Oral History Cover Sheet

50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act

Date of Interview: September 3, 2014
Location of Interview: Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, New Jersey
Interviewer: Libby Herland

On Wednesday, September 3rd, 2014 I will be conducting oral histories with three people who have been involved with the management and /or the designation of the wilderness area at the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. We are gathered on September 3rd to mark the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the National Wilderness Preservation System Act into law. The first nationally designated wilderness within the Department of the Interior was the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, which is part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Secretary Jewell and other high ranking officials will be present to mark the anniversary of the Wilderness Act. I am conducting three oral histories and both the video tape of the ceremony and these three oral histories will be submitted to the archives at the National Conservation Training Center to be protected permanently as part of the history of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The three interviewees will be: Rupert Cutler, who was involved with the designation of the wilderness area at the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge; Judy Schmidt, who was a resident of the area and remembers what the area was like when the wilderness designation was made; and Bill Koch, who was the manager of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge for many years and was responsible for the management and protection of the wilderness area.

Interview with Rupert Cutler
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LIBBY: Hi, this is Libby Herland. I'm a member of the Fish and Wildlife Service Heritage Committee representing the Northeast United States. And I'm here today, September 3, 2014, at the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, where we just celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act being signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. We're here at Great Swamp because Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge was the first wilderness that was designated within the Department of the Interior. I'm speaking today with Rupert Cutler, who was involved with the designation of the Great Swamp Wilderness and with the Wilderness Act in general. And we're going to talk a little bit about the Great Swamp Refuge designation of the wilderness here. So Mr. Cutler, thank you for spending some time with us to share your memories of the establishment of the first wilderness area in the Department of the Interior, which was at Great Swamp. I understand you live in Roanoke, Virginia, right now, but at the time you were working professionally to help with the Great Swamp Wilderness. Can you give us a little bit about what you did to help with the wilderness designation here?

RUPERT: In 1965, I was hired by Stewart Brandborg, who succeeded Howard Zahniser as Executive Director of the Wilderness Society after Zahni died prior to the passage of the Wilderness Act; Brandborg and I had worked together at the National Wildlife Federation in the early '60's. I had moved to Washington in 1962 from the Virginia Game Commission in Richmond and worked with Brandy and then he moved to the Wilderness Society. I went on to become the first managing editor of *National Wildlife Magazine*; that entailed moving from Washington to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where the magazine was being produced. And then Brandy got ahold of me and asked me to come back to Washington in 1965. So I was at National Wildlife from '62 to '65; I actually was in Washington in 1963 to hear President Jack Kennedy at his White House Conference on Conservation in the State Department auditorium urge the passage of the Wilderness Act—

LIBBY: Oh, that's fascinating.

RUPERT: --in his speech in 1963. And I, as the managing editor of *National Wildlife Magazine*, worked with Sigurd Olson of Ely, Minnesota, a longtime advocate of wilderness protection for the Boundary Waters Canoe area, on an article for *National Wildlife Magazine*, on the need for a Wilderness Act in 1963. And, of course, all my life, as a child with my parents on camping trips and my summer jobs with the Forest Service, I've worked in wilderness areas and loved them. So when Brandy asked me to join him back in Washington, D.C. to be his number 2 at the Wilderness Society, I was thrilled to have that opportunity.

LIBBY: Right, it was a logical position for you to take because you already were familiar with wilderness and you helped promote the concept of wilderness.

RUPERT: And I'd also worked with Congress because before I moved, when I joined the National Wildlife Federation in '62, I worked with the Congress representing the Wildlife Federation and was in charge of their publications program. And then when they decided to publish *National Wildlife Magazine*, about a year and a half later, then I had to move to Milwaukee to do the magazine. But I had already worked on Capitol Hill and, of course, when I worked for the Virginia Game Commission, and even prior to that for the Wildlife Conservation Corporate Sportsman's Organization of Boston in 1957/58, I'd worked with citizen groups, with private conservation groups, to help them support political conservation goals. So I was pretty familiar with the political process and with Congress. Since I minored in journalism as a wildlife management student at the University of Michigan, majored in wildlife, minored in journalism, I had some communication skills as well. So my experience on Capitol Hill with the Congress, and with writing and communication, seemed to fit the bill for Brandborg, as well as my interest in wilderness, so I worked there from '65 to '69. So we had an entire staff of the Wilderness Society in 1965 of about a dozen people and was talking to the current executive director today and he said they have about 150 employees.

LIBBY: Amazing, yeah.

RUPERT: Ten time increase.

LIBBY: Even though we were going to talk primarily about the Great Swamp Wilderness today, you were involved and you knew the people that had been advocating wilderness, for establishment of a wilderness preservation system, for years; you knew Howard Zahniser, for example.

RUPERT: I did.

LIBBY: I'm wondering, on a day like today, and his name has come up a couple times, it would be wonderful if he could have seen what his efforts led to.

RUPERT: Well, he was a tireless advocate for the Wilderness Bill, and as you know, it took eight years, from 1956 when Senator Hubert Humphrey introduced the first Wilderness Bill, to 1964, when President Lyndon Johnson signed it to become law. And during that entire time, Howard Zahniser was visiting every member of Congress and getting every other conservation group behind the bill as well. I mean, the Sierra Club, and the Isaac Walton League, and Wildlife Federation, and the National Parks and Conservation Association all helped, but Zahni was the spearhead. And I did meet him and he was a very fine man, he was very understated; he was a philosopher and a writer. He wasn't the kind of he-man, you might say David Brower was with the Sierra Club, or some other mountain climbers; in fact, he had a weak heart and knew it and had to kind of take it easy in that respect. But he'd been a journalist, I think with the Fish and Wildlife Service or with the Bureau of Labor; some other federal agency before he became the executive secretary of the Wilderness Society, and so he was a philosopher. And I think being a minister ran in his family, and he was kind of a preacher for wilderness as his children became as well. So just a little note about Zahni; I visited him in his home in College Park, Maryland, I believe it was. At any rate, he was an inveterate book collector, as am I. And the books were everywhere, they were stacked on the stairs, going up stairs, they were in the attic, they were on top of his refrigerator; everywhere you looked there were books and he just couldn't resist buying books, and I know

that weakness, but Zahni was just a great guy. And so as I said, after he died, unfortunately, and Brandy became head of the Wilderness Society, I was pleased to have the opportunity to go into D.C. and then as I said, we just had a tiny staff. Brandborg was the executive director, Michael Nadel was the editor of *The Living Wilderness Magazine*, I was in charge of the eastern half of the United States as far as responding to the agencies wilderness review recommendations that's concerned. And a fellow by the name of Clifton Merritt from Montana was, against his better judgment because he didn't want to live in the east, he wanted to stay out west, was in there in charge of the reviews in the west. He eventually established a Denver office for the Wilderness Society to move back out west. But at any rate, can you imagine being responsible for responding to all the National Park, National, well Fish and Wildlife Refuges, and National Forest wilderness proposals from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River.

LIBBY: So tell me a little more about what that actually entailed in terms of responding to them.

RUPERT: Well, the reason, of course, we had to do it, was the Wilderness Act's two provisions in terms of establishing wilderness. The first was what we called the instant wilderness system, and that consisted of the 9.2 million acres that the Forest Service had already administratively designated as wilderness or wild areas; they had a designation of areas, I think 5,000 acres and below were wild and above that, no maybe it was 100, I bet it was 100,000 acres and above were wilderness and below 100,000 were wild areas; anyway, sort of an artificial division. But they had already taken what Bob Marshall back in the '30's had established as primitive areas and reclassified them as wilderness or wild areas. And so the Forest Service had already created its own wilderness system administratively. With the passage of the Wilderness Act, the authority for designating wilderness was passed from the agency to the Congress, no longer an executive decision but a legislative decision by the Congress. So the 9.2 million acres that the Forest Service already designated as Wilderness became the nucleus of the wilderness system. And there were actually three areas in the east as well as a lot of areas in the west; there was Great Gulf in the White Mountains in New Hampshire and two in North Carolina.

LIBBY: Part of the Smokies?

RUPERT: No, they were in the Pisgah/Nantahala National Forest that the regional forester in Atlanta had recommended be established. So there was some precedent for eastern national forest wilderness when the Wilderness Act was passed.

LIBBY: Would you say even back then, in 1960's, the idea of wilderness in the east, did that seem far-fetched or did it seem very feasible; was there a lot of enthusiasm?

RUPERT: The word far-fetched is probably the best term, particularly in the Forest Service, even though there were these exceptions that I mentioned in North Carolina and New Hampshire, most of the Forest Service folks thought of wilderness as million acre rocks and ice out in the Bob Marshall or the Cascades or the southwest Colorado or someplace. So this idea of eastern areas, small areas, areas that had been farmed or logged or homesteaded didn't sit very well with the Forest Service. But like I was staying, the second part of the Wilderness Act, Wilderness System

establishment provision was a review requirement that required the Forest Service to go ahead and finish its review of the 5.4 million acres that the Forest Service still had under review, still called primitive areas. And the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service were required to review all the roadless areas in the park system and the refuge system. And one reason that they had to review areas like Great Swamp is as follows, and very few people know this. When Congress passes an authorizing statute, it can't be enforced until the executive agencies match it with implementing regulations; there's legislative history and then there's administrative law. And so the Solicitor of the Department of the Interior was required to take the Wilderness Act and make it more specific about how to go ahead out in the field and implement this rather vague law. And so the Solicitor of the Department of the Interior published regulations telling the field staff of Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service how to go about implementing this new law. The same thing is going on over in the Department of Agriculture in the Forest Service and the regulations weren't necessarily identical.

LIBBY: I was going to ask that.

RUPERT: Now there's a lot of discretion given to the Executive Branch when it is handed a new statute, a new authority. In case of Interior, the Solicitor's Office, in case of Agriculture, it's the Office of General Council; the head lawyers in both departments take this statute and try to figure out what Congress intended and how the agency should go about implementing the law. Well, in the case of the Department of the Interior, the Solicitor's Office had drafted its Wilderness Act regulations and published them as draft regulations in the Federal Register. And Stewart Brandborg and I made an appointment with the Solicitor at the Interior Department Office and went over to visit him one day and we said, "Mr. Solicitor," I forget his name, "We would like to recommend one change in your proposed wording of this long regulation, it's a little word, one little word. It has to do with a minimum size of areas that can be reviewed and included in the Wilderness System. And your current language says, they have to be of 5,000 acres in size and practicable to be managed as wilderness. And we would like you to change the word 'and' to 'or'." And he did. And that meant there was no minimum size of wilderness areas.

LIBBY: Right. And that's obviously very useful in the east.

RUPERT: Well, it was very useful in the whole refuge system because there's a lot of islands, Pelican Island and all these islands, so that was pretty cool.

LIBBY: I manage a national wilderness area at Monomoy Refuge, which is less than 5,000 acres, but it's on an island.

RUPERT: Yeah, well, there was a reference to islands, natural, ecological islands or something like that, so anyway, we were able to overcome this notion of a minimum size. And then that opened up, as you just said, opportunities for all the little refuges and all the little park system units. And it also eventually led to a lot of national forest wilderness areas, particularly in the east; like I live in Virginia now and there are 24 wilderness areas in Virginia, 80,000 acres in Shenandoah National Park and all the rest like 23 areas in the George Washington/Jefferson National Forest that range in size from 3,000 acres to 12,000 acres, but they're the last little, natural areas in Virginia.

LIBBY: And these areas are really, really important for protecting our ecosystems.

RUPERT: Well, that's old growth forest and that kind of thing.

LIBBY: Right.

RUPERT: So anyway, I had to respond to all these proposals that were coming down from those other agencies and what we would do is go out to their congressional district, and every little town was there. And we would take a pocketful of 3 x 5 cards that we would print off of our addressograph-multigraph that went bang, bang, bang, that printed out these little cards. And we'd borrow names and addresses from the National Wildlife Federation and the Isaac Walton League and Sierra Club, and we'd go out to some little community, like Bryson City, North Carolina, and working on the Great Smoky National Park. And we would go to a phone booth; we'd drive into this little town, that's back when there were phone booths. [laughing] I don't how Superman does that to change his clothes.

LIBBY: I just imagine somebody in 50 years from now listening to this interview.

RUPERT: Phone booth! What's that? Watch Superman! [laughing] So I go in the middle of town, get on a phone and call some likely looking person and say, "May we use your living room for a meeting," and down in Virginia they'd call them 'come to Jesus meetings.' And we'd have a meeting of eight, ten, twelve, fifteen people that never heard of us before but they live near this purposed wilderness area and we challenged them to get together and have a field trip, by foot, or on horseback or by canoe, whatever it required, and take a look at the boundaries proposed by the agencies and see if they thought they were the best boundaries. And nine times out of ten, these committees, encouraged by us, of course, on the Wilderness Society staff, would find some areas we thought could be added to the original proposal, and so we would call that the Citizen Proposal Alternative to the agency recommendation. And then we would encourage these groups, once they've established their proposed boundaries, their proposal, to come into Washington D.C., and that was the other half of my job, was to help these people find housing. And sometimes used the, it was kind of extension service has some sort of hostel out on Connecticut Avenue, cheap housing. But we'd find them a cheap hotel downtown, or we'd put them up in our own homes and then we'd take them around Capitol Hill and introduce them to the members of the subcommittees, help them write their testimony, get the committees to schedule hearings, write the testimony for the hearing statements; so to babysit the project through the subcommittee and committee hearings, working with the staff on their committee reports, and basically just babysit the process all the way through to helping the local folks be as effective as they could be vis-a-vis Congress and at the same time working with the agency, working with members of Congress; we'd establish good working relationships with a lot of members of Congress and a lot of committee staff members. And it was kind of an assembly line process in a way, because there's so many of these things coming through, and what's the wilderness du jour.

LIBBY: Well, I know when Monomoy Refuge was designated, there were many units that were of National Forest, Parks, or Refuges that were all designated in the same bill, so I understand that. So that's really helpful and fascinating to learn how that process worked in general, and I really appreciate all your efforts.

RUPERT: Well, today I was just coming back from our field trip out with a Student Conservation Association and overhearing a conversation in our van between the current director of the Wilderness Society and a senior staff member of the, what's the lady in charge of wilderness of the Fish and Wildlife Service?

LIBBY: Nancy Roeper.

RUPERT: Nancy Roeper, and she was expressing dismay that the refuge system hadn't had an addition to the wilderness system in a long time and the friends organizations for the refuges were not particularly active as advocates for wilderness for those refuges. And I just turned around and said, "That's what the Wilderness Society should be doing, they should be getting those friends more activated and more insistent upon legislative action." I think, frankly, that's where Wilderness Society is falling down in recent decades; it's too focused on Washington D.C. and not out enough with the grassroots organizations getting those people animated and involved. I acknowledge Stewart Brandborg's leadership in that regard, unlike his successors at the Wilderness Society who tend to put a lot of resources in headquarters with sophisticated economic analysis and lobbyists and magazines and so forth. Brandy said the action has to be out in the field, at the grassroots in the congressional districts because you're not going to get a bill passed to establish a wilderness area unless the local congressman wants it.

LIBBY: That's right.

RUPERT: And he's not going to want it unless his constituents tell him he wants it. So that's where the action is and that's where I think the process is broken down a bit.

LIBBY: Well, tell us about how the process worked for Great Swamp in 196-, it was designated in 1968, I believe. So the Act was established in 1964, and the refuge was established in 1964, the same year. So Great Swamp hadn't even been a refuge for very long and now they're talking about wilderness designation.

RUPERT: Well, I came into after, of course, the refuge had been established, but I know that the background of it was the proposal for a fourth jet port, airport, by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey; they already had Idlewild, which is now Kennedy and Newark and LaGuardia. I don't know why they wanted a fourth one, but they did and the state-level politicians wanted it and so forth, but this also happens to be the home of a lot of wealthy people and a lot of large corporations. And the hotel I'm staying in is right across from Verizon's headquarters, was that Bell Labs before?

LIBBY: Yes, well, AT&T.

RUPERT: I remember they were involved in advocating for the wilderness.

LIBBY: How about that.

RUPERT: Yeah. And just kind of skip ahead a bit, when we held the House Interior Committee hearing on the Great Swamp Wilderness Bill, it just blew the chairman, Wayne Aspinall, from western Colorado, away when he saw this lineup of suits; these high power chief executive officer types, whose major national Fortune 500 corporations, lined up to testify in favor of wilderness.

LIBBY: That's fascinating.

RUPERT: That had never happened before.

LIBBY: Fascinating.

RUPERT: He was so used to having commodity groups from the timber and the mining and grazing industry and others opposed to wilderness, and here he had the business community like the Chamber of Commerce types saying, "Yes, we want wilderness. That was a whole new thing."

LIBBY: And why do you think they were so supportive of wilderness?

RUPERT: Well, it's pretty easy to imagine and it's become easier for me to imagine the last couple days as I've driven around here and seen all the beautiful homes and all the corporate headquarters; who wants to have 707's and DC 8's flying in over your head several times a day, not to mention all the construction and the noise and traffic and all the rest? So it was a combination of "Not in our backyard" for a darn good reason from the standpoint of the conflict of living conditions, quality of life, plus the environmental advantages of saving the wildlife habitat and the watershed, to protect the water quality in the Passaic River and flood water absorption and all that kind of thing and environmental education. The other large number of witnesses that appeared at the Congressional Committee hearings in favor of wilderness were from universities and colleges and other educators, because it was the only place where they could have field trips for the biology/science classes.

LIBBY: Now, if you know anything about the Great Swamp Refuge and the Great Swamp itself, it's hard to imagine this as a jet port. They would have had to fill thousands of acres of land and this is where all the water drains to; it would have created a lot of problems. And the engineering that they would have needed; all the storm water, everything, drains right here to the Great Swamp. Who were some of the people that were involved that stand out from local people that were involved with the proposal to designate this as a wilderness?

RUPERT: Well, of course, number one is Helen Fenske, and she, I'm not quite sure where she came from in this regard; I mean she's obviously local and she obviously became the point person and spokesperson for the land acquisition for the refuge for the wilderness. And I don't know the background well enough to tell you which organization she sprang from, but she put together a coalition of Audubon people and business people and local government people and congress people that would not be denied. But she was assisted, to a great extent, by the then Regional Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, John Gottschalk, because if the Fish and Wildlife Service had opposed it, it probably wouldn't have become a wildlife refuge in the first place. And John Gottschalk, whom I knew pretty well too and was a fine fellow, was supportive of the wilderness designation as well. And the reason the Fish and Service was more enthusiastic about the passage of the Wilderness Bill than either the Forest Service, which thought it knew all there was to know about wilderness and didn't need anybody telling it what to do, or the National Park Service, which thought there wasn't any finer nor pure classification of land than National Park, even though they allowed a lot of desecrations in their national parks. The reason the Fish and Wildlife Service thought it was such a cool idea is because, I don't know what the percent would be, but a large proportion of the national wildlife refuges had been

established by some sort of administrative process; by Presidential Executive Order or Antiquities Act or—

LIBBY: Memorandums of Agreement with other federal agencies.

RUPERT: So in a sense it was kind of a tenuous land protection category, it wasn't particularly permanent and could be changed either by a Presidential Order or by some deal like Secretary of the Interior, who decided to go along with the head of the Federal Aviation Administration and just transfer the land from Interior to FAA for an airport. I was told that was a pretty realistic possibility, and that just freaked out the people around here when they realized; you know they probably took a sigh of relief when they acquired the land and gave it to the Department of the Interior, "Oh boy, now it's a refuge. Cool!" And then somebody said, "Well, maybe it's not so cool because it could change overnight with the stroke of a pen." And they said, "Oh my God! What do we do now?" And so that's when I got a call from Helen Fenske with the Wilderness Society and she said, "Okay, Mr. Cutler, what do we do now?" And as I said, before you're sort of in the line of duty, I just said, "Okay, that's my next job." I just did Moosehorn and Monomoy, and I just got back from Cumberland Island and Okefenokee and I was working out in Seney in Michigan and now here's one in New Jersey, okay; I'll put everything aside, and Helen Fenske kind of made that mandatory. She would not take no, or no, I'm too busy for you, she would not take that for an answer.

LIBBY: She was very persistent.

RUPERT: So I came up here and scouted the area out with her and laid out the steps and the process of getting the coalition together here and the politically active coalition and it had to include local government because a road had to be closed and utility lines had to be taken out, and structures had to be removed and trash had to be removed, and all that, and that's pretty complex.

LIBBY: Right, compared to maybe some other areas that were being considered for wilderness where there was no development in them.

RUPERT: Well yeah, Monomoy Island was just an island and Moosehorn was a refuge.

LIBBY: There were cabins on Monomoy though, and those areas ended up being excluded from the wilderness until the cabins were removed. And by the way, as of 2014 have not been permanently added to wilderness.

RUPERT: It's on your action agenda.

LIBBY: Yeah, it is. So you had also strong congressional support.

RUPERT: Yeah, Congressman—

LIBBY: Peter.

RUPERT: Peter Frelinghuysen was just super. And I remember coming up here for a public meeting in the Morristown High School Auditorium at which he presided. And I think they filled the auditorium, it was very vocally supportive of the wilderness proposal and that was pretty exciting. But he was 100% behind it all the way, and I guess he had been earlier for the refuge and the land acquisition. So his support, as we said earlier today at this 50th Anniversary meeting here at Great Swamp, by his successors in congress, his support was essential to the success of the refuge and the

refuge wilderness proposal. So that's true almost in every case, the local congressman has to be an advocate or it doesn't get anywhere before Congress. The only exemption I know to that rule was the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, ANILCA, where the Alaska Congressional Delegation objected to it, but everybody else in the United States thought it was a great idea so they were overruled by the rest of the Congress by a uniquely complete environmental coalition did the Alaska Lands Act in the Carter Administration.

LIBBY: Right. So you basically coached Helen, but Helen must have been working with people; she was working with John Gottschalk in the Fish and Wildlife Service so the agency prepared a study plan or some sort of wilderness proposal, which you then reviewed.

RUPERT: I remember that, and there was a question of a road, whether it could be closed or not. There were two or three units in the first draft and we had to kind of negotiate with the local governments to agree that the roads could be closed. I think that was sort of a second step; I think the first step is two or three small units and I sort of went back to Helen and said, "Can you get the local governments to agree to close those roads to make it a larger single unit." And she was able to get that done.

LIBBY: And apparently that's now the Orange trail, used to be a road.

RUPERT: Saw it on the map.

LIBBY: Right. Do you recall how long it took from the beginning of the process to the actual designation by Congress?

RUPERT: Well, I'm sure a period of several months; you know it's 46 years ago.

LIBBY: I think you have a terrific memory.

RUPERT: [Laughing] I can't remember just how long it took, but I know, as I said earlier today on a couple of occasions, Helen would call me at home at all hours. And half the time my wife would pick up the phone and she would hand it to me and say, "It's that woman again." And that was Helen and she just wanted to know what the next steps were. So my role was basically to be a coach and a guide and just say, okay now that we've got the agency proposal, now we have got to get the bill drafted and introduced, now we have got to get the subcommittee to schedule a hearing, now we have to get the full committee to hold a hearing, now it has to be scheduled for floor action, yada, yada, in the House and the Senate. And so I just tried to stay on top of it, and make sure it moved along as quickly as it could.

LIBBY: And it seemed like you said it may be a matter of months, but today that seems that would be inconceivable to have an agency proposal enacted within just a few months.

RUPERT: Things have changed so much since I worked on Capitol Hill. As I said, I moved to Washington in 1962, I was at Jack Kennedy's Conservation Conference and heard him speak. And I worked on Capitol Hill until I left the position of President of Defenders of Wildlife in 1990, but most of my lobbying was done for the Wilderness Society in the 1960's. And then, of course, I appeared before Congress over 200 times as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. But back in the '60's and '70's, the Congress was a much more collegial operation; guys stayed in Washington, they didn't go home all the

time. And Republicans and Democrats were friendly with one another and they and their wives would go out on social occasions with one another. I used to walk from the Rayburn House Office Building or the Cannon House Office Building or the one Senate office buildings with a clutch of members of the House, the Senate; when there was a roll call, the bells would ring and we all had to scurry over for a vote. And I would ride on the little subway trains with them or walk through the tunnels from the House or walk through the tunnels from the House or Senate buildings over to the floor. And it was very collegial and good humored. And the difference is between Members of Congress was more based on regional economic considerations, regional kind of things, rather than partisan. And there were so many environmental bills, you go down a long list of the environmental bills passed in '60's and '70's, they're always unanimous; Republican as well as Democrat; the environment was a very popular subject. I mean, I was involved in putting on Earth Day at Michigan State University, which I think was the second one following the one at University of Michigan in which I attended and participated in; they were called teach ins. And it was April of 1970 and I was a graduate student at Michigan State when I did that. And that followed Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, that's when I began working for the Wildlife Federation. So *Silent Spring*, and then Earth Day; that appeared in '62 to '70. The environment was kind of a magic, very popular topic, and it was much more popular than the whole controversy over the Vietnam War, or Civil Rights or other things that were really divisive. It was one area where a lot of people could agree on, and so there were unanimous votes in the Congress, Republican and Democrat on environmental issues back then. Today, we're totally stalemated and it's terrible.

LIBBY: Well, yeah, so that just leads me to a question I hadn't even thought about asking before, but on my list here I had, what do you feel about the Wilderness Preservation System and its significance to the country? Which I do want to ask you that, but then I'd like to follow it up with, have you any worries about the future of the Wilderness System given the changes in Congress?

RUPERT: Sure, I think it's a really important question; that's a very important question. To answer the first question, wilderness has never been more important as we're so dominated by technology. I was walking across the campus of the University of Virginia recently, drove to Charlottesville for a lecture, and walking across campus. Everybody on campus was looking at cell phone; I don't know how they couldn't keep from running into each other. I mean everybody was staring at a screen and that's just ubiquitous. And so technology is a big deal and we need to get away from that, wilderness gives us that opportunity and wilderness provides the last refuge for natural ecological forces to take place. So it's a human kind refuge, it's a nature refuge, and it's very, very important. But as you just asked, there's a lot questions being raised by newcomers to this field that I think they're kind of like smarty pants. They ask questions about what good is wilderness, we need those resources or it's too simplistic, we need to manipulate nature, we need to have more fire, we need to deal with invasive species, you need to have access by disabled people; that's an obsolete concept, wilderness is something from the 20th Century and we're in the 21st Century and it's not important anymore. And I think that's just terrible and I think it's all too

commonly expressed. There's a journal called *The Journal of Environmental History*; Environmental History Society. They published a journal and these papers show up in there every once in a while, and some of us old timers get a little concerned about what we read because there's, on the part of these younger academics who look at wilderness as kind of an old-fashioned concept. There's a lot of skepticism on their part that maybe it's not politically correct, doesn't involve enough ethnic diversity, it doesn't allow for handicapped people, it doesn't allow for scientific management, blah, blah blah. But by God, we need those baseline areas, and we need that opportunity for solitude, and we need some places where natural forces go on. But I'm worried for another reason too, and that is that younger people are so technologically preoccupied, whether with computers or indoor activities of one sort or another. The attendance at National Parks is going down, the membership in environmental organizations is stagnant, as far as I can tell. In other words, the younger generation, the folks that are going to replace us are getting kind of scarce on the landscape and we've really got to figure out how to keep this faith alive. And I've been speaking to quite a few interagency, multi-agency wilderness workshops around the country, out at Mt. Rainer, and up Rutland, Vermont and Roanoke and other places. And the challenge that the agency people that administer wilderness, faces, protecting wilderness character, and what is that, and what's the limit of acceptable change and how many people at a time and how large a group. I heard the Secretary today talk about the North Cascades National Park and the composting toilets. And I thought to myself, what the heck is that? That's not compatible with wilderness.

LIBBY: That surprised me too.

RUPERT: [Laughing] Since when do we have potties in wilderness areas. I know I was jumping out of my chair.

LIBBY: Hopefully she wasn't in the wilderness area at that time; I noticed that too.

RUPERT: But it's so easy to incrementally shift in favor of administrative convenience.

LIBBY: Definitely. Well, I think we're about ready to end our oral history here. Is there anything else you'd like to say or any last departing words for future listeners?

RUPERT: Well, I certainly take pride and pleasure in that chapter in my life where I was involved in wilderness. It was just five years in the Wilderness Society and then four years as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture where I kicked off the Rare II Roadless Review—

LIBBY: Oh, I remember that.

RUPERT: --of the National Forest System, and doubled the size of the National Forest contribution to the Wilderness System. And, of course, I've been a member of the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club. And I'm working on conservation easements now in Virginia with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and I'm President of the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy now. So I tried to keep my oar in, but I guess, now that you've asked me that question and I think about it for a moment, it seems to me there's an important weakness or gap in our academic preparation of natural resources managers. The wildlife biologists who train to be wildlife research biologists, the foresters are trained to manage forests, and the fisheries biologists are trained to manage fish. I don't think there are many places where the value

of wilderness is being taught. And the importance of wilderness areas is being given not very much attention. And I don't think the agencies have a very good career track for wilderness administrators, rangers, and so forth. In other words, it's, and there's no wilderness agency, it's up to the four federal wilderness agencies to figure out, and each one does it a little differently, how to manage wilderness on their systems. And so I think there's a gap, there's a shortcoming in the kind of the profession of wilderness administration; the policies, the practices, the academic preparation, the status that's given to wilderness as a profession and career. I think that deserves a lot more attention.

LIBBY: Interesting. Well, we'll see what the future holds. It's been a real pleasure to speak with you; I really appreciate your time. I think this is really helpful; the history as you said, there's a *Journal of Environmental History* but it's hard for people to remember the past. It's hard sometimes to get the information, and I know that there will be people that will be listening to this in the future, and I just wish I could be there and see what they think and I hope things go well. But I really appreciate your time and I appreciate all your contributions to conservation and to the wilderness preservation system.

RUPERT: Well, thank you for the opportunity.

LIBBY: Thank you.