle it." So indeed we were assigned a retired judge, and the Fish and Wildlife Service was kind enough to send me to Washington where I met with the National Academy of Sciences, they agreed to take on this whole 'alala recovery circumstance as a special report by their National Resource Council.

And the people that National Resource Council chose to work on the report were people suitable to both the McCandless private land owners and the Audubon people. So when the National Resource Council report came out on how to do the recovery of the 'alala, it already had buy in from both parties of the lawsuit. And the lawsuit was settled in a fashion that allowed the Fish and Wildlife Service to go onto private lands to essentially double clutch crow eggs, take the entire first clutch of eggs from the nest and artificially incubate them and raise the young in captivity. And should the bird's double clutch, the idea was you give the birds a chance to raise natural chicks. Well, that lasted a little while, birds were not good at raising their own young, but the bottom line was in the first year I think we hatched eleven 'alala, which was more than anyone could remember being hatched in the wild in any year or in any other manner.

And the follow on to that, this was a feat that was reported on television news for an entire summer. And Dan Inouye liked what he heard, and some other members of Congress did too, and we ended up getting a lot of money to build a new Keauhou Bird Conservation Center that now hatches a number of species of birds, not just 'alala. But we were also given the funds necessary to purchase the last occupied habitat for the 'alala, and that was the purchase that become the Kona Forest National Wildlife Refuge Unit of Hakalau.

So that pretty much summarizes the highlights of my Pacific Islands manager job. I will tell you that toward the end of my term there, President Clinton requested a thorough inventory of coral reef habitats under the jurisdiction of the Fish and Wildlife Service. And he was requesting the same sort of information from any and all federal agencies that had purview and jurisdiction over marine resources. So the Service put together our

inventory based on our belief that we managed refuge lands out to a hundred fathoms of water in the northwestern Hawaiian Island, at Johnston Atoll, and elsewhere. This was a long drawn out discussion about who manages what and where on a coral reef.

In 2000 it became known that President Clinton was going to sign an executive order that granted extra power on the part of the executive to protect coral reefs in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands. I think, well, my dad died in October of 1999 and in November of 1999 I had my mom with me in the car and we were trying to get over his sudden and unexpected death, and I got a phone call on my cell phone, which is oh great, I'm on leave but okay. And the voice said, "Mr. Smith, this is the office of the President calling." Well, I had been good friends and buddies with President Mortimer of the University of Hawaii System. And I said, "Oh, tell President Mortimer I said hello and how can I help you?" And she said, "No, no, this is the executive office of the White House calling, this is the office of the President of the United States." I said, "Oh my, what have I done?" And she said, "It's not only what you've done, it's what you're going to do." And I said, "Oh dear."

So the phone offer was the President was going to sign this executive order, he needed somebody in the islands to carry out its provisions, it wasn't going to happen in the Department of the Interior, it was going to happen in the Department of Commerce and they wanted me to switch from Interior to Commerce. And I tap danced about as much as I could on the phone and made some arrangements, and then told them I'd do it. So the last four years of my career, I think I had the longest title of any government employee. I was Administrator for the Northwestern Hawaiian Island's Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. And I retired in October of 2004, and that same Reserve, with some modification, is now known as Papahanaumokuakea National Marine Monument, our nation's largest national monument. So that's it for me, and thank you for listening.

JERRY: Thank you. I'm going to backup a bit, a P.S. to this interview. Somewhere along the line, there was a lady and a Parker, can you tell us how that all happened?

ROBERT: You mean my wife and my son?

JERRY: Yes, you haven't mentioned family and they are a very important part of you.

ROBERT: Right, right. Yeah, let me just say that my career was wonderful and I sort of did my personal life backwards. I met my wife when I was over 40, her name is Karla McDermid Smith and Karla is a Ph.D. and seaweed expert, and she is a professor at the University of Hawaii and still working. And she and I worked really hard after we met and we got married and we continued to carry out our professional lives. And one day we said to one another, "Hey, jeez, we forgot about something, what about a family?" And we had actually talked about it, and Karla was up for one child, so we said, "Oh, let's give it a try." And I was 53 and she was 37, I'm sorry, I misspoke; I was 53 and she was 47. And at age 48, with me being 54, we had our one and only child, Parker Miles Smith, a little boy, and everything was perfectly normal. And the year he was born, I retired, so when Parker was actually in my arms, I was retired from Federal service. And it's been ten years now since he was born, actually he'll be eleven on May the third and we're in early February now.

But it has been sort of a backwards way to plan and carry out a family, but it's been absolutely wonderful. And I met Karla in the Republic of Palau, a far flung area near the Philippines, and I was out there as an envoy to the U.S. on a flora and fauna expedition and she was the seaweed expert on the expedition. So we met and fell in love on a research cruise and it was pretty text book, romantic. But there you have it. Here I am 65 with a ten year old boy and enjoying life.

JERRY: And Parker shares the name of your uncle.

ROBERT: Yes, earlier in the interview I mentioned Parker Benton Smith formerly of the Fish and Wildlife Service. My favorite uncle, the person who influenced me into the career and Parker Miles Smith, my son, is named after him.

JERRY: I want to thank you Robert for inviting us into your home and providing such an interesting oral history of you Service career. It has been enjoyable and rewarding to me to here some of, 'the rest of the story.'