

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Chuckie Green

Date of Interview: July 20, 2015

Location of Interview: Mashpee Area, Massachusetts

Interviewer: Christine O'Neill

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Green, a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, discusses his involvement in helping get the Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge established. Mr. Green has held several positions not only in the Tribe, but also on the Mashpee Conservation Commission. He discusses the tribe's attitude toward the refuge, working with Fish and Wildlife Service on rabbit DNA testing for the New England Cottontail, controlled burns, and preserving plants found on the refuge. He mentions partners, such as Friends of Mashpee and Orenda, and their involvement with the refuge. Mr. Green feels that the refuge does need a visitor's center to show visitors where to go, to have information about the refuge available, and also to have a presence on the refuge to help stop dumping and other types of vandalism that occur.

[Picks up in conservation]

CHUCKIE: Anyways, when I first brought it up to the tribe, Carl Melberg and I were working together on it and he was surprised that the tribe was so strongly opposed to doing it. And so what I tried to do was convince, I spoke with the tribal body a couple of times about, “Okay, we do this, or this happens.” So a bit part of it was keeping open our tribal hunting and fishing rights. So we have a place to do our practices and to harvest plants, medicine plants, and food plants that were traditional to us.

A lot of times when we went, I was picked as the guide because it was like where I grew up.

CHRISTINE: That’s awesome.

CHUCKIE: It was fantastic. The funniest story that I have about the refuge is when, just before the signing, Gerry Studds came out to view the refuge. So I’m driving through the refuge through all the roads. And I’m in the lead and Gerry’s running a little late, so we got down to the beach, South Cape Beach, and Gerry Studds get out he’s in wing tips and a three piece suit. And we’re going to walk across the beach too; he didn’t even hesitate.

CHRISTINE: Oh, good for him!

CHUCKIE: He didn’t even hesitate; didn’t take his shoes off, just strutted right through the sand out to Great Flat Pond.

CHRISTINE: That’s awesome.

CHUCKIE: Well, without Gerry it would not have happened because he did

so much to pull together the federal folks, because as Carl may have already told you, when we sat at the table at the beginning, it was like, “No, no, this can’t happen. There’s no way this will work. It can’t work.” All of the higher ups were just totally thinking that it could never work putting feds, private land owners, towns, and the state all together in one big pot. It’s been an incredible return. I’m taking my summer camp out there tomorrow.

CHRISTINE: Is this the one that’s at WBNERR, or was that a different summer camp?

CHUCKIE: Different summer camp.

CHRISTINE: Oh, okay. Because that’s the other place I’m interning right now, so it’s with the refuge and with WBNERR.

CHUCKIE: Oh, okay. Well my kids will probably be out at WBNERR on occasion. It’s called POH, Preserving Our Homelands, Youth in Science.

CHRISTINE: Oh, that’s nice, yeah.

CHUCKIE: Where we do a crossover from traditional knowledge to conventional science.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, that’s right; that’s awesome. Very cool. If you ever need help, let me know.

CHUCKIE: We always need help; we *always* need help. Don’t put it out there, because I’ll take advantage. [laughing] You know it’s been, it’s been, how do I say this—sometimes a difficult road. Like I said originally the folks, in my tribe, were not really into joining a group

that was going to sign over land to the federal government; trust of the federal government was not something that was strong here in my tribe, in most tribes, put it that way. So when the question came up to sign on, it was like "Well we don't want to be a partner with this because they're going to take our land and then they're not just going to let us go on it at all." So it took some convincing, took many meetings to discussion. Each step that we took, and like I said, Carl Melberg was pretty incredible; supportive guy to stick himself in a tribal environment and help me convince people that it was probably the best thing for us.

CHRISTINE: Did you know him before this or just?

CHUCKIE: No, pretty much me and Carl met during the discussions; I had no contact with him before.

CHRISTINE: And you guys are still friends?

CHUCKIE: Oh yeah!

INTERVIEWER: That's awesome! Very cool.

CHUCKIE: Oh yeah. Well, Carl and I; Tom, Carl, and I and Mark are the, we're the original team.

CHRISTINE: Right, right.

CHUCKIE: We're the only ones left of the original team pretty much. So I guess we sort of had to be friends; it wasn't hard, Carl's a great guy and he's helped out in a lot of other ways and other things that, we the tribe have done with U.S. Fish and Wildlife. And that's

how it all started. In the '80's, there wasn't any money. So these developers were all facing foreclosures, so that made it that the federal government in the state and the towns were able to come in and buy large tracts of land for short money. Or take them in a tax title because the developer was folding up. It could never happen here in Cape Cod, again, because first of all there's not that much contiguous land left on Cape Cod period. With all the partner's lands, we're approaching, we've got 6,000 some odd acres. The number varies back and forth, I've seen 6,444, I've seen 7, 8, but we're real close; we're real close to what our goal was in the beginning. And it's helped us as Mashpee folks because there are plants, for instance, that you can't find anyplace else but on the refuge because the refuge hasn't the impacts on civilization. So there are plants, their deer population has been maintained because there's acreage for the deer to forage.

CHRISTINE: What kind of plants are only found on the refuge, do you know any of the top of your head?

CHUCKIE: No, I don't. And I'd have to get [unintelligible@7:17], my botanist.

CHRISTINE: No, no worries.

CHUCKIE: He knows those.

CHRISTINE: It's all good. So it's important for hunting as well with the deer?

CHUCKIE: Deer, rabbit, I mean we wouldn't be; you know we're doing cottontail projects now.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, I was going to say. You have to be careful with hunting the rabbits right?

CHUCKIE: Not yet, but they're a candidate. The New England Cottontail is a candidate species for listing in endangered species. There are still a lot of eastern cottontail.

CHRISTINE: Right, yeah. And I heard that they're almost impossible to tell apart right?

CHUCKIE: They are almost impossible to tell apart. Real difficult. You almost have to do DNA or the skulls are different too if you, but you have to take the skin off to do it that way.

CHRISTINE: Right.

CHUCKIE: Kind of hurts.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, [chuckling], right.

CHUCKIE: But I mean, we've done trapping and DNA testing, the tribe. Tony, who I was just with this morning, Tony Perry, he's; and we've worked with U.S. Fish and Wildlife in trapping and testing, telemetry to locate the rabbits and show that we still have a significant population of the rabbits to make it worth-while what we're doing. The partners are looking at now a thousand contiguous acreages of rabbit habitat treatment.

CHRISTINE: What does that mean specifically?

CHUCKIE: We did control burning.

CHRISTINE: Oh, okay, right.

CHUCKIE: Which was another thing that was difficult to bring back home. I laugh 'cause, I ended up, I had to turn to a pilgrim to convince the tribe that clearing and burning was a good thing to do for the rabbits and for other species. So I went to Thomas Morton. And Thomas Morton wrote back in 1637 about how the Indians burned, how they went and burned wherever they went twice a year.

CHRISTINE: Right.

CHUCKIE: So I used that documentation to convince everybody that this is not a bad thing we're doing. This is what we did all the time.

CHRISTINE: Right. Has the attitude towards the refuge improved with time, or are they still kind of suspicious of it?

CHUCKIE: It improved for a long time, but now we've got a new generation of folks that have reverted to; how do I say this, reverted to skepticism and loss of trust. The refuge, the only reason the refuge has worked is trust; people trusting each other not to be trying to hurt each other but trying to work together. And you know, it was tough in the beginning to convince folks that was no way; we were thinking about when we were doing this. But after changing folks, we got new tribal members; we started this we had around 700 members, now we have over 2800 members.

CHRISTINE: Wow, that's awesome. But I mean that's a whole new group that has no idea where we are and what came from, so I mean it makes it difficult to actually convince folks that this is all good and we can do this. And

plus the lawyers, we have a lot more lawyers than we had then.

CHRISTINE: Got it.

CHUCKIE: So that changes things too because lawyers need to have it written like what they want, everybody's lawyers not only ours. So if you can't write exactly like everybody's lawyer wants then it just goes back and forth and back and back and back and forth. The lawyers make a lot of money and we get very little accomplished on the part of open discussion.

CHRISTINE: Can you tell me a little bit about John Peters and his involvement?

CHUCKIE: My uncle John Peters Senior?

CHRISTINE: Slow Turtle.

CHUCKIE: Yeah, that's my Uncle John.

CHRISTINE: Oh really, that's so cute! I didn't know that! How cool!

CHUCKIE: Yeah, that's my Uncle John. Uncle John was not very active in the start of the refuge; he was actually unsure. He was older, and he was at that, the time Supreme Medicine Man and also the Director of the Commission on Indian Affairs. So he was reluctant to buy in but he show up and bless the ceremony. So he found his way into and I was happy that, that happened.

CHRISTINE: When you say he blessed the ceremony, did he give a speech or something?

CHUCKIE: Yes, at our opening ceremony.

CHRISTINE: Okay, got it. Yeah because I read this really, really nice quote from him somewhere; I can't remember. I think it was in a newspaper article that I saw that it was something about like how this is completely in line with our values or something like that, it was very nice. Was there anyone else from the tribe that was really involved with the start of the refuge, or was it mostly you and Carl trying to convince people?

CHUCKIE: Well I think everybody was trying to convince folks, because there were a lot of people other than just tribal that did not want to see—

CHRISTINE: Yes, that's true.

CHUCKIE: —this happen. It's really difficult for me to understand as far as; I'm an environmentalist. And to know that people were afraid, everybody's afraid of the government. They don't want government control over anything; this is the moral thing to do.

CHRISTINE: Oh yeah, there we go.

CHUCKIE: Yeah. Uncle John did realize that if we didn't do this now, that development would overwhelm it before it got to anyplace where it would be able to be saved. And if it had been developed, that would have been no access because there were so many parcels of land that were just ripe for the picking. Like I said road infrastructures were already started. It's the funniest thing when you're walking through the woods and you run into a fire hydrant. It's like, "What is this doing here? This

does not belong.” But it was a subdivision, it was going to be a subdivision.

CHRISTINE: Were you involved with the acquisition of the Bufflehead Bay property or did you guys come in later?

CHUCKIE: I was involved from another direction.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

CHUCKIE: I don’t know if you know anything about my history, but I’ve probably been everything at one point in time at something. But I was eight years on the Mashpee Conservation Commission while I was a tribal member, and also I spent nine years as a Selectmen. So Property Acquisition people always tease because there’s about 1,000 acreages of conservation land around my house.

CHRISTINE: Oh, there you go.

CHUCKIE: But I was involved in a different way during Bufflehead Bay. I was involved, that was a nice piece of property to add to the refuge.

CHRISTINE: I think that was property the first big acquisition, right?

CHUCKIE: It was ’95 when we signed, was my last year on the Board of Directors of my last year as a vice chair. So after that—

CHRISTINE: For the tribe, or—?

CHUCKIE: For the tribe.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

CHUCKIE: It was my last year as vice chairman, and I went from there pretty much onto Conservation Commission.

CHRISTINE: If you don’t mind me digressing for minute.

CHUCKIE: Go ahead.

CHRISTINE: There’s actually an opening right now—

CHUCKIE: On the Commission?

CHRISTINE: Yeah, for Assistant Conservation Agent or something. And I’m in the process of applying—

CHUCKIE: Really?

CHRISTINE: Yeah. Did you like working there?

CHUCKIE: I loved it. I actually, that’s another story. I was by Great Flat Pond, and I heard water running, a lot of water. So I was in the woods and it was just before dark, so I walked out and I found that they were pumping off a fairway into a wetland.

CHRISTINE: Oh my God. When was this, the ‘80’s?

CHUCKIE: Early ‘90’s.

CHRISTINE: Oh, yeah, yeah, early ‘90’s.

CHUCKIE: Early ‘90’s. So I went back to, I knew there was a [unintelligible@18:48] meeting that evening. So I went back to town hall and Harry DesRosier was the Chairman of the Conservation Commission at that time. I said, “Mr. DesRosier, I just saw

New Seabury pumping water into a wetland off of a fairway.” And Harry just said, “Well, Mr. Green, do you know where this is?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Would you mind going back out there?” And the consultant for Seabury was saying, “No, that’s not happening. That is not happening! We are not doing that!” I said, “Hey, okay, let’s go!” So Harry and the consultant and myself jumped in my car and we went out and walked down old Flat Pond Road; it’s an old dirt road off of South Cape Beach Road, Great Oak. We walked out and we were going out and you could start hearing [makes water noise].

CHRISTINE: Oh yeah.

CHUCKIE: Look at the consultant and he’s like, “Oooh crap!” And so we get out there and there’s a six inch pipe just pouring water and ripping up the bottom of the wetland. It was like oh no.

CHRISTINE: Did he address it or was he?

CHUCKIE: The consultant?

CHRISTINE: Yeah.

CHUCKIE: No, he needed some backup, he wanted find out what was going on. He did want to, nothing, he was like “I didn’t know this. I didn’t know! I didn’t know!”

CHRISTINE: Right, exactly.

CHUCKIE: But Harry asked me then, there was an opening on the Commission, so Harry asked me if I’d like to sit because I had a construction back ground then. I was an

environmentalist with a construction background; I knew all about building houses, doing septic systems, doing pumping stations. So I spent the next eight years on the commission.

CHRISTINE: That’s awesome.

CHUCKIE: Then I ran for Selectmen, so I had to quit the commission.

CHRISTINE: Right. Well that’s good. Maybe I’ll let you know how it goes, maybe I’ll be working in that office.

CHUCKIE: We do a lot of work with Drew.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, apparently he used to be an interpreter at WBNERR, so that’s cool because that’s where I’m interning now.

CHUCKIE: He’s super understaffed and overworked. He’s one of those people that does not know how to say “no, that’s not my job.” He takes on everything, and he has difficulty doing it all. I mean we help him with Herring for instance, because we’re out and about and we go see what’s going on and if there’s issues that the Herring Warden needs to deal with, we let him know or we get in touch with Brad Chase at Division of Marine Fisheries to take care of those issues. But he should have never taken on, I mean one guy for all of the development that’s going on; that is insurmountable. Then you add a couple of more jobs onto like, there’s a team of folks out there that do cleanups and do stuff like that.

CHRISTINE: Right, and he’s in charge of that?

CHUCKIE: Conservation stewards, yeah, he is in charge of that too, and he's the Herring Warden. So he got to go out and make sure the herring are doing okay. I mean he has no time to cover everything that he has. Having somebody is going to be great for him.

CHRISTINE: Good, hopefully I can be that person. Okay, sorry I didn't mean to diverge so much but I was just curious.

CHUCKIE: Little sidebar.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, there you go. So let me see if there are any other specific questions that I have. Were you ever involved at all with David Palmer? He was the first president of the Friends?

CHUCKIE GREEN: Of the Friends.

CHRISTINE: Did you know him?

CHUCKIE: Yes, I did know him. I was on the advisory committee at WBNERR for four years. So besides being on the planning committee for the refuge and, so yeah I've met everyone.

CHRISTINE: Right, okay.

CHUCKIE: But.

CHRISTINE: He didn't really leave an impression or anything?

CHUCKIE: Oh, they were an incredible group when it came to acquisition. When they first started, acquisition was their mission and they were incredible but as the funding dried up and their enthusiasm dropped, they kind of fell apart. But I mean MaryKay has done a—

CHRISTINE: She's awesome isn't she.

CHUCKIE: —fantastic job at yanking the crew back together and getting things started again.

CHRISTINE: Is there anything in particular you think I should look into or do some more research about regarding the start of the refuge? I've interviewed—

CHUCKIE: The biggest thing that should have happened that hasn't happened—

CHRISTINE: Visitor Center?

CHUCKIE: You read my mind!
[laughing]

CHRISTINE: Yeah, [laughing] right.

CHUCKIE: You know, the town gave up a nice piece of land that's in a nice central location in the refuge and besides that we haven't kept up on the M.O.U.'s, that we haven't gone back and touched them and a lot of partners aren't doing any kind of maintenance, stewardship, or such on their properties. That's the biggest thing that we have; we've got plans. We had, as far as plans, Tom Fudala had wood donated that rotted in his back yard.

CHRISTINE: Oh, yeah. He told me that, that's right!

CHUCKIE: And it's like, I think a visitor's center would give us a visibility to do fundraising, to have a central; because the refuge is kind of, nobody knows.

CHRISTINE: Exactly.

CHUCKIE: It's like here. It's there but,

CHRISTINE: It kind of works out of WBNERR sometimes, I mean that's pretty much their only facility.

CHUCKIE: Yeah, but WBNERR is like offset. It's not part of the refuge. And if you look [getting a paper out, map possibly], there's no part of the refuge that really comes close to WBNERR.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, that's true.

CHUCKIE: I mean, this is pretty accurate but Route 28, which is here, and this parcel here is the town parcel that was donated by a town meeting, so this accesses both sides, this is refuge, okay. These are the two largest pieces of refuge that are all in one place. So you have the Quashnet River, okay, and then you can come back through the Hay Road, Great Hay Road. So I mean those are two significant places that you could access, if it was in place, you'd have a place to go in and you'd have a place to direct people out. Right now the refuge is invisible, that's why we have dumping, that's why we have you know, because nobody really knows, nobody's there. When people are not present, things happen. That's why a visitor's center is something that we still need to chase down. I mean, I would like to see; I can't do it from here, but I would like to see either one of the agencies look to find some grant funding. I know it's going to be difficult because the town or agency could fund it under a grant, but it gets tricky when you've got so many partners.

CHRISTINE: That's a good point. Yeah, that's definitely a refrain I've

been hearing about the visitor's center that should—

CHUCKIE: We had plans. I mean we had it to a place where, plus the fact that if we had done it back then it would have cost a tiny bit of what it's going to cost to do it now.

CHRISTINE: Right, the donated wood that rotted.

CHUCKIE: In Tom's backyard. We had a lot of people at that point that really wanted to see it go up. I mean that would give it some identity. I don't know if you know about any of the other refuges.

CHRISTINE: Not nearly as well as I know about this one.

CHUCKIE: Well Assabet River for instance, they have a beautiful visitor's center, you drive into the refuge, you go to the visitor's center, or then the visitor's center, it tells you about where you can go, where you can get into the refuge, where you can see things, and then it also has exhibits. And it's something to inspire ecotourism. Like I said, if you had people out there, people don't mess up. If you've just got gated off properties with no management, I mean it's eventually going to draw vandalism and abuse. And I don't know how you stop that without bringing people into the loop.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, so visitor's center is definitely something I'm going to mention when I write this because a lot of people have pointed that out.

CHUCKIE: Yeah, central location is the key. I mean it takes you; if you know

the refuge and you take all the dirt roads, it takes you almost two days—

CHRISTINE: Wow.

CHUCKIE: — to drive the refuge. You can't go very fast because they're old beat up fire trails.

CHRISTINE: Sure.

CHUCKIE: But it takes you almost two days to cover all of the refuge. All the little nooks and crannies that you can get to by the old dirt roads. And we've seen change in the people that are involved. We've seen partners grow, When Orenda started out they were, well "Don't walk on it, don't look at it, don't touch it." And now they've come around to doing burning and cutting and maintenance of the forest because if you don't then you end up with a wildfire comes though and cleans it all out and then there's nothing there.

CHRISTINE: Right, exactly. So I'm still a little unclear, what exactly is the tribe's involvement with this refuge, do you have any land there or you just support it?

CHUCKIE: We, up until a short time ago, we had none in it. Now we have 8.6 acreages.

CHRISTINE: Okay. And when did that happen?

CHUCKIE: Not exactly sure of the date, it's fairly recent. I'd say probably around 2007, 2006.

CHRISTINE: Got it.

CHUCKIE: I'm not positive of the dates.

CHRISTINE: Yeah, just to get an idea.

CHUCKIE: That's about when we actually had property within. We've always been part of the management team, we've always been part of the M.O.U. in the discussion. The M.O.U. has been beneficial to the tribe as being able to work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, having U.S. Fish and Wildlife equipment come on to tribal property and help us with our management of our tribal lands here. The partnership has done a lot of good things in keeping people at the table talking of what should be and what shouldn't be. It's also been a way that we can demonstrate to other partners that, okay if we do this, this will happen. To every action there's a reaction, so we are able to show them; we did 37 acres of rabbit treatment. Once everybody saw that we could use this machine, that's like this big machine, it turns trees into chips. And then prescribe fire, the partners joined in quickly and took up that. Now Faun Koplovsky, I keep telling him he owes me money because now he moved down to the Cape from Vermont. [laughing] Because everyone's using it[machine]. The partnerships that have been made, the friendships that have been; Ted Kendziora from the Partners for U.S. Fish and Wildlife, greatly assisted in us being able to do a prescribe burn and treatment. Since '95, the friends that I've made, just personally, is such a benefit that I would've never have been able to experience without the refuge.

CHRISTINE: That's great. Was there anything else that I should look into or that you wanted to mention?

CHUCKIE: Not really, but the cooperation again I guess from Jim Rassman and his crew out there, that has made my camp so much better. And that is working with WBNERR and the refuge, going out and showing my kids where and how we lived. Jim guided a tour through the refuge from Martin Road to John's Pond along the Quashnet. They walked the whole thing.

CHRISTINE: Oh, that's awesome.

CHUCKIE: Looking at plants and tracks, and the kids loved it; they nicknamed Jim, Harold last year.

CHRISTINE: What they'd name him?

CHUCKIE: Harold.

CHRISTINE: Harold [chuckling], why?

CHUCKIE: [chuckling] No reason, they're just kids.

CHRISTINE: 'Cause they're kids.

CHUCKIE: They're just kids. Yeah, the friends and the relationships have been a big part.

CHRISTINE: That's awesome. Okay, cool.

[Causal talk, correct pronunciation of Wampanoag small talk about Mr. Green's cousin Kitty Hendricks.]