

Interview with Bill Koch
September 3, 2014
Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
Interviewer: Libby Herland

LIBBY: Hi, this is Libby Herland; I am the manager of the Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex and I'm also the representative for the Fish and Wildlife Service on the Heritage Committee from the Northeast Region of the Fish and Wildlife Service. It's September 3, 2014, and I'm at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge where I am speaking with Bill Koch, who recently retired as the manager of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. We are here today because we just celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the National Wilderness Preservation System being enacted into law. And that event was held here with the Secretary of the Interior, Congressional Representatives, and many other people because Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge was the first designated wilderness area within the Department of the Interior. We just had a wonderful celebration and I'm doing three oral histories today, and this history with Bill Koch, is to learn a little bit about the management and the activities of the wilderness area within Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. We're really focusing on the wilderness today and some of the activities that have occurred in there, the management or how people perceive it. Bill, I want to thank you for agreeing to be part of the oral history project about the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness. You are the former, long-time manager of the refuge and I know that you were raised nearby, and I want to discuss that, but before we get started today, we had a little bit of history created when Bill received the very first National Wildlife Refuge System Wilderness Legacy Award.

And I wanted to read this because this is pretty spectacular. Bill is the first recipient of this award, which "is presented to individuals for their tireless support of wilderness throughout their career. Through their actions and accomplishments, they preserved the wilderness character of the National Wildlife Refuge System wilderness areas. They have continued the legacy of wilderness heroes Aldo Leopold, Howard Zahniser, and Olaus Murie. Their dedication and commitment is hereby recognized upon retirement from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service." And this is a really wonderful plaque, wooden plaque with the blue goose symbol, the Fish and Wildlife Service logo and the Wilderness Preservation System logo. And there's space on here for twelve names and Bill's is the first name, "William Koch 2014." This is going to be permanently stationed at the National Conservation Training Center for all the people who work for conservation throughout the country and who go there will see Bill's name forever; pretty amazing award, and Bill's the first. Congratulations on that.

BILL: Thank you, Libby. As I said a little earlier upon receiving this, with great surprise, it might have my name on it, but what I've been able to do here was truly, with a tremendous help from a lot of other passionate people and organizations, and my name is just, it does represent many, many people. It's just a true honor; I was just totally blown away. I was almost speechless, which if you know me, that's unusual. But I just still don't know what to say other than it was, it's been a privilege to

have a dream come true job with the Fish and Wildlife Service for 43 years and to be the manager at Great Swamp for 30 of those years. I've had a lot of help and, again, speechless.

LIBBY: Well, it's a very well deserved honor. And for the record, we are going to do a separate oral history of Bill's management for 30 years, and we wanted to spend a little bit of time just focusing on the wilderness here as part of our wilderness legacy little section here. So Bill, but still, nevertheless, we need to start with a little bit of information about yourself. I do understand that you grew up real close to the Great Swamp, right?

BILL: Yeah, about 20 minutes away; I grew up in the town of Whippany, same county that the refuge is in. And got real hooked on conservation in this area, didn't really, growing up, pay much attention to the news and the establishment of the refuge. I'd groan when my parents would want to put the news on when I couldn't put something that I wanted to see on the TV in those days. So while the saving battle was going on to save the Great Swamp from becoming an international airport, I really didn't hear much about that.

LIBBY: You were a kid, weren't you?

BILL: Yes, I was. However, I will never forget when I was a senior in high school, that on one of the career days the manager from the Great Swamp Refuge was there and he was the only table I went to; I was drawn to what he was about. So that was Tom McAndrews, and so I don't remember much, we didn't talk so much about the swamp, but that was my first awareness of it. Also when I was in high school, one of my biology classes came to the Great Swamp but we went to a county facility in

the Great Swamp and there wasn't much talk about the National Wildlife Refuge back in the '60's then. And the timing of that was back when the; that was about '66 when we did that, no, maybe it was in '64. So it was about the time the Wilderness Act was being signed and all that was going on.

LIBBY: And the refuge was also established the same year as the Wilderness Act.

BILL: The refuge was designated in '64, it was designated; they had a big celebration but there was acreage in hand prior to that because the original agreement was a donation of 3,000 acres. And the momentum was starting to slow down on gathering those acres, so there was about 26, 2700 acres but the folks felt that's enough to get the Fish and Wildlife Service stamp on things and a presence; need to get a presence. And then they went out after migratory bird approval to get federal funding to start buying land.

LIBBY: To start buying land.

BILL: So there was a big celebration in 1964, Interior Secretary Udall was the keynote speaker. And he had really been watching this effort and said it was the first citizens' effort, remarkable effort; those weren't his exact words. And the reason I'm saying this is because I had the honor to participate in the fireside chat with Udall and John Gottschalk and other folks, Helen Fenske back in '94. And Udall did come out for a celebration that the Watershed Association sponsored to rekindle the interest, preservation interest and the desire to protect the Great Swamp from outside threats. So that effort was amazingly successfully as far as stirring up a lot of interest. I had the honor to meet former Secretary Udall and have dinner with John

Gottschalk and his wife, and meet a number of other extremely awesome people that were part of that whole effort. It's been a lot of, there's just been a lot of help to do this, to take care of the swamp in the earlier days to save it and that effort continues to this day. And it will never end, conservation, you're never done with it, it's always something that you have to keep doing. But to keep back to the original question, because you did ask, I grew up around here, I did hear about the Great Swamp way back when, but I didn't really pay much attention to what was going on; I was a kid. But early in my career, coming out of college, I did start to work at Brigantine for the summer; when the money for that temporary ran out, appointment, I stayed on for another month or so volunteering. But during that summer of '71, the staff at Brigantine and Great Swamp had a staff picnic and it was here at a house just down the road from this visitor's center where the manager lived and that was George Gavutis. And I was a temporary but invited up to that staff picnic. Well, we had Hurricane Doria that year and the swamp was flooded, so I came up, you couldn't drive to the house; the roads were under water. We didn't have cell phones in those days and so I found a pay phone and I called the Gavutis residence and they told me how to get into the swamp. And I was greeted just down the road from the Visitor's Center by the water, but a big sign, "Blow horn for Great Swamp Ferry," so I did. And the tractor comes through towing a boat, a flat bottom boat, and we got across through the water that way. I was also with a couple of the other guys that were working with me at Brigantine, so there were three of us that had come up for that. So I got to meet the Great Swamp staff that way, and then I went back to Brigantine. And that appointment, when I took it initially I was told there's a good chance that it might become permanent position, which it didn't.

So I helped the deputy pack, he was moving to Kenai, and I was volunteering there and living, staying in at a cot, they set up their basement for me; I became a live-in babysitter for them, but it was free rent and no rent and right on the refuge and an opportunity to continue volunteering. But when he was moving, then I had to move. So he said, "Well, why don't you go up to Great Swamp and see what they've got going?" So I did, I came up here and there wasn't any jobs, paying jobs, so I was volunteering here for a month or two. And then the college loans start coming due and then I asked the manager, George Gavutis, if he could pay me for one day a week, anything would help but "I'll be here all week but if you can afford anything and you can swing it, it would help with the loans," because I was living, again, at home with my parents. So we were out and he was able to put me on a temporary appointment as the deer biologist because the guy who was doing it went on for his master's degree. We were studying deer because the refuge tried to have a deer hunt, and we were in court.

LIBBY: Oh yeah, opposition.

BILL: So, Libby, I just realized we were talking more about my career and not the wilderness and let's get it back on track.

LIBBY: So you started here as a temporary and then you went to some other refuges?

BILL: No, I was a temporary about a year, we were out for about a year, maybe a little less than that, we were out tagging deer and Gavutis drove up, called me over, there were several of us; we had drugged a deer and were tagging it and getting ready to release it. He called me over said, "Your paperwork came in today for permanent appointment to refuge manager, entrance level." And I was

totally, wow, that's way more than I thought could ever happen. He said, "You have a choice, there's two positions; one right here at Great Swamp and one at Brigantine." I said, "Oooh, I want to stay here." I was at Brigantine and I would have gone there in a heartbeat if there was no other offer, but I was totally enjoying what was going on at Great Swamp and I said, "I'd like to stay here." He said, "Well, that's good, because the same offer is being made today to some other guy and he picked Brigantine." So we both got our first pick. So I was here for three and a half years as a refuge manager, lower level, you know an assistant manager. And then transferred from here to Parker River, and then Parker River, Montezuma, Montezuma, Blackwater, and then Gavutis called me again when I was down there; I was there, it was going on five years, and said, "I'd like to see your application for the project leader at Great Swamp." And because I had been here three and a half years, never thought of coming back; my goal was to work in every region in the country. So I said, "I'll give it three to five," because I had been in Blackwater for five years and that was an eternity in those days.

LIBBY: Right, it was.

BILL: And three years turned into thirty.

LIBBY: Wow, that's fascinating to me. So you were here, at first, in 1971. The wilderness designation was only a couple years old and then you came back in 1984 or so?

BILL: Yeah, I was selected in November '83, but Blackwater was so understaffed, they asked me to stay, because I was the acting manager there at the time. They said, "Can you stay until we get a manager down there?" And I said, "Sure." So I didn't physically move here until February of '84.

LIBBY: So really, almost the entire time that this has been wilderness, you've been involved one way or the other.

BILL: Almost.

LIBBY: So tell me what the wilderness area was like when you first came here.

BILL: When I first came here, there is a road that goes through it that was almost entirely closed. That was something that Congress would not allow, Wilderness Act would not allow. And both towns that it encompassed, previously agreed to abandon it so the Service could undo it, otherwise it wouldn't become wilderness, which really felt we needed wilderness protection here; that was going on in '67, where the wilderness hearing started and it was designated in '68, signed by President Johnson in '68. So when I first came here, George Gavutis was a really on-the-grounds manager. I remember seeing houses that were crunched along that road, the bulldozer was in there peeling up the pavement and ditch plugs, because the swamp had been previously drained by the previous owners, brooks channelized and everybody, all the privately owned properties, they tried to dry the swamp up because you go back far enough, they felt wetlands were wastelands, mosquito breeding wastelands and a good place to get rid of your garbage. But convert that wetland into more farmland or orchard or whatever and to keep your backyard dry.

LIBBY: That was a very common perception.

BILL: So we were undoing a lot of that. We were plugging the ditches to restore the natural wetlands, taking out the permanent structures, the bridges, the asphalt and the buildings. And I remember seeing

structures, houses, former home sites that are no longer there. And Congress charged the Fish and Wildlife Service to remove those things, restore the natural wetlands, and Gavutis played a big part in that; he was very aggressive at that time doing that. He's just an individual I greatly admire, not because he hired me initially into the Fish and Wildlife Service, but because I had the opportunity to work for him three different occasions. When he hired me here at Great Swamp, later on when I moved to Parker River, he was the project leader there so I was his deputy. And then later on he was a refuge, regional supervisor and I, again, my boss when I came back here. And Great Swamp, he was passionate about, and he left his footprint here. And since I totally admired his work, I wasn't going to let him down or the people or the Congress, and so I had big shoes to follow and I wanted to fill them and do what was right here. So the area is much more wilderness today than when it was declared.

LIBBY: That is exactly what I was going to ask you. So here we have people advocating for a wilderness designation in an area where there's roads and there's houses and probably didn't even feel that much like wilderness.

BILL: No, it didn't.

LIBBY: And had been cultivated and had some farm land.

BILL: That's right. At one point, you talk to some locals, Lou Hinds's dad told me once, and Lou Hinds retired about a little more than a year ago as manager from Chincoteague, another awesome Fish and Wildlife manager. His dad told me once, because he's a swamper; Lou grew up in the swamps, started his refuge career right here at Great Swamp. But I was one time talking

to his dad, and his dad said at one time you could see clearly across the swamp, all the wood, all the timber was cut; it was just clear. When I got here in '71, that wasn't the case, but it was very different than what it is today. Some of those, because as the refuge was established there, there were saw mills, in fact, Lou's grandfather had a saw mill in the swamp; one of them. When most of the timber was gone that they could get to, and fortunately on some of the knolls out there that were very difficult to get to, there are still some awesome trees that are hundreds of years old, which is just great, and a lot of that's in the wilderness. But the old fields were let go and became forest again, the wetlands were restored and nature was reclaiming it. But the Fish and Wildlife Service gave it a big jump start by plugging those drainage ditches, and putting the water back to where it used to be, removing the structures. And we also, years ago, did not, because we got a big donation of about 2700 acres, and it didn't go directly to the Service, it went to the North American Wildlife Foundation; they held it and then turned it over, the big donation. And there was no pre-acquisition survey, so we ended up with lands that ultimately were declared Superfund sites.

LIBBY: Right, I remember that.

BILL: So, we had to do something about that for sure.

LIBBY: Is any of that in what is now wilderness?

BILL: Yes. There was an asbestos dump in the wilderness, there was about a five acrea, five and a half acre field of asbestos, twelve feet deep, filled wetland, and then some outlying areas maybe totaling a half acreage more of piles of asbestos. There was a plant in Millington, which is just outside of the

swamp, manufactured this stuff, siding, shingles and stuff. And there was a truck driver for the company who lived in the swamp and nobody knew the hazards of asbestos in the day. And being a swamp, the Great Swamp is part of an ancient glacial lake, and it's got poorly drained soils, high water tables, artesian water popping up in places. So the people that were living here, if you paid for expensive gravel for a driveway or a road, if you had a farm, that gravel would sink down in time and it was endless, it would just keep pressing down and it was costing a lot of money. And then they discovered that these sheets of asbestos floated on the surface longer and all it cost you for a whole truck load was a six pack to the driver, because the driver got paid at the plant to get rid of it and now he got a six pack before he went home. And many driveways and roads in the swamp, backyards were filled with asbestos.

LIBBY: Oh my goodness.

BILL: But this one area, which he owned, the driver owned, was his back yard. And he just kept dumping and dumping and dumping, and when I got here in '84, EPA was just beginning to do the site investigation of the site. And a long story short, fast forwarding into the late '90's, the site was remediated and so I saw it all the way through to that stage, the completion and it is delisted now, it's been delisted from Superfund. And we did manage to, because I insisted this has got to look like wilderness when you're done. And my number one choice for remediation was remove it and get it out of here.

LIBBY: As opposed to capping it.

BILL: Yes, and did an engineering study and that would have cost millions and millions and millions of dollars and we

would have to buy new roads from all the years of truck traffic, getting it out of there and put the public at risk hauling it out if there was an accident or something. So the next best thing was to cap it, and so I worked very closely with them, with our team, which was a fabulous; we worked with the Army Corps out of St. Louis, they were great, tremendous team. But the contractor, design contractor who was in earlier, they went out and they were locating, we did ground penetrating radar on that whole field of asbestos and there was lots of stuff; drums, a school bus packed with drums, there was a bulldozer buried in it, the bus was buried in it. And it was filled with drums and sometimes when the drums, air hit it, they'd explode in effervescence.

LIBBY: You have to get rid of that.

BILL: Oh, we did, ground penetrating radar throughout and all of those things were removed, and then an engineered cap, earthen cap but with fabrics and stuff to keep any trees from breaking through and critters from digging in. So it looks like the wilderness area now, like it should, and it's safe to have a picnic on; it's open to the public and it's delisted. So the wilderness character, restoring that, was the primary objective next to making it safe for critters and the public.

LIBBY: Wow. That's really fascinating because I was not aware that you had that contamination in the wilderness area. During the course of the remediation, did you have to do special planning because it was wilderness?

BILL: Yes. I was at the table all the time explaining this is minimum tool, but it required heavy equipment. And I told the team that the minimum tool, I felt, the minimum tool, if I restrict you guys to wheel

barrel, you're going to be in there for centuries. Let's restore this as soon as we can, so part of my interpretation of minimum tool was to do it in a shorter period of time. So to enable that minimum disturbance to all the outlying wilderness area, and let's get this back into the hands of the wildlife and the people. And to do that, we're in there for a much shorter period of time with heavy equipment, and do it right, otherwise it will drag on forever and cost a fortune. It still cost 8 million dollars to do it, but the Central Hazmat Committee funded it. And we did go to court with National Gypsum, the responsible party there, who was in bankruptcy court because they had many environmental debts around the country. So they reorganized through Chapter 11, we got a cash settlement of \$3.2 million; I worked on the estimate with the engineers on putting a price tag on the damage over time, and our estimate was about \$37 million.

LIBBY: Including to wilderness, was that one of the?

BILL: Yeah.

LIBBY: Not just to wildlife or to the water or ecosystem.

BILL: And the public lost habitat and lost use of the habitat to wildlife and to the enjoyment of the public over time, not just what can't be done today. So that was part of the price tag; I've never done that type of calculation before and haven't done it since, but it was interesting to do. But typically, and I was told going into this, you get ten cents on the dollar in bankruptcy court and that's about what happened. We went in asking for about \$30 million, we got \$3.2, but Department of Justice put that money into restoration not remediation; restoration means it's used at Great Swamp to restore

lost uses and values over time to the public and to the wildlife. But to able to spend that here, we had to write a restoration plan. The site was remediated in the late '90's about '98 I think, somewhere like that. But it wasn't until a few years later that we actually completed a restoration plan, which is the key to the bank. We wrote six chapters in there with the help of the New Jersey field office, they were our partner in doing this plan. And the primary players, the little team, was Clay Stern in the New Jersey field office, and Mike Horne, who's now manager of your old refuge, the Wallkill, and myself. And basically we wrote six chapters for spending that money. Number one was my highest priority, was land acquisition, now we had no year money--
[break in interview]

LIBBY: Hi this is Libby, we were interrupted by one of the refuge staff, whose office we're in and he came in with his 9-month old baby. Bill was just wrapping up telling us about the restoration of the asbestos site that is now part of the wilderness and how, when it was done, preserving wilderness character, that was the intent. And you can't even tell that it's a former asbestos site anymore. Can you tell me about some other, were there any other areas within the wilderness where you did either any habitat restoration or other containment sites in the wilderness area?

BILL: Yes. Most of the wetlands restoration was already taken care of by previous managers, mostly George Gavutis, later George Gage did some, which I was here in the early '70's when that was going on. And, but when Jack Fillio got here, from about '75 or '76 up until, well I'm not sure when he got here, but he left in '83 and I replaced him.

LIBBY: Jack Fillio.

BILL: Jack Fillio. And he was here during construction of some of the major impoundments outside the wilderness. In my early time here, I was involved when Gavutis was building the first major impoundment and we were building some of the smaller, water control structure wetland areas doing that. But to this day, there is another Superfund site that is in the Great Swamp, mostly not government-owned but about 40 acres of it is, of this landfill, this Superfund landfill, is refuge-owned, and it was part of the original donation. It was a part of a 200-acre parcel that was donated to the Fish and Wildlife Service and it's got some awesome, that parcel, awesome; it's in the wilderness, red maple swamp, really great habitat but unfortunately included an outer part of this landfill, which was household trash and stuff like that. It is a Superfund site, EPA's in charge of it, the Fish and Wildlife Service is a responsible party next to some big responsible parties, only because we own it. We're not a big player, but owner is somewhat responsible too under that law. So that one is still, they don't know yet what kind of remedy; there's been all kinds of plans, golf course, dense living units, on top of a landfill, solar farm; no decisions have been made yet. But that one drains into the refuge and is being monitored and developed for remedy by the lead agency which is EPA.

LIBBY: And it affects the wilderness area?

BILL: Yes, it's in the wilderness.

LIBBY: It's in the wilderness area.

BILL: Yes, yes.

LIBBY: So the remediation or restoration of this is not over yet.

BILL: No, it hasn't started. They don't have a plan yet, and that can go on for years. We did the asbestos one, it got to a slow start, in fact backing up to that asbestos, the contractor that Natural Gypsum was paying, when they came out to look at the refuge part of it, when I saw their first report, they only identified a half acre of piles of asbestos, totally overlooking a five-acre field of asbestos. And I think that was, so I said, "Hey guys, come here. This is part of it, this is the biggest part of it."

LIBBY: So other than the asbestos and the contaminants, I know George Gavutis and some predecessors had restored some of the hydrology, so now you've got the hydrology restored and native vegetation is coming back in but were you involved with planting native vegetation, or how did the wilderness get to where if you were to go there today, it would look pretty darn natural?

BILL: Yeah. It got that way, we removed the permanent structures and the evidence of that, and also over the years we had home site cleanups with our volunteer schedule. Okay, we can't go in there with vehicles anymore, but we can go in by hand and carry out some of the old tires, whatever is left, because most old homesteads in those days had a backyard dump.

LIBBY: Yes, they did.

BILL: So there was a lot of stuff that was cleaned up.

LIBBY: All done by hand basically?

BILL: In later years. But we had permission, because when it was designated in '68, there were still some people living there in houses that we were in the process of acquiring and the road going into that residence, you had to cross a bridge and had

to keep the road active until they moved out. So it was declared, and I remember seeing that stuff in 1971 and 1972, and that was well after the wilderness area was declared. So Congress said, get in there, do what you need to do, and get out as quickly as you can. And so that was going on in the late '60's and ever since 1968 and a good part of it was wrapped up in the early '70's.

However, there was a life use reservation, when I got back here in '84 that the house is still standing; they owned part of what was declared wilderness. On one side of the road, which was the wilderness boundary, this county road, was the house outside the wilderness. But on the opposite side, in the wilderness, were barns and out buildings and a lot of junk. When that life use reservation expired and we had complete control for the Fish and Wildlife Service, I was so eager to remove the last remaining structures in the wilderness and they came out relatively quick.

LIBBY: Was it done by refuge staff force account?

BILL: Yes. Of course, we had to deal with some contaminant, some junk that was left in rusting containers and a lot of creosote containers and some asbestos there. And so we had the professionals deal with that stuff and of course go through the historic clearances that we needed; we do that on everything.

LIBBY: Where did all the funding come for that?

BILL: Most of it was our own, we would just do it, eek it out of our budget because it was important. And it was just a delight for me to take down and clean up the last remaining structures in the wilderness—

LIBBY: Congratulations.

BILL: --area. Now we still might go in, there are no structures there, permanent structures, but you might find something, you know a leftover remnant of former residence that got missed; it's all overgrown now. But nature's rusting all of that up, we just accelerated nature because a lot of that would melt into the ground. We did it so it's environmentally clean and proper, and quick to get it out of there to give to the public, fulfill our promise that we're going to turn the clock back on this area. And the promise preceded me, but I felt I was obligated to fulfill it.

LIBBY: So part of the speeches that we heard today about how this was the first designated wilderness within the Department of the Interior and here we are 26 miles from Times Square, who would have thunk. But at the time, and it was a great victory to have this area designated as wilderness because it provided an extra layer of protection for the Great Swamp Refuge. But it really wasn't very wilderness-like, but 50 years or 46 years from that designation, you go there now and it's very wilderness-like and it probably is comparable to many other wildernesses around the country.

BILL: It's just probably, I mean, there are some smaller, it's by no means a large, vast, western, remote, primitive area. But you can get lost out there, in thought, you can get lost physically if you're not careful, and it's 25 miles from Times Square and who would have thunk. If you're out there, I can't imagine. So many people come to the refuge and, "I can't believe this place is here!" Just yesterday I was staffing the refuge office and Jerfelis[unintelligible@10:47] had to leave to wash the vehicles for today's big event, so I covered the office for him. And a visitor came in and he was from New York City,

and he was astonished with what he had seen. He had been here before, years ago, but not since and he was just, he just couldn't believe; he had gone to places he hadn't been before on the refuge on this trip and he said, "None of my friends in New York City know about this place, I've got to tell them. This is awesome!" And I'm hoping that we can do a better job because that was part of the vision for this by John Gottschalk, Stewart Udall, that this place, being so close to the metropolitan area has great outreach potential. And not just being a wildlife resource, it is that, but it's much more.

LIBBY: So it has great potential for connecting with one of the largest metropolitan areas in the entire country.

BILL: And that was almost as significant a part of the refuge purpose as what it meant for the wildlife, and all these years having potential for outreach. And I can give you a lot of reasons why we haven't, there wasn't a visitor's center here for many years despite Udall and Gosttschalk saying there should be a first-class visitor's center here because of the potential. We only dedicated this facility and opened the doors to the public in 2010. And so it was too many years in coming, but we did interpretation and education in other ways, but this facility has enabled us a lot more but we have much greater potential than we're able to fulfill at this staffing level.

LIBBY: So it does kind of, I think, tie in or lead in very nicely to maybe the last question which would be what role do you think the Great Swamp Wilderness has had and will have in the future of public's understanding and appreciation of the National Wilderness Preservation System?

BILL: Wilderness; earlier in my years here, there was still a great scramble for tax ratables by watershed communities. They felt development; much of the mindset was that if you get development, you increase tax ratables, then life will get better. And there was not the understanding or appreciation for these natural places, what they mean to the people, not just the wildlife because, "oh, that's just a wildlife place and I don't care about wildlife," or something like that. But they didn't understand the relationship to themselves and to water quality and to flood protection and to their soul, and so we spent many years working and watershed organizations and working together with the community and the contentious battles started to diminished. We had growing support for the refuge, but I would be at these public meetings telling people about their national treasure in their own backyard and it needs their help. But there would be other organizations, like the Great Swamp Watershed Association, that would remind folks that, I would see in their written testimony or stated verbally in a public meeting, that they would include the wilderness area and impacts on that. And the wilderness designation is the highest level of protection on the land and I've relied on that to fend off threats on our perimeters that would have a negative impact on the adjacent wilderness area. And it was endearing to see that others were using the same thing. So wilderness designation has helped protect this place far beyond and into the future because it's something more and something that needs to be considered and respected and it's just an extra shield but one that also stirs curiosity, "Well, what is this?" So people what to learn more about it and when they learn about and what it can offer them, it just generates more support. So the conservation community and the refuge has used reminded threats, threatening actions, that in addition to this being a national

wildlife refuge, part of a big system, and it's just not a little local park or area like that, it's part of a system where there's nothing else like it in the world, you should be proud of it. But in addition, this refuge is a designated natural landmark and it's got the first designated wilderness area in the Department of the Interior, and there's special rules that go along with wilderness and then we would elaborate. So it's helped us protect it from outside threats, that additional designation, but it's also something I'm very proud of to be here, privileged and proud, to be part of all of it.

LIBBY: Do you think the public really, the average visitor today, are they even aware of wilderness and the significance of wilderness?

BILL: As Dan Ashe said earlier today, the country is getting more and more urbanized and people are less and less connected to nature. So I think the trend is fewer people are aware of these wild places, not to mention wilderness. So we have to get, and the Service has gotten more aggressive with an urban initiative, which is absolutely needed. But also, the tools for communication have improved and we can reach into people's homes and should be there. Just this morning, or was it last night, Dan and Wendy were in New York City with Al Roker.

LIBBY: Yeah, this morning.

BILL: And reaching out into people's living rooms. And with the internet, and with the awesome job that the Department of Interior and the Fish and Wildlife Service is doing on the webpages and with those announcements; awesome. So that helps, but the culture, I see the culture changing and so these initiatives and new communication outreach tools are absolutely

necessary to push that in a new direction, the proper direction to continue and maintain and grow the support for these natural and wild places.

LIBBY: Do you have any last thoughts for somebody who might be listening to this, say in 20, 25 years, 50 years, about managing this wilderness or the importance of this wilderness?

BILL: Look at Great Swamp, look at the history of it, approach with an open mind because it took vision for Great Swamp, it was not, it was not; many people said then that it was not really, "That's not wilderness." It wasn't, I'll be the first to say that; you had to turn the clock back, you had to undo things. The Service agreed to that, committed to do that and did it; nature was working alongside of the Fish and Wildlife Service and it is more wilderness today than it was when it was designated because there was vision. So have vision, never give up hope because just saving the refuge, this wilderness designation was really, probably the motivator was the Port Authority that wanted to build an airport here. And one of your questions, Libby, you didn't ask but I would; it was something along the lines of important, who were the most important people in the establishment of the wilderness? Well, there's obvious folks, Congressman Peter Frelinghuysen, John Gottschalk, Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior, many unnamed individuals that supported it, Helen Fenske, if I didn't say her name. Rupert Cutler, who you just recently interviewed, and a host of others, there are so many to name. But also the Port Authority itself, if they were not so omnipotent in those years, the refuge was established and the interest, the public interest around here was waning on adding more land to the refuge and fighting the battle because they thought the battle was

won. But the Port Authority didn't like to lose and they weren't giving up and they were still, in '67, when the refuge was over 5,000 acres in size, talking about plonking the jetport here and if they pulled the right strings they may have been able to pull it off. So wilderness came along in '64, and so the folks wrapped, so yeah, we need the final nail in that coffin and wilderness designation will do it. So because the Port, I don't think they would have pursued the wilderness designation if the Port Authority hadn't continued to push it, push the issue. If they had turned their back on it and publicly announced we're done with the Great Swamp, we're beat, then I don't think they would have pressed it, because there had been no other effort before by Interior and the mind set for wilderness never came close to what Great Swamp was. It was vision. And it goes back to that, those folks, "Yeah, we have a purpose, we have to stop that airport but we can undo these things and we can make it better." And the Fish and Wildlife Service, with nature and a lot of volunteer help, we did it.

LIBBY: And I didn't go into a lot of history because I got it from Rupert and also we heard it today, but I love the way you connected the vision that those people had. And one of the things that came out of this interview perhaps more than the others is that when the wilderness area was designated, it wasn't wilderness in the sense that we think of it now in 2014. And I really appreciate all the work that was done to get it to this point and I think your words about vision, that there may be areas that are not wilderness now in 2014, but can become wilderness in the future.

BILL: Exactly, that's right.

LIBBY: If you have the vision and you have the courage and you have the time and you

have the dedication to make it happen, and you have leaders like you, who always kept and honored the purpose of the wilderness and tried to preserve wilderness character, which is really what it's all about. And so for thirty years it was under good stewardship, under your leadership. It's hard to imagine this place without you at the helm, but things go on, we're all going to be succeeded by somebody else, and I'm sure that they'll do a fine job as well. I'd like to conclude this interview now. I want to thank you for your service, we will have a separate oral history project where we can learn more about this and some of the other challenges here that you did. Bill, thank you for your service and thank you for your leadership; this is a wonderful refuge, one of my favorites, and it has a lot to do with you and your team.

BILL: Thank you for the honor of this interview, Libby, and it's been a sheer pleasure working with you and many other awesome Fish and Wildlife Service people. It's a great mission that we have; it was very hard to leave it. I haven't been successful in totally leaving it, probably never will be. It's just a really, really awesome thing that the Service does. And keep up the good work, you people in the future.

LIBBY: [chuckling] Yeah, protect what we've protected for so long.

BILL: That's right.

LIBBY: Thank you.