Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Jim Frates
Date of Interview: May 3-4, 1999
Location of Interview: Alaska
Interviewer: Diana Thomas

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 34 years (1966-2001?)

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: GS 5 Assistant Refuge Manager/Biologist at Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota; GS 9 Refuge Manager at Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota; GS 11 Refuge Manager at Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota; DeSota National Wildlife Refuge, Iowa and Nebraska; Kenai National Moose Range (renamed Kenai National Wildlife Refuge in 1980)

Most Important Projects: Canada Geese Restoration Program, Farming and Biological Programs

Mentors: His parents, his aunt and uncle, Skeet Dart (a friend of his dad who worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service), Dr. Ryder, Dr. Gilbert, Carl Wolf

Colleagues: Audrey Berg, Forrest Carpenter, Robley Hunt, Stan Christensen, Jim Stillings, Bob Seemel, Al Johnson, Johnny Stuart, Homer Bradley (former manager at Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge), Don Lindberg,

Most Important Issues: public use and access, dealing with politics, banding, working with Native Americans, grazing issues, water access at DeSota

Brief Summary of Interview: At a young age Jim Frates knew he wanted to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service. He first starts out talking about early life growing up, going to school, going to college, having a rough time with algebra and geometry, and finally getting his degree. He would meet his wife while in college; they would marry and eventually have three children. He would work for the state of South Dakota Fish and Game Department as a wildlife biologist before getting hired by the Fish and Wildlife Service. He talks about the various refuges his worked, ups and down, his experiences with the public, and how he knew when it was time to move on from DeSota National Wildlife to Kenai in Alaska. Along his journey he got to meet Roger Tory Peterson and became friends with famous birders Doc and Anne Gambell. He says the highlight of his life was giving the Commencement Address at the high school he went to. He said he found it amazing that in his yearbook he stated that ten years after graduation, "I, Jim Frates, am up in Canada banding ducks and geese in 1966 and working for the Fish and Wildlife Service." And that's exactly what he was doing. Not included in this oral history was other positions Mr. Frates held which included: working in Anchorage Regional Office and as Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Operations Specialist before retiring in 2001.

Jim Frates
Oral History Interview, #1
May 3-4, 1999
Interviewed by: Diana Thomas

Diana: Can you please tell me a little about your personal history. When were you born, place of birth, etc?

Jim: I was born and raised out in western Nebraska, a little town by the name of Brule, an old Sioux Indian name, tucked away clear down in the southwestern corner of Nebraska, right next to the Colorado border. My mom came out there to teach school back in the 20's and my dad came out to barber about the same time. I was born January 2, 1939, actually, across the border in Colorado, a little town by the name of Julesburg. I grew up in that little town in Nebraska. I graduated from high school there.

Diana: Tell me a little more about what kind of jobs your mom and dad had.

Jim: Mom was a schoolteacher. At that time, I think they called it a normal degree. I think you had to have two years of college and then you were eligible to teach. She had a sister that lived in Brule. She decided to go out and spend some time there and she got a job teaching. Dad was barbering with his brother in Brule at the time. Mom would walk back and forth, to and from school. Dad happened to see a new lady in town and after about the third or fourth pass by the barbershop, he decided he would go out and introduce himself. They were married in 1935 and I was born in 1939. I had an older sister, Jean, who was born in 1937. We lived there until about 1944. Dad's brother lived out in Yakima, Washington. He was a contract homebuilder. He wanted Dad to come out and help him. He had a lot of work. So Dad loaded up the car and took us out to Washington. We lived there for a couple of years. Dad actually helped his brother build houses but he also barbered on weekends so he did maintain his barber's license. He was really homesick, come to find out later. He missed the hunting and the fishing and most of his family were still back in Nebraska. While we were out in Washington, my younger

brother, John, was born – in 1947. After that, Dad decided he wanted to go back to the prairies.

Dad packed us all up and we took off and went back home, in an old 1939 Ford. I can still remember that trip. I had an earache and a toothache, something terrible, when we pulled into Pendleton, Oregon. They had these old heat registers in the hotel. I laid my jaw on that register almost all night long to try and keep the pain down. That was the memory I had of coming back from Yakima. They got me into a dentist the next day and ended up having a tooth extracted.

We finally got back to Brule and at that time, Mom started teaching country schools. They had several rural school districts at that time and they still do. That was really her first love. She went to school in a one-room country schoolhouse. She got a job north of town in a little one-room country schoolhouse where she taught all eight grades. She did that all the time I was in school. She taught in several districts in the area. Mom just lived and breathed school teaching and working with kids. They all loved her. It was a hassle for her because she had to get up early and drive in all kinds of weather. The roads wouldn't be plowed and she would get stuck and the farmers would have to come out and pull her out. Once she got to the school, she would have to stoke up the fire and get the place warm for the kids before they got there. A lot of times she would stay late, doing her lessons. I remember many, many nights she would stay up until 1:00 – 2:00 o'clock in the morning completing lesson plans for all eight grades. People laugh when I say this, but in many respects, it was an ideal childhood life. It was a lot like the "Ozzie and Harriet Nelson's." My parents were home every night. They took a real interest in us kids and the things that we were involved in. Mom always made sure that we had our homework done. They would help us with whatever we needed help with and supported us in our every day lives. I was involved in cub and boy scouts and my sister was involved in girl scouts.

I was always active in athletics. I played football, basketball, ran track, played baseball. They were at every game if at all possible. It was just one of those supportive family units that unfortunately you don't see so much of today as you did back in those days.

Looking back on it, I never had problems with either of my parents. It was an ideal situation. I was probably a typical teenager and got into a few scrapes now and then but nothing serious. We had no drugs. My dad was a reformed alcoholic. He made a vow on the day that I was born that he would not take a drink until I turned 21years old. I never saw any alcohol in the house at all. I really didn't know what it was until I got out of high school.

Dad was a semi-pro baseball player and he traveled around a lot with the various baseball teams. He would go down to Kansas and play on different teams and then he would come home – this is before he and Mom were married, back during the prohibition days when everybody made home brew and their own rot gut whiskey. He lived with a couple of his buddies in town before he was married. His hunting buddies had a big still out behind their shack and they just lived to hunt and fish and play baseball. Dad realized that he was going to have to quit drinking because it was getting to be too much a part of him.

I remember Mom telling me, the day I was born that Dad said, "well, now I have a son, I have to put the bottle away and I will not take another drink for 21 years." He kept that promise but the day I turned 21, he had his first drink. He was always able to control it. He would drink a beer occasionally. I have always been very grateful for that. It could have been a bad situation. I have seen families and I know of cases where either one or both of the parents drink and it just tears a family apart. I have always looked back on that and am so thankful for such a gift that a father gave his son.

Dad saw to it that I always went with him when he went hunting and fishing. Unfortunately, Mom thought my place on Sunday morning was in church and Dad

thought it was in the duck blind! There was a little bit of a conflict there but they worked it out. I spent a fair amount of time in Sunday School, probably more than I wanted to. It was sort of a trade off when Sunday's rolled around.

I think Mom grew up in a strong Baptist family. She had a lot of the Baptist type anti-swearing, gambling, alcohol, etc. Even though she wasn't a fanatic about it, she wanted to make sure that the kids really got on the right path and stayed away from temptations as much as she could. She was pretty strict, although she was probably a lot easier on us than she should have been because that is the way Mom was. I think probably when I got to be a teenager, got my first car, went to my first party and came home sick, she told me that she didn't appreciate that kind of behavior. I don't ever remember hearing Mom and Dad argue. That is kind of unusual.

This was such a small town. Everybody knew everybody else. I had buddies that I grew up with. We were all born and raised in the same area. We went through grade school, junior high, and graduated from high school together. Guys like Bric, Butsy, Soupy, Mutt, Chick, Goldy, and Speed. We had our own little clique there in this little town of about 300 people. When we weren't playing around town we were at the river about half a mile away or in the hills. From the time we could escape town, we were either in the river swimming or up in the hills playing, doing something outside almost all the time. We had a lot of fun. It was a good life.

The first memory I had of my dad was standing in a goose blind up on the hills in a wheat field north of town, standing on an old wooden shell case. I was probably about 4-5 years old when he started taking me hunting. My job was to stand on that shell case so I could see out over the blind and spot geese for him. I was the lookout. We had decoys, a number of old Canada goose decoys. He let me spot the first flock of geese of the afternoon and he called them in and shot two or three and he then told me to go and get them. I remember running out of the blind and chasing this big old goose across the wheat field. I finally caught it and, of course, it was still alive and it just beat the crap out

of me. It bit me in the cheek and it bit me on the chin. It flapped its wings but I hung on. I drug that thing back and Dad was laughing. We spent a lot of time together. When we weren't hunting, we were fishing.

I grew up with almost an instant appreciation for being outside, although my interest was basically hunting. I never took a lot pride in killing but it was just being outside. Those are precious memories because I can see kids now that don't spend a lot of time with their dad. Even in my hometown, I think that my dad was about the only one that spent a lot of time with his son. Dad barbered six days a week so we only had Sundays. When I got a little older, I would go down to the river before school in the morning during the duck hunting season and hunt ducks and then go to school. Those are good memories and I wouldn't trade them for anything. I guess if you want to get to know someone well, you spend a lot of time in the duck blind. I learned what they call "duck blind discipline" very early. You had to be quite, not talk, etc.

At that time, I wasn't yet carrying a gun but I can remember the shots, the ducks hitting the water, the dog going out and getting them and coming home. Dad would always make sure that I would carry a couple of ducks in each hand to show Mom. We always cleaned all of our own game; we didn't have Mom do it. He always made sure that we would spend whatever time it took to properly clean and take care of whatever we killed. We never wasted anything.

I guess there was never a question about what I wanted to do when I grew up and that was it was going to be something outside, something to do with the forest, the fish or the wildlife. That was never a decision that I had to wrestle with. I wasn't sure what form it was going to take. Dad had a good friend that he grew up with back in the eastern part of Nebraska, a guy by the name of Skeet Dart. Skeet went on to college and then went out to Yellowstone as a ranger. He would come back and visit and would tell stories about being a park ranger in Yellowstone. Later he went with the Fish and Wildlife Service. He was a refuge manager on two or three different refuges.

Every time he would come through on a visit, he would tell us about banding ducks, following ducks and geese and I was just fascinated. He was my hero. I thought right then that that is what I was going to be. He was a role model. Dad always encouraged me because he saw where my interests were. He would make sure that I had books to read about wildlife and save articles for me to read. He was always trying to encourage me to continue.

Actually, there were three things that I always wanted to do. I wanted to climb telephone poles. I would watch those linemen when they would come through town and they would put up wires. I wanted to climb poles. I wanted to work in the field of wildlife and I wanted to fly an airplane. I ended up doing all three of those things. Those are the three things that I always wanted to do and I ended up being able to accomplish them. I worked for a telephone company for awhile and got a chance to get that out of my system and then went into wildlife work. I eventually bought my own airplane. That was actually pretty special when I think about it.

Not too long ago, I was going through my high school yearbook. Everybody had written what they were going to do after 10 years. In that book it says, "I, Jim Frates, am up in Canada banding ducks and geese in 1966 and working for the Fish and Wildlife Service." Little did I realize that when I wrote it, 10 years later I would be in Canada and I would be banding ducks and geese and I would be working for the Fish and Wildlife Service. It was almost preordained. I was actually working in Minnesota at the time but was sent on detail up into Saskatchewan to help on a banding crew so there I was, 10 years later, banding ducks and geese in Canada.

Diana: Can you tell me a little more about your brother and your sister.

Jim: My sister, Jean, is a couple years older than I. She graduated and went to a teacher's college. She got married before she finished college. The man she married was

a vocational education schoolteacher and they moved to Colorado. He just retired about four years ago. He taught for about 30 years in Colorado and Jean did a lot of substitute teaching. They had three children. She was real active in education even though she didn't get to finish her education. She always wanted to be involved in education.

My younger brother, John, graduated from a teacher's college in Nebraska. In fact, we all went to the same teacher's college right out of high school. John got his master's degree there and came back as principal of the high school in my hometown. That is where he is today. He is superintendent now. They consolidated with some other districts. They were having a hard time maintaining the districts; the tax base was a problem. John started working closely with other districts trying to save their small schools. Essentially he went right out of college, right back to his hometown and has been there ever since. He loves to hunt and fish and is completely satisfied with what his hometown has to offer. He still has a nice place to hunt there on the Platt River. I try and go back once a year to hunt with him. I grew up right in-between the south and the north Platt Rivers. They come together in a place they call North Platt.

I lived right in-between the Platt Rivers. There was a large reservoir just to the north of our place called Lake McConaughy. It is the third or fourth largest earthen dam in the world. They dammed up the Platt and it backs up about 25 miles when the reservoir is full. The other part of my back yard was the lake. That is where we did a lot of our hunting and fishing. I had all the things that a kid would want right in my own back yard.

In a small town, there weren't a lot of athletes to choose from so just about every body participated. We played "six-man" football. I don't think they have that anymore. We didn't have enough sometimes to scrimmage against each other. We couldn't get 12 people!

I had a paper route. I delivered the Omaha World Herald when I was in junior high. We had two papers in town, the Omaha World Herald and the North Platt Telegraph Bulletin. There was an older lady, Bella Shadey. She lived in a shack in the west part of town. Bella wore the same dress all the time that I can remember. She wore high-top shoes and she was bent over but she delivered those papers every day. She was an incredible woman.

We would go down to the Union Pacific train depot and wait for the train. The train would go by and throw a bag off that had our papers in it. Hers came in the evening and mine came in the mornings. She would pick up those papers and stuff them in her bag. It was heavy. They never had an automobile and they walked everywhere they went. She lived to be about 94 years old. She continued delivering papers up in her 80's. I don't think she nor her husband ever finished grade school. I think they had nine children. They were illiterate so they named their kids, starting with A-Alice, B-Basil, C-Clarence, D-David, and they went on down as far as they could go in the alphabet. They got stuck on E and that was the last kid they had – as least that was the rumor.

My dad was the mayor of the town for a while. He appointed me to be the "water meter reader." I was about 13-14 years old. At that time, when they hooked up to a house, all the meters were in the basements or crawl spaces; they weren't put on the outside. So you had to go inside to read them. I never had a love for spiders, and crawling in all those spaces with a mass of spider webs, I just used to hate that job. I still hate spiders! I did get paid a small amount, however.

We grew up without television. My folks never got a TV until I was in college. We didn't have any way of getting TV out to the western part of the state. They did put a tower in at North Platt in the 50's but it was a terrible signal. A few people got the first sets and we would gather at their houses for special events, like the World Series or Lawrence Welk.

We never had a telephone when I was growing up. There was phone service available but I was a senior in high school before we got one in our home. Not many people had phones.

We had radios. That was the major thing on Sunday evenings, just sitting around listing to the radio. We had a big Philco radio. Mom and Dad would make popcorn and we would sit around and listen to "Fibber McGee and Molly," "Red Rider," "The Inner Sanctum," and several others. It is hard to tell kids now that we used to sit around a radio and listen to the programs. It was sort of like watching TV, I guess, but that was entertainment.

--end of Side A, Tape 1—

--start of Side B, Tape 1—

Diana: Can you tell me a little more about some of your early influences.

Jim: I mentioned that my dad was a barber. I spent a lot of time in the barbershop. If you want an education at an early age, just spend some time in a barbershop. Looking back on it now, I just wish I would have had tape recordings of the people that would come into the shop and tell their stories – old farmers, old ranchers. I would always listen because I was always fascinated with history. Dad had card tables in the barbershop where they would come in a play Pitch or Rummy. Sometimes on a rainy day all the farmers would come in. There would be as many as 6-8 tables of people playing cards. I was the moneychanger. They would play for quarters and my job was to make sure that everybody paid after the game. The "house" got a quarter for every game and my job was to go around and collect. Come to find out later, there were some "tight wads" in town that wouldn't pay up when they won. It was my job to watch them. At the end of the game, if they didn't pay up, I would go and tap them on the shoulder and ask them for their quarter. I got to know who to talk to and who not to. It was actually really fun.

In those days, people would come in from the outlying areas. This was in the 1940's, not like the depression of the 30's but there were a lot of poor farmers that didn't have cash and they would come in on Saturday nights – which was a big night for the barbershop. They didn't have any money but yet they all wanted a hair cut and a shave. They would bring in a chicken or a ham or home cured bacon or eggs so at the end of Saturday night, here we would have one room of the barbershop with all sorts of food. It was the "barter" system.

I had a big red wagon and we would load that stuff up in the wagon. We lived about four blocks away. I towed all that stuff home. We had a garage with a walk-in cooler where we kept all the meat. One night I had a crate of 5-6 chickens and the crate fell off my wagon and the door came open. I lost all those chickens; they were running all over the place. I spent half the night chasing those chickens down. I think the dogs got two or three of them and I ended up catching a couple of them. I felt so bad that I had lost our food. On Sunday mornings, if there were chickens, we would clean them and get them ready for cooking. You really never knew what you were going to get on a Saturday night.

We had a couple of guys in town that absolutely couldn't stand each other. Normally they were never at the same place at the same time but one of them came into the barbershop and they both had been drinking. One of them was from Texas. Everybody was afraid of him because he always carried a knife. Sure enough, those guys got into an argument and got into a knife fight right there in the shop. I wasn't there at that time but one of them was cut up quite badly. The next morning, I had to go down and help clean up the shop. There was blood all over the place. The guy carried the scars on his face all the years that I was growing up there.

We had a lot of Mexican Nationals that would come up from Mexico during the beet harvest. A lot of sugar beets were raised in that country. They would come up and hoe

beets in the summertime. A lot of the beet owners had little shacks that they would put their help up in for the 6-7 weeks during the summer. One of them came out of the bank one afternoon and another guy walked up behind him with a big butcher knife and stabbed him right in the heart! That was the only homicide that I ever remember hearing about and I happened to be unfortunate enough to witness it. I was probably 6-7 years old. That was traumatic. I never did hear much more about it but the memory is vivid. I think of it every time I sharpen a butcher knife.

We had a lot of what they called "community rabbit hunts." There were a lot of jackrabbits in the area. On Sundays, a lot of folks would go out and walk through the hills and have people with guns and clubs on one end. The jackrabbits were eating a lot of the grass that the farmers wanted for their cattle. They would also have coyote hunts on Sunday afternoons. There was a guy with an airplane and he would go spot the coyotes from the air and then the guys would go in vehicles and chase the coyotes through the wheat fields and kill them. There was a $5.00 bounty on each coyote. That was quite a bit of money.

Usually after these events, there would be a meal. The women would fry chicken or a type of potluck affair and when the guys would come in from these hunts we would have a big meal. In the fall, there would be community pheasant hunts. I grew up with that. I always liked hunting alone rather than with a group like that. I didn't care for that but it was still an experience to be part of that kind of a hunt. I don't think they do that type of hunting anymore.

I had a buddy by the name of Jerry. We graduated from high school together. We spent a lot of time hunting together. Jerry lived on a farm south of town. One morning we had decided to go duck hunting. It was late fall, early winter. My uncle had a farm nearby and they had picked their corn and when the corn pickers went through, they left a lot of corn in the field. The only way we could get the corn that was left was to get a bunch of guys with a wagon, pulled by a couple of horses and go through the field and pick it up

and throw it in the wagon. We went out early on a Saturday morning and we spent all day picking up corn. It was very cold. I was 16 years old and I had just gotten my driver's licenses. He worked us until about 4:00 in the afternoon. That was very hard work, bending over all day long, fighting the cold and the wind. I got home about 4:30 and was planning to go duck hunting the next morning with Jerry.

I was so tired that I set the alarm clock for about 5:30 a.m., the clock went off and I thought it just couldn't be that time already! I got up, got my hunting cloths, my dog, my gun, got in the car and headed out to meet Jerry. I kept noticing that every house that I went by had lights on and I thought, gee, everybody is up early! I got out to the meeting place about 6:00 o'clock and waited and waited for Jerry. He never showed up but sometimes he wasn't always prompt. We had this agreement that if he wasn't at the gate, I would go on and get the decoys set out. I waited for awhile then decided to go on down. It had started to snow and the wind was blowing. I went on down in my 1946 Chevrolet and bounced up through the prairie trail down to the river's edge. I got out, took my dog and my gun and went to the river.

I always felt sorry for my old Springer Spaniel so I always carried old Skip across the river. The water was pretty deep that fall. I got water in my boots, I was cold and I was mad because Jerry wasn't there to help put the decoys out. I kept looking at my watch and I knew shooting time was at 7:00 o'clock and it didn't get light. In fact, it was getting darker. I couldn't figure out what was going on and now it was getting on toward 8:00 o'clock and it finally dawned on me that something must have happened to the sun! I started to get a panicky feeling so I left the decoys in the river, got my dog and we left to go find out what was going on. As I got closer to some houses, the lights were still on in these farmhouses. I thought, well this wasn't too unusual to see lights.

I walked up the house where Mary Lou, my music teacher lived. I knocked on the door and Mary Lou came to the door and she said, "Jimmy, what are you doing out on a night like this?" I said, "night?" Finally, things started to click and I asked her to not tell

anybody about this! I really felt like a dummy. Here, I thought it was early in the morning and instead it was night. I had worked hard all day and that hour of sleep I got, I thought it was early morning. Mary Lou didn't keep this to herself. Her mother lived across the street from my folks and she was the town "gossiper." Mabel had heard about my early morning/late night escapade and pretty soon it was all over town. I still hear about it to this day from some of the older people when I go back there.

Diana: What were some of the "values" that your family had?

Jim: I think growing up in that environment certainly had to carry over. I have tried to pass some of these values on to my own children. There was a real value system. We were all expected to work and we were all expected to stay above the law or at least within the framework of the law. None of the kids were ever involved in serious problems. We were playing ball one day and a ball went through my aunt's window and she reported me to the police. I was so afraid that they were going to take me to jail. She was not what you call a "child friendly" neighbor. She would always watch us real closely when we were out to make sure that we didn't get on her lawn and that we didn't chase the ball across her lawn but one day, I just happened to make a bad throw and hit her window.

I think the value system was instilled at a very early age and I am really thankful for that. It was one of the blessings of having those kind of parents that took a real interest in all the things that the kids did. When kids started to stray or got off course, the parents were always right there to get them back on the right track.

A lot of my time was spent with my friends. We did lots of things together. We grew up and went to school together, played sports, and roller-skated on the sidewalks. That was always a lot of fun. After graduation, we all took different paths and we seldom see each other now. There were only 10 in my high school graduating class. We do correspond with each other. Of course, because our class was so small, we did get a lot of individual

attention and instruction in the academic part of school. We were always blessed to have good teachers. Historically, small towns didn't always get the cream of the crop in teachers but for some reason, we had a superintendent that was probably really intent on selecting good teachers. I had such trouble with math that it almost kept me out of college. My uncle who was an engineer, lived in Colorado, he had a degree in mathematics from the University of Nebraska. After I had gone to college and was having some real problems, he finally found out that I was struggling and he said, "well, we can fix that." They invited me to come to Denver and spend a semester with them. He would drill me every night on the black board, five nights a week, just to get me through algebra. That is what it took!

One of the disadvantages of going to a small school was our algebra teacher got fired and they didn't have anybody to replace him so the superintendent's wife kind of "baby sat" the class and we worked on our own. That didn't work for me. When I came out of high school, I had absolutely no concept of algebra. That foundation is so important and I didn't have it. We didn't have chemistry and that was another required course. When I got to college and my first lecture in chemistry, the professor had a chart pulled down and he said, "well, I know you are all familiar with this." Well, this was the first periodic chart like this that I had ever seen in my life. It meant absolutely nothing to me. There again I was playing "catch up" with chemistry. I struggled through but it was tough. It made a little more sense to me than algebra. I was a good student but I probably didn't work as hard as I could or should have. Probably the reason that I worked as hard as I did was that Mom saw to it that whatever homework that I had was done and she signed off on it. That is probably the way that I was able to stay ahead of things was to have parents that cared. There are certain advantages of going to a small school like that but there are certainly some disadvantages also.

The farmers started raising a lot of seed potatoes in that area. They gave up their beets and started with potatoes. In order to plant seed potatoes, you had to cut them into pieces. They would hire the kids in the summer time to go out to the potato cave. We would sit

there with a big trough full of potatoes. You had a little chair that sat right beside the trough with a 2x4 in the center with a real sharp knife stuck out of the top of it. We had a bushel basket right under the knife and you just kept grabbing potatoes out of the trough and pushing them through the knife, making sure you had an eye on each part of the potato that was cut so when they were planted, you had at least one eye there to grow. I don't know how much we got paid but it was by the bushel basket. It wasn't very much but it sure kept us busy. It was kind of like the canneries here in Alaska, the kids were kept busy every summer. I was probably in my freshman year when I worked the potato cave.

After that, I started working on the farms. I had a lot of relatives who had farms and ranches and I was always helping them fix fences, feed cattle, milk cows and do after school type chores.

We had a lot of Native Indians from the reservation up on the northern part of Nebraska who would come down and they would pick potatoes. We got to looking at how much money they were making. They were mostly women that were working. They would put a gunny sack between their legs with a harness and they would bend over and walk down a row of potatoes and they would just start picking those potatoes, fill their bag up, set it down and start another one. They got paid by the bag and we figured some of them were making $15-$20 a day. We thought we had better starting picking potatoes instead of cutting potatoes! We tried that but we didn't last but a couple of days, even though we were in good shape. By the first half-mile row that I picked I couldn't even get up. This one Native Indian ahead of me on the next row had three bags of potatoes setting in her row and I still had only a half of a bag. There was certainly a technique to it and I didn't have it and I didn't want it. It was just too much hard labor work!

When I turned 16, I got my car and I had a friend that had a big food farm. The farm was about 10 miles away so in the summer I would go out there and stay and work 12-hour days there on the farm. I would drive the tractor, build fences, milk cows, and do

whatever needed to be done. Many days, I would drive a tractor all day long. We would get the cows milked early in order to be in the fields by 7:00 a.m., stay out until 7:00 p.m., then come in and milk the cows again.

During the harvest season when the wheat was ripe, they started cutting it around the 4th of July, we had to harvest the wheat.

--end of Side B, Tape 1—

--start of Side A, Tape 2—

Diana: We are continuing with personal information and early childhood and work history. Go ahead, Jim.

Jim: We were talking about working in the wheat fields. That was most of the jobs that I had later, after I was 16. A lot of winter wheat was produced. The wheat would be planted in the fall of the year and start ripening in the spring and by early July; it was ready for harvest. The harvest crews would come in from Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma in a convoy with custom combines. Some of the farmers had their own combines and some would contract with these crews. They could do it all in a couple of days if the weather cooperated. That country is subject to hailstorms and there were certainly advantages to getting into the fields and getting the wheat out before the hailstorms hit.

The farmers that I worked for had their own combines. My job was to drive a truck and they would load the truck. Once we got moving, we hardly stopped. We would unload on the go. The auger would come out of the combine bin and you would just pull the truck up beside them. They would be combining, harvesting the wheat, and unloading at the same time. My problem was, I was terribly allergic to wheat dust. My eyes would swell up, I couldn't breath and it was a struggle. I tried to stay out of it as much as I

could. I wouldn't get inside the bin but just the dust coming around when we were loading and unloading was bad enough.

We had probably the most beautiful wheat crop my senior year that they had had in years. The conditions were just right. We had this one field that was almost a full section, probably 500 acres. The wheat stood almost chest high. The heads were so tall and heavy, they were starting to fall over. We had figured on harvesting on a Wednesday. On Tuesday night prior, we got a tremendous thunderstorm that came through and it hit about 6:00 in the evening. It completely flattened that entire 500 acres. It hailed for about half an hour and it just beat the wheat right back down into the soil. I remember really feeling for the farmer because his whole year was wrapped up into that harvest. It was totally devastating to most of the farmers, especially those that were on the "edge" anyway, monetarily. It wiped out many families and they lost their farms. Some of them had crop insurance but crop insurance was very expensive and a lot of the farmers just would chance it. As soon as the ground dried up enough, we plowed everything under. Farming was not an easy life. I'm not sure there were very many rich farmers but some did make a comfortable living. There were several that were marginal even with their wives working in town. It took a total commitment of the family if they were to make a go of it with farming. Eventually, many of the smaller farmers started working in town and farming then became a part time job. That whole culture has changed in that country. Now you find a lot of big corporate farms.

I think that is sad in a way because the family farms as I remember were synonymous with family unity. The family had children, all had chores on the farm, whether it be feeding ducks or chickens or whatever. You learn this work ethic as a very early age. Everybody had chores to do and they came first and then you were off to school. I believe it was a real unifier for the family. We started seeing that disintegrate because the prices of crops went down, the demand to produce more was greater and the farm equipment cost more. You had to be a really progressive farmer and it took a lot of money. Consequently, there were people that just couldn't do that so you started seeing

the mother going into town to work, pretty soon the dad went into work and the kids were left at home alone. Some of the people were forced to move either out of state or out of the county into cities to find work to make a living. The disintegration of the family unity was starting to be seen.

I lived through this period and a lot of my friends grew up on farms. They looked forward to having the farms passed on to them when their folks retired but a lot of times, it just didn't happen. The farms would have to be sold before the kids were grown and they had to find other lines of work. That is not a real proud chapter in my growing up years but it was just kind of the evolution of things. Some people call it progress but I certainly don't see it as progress. The fact was, people could not compete on the small family farms and once they lost their farm, they lost something pretty special. It only took one disastrous year to ruin some of the small farmers.

The small towns suffered as a result because the small towns were so interdependent on the outlying communities, so went the farming communities, so went the small towns. Earlier, the towns were the center of the communities' activities such as the churches, the town hall, drugstore, grocery store. They were the focal point of those communities. As those farms evolved more into the corporate level, the small towns suffered. I remember the Saturday nights where I grew up was a big time. Main street was just lined with cars and people. It was the social event of the week. People would come into town and people would bring their milk, eggs, cream, etc. and sell it to the grocery stores. People would get haircuts, buy their groceries, go through the hardware store – the community was alive!

The same was with the schools. The communities had a tremendously hard time trying to hang onto their schools because you didn't have the major tax support that was required to support those schools. All the small school districts like where my mom used to teach, they just died away. Those schools within themselves were kind of a sub culture of the larger communities. There were hard feelings and fights about consolidation coming in.

I never rode or saw a school bus all the time I went to school and now they are bussing kids from 20-30 miles away. Kids spend a lot of time on the school bus but the only salvation for those towns was to consolidate, destroy those one-room country school houses and bring the kids into town. It was a matter of survival. Now they have consolidated even more, into larger schools and communities.

This is what my brother has been working on. He goes all over the state talking to these small districts, telling them how they did it and the problems they encountered. He sees that as the only option that a lot of these small communities have. It has changed a lot to go back home and see the old high school is no longer the "old high school." It is now used as a grade school or a junior high. The high school is in another town. Each town kept a school, whether it be elementary, secondary, or high school. It seems to be working out but it has certainly changed things.

Diana: What kind of books did you like when you were younger?

Jim: Anything to do with outdoors. My folks got me a book, *Birds of America*, by Roger Tory Peterson. I was probably in 6th or 7th grade. I think I drew every bird in that book. That was the one book that really had a lasting impression. I liked adventure stories as related to the outdoors. *Treasure Island* was another favorite. I didn't have or didn't take the time to do a lot of reading. I did read books relating to other places such as Alaska. I always had a fascination for Alaska and I think that was because my dad always had a dream of going to Alaska. He would always read a lot about Alaska and how he always wanted to go to Barrow and go above the Arctic Circle. That was one of his dreams.

My dad had polio and spinal meningitis when he was in high school. He spent a lot of time in the hospital and the one thing that really got him through his illness was reading about Alaska and the hunting and fishing possibilities. That may be why I am here. I don't know that I ever had that burning desire to come to Alaska but when I was offered

the opportunity, I somehow remember how much he wanted to come. I thought maybe, deep down, I really should go to Alaska. My dad developed cataracts later in life and it really impaired his vision. I wanted to bring him up here several times but his lack of vision was so severe he would always decline. I was all set to take him to Barrow but he wouldn't come.

My mom always had a lot of books around the house but I just never had a lot of time to sit around and read. It seems that I was always doing something and staying busy doing jobs, etc. Mom did instill in us a real love of books and far away places and following your dreams. She taught all eight grades and she would always try out her lessons on me! I would have to do research on my own and then go back to her with my answers. She had a real way with making learning fun. Outside of algebra, that's the way I approached my learning. I just never found the fun in learning algebra.

Diana: As a child when you were growing up, what person influenced you the most?

Jim: Without question, it would be both Mom and Dad. They were always trying to open new doors for us and in whatever way we wanted to go, they would help us to see where our interests were. Dad's friend that went to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service played a significant role. As I look back in listening to him talk about working on wildlife refuges, Yosemite Park, being a forestry ranger and doing all those things, I thought those are the things that I would like to do. His influence on me, even at a very early age, was indelible. I was fascinated by his stories. I always kept thinking that is just what I want to be when I grow up and my folks knew that and each one of them in their own way would try to lead me down that path, just to reinforce not to push, but to open up new avenues of appreciation and understanding.

Diana: Is there anything else about your early age that you would like to add?

Jim: I think we have covered a lot of ground here. I think we have touched on growing up in a small Nebraska town and covered a lot of what sticks in my mind as being important. I am sure there are a lot of things that I don't recall but for the most part, it was a tremendously happy childhood. We had such community support.

Years later, I was asked to come back and give the Commencement Address at the high school. This was one of the highlights in my life that really meant a lot. One of the things that I really wanted to impress on those kids was how fortunate they were in growing up in a small town where they had not only their parents' support but also the community support.

(May 4, continuation)

Diana: Jim will be telling more about additional background information, education, etc.

Jim: It has been 43 years since I graduated from high school - in 1956! As I mentioned earlier, there were 10 students in my graduating class and all but 2 started school together in the first grade. I knew I was going to go to college. That was a given and I knew what I wanted to do. What I really wanted to do was go out to Fort Collins to the Colorado State University which then was Colorado A&M (Agriculture and Mechanical) School. You could get a 4-year forestry degree, plus other degrees, of course.

One thing about going there was I was from out-of-state and the tuition was quite expensive. I thought I could get my first year or two at a teacher's college in Nebraska, pay in-state tuition and get the basics out of the way. That is what I did. A friend and I went to Nebraska State Teacher's College in Kearney. It was 150 miles from home. We got a room in the dorm and I selected a pretty tough curriculum. I got right into chemistry and college algebra and the standard courses. I ran into an immediate problem with my algebra. It was a large class and I think I was the only one that didn't have the grasp of algebra and I knew it was going to be a struggle. I worked at it. College should have

been real fun but to me the first year was kind of "hell week" the whole year because I was fighting with algebra and chemistry. I spent all my free time studying. I did really well in my other classes but I ended up on the probation list. I flunked algebra but I did pass chemistry. I came out of that first year with a less than desirable grade average.

--end of Side A, Tape 2—
--start of Side B, Tape 2—

Even though I didn't have a real positive academic experience that first year, I thought that if I got out to Colorado and got into something that I was really interested in that things would go better. I was still faced with having to take algebra again and more chemistry.

That first summer I went to work on a farm again. It was the same people that I had worked for the previous summer. I actually took a correspondence course in algebra, which was a mistake, because I was working all day and playing American Legion baseball at night and frankly, I didn't have time to study. The superintendent of the school worked that summer at the school and I would go by there and he would help me a little. In fact, he is the one that gave me the final test and I flunked that. I was really getting discouraged about this algebra stuff.

It turned out that I did, in fact, go out to Fort Collins that next fall and I jumped right in to college algebra and other courses. I went there on academic probation which is not a good thing to do but I thought with really hard work, I would be able to get my grades up. I did fairly well, again, except in algebra.

At that time, there were a whole bunch of Hungarians – it was during the Hungarian Revolution and a lot of Hungarians came to the United States. The whole dormitory floor where I lived consisted primarily of Hungarians. These guys had had algebra like in the 5^{th} and 6^{th} grade. I became friends with one of them by the name of Peter. He saw how I

was struggling and he would help me every night. He didn't speak very good English but math tends to have a universal language all its own. He worked very patiently with me but I flunked again, I still didn't make it. At this point, I was really getting discouraged. I thought, here I am spending all this money and working this hard, I should have been able to pass it. After the first semester was over at Colorado State, I decided that I would just go home and get a job and go to work and forget about school for awhile.

I quit at the end of the semester, still on academic probation. My folks got a letter, which I still have, which said, "Dear Mr. and Mrs. Frates, we regret to say that your son, after his last experience here at Colorado State, will probably not have a successful academic career here and we suggest that he may ought to try another field or some other university." It was just devastating. I remember showing this to my folks but what that did is, probably just what I needed. I took that and put it away and I said to myself, "one of these days, I am going to go back to the University and show the letter to the Dean when I graduate and tell them they were wrong."

I got another farm job but the next school year in the fall, I went back to the Teacher's College where I started initially. I decided to forego math when I returned and I worked really hard in my other classes, such as zoology, ornithology, and all the natural resource courses that I could take, plus the standard curriculum of English, etc. I got my grade average up way above a B so when I came out of that year, my academic standing was in a positive side of things. The real kicker was, of course, if I was going to get a degree in forestry or wildlife management, I still had to take algebra.

My uncle and aunt lived in Denver. My uncle was an engineer and he taught math at the University of Nebraska and he had been all over the world as an engineer. He was one of these guys that lived and breathed mathematics. He suggested I come out to Denver and enroll at the University of Colorado, extension center, and he would help me with the math. He told me he would guarantee me that I would get through it. That was one of those offers that I couldn't refuse, so I packed my bags and went to Denver and enrolled

in the University Extension Center. I learned how to use the bus to get me to classes, right in downtown Denver.

I got into the college algebra class and also took geology there at the same time. My uncle was also a geologist and he thought he could help me with both. That worked out fairly well. He drilled me every night. He had a blackboard in his basement and we would go through the lesson for an hour every night. It was a unique experience living with them. It was a totally different lifestyle than what I was used to and grew up in. These people knew a lot people high in government and they would have a lot of people over to their home in the evenings, dinners and social events. Here I was this kid from Nebraska and I had never experienced "cocktails before dinner." I got exposed to a lot of different people and a lot of different types of events and I did well. I passed my algebra. I had to take my fieldwork at Boulder. Every Sunday, I would drive to Boulder to do field work for the geology course. By the end of the semester, I had good grades in algebra and geology and I was feeling very elated. I am still thankful for the fact that they took me in and Uncle Rex was able to take this very defunct mathematical anti-genius and at least got me to where I could pass the course!

The other year that I had spent in Kearney I met my wife, Marlene. We had met there and I decided that I should get married. It just seemed like the right thing to do even though I didn't have a steady job. My folks felt I should wait, get my education first. The more Marlene and I talked about it, the more we thought we could probably do it. We got married in July of 1960. In April before that, I had gotten a job with the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company, climbing telephone poles and doing construction. So we did get married with the intent of getting our feet on the ground and one day go back to school and continue our education. It worked out fairly well. Marlene was going to college also and she took a year off to become a secretary.

We got married on a Saturday and I had to be to work on Monday. After 40 years, we are still waiting for our honeymoon. Four days after we were married and I was at work, I

fell off a telephone pole and ended up in the hospital. Lying there in the hospital, I got to thinking that maybe this is not a very good way to make a living. I continued to work for the phone company through the summer and as fate would have it, I got into a tremendous hailstorm. We had 55 Chevrolet and the hail just pounded the hell out of that car. It looked like somebody had taken a hammer to it and put dents all over it. I had insurance and they asked me if I wanted the cash or if I wanted to have the car fixed. They offered to give me $550 cash, which I took, and continued to drive around with the dents in it. We felt that the money was a "God send." That was a lot of money. We decided to take that money and go back to Fort Collins and go back to school.

Looking back, if it had not been for that hailstorm and receiving the money from the insurance company, it would have probably been quite some time before, if I ever, went back. We both took off for Fort Collins with no idea of where we were going to live or anything. We found a cheap apartment and I enrolled in school. Marlene landed a job right away. That was in 1961. We spent the next two years in Fort Collins and I graduated in 1963. Our first son, Brad, was born in 1962 and I still had a year to go before graduating. It was not exactly a planned event but, there again, we were able to work through it. It just so happened that the people that lived in the apartment owned the house that we lived in and had several kids and she elected to baby-sit Brad. All we had to do was take him upstairs in the morning so that worked out well.

My chore on Saturday mornings was to go to the laundry mat and do the dirty diapers along with all the sorority girls that showed up to do their laundry. There I was shaking out diapers surrounded by all these beautiful girls.

I guess I don't look back on my college as being a particular fun part of my life. It was work for me and now that I was married, had a son and I was under the gun to come through. I worked late, studied late and I needed money so I got a job unloading freight every morning from 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. That lasted just a short time because my grades started to suffer. We didn't have much money but I remember only borrowing

money once. I remember many times, we only had crackers and peanut butter in the cupboard, except for the baby food. A lot of our other friends were in the same boat so we would pool our resources about once a week and buy a pizza. We didn't go to movies or anything for entertainment except get together and play cards. It was really no big deal at the time. I was just thankful that Marlene was able to continue working and that kept the rent paid and a few groceries.

I graduated in 1963. I did take the letter back to the Dean of the College. I got to know him quite well during the 2-1/2 years that I was there and he knew me. When I showed him the letter, he laughed and said, "yes, you know sometimes we make mistakes too." I always felt good about actually being able to take that letter back. I have that letter and it is framed. It wasn't something that I was particularly proud of but it was a motivator. The fact that my uncle took the time to give me the assistance and the help that I needed was priceless. He knew what I needed.

They had no children. I was the adopted "son" of Uncle Rex during the time that I was there. They involved me in just about everything that they were involved in. They never excluded me from their activities. They both understood the value of an education. Uncle Rex grew up in a poor home, lost his father when he was 12 or 13 years old. His stepdad basically disavowed him and he had no fatherly image. Uncle Rex went on to the University right out of high school. He worked as a bellhop out of Lincoln. He worked all the time and went to school. He got straight A's. He was just a really gifted individual. He was a Naval Commander during World War II. He saw action in the Pacific. He was always one of my hero's too. He was a world traveler. He was involved in the Aswan Dam construction when it started backing up into the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens there along the Nile. He was on some type of a task force to evaluate some of those ruins up on the upper reaches of the Nile. He had some pictures that he had taken of some of the first people to see some of these tombs. He was a fantastic historian. He understood the Egyptian culture. Everything he did was very

precise and very thorough. That is what he tried to instill in me. He said, "mathematics is nothing more than trying to be thorough and grasp and understand the concepts."

Both Uncle Rex and his wife passed away within about a year of each other, within the past two years. I would always make sure to stop and see them every chance that I had. They both came up to see us shortly after we arrived in Alaska. Uncle Rex had always been interested in Katmai National Park and the volcano that erupted there in 1912. He would devour the National Geographic specials of that sight. That was one of the things that he wanted to do before he died was to go see the Valley of the Ten Thousand Smokes. Even though he could hardly walk, we went over and spent a week at Brooks Camp and took the tour up to the Valley and he got a chance to see it in person. It was just tremendous. He also caught a 70-pound king salmon. They were just very special people in my life.

Diana: Did you have other mentors too?

Jim: Yes, I had one professor in particular, his name was Dr. Ryder. He was a waterfowl man and I was really interested in waterfowl. He picked up on that about my junior year. I would always go with him on bird watches. He had such a great interest in waterfowl and waterfowl management and things we could do to improve migratory bird habitat throughout the entire mid-west. I think I identified more with him than any other professor simply because we had the same interests.

I was really fortunate in having some outstanding professors. I was never that interested in big game but I got to be friends with Dr. Gilbert who died of cancer just a few years ago. He took a real interest in students. Dr. Gilbert and Dr. Ryder are two that really stand out. They both realized my situation and they would try and find odd jobs for me to do to help pick up a few bucks. They really went beyond the academic world in trying to help me.

Diana: Did you get your degree in forestry?

Jim: No, my degree is in wildlife management. The School of Forestry had several options that you could go into such as recreation, hydrology, watershed management, fisheries, etc. There was a broad spectrum of different resource areas that you could go into. I always wanted to go into wildlife management, particularly waterfowl management. That is where my interest was and still is. Even though I ended up as manager of the Kenai Moose Range, I was never particularly interested in big game.

Diana: So do you think that your college education prepared you for your future jobs?

Jim: Oh, yes, I think so. It gave me a basis but nothing prepares you like the on-the-job type training once you get into a position and start learning it. Nothing prepares you for the politics that you are going to eventually encounter. Just the basic courses in biology was a good foundation and it acted as a base of the building blocks for my career. I had the option of going on to the master's program but being married with a child, I wanted to get out and go to work.

Between my junior and senior year, I had gotten a job with the State of Nebraska. They had a pheasant research project and they were looking for somebody who was interested in upland game and/or waterfowl. They had been recruiting on campus during my junior year. I applied for that job and was selected which was a neat project. It was my first field experience and working in south central Nebraska, I had a really intensive study in trying to determine the best pheasant-nesting habitat. There was a lot of agriculture in that area. The pheasant population had been going down hill for years, mostly because of the land use. They were trying to find out, first of all, what habitat was the prime nesting area for pheasants and what they could do to work with farmers to get them to plant a certain type of habitat and maybe compensate them for the crops.

At that time, we still weren't sure what was prime nesting habitat and that was one of the things that I was working. It was a multi-year project and I only worked on it for two years but I helped put some of the pieces of the puzzle together. It was a good study. We would go out all day and look for pheasant nests in different types of habitat. I got to know more about pheasants than I ever thought I would ever learn.

Having some understanding of how research projects are established, how they are set up, quality control, data analysis was special to have that kind of training. It was something that probably prepared me more than anything else for some of the research work that I did later on refuges. I had a super boss, he was from the University of Pennsylvania and he came to Nebraska to study pheasants.

Carl Wolf was another one of those influential individuals that took a real interest in finding out where I was heading and what he could do as a project supervisor to help prepare me more for my future. It was a great learning experience. He put me in charge of a lot of the data analysis and the summarization of the field data that I probably would not have had the experience had he not had enough confidence in me to go ahead and work it up and start analyzing it. He even had me give presentation of papers at different meetings. He didn't have to do that but he was just one of those individuals who had been through what I was going through in just starting out. Even though it was a temporary job, he wanted to give me the basic experience.

Diana: Did you get college credit for this?

Jim: I didn't get credit. We were required to have field experience between our junior and senior year in some natural resource field and this just worked out fine for me. We had a chance to stay with my wife's parents who lived in Nebraska. It was only a short distance away from the research area. We were able to save some money and I was able to commute back and forth every day to the project site.

Diana: You haven't mentioned any negative aspects of school or college. Are there any experiences there that you would like to address?

Jim: The only negative thing that I can think of and it was a temporary thing, was being broke all the time, short of cash but we always knew it was temporary. As far as other negative aspects, I don't know. It was a lot of work. School was not fun but it was like a job. At least, that's the way I approached it but I never came out of college with any real negative feelings. Everybody that I worked with were very supportive. I came out with a positive attitude and looking back and thinking "thank God, it's over." At the time, you just take it in stride but looking back now, I am not sure that I would want to do it again.

--end of Side B, Tape 2—

--start of Side A, Tape 3--

Diana: You told a little about how you met your wife and when you got married. Do you want to tell a little about her background?

Jim: Sure. Marlene grew up on a farm in the south central part of Nebraska, in a little town by the name of Hampton, in Hamilton County. Her dad had a 160-acre farm just outside of Hampton and Marlene and her older sister Virginia, grew up on the farm. She was a farm girl and she worked on the farm from the time she was in grade school. She helped her dad drive a tractor, truck, irrigate crops, etc. She was one of those that liked to be outside all the time. Her sister was more on the domestic side. She liked to cook and do the things around the house. They complimented each other with their different interests. As sisters, they got along great. Unfortunately her sister passed away about 10 years ago. She had an aneurysm at 49 years old. She lost both her parents at early ages. Her mom was 49 and her dad was only 51 when he passed away. Since we have been married, she has lost her only sister and her parents. That has been tough because her sister passed away while we were up here and of course, it was very, very sudden.

Marlene went to a parochial school there in Nebraska. It is a good German-Lutheran community; mostly German stock in that whole south central part of Nebraska. She was real active in volleyball and all the other activities that kids would be involved in.

It was love at first sight. It just so happened that when I went to Kearney that second go-around, there was a girl from my hometown, a sister of my best buddy, Jerry. Marlene was her roommate and when Shirley saw me on campus, she said, "you've got to meet my roommate, you've got to meet my roommate!" She got us together. We had a dance before school actually started. It was a kick off for the school year. When Shirley introduced us, I thought "O.K., there is my future wife." We danced the first dance and I said to my buddy, "someday, I am going to marry that gal." She was a freshman, just out of high school. She was only 17 and she had just broken up with her boyfriend. She was not ready to get into another relationship. I kept working on her and we saw each other quite regularly through the semester. We arranged to eat lunch together at the cafeteria. We never did have any classes together. She was in the secretarial curriculum and I was pretty much hanging out in the zoology lab. We spent a few hours together in the evening.

They didn't have co-ed dorms at the time. They had men's dorms and women's dorms. The relationship blossomed through the whole semester then we got separated. I had to go back to work for the summer and she went back home and worked on the farm. We never had much contact throughout the summer other than letters. I went to see her a couple of times. I think both of us knew that eventually we would get married. I proposed to her on Valentine's Day. I had a ring for her. I didn't have any money; my dad bought the ring. I asked him for a loan. I told him that I wanted to get engaged. He said, "do you think you are ready?" I said, "yes." He said, "do you have any money?" I said, "no." He said, "well, that never stopped me either." So he floated me a loan and I got the ring. My wife, she still wears the ring. By today's standards, it really wasn't much of a ring. That is another thing that I have in my mind. I want to get her another

ring some day. I just haven't done it yet because there is so much sentimental value in that first ring. We were engaged for about a year.

Diana: Have you asked her if she felt the same way, as you did, that you knew right away?

Jim: I don't think it was quite as instantaneous with her. I think it was because she just didn't want to get attached again right away. She was a little standoffish. I had to work on her. I think after we spent some time together, we both understood that we were somehow destined to get married.

Diana: What were her parents like? What kind of value system did she grow up in?

Jim: There again, it was a real close farm family. They worked together and spent a lot of hours in the field working the crops. She had chores to do. They had cows, chickens, ducks, turkeys, goat, etc. A lot of their life centered around the church and the parochial school and the activities there. They were German. Her dad's name was Adolph. I always associated that with Adolph Hitler. It took me a while before I really got so I could get over that. In fact, during the Second World War, her dad, with that name, there was a lot of anti-German sentiment. They had been doing some work, building an irrigation canal through that area. They had stored dynamite in one of his sheds. About the time the Germans entered the war and we were really fighting with Germany, they were interviewing a lot of the German farm families, thinking they were giving some support to some of the people in Germany. They actually went through and raided and inspected farmhouses. They found this dynamite in his shed and his name being Adolph, they just about locked him up. It was a pretty intense time for them. There were these vigilante groups that went around to make sure that the people weren't aiding or abetting the enemy, either through sending money or clothing or whatever to Germans. They had a lot of relatives in Germany. You could almost understand how they were making the connection even through it was pretty far fetched.

Diana: Were they discriminated against?

Jim: Oh, no, I don't think so. They were all Germans in that community. There were some people from the outlying towns that were not Germans. She had some real strong values. She is an extremely honest person and I'm sure that was part of the upbringing that her parents instilled in her. The Lutheran religion is very important to her and that is all part of going through the parochial school process. They spent a lot of time reading the Bible and doing lessons. I was not Lutheran when we married. We had two churches where we lived; the Lutheran Church and the Congregational Church. I always called them the "good" and the "bad" church. The Lutherans had to go to church every Sunday. They were very strict. You couldn't go hunting on Sunday morning, you had to be in church. So I always grew up thinking the Lutherans were too strict, even though my mom saw to it that I was in church most of the time. I thought I would never be a Lutheran because it was just too restrictive. Then after I met Marlene, I thought I was going to have to get serious about the religion part of it. One thing that I didn't want was to have a family that was split along the lines of religion. It just seemed natural and right that the husband and wife should belong to the same church. I bit the bullet and I actually took instructions in the Lutheran Church during the time that we were going together and by the time we got married, I had gotten my "degree" in Lutheranism. We got married in the Lutheran Church.

Diana: Well, then, did you ever go hunting on Sunday's?

Jim: Yes, I did. I didn't make a habit of it. It had to be under special circumstances. We were always pretty faithful to our local church, wherever it might be. That has never been a problem with us and the kids all went through their instructions with the church also.

Diana: It sounds like the two of you had a lot of similar interests.

Jim: Yes, we did. Her dad taught her to shoot rifles and shotguns at a fairly early age and by the time I met her, she was pretty accurate with a 22 rifle. She outshot me the first time we went out. The use of firearms was not foreign to her by any means. She drove trucks and tractors and she was just a very hard worker.

Diana: What is your ethnic background?

Jim: The name "Frates" is Portuguese. My mom was of English background. My sister is putting together our family history on the Frates side. She has worked over the last 4-5 years and is developing a pretty complete history book. There are still a lot of gaps because the Frates' that came over from Portugal apparently were adopted so we don't know what their names were. They lost their parents and they were adopted by a Frates family. She is trying to trace it back to what our real name was before that. There are quite a number of Frates' in Portugal. It is a common name there and even in Hawaii where the Portuguese settled in certain places of the Islands there, Frates is a common name, sometimes spelled a little differently.

On the East Coast, Massachusetts is where the family first settled. They were whalers and involved in the whaling industry. That is another thing that we are trying to piece together. My sister is going back through some of the old records of the old whaling museums back in New Bedford. The name is there so we are now just trying to trace the vintage to find out if it is part of the same family that came out West. It is a very difficult family tree to try and nail down. I wish I knew more about my background. We have some evidence that my great, great, great grandfather owned at least a fleet of several whaling vessels. They would bring their catch in around New Bedford and process their load. I'm not sure where this is all going to lead. Maybe we don't want to know!

Our family had quite a bit of land in Hawaii at one time. It was part of the Frates family that had actually bought property back around the turn of the century, maybe even earlier.

In the early 1900's, one of my great, great uncles had the paperwork. All we had to do was to validate the relative. You had to prove that you were a living relative of this person. The family elected Uncle Joe. He was not married and had been around. He was thought to be a good candidate to send to Hawaii to claim the property. There were several hundred acres involved. They all chipped in and got a train ticket for Uncle Joe to go to San Francisco and then get a boat to go to Hawaii. The last we heard, Uncle Joe never made it out of San Francisco and he wasn't heard from for a couple of years. By that time, he was on his second wife and he never did come back. As a result, we lost whatever land we had over there. It was never claimed and it reverted back to the Hawaiian Government. There are a lot of stories about Uncle Joe.

Diana: In thinking back, is there anything else you want to address about your wife's upbringing?

Jim: I think we have pretty well covered her background. I think the thing is, we both had similar and mutual interests because of our rural background. She has been a good trooper all these years.

Diana: I think we should move on and begin talking about your career issues. When you first got out of college, where did you end up?

Jim: After graduating in 1963, as I mentioned, I went back to work on the pheasant research project back in Nebraska. That was a temporary job and I knew it was going to end in September. Our son was about a year old then. I sent out letters to different places. I wasn't sure really where I wanted to go. I asked Marlene where she would like to go and she said, "I'll go anyplace except South Dakota or North Dakota." The way it turned out, the first two places that we went was South Dakota and North Dakota. You have to go where the jobs are. I usually listen to her better than that, but I didn't have a whole lot of choices.

I spent the summer of 1963 sending out letters to different conservation departments, trying to find some waterfowl work. There really weren't many options available. The job market was pretty tight. I had a response from the South Dakota Fish and Game Department. They needed a wildlife biologist to help with their research project – pheasants again. I thought, well, I've had the experience. I think that is why I got the job because of the two years I had had doing pheasant research work. I had the kind of training that they were looking for. I remember when I was offered the job, it was in Aberdeen, South Dakota. I could just tell that my wife's heart was sinking. We didn't know where Aberdeen was so we looked on the map. We really didn't want to go there but nothing else came along.

I was to arrive by the middle of September, at $220.00 a month! I wasn't sure what to expect. We had a U-haul trailer and my '55 Chevrolet. We had all our possessions in that U-haul. We packed up our son, who was a year old, and we headed north to Aberdeen.

I remember we were about 30-40 miles south of Aberdeen, in the evening, and the wind was blowing something terrible. The tumbleweeds were blowing across the road and every once in awhile, one would smack against the side of the car and bounce up over the top. Brad was sick and he was crying. About the fourth tumbleweed that I hit, I said, "that's it, I'm not going any further." She said, "what are you going to go back to?" We had nothing to go back to. About that time, another tumbleweed hit the car and I turned that car around and we headed back south. I was going back to Nebraska. We drove in silence for about a mile and she said, "I don't think this is a good idea." I said, "well, you are probably right." So, we turned around and headed again for Aberdeen. It was almost dark when we got there. This was not a pretty sight of what Aberdeen was going to be. We found an old motel. It was a bunch of trailer houses put together. We checked into the motel. We thought if we could get Brad out of the car, he would feel better.

It just so happened that it was homecoming night at the local college. There were a bunch of college kids that had rented most of the motel, all except our room, of course. They partied all night long! They were dancing, the horns were honking, the baby was crying.

--end of Side A, Tape 3—
--start of Side B, Tape 3—

What a trip that was. We did get through the night and the college kids finally settled down about daybreak. Brad started feeling better and Marlene and I were feeling a little better. We drove into Aberdeen that morning and found a pay phone and called the guy who had written me the letter, Morris Anderson, who was the head biologist for the South Dakota Fish and Game Department. I told him we were in town. He invited us over to meet his family. We spent the afternoon with them. They had 10 kids. Morris was one of those guys that you instantly take a liking too. He understood what we were going through with just starting our family. I explained to him that I almost had second thoughts and had, in fact, turned around. He said, "well, this country will grow on you after awhile." He said, "the last few days had not been a pretty sight, weather wise."

Knowing that I had a boss that I liked, made a big difference. We spent part of the afternoon looking for an apartment and we finally found one. It was $80.00 a month, utilities were paid. We moved in within the next couple of days. It didn't take us long to get settled. It was a big two-story farmhouse. We had the upper floor. It wasn't much but it was clean. It had been recently paneled and for $80 bucks, I guess it wasn't bad. One of the problems was I didn't get paid for a month. We had a few extra dollars to carry us through until the first paycheck came. We didn't have a telephone, couldn't afford one. Marlene stayed home with Brad.

I started work and my first job on this pheasant project was, of all things, to shoot pheasants. I had to collect 20 pheasants a week. Here I was shooting pheasants and getting paid for it! I thought I had died and gone to Heaven! They were studying the loss

of fat of female pheasants during the winter. By collecting a certain number of pheasants every week through the winter, we were able to follow the loss of their fat deposits and try and correlate that to production the next summer.

I also got involved in the establishment of a Canada goose project, to re-establish the giant Canada goose. There was an adjoining wildlife refuge, called the Land Lake National Refuge just outside of Aberdeen. We worked real close with the refuge staff. We did a lot of banding of the geese and setting up nesting platforms. At least I was working with both pheasants and waterfowl which were my two loves anyway – upland game and waterfowl. That worked out very well. The pay wasn't all that great but I was getting some good experience and I had a super boss to work with.

I stayed in that job for about a year. Another job opening came up over in Watertown which is over on the eastern part of South Dakota. It was a district game manager. I was in charge of five county areas. I was in charge of doing all of the waterfowl surveys, the deer surveys – anything to do with wildlife in those counties. I applied for that job and I had to go out to the Black Hills for an interview before the Fish and Game Commission. Several of us went in for interviews and I remember being terrified. These were Commissioners from all over the State of South Dakota. It was an interview panel. The Governor had a representative on the panel also. I felt that if I survived this, I could survive just about anything. It was really a detailed interview for such a position with the Fish and Game Department in South Dakota.

I thought that I had done poorly on the interview. I didn't feel good about it because I had not had a lot of experience and they were asking questions that I simply could not answer. About a week later, I received a phone call and they told me that I had been selected for the job in Watertown. That meant a big raise. I think I went from $220 a month to $300 per month plus it was a big promotion for me.

We moved to Watertown and found a house that we rented. Again, it was an upstairs of an older house. We made good friends with the people on the lower level and have maintained our friendship with them over the years. They were up here two summers ago to see us. They had kids the same age as our oldest boy. The kids played together all the time and Marlene and Julie got to be real good friends.

Watertown was a good experience. It was my first introduction to doing a lot of wildlife work, survey work, pheasants, deer, and waterfowl and working with the development of marshes, trying to improve nesting habitat for waterfowl. I also got introduced to the real politics of the situation. I had to deal with a lot of different diverse groups. We had the trappers, hunters, the Rotary and the Lions Club. They were always asking me to come and give talks about what was going on.

There was a real push at that time in South Dakota. The pheasant population was on a crash. In 1963 was the last major year when all these non-resident hunters came in to hunt from all over the United States. The airport in Aberdeen was busy with probably 200 planes with people flying in, renting motels. Hunting pheasants was a big deal in South Dakota. Because of the land use changes that were coming about and more and more land being taken out of production, they had what they called the Soil Bank Program. They would pay farmers to leave their land in a cover-type grassy cover so the pheasants had a lot of undisturbed areas to nest. The production was pretty stable and in fact increasing. That was a 10-year period where they had the Land Bank program in effect. The last year that that program was in effect was in 1963. The next year they started plowing it all under again. We then saw a tremendous decrease in the number of pheasants.

There were a number of red fox throughout the whole part of eastern South Dakota and everybody was pointing the finger at everybody else. Nobody really seemed to think that it was the habitat that was the cause of the decline. They were blaming things like the fox so there was a big push to eradicate the fox. They wanted to reinstate a bounty, like $5.00

on a fox. We fought that. We thought that was a tremendous waste of resources to pay people for foxes that would be brought in from Minnesota. You can't tell a Minnesota fox from a South Dakota fox. People were raising foxes and bringing them in.

We fought that and there were some people that were really on us because we were against the bounty. I would go to a lot of the sportsmen's club meetings and talk about what it took to maintain a pheasant population and basically it was how we dealt with the land. If they wanted pheasants, we had to set aside areas that would be protected so that we had undisturbed nesting and winter cover. Winter cover was real critical. Now that the land was becoming more and more valuable, there was more pressure to produce on every acre of land. The land use was changing but people either were so close or they didn't want to understand. I got involved in some real controversy about land use. I even had my tires slashed one night at a sportsmen's club meeting.

Some of the guys that had Super Cubs and shot a lot of fox from the air, they wanted that bounty. That was pretty good income for them. We were essentially taking food out of their mouth by not going along with the bounty system. There was a lot of animosity and strong feelings towards the department by us not willing to reinstate the bounty. There were some pretty tense moments.

We did have an element of support. We had people on both sides. It was a real eye-opener to me. That was the first experience that I had had in controversial issues. I had been pretty well isolated in dealing with any of that type of activity. I could start to see that going up the ladder was going to have some negative aspects to it. You had to react and you had to be professional about it and being professional meant that you weren't always telling the people the things that they wanted to hear.

I think we made some real progress. We made an effort to talk to a lot of different groups. We set up field tours of different habitat types and tried to explain what was happening. In the meantime, the tourism industry, the motel owners, the restaurant

owners, were all wanting to get on the bounty wagon and do anything they could to increase the pheasants. Once we got to those people and started showing them why we were having some problems, they became good supporters of our efforts to develop wildlife habitat.

In fact, we started a program there called the "WHIP" (wildlife habitat and improvement program) where the Department would allocate so many dollars out of the budget each year to work with farmers and landowners to try and replicate what the old soil bank was doing. Certain acres would be set aside and we would pay them an equal value just to leave the land alone, seeded to a mixture that was conducive to provide nesting habitat and wintering habitat. That was a real successful program. I think they still have this program or one similar ongoing in South Dakota.

We had to get over this hurdle of showing people why the pheasants were declining. It wasn't just the fact that the foxes were eating them all. That was the easiest thing to blame. Since most of the people affected were farmers, the last thing they wanted to blame were themselves. They were just trying to make a living. Most of them could not afford to set aside part of their farm for pheasants. An economic incentive had to be provided to them in order for them to participate and that was the only way we could see a possibility of saving the South Dakota pheasant population. That did work out fairly well.

That was a good experience. While we were in Watertown, our second son, Bobby was born. That was in 1965. At that time, I still had this feeling that I wanted to go to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service. That was still in the back of my mind. Wildlife refuges was still the place that I wanted to be eventually. I knew that the Fish and Wildlife Service was in charge of migratory bird management throughout the flyways and wildlife refuges were a key part of that waterfowl management concept. I also thought that working for the Federal Government provided a little more security and a little more money.

A funny thing happened there in South Dakota. I was going out to do a pheasant survey one morning just west of Watertown. There was a car along side the road and the hood was up. There was a lady standing by the trunk. I could see that she had a flat tire so I stopped and asked her if I could help. She said, "yes, I can't figure out my wrench." She had a wrench that would not fit the lug nuts on her car. I just happened to have a lug wrench that had multiple sizes. I changed her tire and we got to talking and come to find out, her name was Audrey Berg. She was a personnel director for the Fish and Wildlife Service out of the Minneapolis Regional Office. Her mother lived in Florence, SD, which was near Watertown. She was on her way to visit her mother.

I introduced myself and told her where I worked and that I really wanted to go to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service. She said, "I'll be back in my office in a week." She gave me her number and told me to call her and she would see that I got an application and we would go from there. We talked a lot about what the Fish and Wildlife Service was doing in that region and it sounded pretty good. She said they had several openings around the region.

About a week later, I called her. She first thanked me for changing her tire and said that she had talked with several people in refuges and there were a few job openings. She sent me the old dreaded SF-171. I filled that out and sent it in. It wasn't long after that that I got a letter to go to Minneapolis for an interview. I went into the Twin Cities. The Regional Office was right down town Minneapolis. I am not a city person. I got lost and I was late to my interview. I ended up parking in a tow-away zone and sure enough, my car got towed away. It was a terrible experience.

I did do the interview and I talked to several people in refuges. One of the guys that I talked to was Forrest Carpenter. He was refuge supervisor for Region 3, which included Minnesota, Iowa, Indiana, Wisconsin and the Dakota's. He asked a lot of questions about my background and my interests. I had handed in my SF-171 and went on back to South

Dakota. It wasn't but a few weeks later I got a letter from the refuge manager at Tamarac Refuge in Minnesota. They had an opening for a GS-5 biologist and when could I report. I thought, "Wow!" They had a lovely two-bedroom home on the refuge by a lake. I thought this was sounding better all the time. The pay was a whopping $5,235 a year. Marlene and I talked it over and she said, "oh, we got to move again?" I told her that we would go up and look at the house first.

We left the boys with the folks downstairs and we drove up to the north woods of Minnesota. I thought it was the end of the world. It was east of Fargo. It was a beautiful spot. We got up there and met the refuge manager, Robley Hunt. He was in the final stages of going through retirement. He wanted someone to take over the biological program. They didn't have a biologist and no one to do the wood duck surveys, the deer surveys, waterfowl surveys and handle the farming program. They farmed about 400-500 acres. They planted crops and they left part of the crops in the field for the wildlife and the farmers took the rest.

He took us and showed us the house. I could just see Marlene's face start to change. Her whole complexion changed, her jaw went down. The house was an old, old two-story house. When we looked at it, it was vacant. There were shrews in it, it was musty, the wallpaper was coming down. I think she cried all the way back to South Dakota. It seemed like a starting point, even though we weren't excited about the house. We knew that if we were going to start with the Fish and Wildlife Service, we had to start somewhere and it might as well be here. We had to live in refuge housing. That was a condition of my employment and that was the only house available. I received a promotion which was good for us but not for Marlene from the house standpoint. She was a good trooper and she said, "well, we'll make the best of it."

I accepted the job and sent my resignation in to South Dakota. I was to report the first part of January and it was so very cold. We had a U-haul truck come to pick up what little bit of stuff we had accumulated and we took off for Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, in

January. I think it was 40 degrees below zero! The truck was supposed to have been there that night but we decided we would get a motel and go out and do our furniture the next morning. The truck never showed up and never showed up. I had to go out and start my car about every half-hour to make sure it would run.

Come to find out, when the truck pulled into Detroit Lakes, the ball joints and everything else had frozen up. He couldn't turn it off the highway. He had to park it on the highway and get a crane to lift the front end off and move it in a shed overnight and thaw it out.

The next morning we went out to the refuge. It wasn't until in the afternoon before they got the truck in running order again. There was about four feet of snow on the ground and some of the guys there at the refuge took a front end loader out and scooped the snow out of the drive way and away from the door so we could get the van close by to unload it. We finally got the truck in there. We had a lot of canned goods and it was all frozen solid. The pickles were frozen and the glass jars had broken.

We got everything unloaded that night and then we proceeded to make the bed. The staircase going up to the second floor of this old house was about two feet wide. We couldn't get the mattress up the stairs. We left it outside all night and we slept on the floor. The next morning, the guys came over and they took the second story window casing apart and they pushed the mattress in through the window. It was just a small bedroom. We had the crib at one end. Brad was about 4 years old and we had his little bed there. The sewer pipe ran right up through his room. He looked at that and he said, "I don't like this room, I don't like this house!"

We survived that and got settled and started trapping shrews.

--end of Side B, Tape 3—
--start of Side A, Tape 4 –

This was an upsetting experience for my wife, Marlene, because this house was simply a shack with a couple of add-ons to it. Someone had put a couple of bales of straw inside for what reason, we never knew. It took us several days just to clean up the house and this was a traumatic experience. The weather being so cold didn't help matters.

We were right on the edge of Tamarac Lake. That was the largest lake on the refuge. Neither one of us had been to the North Country. What we heard at night were these god-awful groaning sounds and we didn't know what it was. We learned later that it was the ice expanding as it froze. Every once in awhile a tree would snap. It sounded just like a rifle shot. All these strange noises were really upsetting for the first week or so.

About the first week that we were in that house, I heard a definite rifle shot. We had a yard light and it was about midnight. I looked out and I could see a couple of guys in Army uniforms running across the driveway, sneaking around the shed. Pretty soon, here came a couple more the other way. They all had rifles. Then here came an armored personnel carrier through the yard. I didn't know if I wanted to go outside or not.

I did go out and one guy was tiptoeing around the house and I hollered at him and he didn't think anyone lived there. It was the National Guard doing maneuvers there. They had a refuge permit to use part of the refuge to do night training maneuvers. Nobody had bothered to tell us and we had no idea. They thought it was an abandoned farmhouse and their strategy was they were planning to take over the house. We finally got that squared away.

We were still going through this business of adjusting and to have this experience on top of everything was almost more than we could endure. The refuge manager knew about these maneuvers but unfortunately, he was in Minneapolis for a regional conference and he had failed to inform us before he left.

We lived in that house through the remainder of the winter. There was another log cabin about a half mile down the lakeshore from us and we thought that would be a much nicer house if the manager would let us fix it up. Before this land became part of a refuge, it was owned by a pretty elite-hunting club comprised of businessmen out of Minneapolis. They had built two or three lodges on this lake. When the refuge took over the land, they didn't destroy the lodges but they were pretty well in disrepair.

The refuge manager finally consented to letting us fix it up and we spent the whole summer getting it sheet rocked and insulated. We moved into it in the fall. We had a garage, a full basement, and a fireplace. It was a typical home in the north woods. It was just a stone's throw from the lake and we had a dock. The lake was full of northern pike, which was neat. A lot of times, Marlene would go down and catch a few fish for dinner by the time I would get home.

We had a pontoon boat that we kept at the dock. We would take the boys and go out on the lake and spend the day out fishing. We had the whole lake to ourselves. Nobody else lived there. We were probably 20 miles from town. It was a beautiful spot. There were a number of wetlands all throughout the refuge. There was a good population of wood ducks, white tailed deer, nesting Canada geese, grouse, etc. Several of the areas had previously been burned and the ruffed grouse were quite common.

One of my jobs was to run both the farming program and the biological program. The manager put me in charge of helping a couple of old farmers. We farmed about 400-500 acres of refuge lands with wheat and corn. That was a neat part of the refuge operation.

I then started doing research on wood ducks and finding ways to band them and capture them that had never been done in this particular area before. I really got successful. I was catching these wood ducks and I don't know how many I banded but I was later notified by the banding office in Washington, D.C. that I was screwing up their statistical samples for the Central Flyway because I was banding too many. I was way beyond the

percentage that they were expecting. A quota was finally set for me so then I knew how many I was supposed to band.

We developed some unique ways of catching those wood ducks. When we harvested corn in the fall, we would usually bring it down to the lakeshore and pile it up and then use it later for seed corn. When the wood ducks would arrive in the spring, they would just congregate on these corn piles. We set steel clover-leafed traps around the corn piles. One night my son and I went out and we had over 250 wood ducks in the trap. We had to band all of them that night, in a blizzard, with a lantern. He was only about 5 years old but he helped me out a lot.

I had some good hands-on type experience in designing research projects. We worked closely with the Chippewa Indians. They had a Ponsford reservation just off the refuge to the east of us. Historically, they had harvested wild rice on the refuge. Many of the lakes had wild rice and each day they would come in with canoes and harvest it. They would go through the rice beds and tap the tops of the plants and all the wild rice seeds would fall into their canoe. That was an old tradition but unfortunately, we didn't have a lot of control over it and some of the rice was getting over harvested. There wasn't a lot of natural seed going back into some of the lakes.

We started allocating so many permits per lake. That was a real struggle because the Natives didn't want any type of restrictions placed on their harvesting the wild rice. Wild rice, at that time, was selling for $7-$8 per pound so it was a tremendous valuable cash crop for them.

We had a lot of meetings at the town of Ponsford with the Natives. Some of the meetings were pretty tense. Some of them didn't take kindly to us coming in and making changes but we felt it was in the best interest of the refuge and in their interest too. We were trying to ensure that there would be crops every year. That was one of the big projects that I worked on, probably the most gut-wrenching project in dealing with the Natives

and trying to get them to understand what we were doing. They saw it as a complete restriction and the beginning of a total ban of wild rice and that wasn't the intent at all. We finally found a way to approach the situation and that was to get together with their community leaders and let them explain to their people. That worked pretty well and by the time we left there, we had a pretty good system set up.

We had a drawing for each lake. We had about 20 permits on any given lake and we would draw numbers out of a box, like a bingo cage. We would twirl the numbers and reach in and everybody that came in would have a number and if their number matched up with the number we drew out of the box, then they were given a permit. It was sort of a strange approach but it seemed to work. In fact, I think they are still using a similar system.

Unfortunately, the original refuge manager, Robley Hunt, had retired and a new guy came in. He was in the later stages of retirement also. What happened was Tamarac was such a beautiful spot that it was sort of a reward for the old refuge managers in their last three years, they would be transferred there. These guys were in the stages of winding down and weren't taking a great interest in what was happening so I didn't get a lot of support from the refuge manager. In fact, I went to a lot of meetings by myself, sometimes other staff members would go. We would always keep the refuge manager briefed on what we were doing. The regional office supported us in the things that we were trying to do.

Tamarac was a good experience. I was a GS-5 biologist. My objective was to go on to eventually become a refuge manager. We had an old maintenance man there, Jim Stillings. He had been around for about 25 years. I think he was at Pearl Harbor when it was bombed by the Japanese. He was a crusty old Navy man. He had a heart of gold. He always took the new guys under his wing. He was a real stickler on everybody taking care of their vehicles. He was always inspecting the refuge vehicles. I got along with him real well but he always told me, he said, "you know, Frates, if you screw up we are going to send you to Lostwood." I had never heard of Lostwood before. It was always

kind of a standing joke. Come to find out, Lostwood was a refuge in the northwestern part of North Dakota, near the Saskatchewan border.

I remember one time I was banding wood ducks up on the northern part of the refuge. I had never had any trouble with my vehicle but I came back in early the next morning after my banding. Jim went around and gave me my usual vehicle inspection and the headlight was broken. I had been out all night. He asked me how did I break the headlight. I said, "Jim, you'll never believe this." He said, "you are right, I won't." What happened was, I had a whole trap load of wood ducks. I didn't really have adequate light to band them. I pulled the pickup right up to the trap and had my bands, pliers, and clipboard to record my data and about half way through, an adult black bear had come up to the cage. When I turned around, all I saw was the nose and the head of this black bear looking at me. I hollered right away at the bear and the bear backed up and then he looked as though he was going to charge the trap. He came up to the trap again and I took my clipboard and I smacked him on the nose and he turned around and backed into my headlight and it just shattered the light to bits. The first thing I thought was, "Jim, you're not going to believe this!" When I tried to explain, he said, "you're right, I don't believe it. This just couldn't have happened. He threatened that this was a prime incident for me to be sent to Lostwood. That was the standing joke around there.

Later I was asked if I really wanted to go to Lostwood. The refuge manager position became available. I got a call from the Regional Office in Minneapolis. I thought, how strange, here I am trying to climb the ladder to someday be a refuge manager and here was one being offered to me. I thought I must have really screwed up!

The staff there at Tamarac consisted of the refuge manager; two foresters that lived on the refuge – in fact, both foresters ended up at Kenai, Bob Seemel and Al Johnson. They both came up to Alaska a couple of years ahead of us. Al passed away about three years ago. We are still good friends with the Seemel's and Al's wife. We had two maintenance men. They were both Chippewa Indians, Tom and Charlie. Everybody kind

of depended on each other. Most of us were new and young and didn't have much money.

One of the other things that happened at Tamarac was we had to go to Rochester, Minnesota. That is where we got our stock of Canada geese for our restoration project. We had a big Dodge carryall with the pushbutton transmission. This was an old military rig that didn't work very well but it was the only thing that we had to go Rochester in to get these five crates of geese. It was my job to do that. We got there and loaded up the geese and as I was coming back, I ended up right downtown Minneapolis with these geese. It was summertime and it was hot. I had the back windows down, trying to get circulation to those geese so they wouldn't die of heat exhaustion. As soon as I would stop at a stoplight, the geese would start honking. Everybody was staring.

As I would start up after being stopped at the stoplight, there was a slight delay in the pushbutton transmission and as soon as it would engage, there would be a slight jerk. After about the third stop light and jerks, the back door of the vehicle came open and one of the crates of geese fell out, right in front of the Pink Panther. As soon as the crate hit the ground, the door came open and all the geese went running down the street. I pulled over to the side and luckily, there were several people around and everybody started chasing geese. It took a few minutes before the geese were captured and put back in the crate and into the vehicle. What an experience – chasing geese down the main street of Minneapolis!

Tamarac was really fun. We had a refuge clerk, Stan Christensen. Stan was about 6'6" and weighed about 300 pounds. His fingers were so big that he could hardly type. It was a real struggle. We used Stan, because he was so big, to give us a hand a lot of times if we needed help in putting in fences, digging post holes, lifting things, etc. We had one big culvert on one of the little rivers there. The beavers had dammed it up. It was an 8-foot wide culvert and it was restricting the water flow through this river that we depended on for wood duck habitat. The manager sent us down to clean up the beaver dam. We

struggled with trying to go upstream and pull the logs out. It just got to be such a problem, we thought we were going to have to get dynamite.

Stan had the bright idea of going down to the other end of the culvert and walking back up and getting inside the culvert and pulling the debris out. I told him that I didn't think that was a good idea because if that thing ever goes and you are in there, it could be disastrous. He was down in there and he wouldn't take "no" for any reason. He was pulling sticks and logs, sweating and cussing. I felt guilty so I finally went in with him but I told him that once that water started going, we had to get out of there. About that time, he pulled one more log and the whole thing broke loose. All I remember is this wall of water and logs. It shot us both out the end of that culvert down stream. I still don't know why we didn't drown or get hit on the head. We got the dam out but what a traumatic event that was. Stan said, "well, I guess we got it, didn't we?"

We had some neat experiences at Tamarac. It is one of the refuges that I always wanted to go back too. When I get ready to retire, I wouldn't mind spending my last few years at Tamarac. Just the chance of working with the Native population was interesting, the fact that I got to do quite a bit of research, both designing and summarizing the data and working with the regional office staff. Forrest Carpenter was just a great supervisor for refuges. He kind of adopted me when I first went there. I don't know if Forrest is still living or not. He was just one of those guys that we kept up with correspondence for many years. He was always interested in what was going on with my career and the family, etc.

We used to be required to send weekly reports to the regional office on our activities. Every Friday afternoon the manager and Charlie and I would take this tractor with a steal bar about 10-feet wide and drag the road around the headquarters just to smooth it out. I wrote my weekly report and put in it, "dragged the road with Charlie" and sent it in. A few days later I got a call from the regional office and they asked, "how's Charlie?"

We would go out at night with a big square stern canoe and a generator, spot lights and nets to band Canada geese. We had to band them during the summer when they were molting and flightless. I don't know why we didn't drown or why we didn't get shot. We would go out on the lake, Flat Lake –

--end of Side A, Tape 4—
--start of Side B, Tape 4—

Looking back on it, I think we violated every safety regulation in the world trying to do some of the things that we did, especially trying to capture those geese at night. The only way you could catch them was to take a boat with motor and lights. We had these big crates with geese in them and here we were in this canoe, the two of us loaded with geese. One night the wind came up and we got into some waves. We just weren't thinking very safely. It was so important that we band those geese so we could see what was happening to them on down the flyway.

We spent a lot of time at night deer shining. Illegal poaching of deer was a big thing back in Minnesota. People would go out on these trails at night with a spotlight and poach their deer. We worked closely with the local state game wardens. We would have an aircraft and radio communication with the aircraft. The pilot would guide us to where he would see the spotlights. It was a game and the people doing the poaching knew it was a game. That was my first experience with law enforcement and working with the state game wardens. They also cooperated with us on our fishing and hunting programs. That exposure was good experience for me too.

There has always been the state-fed conflicts, even though we all went to the same schools, had the same training, liked the same things, but the agencies reflected pretty much the way you did things. For the most part, if you try hard, you can get along because you have so many things in common.

I was given a lot of responsibility at Tamarac because the two managers were going through retirement. The last manager had a home in Jamestown and every Thursday afternoon he and his wife would pack up the car and head for Jamestown and wouldn't come back until Monday afternoon. I was pretty much in charge of the refuge during the time that he was gone and that was a lot. I kind of resented it at times but looking back on it now, it was probably good experience but I never thought I had much guidance. I was young and inexperienced and had little idea of what the Fish and Wildlife Service was all about and their rules and regulations.

I had a good working relationship with some of the key people in the regional office so if I had a problem, I would make sure that I had some backing before I did something really questionable. They were good resource oriented folks.

I got a chance to go on several details to other refuges. I went into Canada on a banding crew. There was a population of Canada geese on Agassiz Refuge and I would go up and help them band. I got exposure to a lot of different types of refuge management including farming and supervision. I was responsible for supervising maintenance men and farmers and foresters. It was a real eye-opener for me to be able to actually have the responsibility to supervise, not knowing a damn thing about it or how to go about it. I guess I learned that when you have good people, you get out of their way and let them go.

I was a little reluctant to leave Tamarac but coming from a GS-5 to a GS-9 biologist refuge manager was a major jump. When the opportunity came up there wasn't much of a decision to make, we were going to North Dakota. I did get a GS-7 there at Tamarac before going to the GS-9 refuge manager. That position was advertised as a GS-9/11 but I couldn't jump to an 11 until I qualified, so I took it as a 9, which I was very willing to do. I just wanted a chance to spread my wings and be in charge of a refuge and make some of my own decisions.

Looking back on it now, I wished that I would have had the opportunity to work under an old seasoned refuge manager for a couple of years. I think it would have prepared me a lot more for some of the things that popped up later that I had a hard time dealing with, mostly conflicts. I didn't have a lot of the tools to deal with some of the issues. I probably went a little faster up the chain than I should have.

Lostwood was a challenge and an experience. I loaded up the family and we headed for Kenmare, North Dakota. When we were at Tamarac, I had bought a 16-ft Starcraft boat with a 7-1/2 horse power motor. We used it all the time there at Tamarac. When we drove to Kenmare and pulled into the gas station there, the attendant came out and I introduced myself. He said, "what are you going to do with that boat?" He told me that I would have to travel about another 100 miles to find water to even put the boat in since Kenmare was mostly prairie and not much water. There was a lake there but no boating was permitted. It was mostly for waterfowl. We changed that, however. I opened part of it up later on to boating.

Our first experience in Kenmare was pretty positive. In the little town of Kenmare, there is a lake separating the refuge complex from the town. The refuge homes were older homes built out of cinder block back in the 1930's during the CCC days. They were comfortable and certainly a step up from our home in Minnesota although they needed a lot of work. We instantly liked the area and the community.

Lostwood was just to the west of Kenmare. We eventually came back to Kenmare after we had been at Lostwood for awhile. Lostwood was stuck right out in the middle of the prairie. The refuge boundary went almost to the Canadian Border. There were 27,000 acres of pretty much unbroken prairie. We were about 20 miles out from the closest town and it seemed so isolated. It was waterfowl paradise. That is why the refuge was established back in the 1930's because of the tremendous potential for waterfowl production.

I had my first experience working with cattle. The refuge was open to grazing. We had to issue grazing permits. I had been around cattle when I was growing up but I never did have to manage them as part of a refuge operation. Working with ranchers was a new experience for me in trying to decide what was a good level of grazing and what was too much, etc. I had a lot to learn.

The people in that area were very poor. The land was marginal and the farmers grew very little and made very little. Our closest neighbor, Johnny Stuart, was my maintenance man. They had a family of four. It was a throw back in time. We were invited over to their house for an evening meal. The people were very, very friendly. They took you in as part of their own right away. We went into the house and the slop buckets were right there in the entryway when you walked in. The dishes were piled on the counter and obviously his wife, Betty, didn't spend a whole lot of time cleaning the house but all of them just had hearts of gold. They had very little but what they had was yours too. They were very generous.

We were sitting around talking and I knew Brad had to go to the bathroom. We were walking back in the hallway and he came back and he sat down beside me and he said, "Dad, there's pigs in the tub!" Betty had overheard him and she confirmed that, in fact, there were pigs in the tub. One of their sows had just had 10 little pigs and they brought them inside to keep them warm. They didn't have inside plumbing but they had framed it in and they had a tub there. That was a real shocker for Brad and he still needed to go to the bathroom and Betty said, "you gotta go?" and he said, "yes." She took him into the kitchen and opened the cabinet under the sink. There were two coffee cans and she brought one out and said, "here, pee in that." Brad looked at her and said, "I'm not going to pee in that can!" We got to know those people quite well and it turned out to be just a beautiful relationship. We still correspond with them.

Lostwood Refuge was a neat experience. I got the chance to get involved in the local community which I didn't really have much of at Tamarac. But now that I was the refuge

manager, I was invited to different places to talk to different groups about the refuge. There wasn't a very positive attitude toward the refuge from the local community. It was pretty apparent that they people harbored some ill feelings toward the refuge. I think probably that when it was established back in the 1930's, they were plowing up a lot of the prairie area and trying to raise crops. Once the refuge was established, they couldn't do anything with it. Some of them resented the fact that the federal land was there and they couldn't do what they wanted to do with it. I felt one of the best ways to counteract these feelings was to try and get involved with the local community and the local newspaper. It was a real challenge to get things turned around in a positive way.

I started working closely with the FAA chapters in the local high schools. The Future Farmers of America's was a pretty big thing back in the mid-west, especially in the rural areas. It was a part of the extra curricular activities of most of the schools. I got them involved in having them come out and help with grouse surveys in the spring and band geese and ducks in the summer. By trying to pull in different elements, especially the young folks in the community, I think it really helped sway some of the parents who didn't appreciate the refuge. It was an uphill battle to try and gather support for some of the things that we were doing.

We were involved in trying to do some grassland management through controlled burning. That was my first experience with controlled burning. It wasn't real popular because anyone who lit a fire on the prairie was either crazy or didn't have his stuff together. We did start some small burning projects and then we set up research projects to carry it through to make sure that we understood what was happening as a result of the fires, whether they were going to be of benefit to wildlife or not. That was a public relations battle too.

It bothered me a lot to have people have negative feelings toward the refuge and toward me, even though they didn't know me, it was just the fact that I represented the Government in that area. Most of the ranchers and farmers were pretty independent

people and most of them were anti-government. I had to show them that I was willing to put my foot forward too and make an effort to try and get them involved.

In the past, there hadn't been much effort to control the amount of grazing that was done on the refuge. There were several ranchers that would bring their cattle in and let them graze just as long as they wanted too. Obviously, some of our grasslands deteriorated as a result of the over grazing. We started, with the help of the regional office, and some other grassland specialists, looking at the prairie and how grazing is used as a tool, just like fire. We felt that grazing was a tool just like fire and probably a better tool because of the fear that everybody had of fire.

We started adjusting some of the grazing rights and we met some resistance there too. Anytime you take someone's livelihood and you start making it less than what it was prior to that, you are going to have some problems. You have to look at the resource since we are responsible for managing the resource. If we see a problem, it had better be addressed in the best interest of the resource and the wildlife that depend on that resource.

I was there from 1968 to 1970. That is not a lot of time to make end-roads but at least we opened the door. We had a lot of meetings with the ranchers and explained what we were doing and why. I think we set the stage at that time for some of the reductions that we saw later on. Some areas, depending on the type and composition of the grass, we would bring in some intensive grazing early in the spring for a short period of time then get them out of there. For some of the summer grasses, we would allow some grazing then. We would try and balance out the grasses that we had to work with.

We had a number of sharp-tailed grouse mating grounds on the refuge. Some of those grounds had been so overgrazed that I think there was a problem when the cattle were released into these areas in the spring. We started looking at some of the interaction there between the cattle and the grouse and how to refine that program.

This was a long process in the making. I wasn't the first but I happened to come along at the time when we started making one of those "10-year" cycles to the grazing rights. This didn't happen over night, but in some ways, I was the bad guy because I happened to be there when the rights were drastically reduced. Most of the ranchers, however, understood that if you are going to have good grasslands, they had to be treated properly. I learned some basic lessons in grasslands management.

Diana: So, how were you generally looked upon by the community? Were they prejudiced?

Jim: I felt that there was an element of distrust in the fact that I was a representative of the Government. I really saw signs of that turning around by the time that I left. I think it was because I got involved in writing a weekly article in the local newspaper and I got involved in the Lion's Club, the Rotary Clubs, some of the farmer's organizations, and other groups that had similar interests. I think this really paid dividends. It was good for me because I never had to really deal with that element of the public before. I started to see some real benefits of the refuge manager getting out and getting involved in community activities. We had tours for the local garden clubs. We identified local plants and grasses; we had bird tours, hiking tours, and just anything we could think of to get people involved. Refuges had not ever really been opened up to the public and to have a group just drive through was kind of unheard of. We began to have people stop by the refuge, pick up brochures and ask questions whereas in the past, they had never stopped by.

I was only a small part of this change but I think it was at a time when a lot of changes were being made in the way managers were managing. The older refuge managers were pretty much content to shut the door and lock the gate and the public be dammed. You just can't survive as a public agency with that kind of an attitude. You have to involve the public if you want to get acceptance for your programs. Lostwood was a good experience just from that standpoint.

Our daughter, Barbara, was born when we were in Lostwood. That was a new experience too. My wife was pregnant and due to give birth the latter part of January and as I mentioned, we were 20+ miles from town. About the time her due date came around, the weather forecast was for blizzard conditions. I really don't know why the community knew this, I guess because we were pretty involved, but several called and advised us to get into town before the blizzard hit. After about the fourth call, Marlene thought that perhaps she had better get into town. She had no labor pains and no indication that she was going into labor but after all these calls, she thought she had better listen to them.

We got in touch with our good friends, Johnny and Betty, and dropped our two boys off there and went back home. By that time we had almost whiteout conditions. I got the car struck in the driveway and the only thing that I had to get out with was the government 4-wheel drive pickup truck. I didn't like taking the government vehicle for personal business but I didn't have a choice. Marlene and I got into that truck and we made it out to the highway, about 6:00-7:00 in the evening and headed for Stanley, North Dakota, which was 20 miles away. The weather had hit quickly, we could hardly see the hood of the pickup. I thought, "oh, my, what a time to get an instant course in obstetrics right here in the middle of a blizzard." It took us about two hours to get to Stanley. There was only one hotel in town, the old Stanley Hotel. There again, it was a throw back to the 1940-1950's. We got a room. Marlene wanted to take a hot bath. She went to turn the water on and the pipes had frozen. They had a big lamp in the corner and I went to turn it on I hit the shade and the whole thing fell off. I thought right then, it was going to be a long night!

--end of Side 2, Tape 4—
--end of Interview #1
Interview #2 to be continued at a later time.

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Continuation of Interview #2 – with Jim Frates – May 25, 1999 (Interview #1 conducted on May 3-4, 1999). Interview #1 transcription completed and submitted April 14, 2000.

Diana: Go ahead, Jim.

Jim: We had checked into this hotel. We had no water. About 2:00 a.m. my wife woke up and said, "I'm going into labor." At least we were in town, as luck would have it. By about 4:00 a.m., we headed for the hospital. By that time, there were 3-4 foot drifts of snow all over the streets. We had a heck of a time just getting to the hospital. We actually checked into the hospital around 6:00 a.m. The doctor and nurses were there. They thought it would still be 4-5 hours before anything really happened.

I had remembered that I had left my Golden Lab in my office. Since it appeared that I had some time on my hands, I decided I would drive back to the headquarters and take care of my dog. By that time, it had started to get light and the visibility had improved. It still took me quite a while because there was a lot snow piled up.

Of course my dog was in the office. I had been working on my annual narrative report. Back in those days, we didn't have electric typewriters. It was just a plain old Royal typewriter. My dog had knocked my typewriter off. It was upside down on the concrete floor, broken. He had gotten into my stack of papers and had ripped them apart. He had done a fair amount of damage to the office. It was a good thing I went back to check on him.

I got the dog taken care of and headed back to town. I just walked into the hospital around 11:00 a.m., and here came a nurse down the hallway carrying a baby. She said, "congratulations, you have a daughter!" I missed the whole thing!

Everything worked out but I think now, looking back on it, it was probably a good thing that the neighbors had enough concern that they talked us into going into town that night. The manager before me had had a similar situation in the wintertime. They went to

another town in the refuge jeep, which they had to use because of the snowstorm. They didn't quite make it. Their daughter was born in the jeep in front of the hospital.

Even though we hadn't been there long, there were so many people who stopped by the hospital to visit. Johnny and Betty kept the boys. I went back that afternoon. I think Marlene stayed in the hospital 3-4 days, as they did back then.

I dug out from the blizzard. It was a real struggle. That winter, our road was always blocked to the highway. Brad was taking the school bus. He was in the 2nd grade. We were at the start of the bus run. I think he had to get on the bus at 6:00 a.m. We had to take him on the snow machine to the highway, which was a half-mile. If the bus was late, we had to sit there in the cold. Then, he had an hour and a half bus ride to the school.

Lostwood was kind of like a pioneering adventure for us. We were so far from town, etc. It was a beautiful refuge and a lot of wildlife, a lot of grouse, deer, and Canada geese. Looking back, it was probably one of our favorite places. I grew up on a prairie and I felt right at home there at Lostwood.

In 1970, I had a chance to take over another refuge. It was about 20 miles away. It was the Des Lacs Refuge on the Des Lacs River. It was basically the same type area, only the refuge was just a half-mile from town. We were really part of the community whether we wanted to be or not. We lived on one side of the lake and the town was on the other side. It was an opportunity offered to me as a GS-11.

Homer Bradley, the previous manager, had been there for probably 20 years. He was in his late 60's and he was ready to retire. Forrest Carpenter out of Minneapolis had good friends there, Doc and Anne Gambell. Doc was one of three doctors in the town.

He and his wife were worldwide famous birders. They had entertained groups from all over the world. They were the experts on North Dakota bird life and prairie bird life.

They were both super people. They never had any children. They devoted almost all their extra time to studying birds.

They were real interested in the refuge and they sort of adopted me when I went to Lostwood. When we moved to the new refuge, we were a part of their extended family. They always had a parade of birders from England, New Zealand, Australia, etc., stopping by and spending the night. They would always invite us over and we would show slides and talk about prairie wildlife.

While I was at Lostwood, one of the highlights there, was, I got to spend a day with Roger Tory Peterson. We had a bird there called the Baird's Sparrow. The only place it nested was in northern North Dakota, in a very restrictive breeding range. I think Roger had seen every North American bird in their breeding areas except the Baird's Sparrow. That was one of the last ones on his list. He came out to the refuge with Doc and Anne. It was one of those days that I'll never forget – spending a day with a master birder.

He was always my hero. From the time I remember reading bird books by Roger Tory Peterson, I never realized I would ever have a chance to meet him let alone spending a day with him walking in the field. He was just an incredible man. He knew every bird by their song without even seeing them! We kept a list of the birds we saw that day and the Baird's Sparrow was one of them.

I have a picture on my desk of the two of us. That picture I will cherish forever. Roger died about three years ago. There were other birders always stopping by. We ended up hosting the National Audubon Society's Northwest District Bird Meeting. The J.C.'s that I was active in there at Kenmare hosted the meeting and helped serve the meals and catered the banquet. It was sort of a community effort. There were birders from all over the country, around 400-500 of them. That was fun.

My experience there at Des Lacs was one of community involvement. The refuge manager before me was one of the typical "old school" refuge managers. He had been there for years and years. He was not a community minded person. He was a good refuge manager but very private. Since the refuge was so close to the town, what the refuge did in the changes of the rules and regulations affected the way people used the refuge. It had an immediate impact. He didn't spend a lot of time trying to explain why things were being done the way they were.

There was a lot of animosity toward the refuge when we arrived there. I could sense that just going through town and doing business with the local hardware store, Penny's or grocery stores or wherever. It was a cool reception that we got.

We got active in our church, the Junior Chamber of Commerce organization, community clubs and community activities. Again, it really was an eye opener to me. I had a little bit of this experience at Lostwood but I was beginning to see the real value of being a part of the community. The only way to be a part of a community is to join in some of the activities and let the people know that you are a part of the community. I could see there was a lot of work to be done.

I still look back on Des Lacs and could see some real positive end roads being made as far as the refuge gaining some level of acceptance by the local people. We had some good staff there too. My refuge clerk, Don Lindberg, is now in the Regional Office in Anchorage. He was one of those guys that did just about everything. He helped me with survey work, helped put in fence posts and whatever needed to be done. I also had a couple of maintenance men that took a real interest in the refuge and were active in the community. It was a total effort by the entire staff. I had bought my own airplane and was doing most of my own survey work.

At that time, you could fly and do your own survey work and the Service would buy your oil and gas. You couldn't do that now but back in the early 70's, you could. I always

wanted to fly and I ended up with my own airplane. That opened up some new doors for me too. I bought a little PA-11, like a Super Cub. My friend was a flight instructor and he gave me flying lessons. It worked out good for me. Before we left, I had a chance to sell the airplane, which I have regretted ever since. If I knew I would be coming to Alaska, I would have kept the airplane and somehow managed to get it up here.

The Des Lacs Refuge went right up the Des Lacs River valley and right on up to the Canadian Border. We had a joint agreement with the RCMP to do enforcement work. We talked to the Mounties quite a bit and worked with them on survey work. That was a good international exposure there.

I had a chance to go moose hunting in Canada while we were in North Dakota. My dad came for a visit and wanted to go moose hunting. He was in his 70's. Two years in a row, we drove up into northern Saskatchewan and hunted moose. It was really great because it was the last time that I got to hunt with him. Even though we had hunted a lot together, it was the last hunt where we spent about a week together. We were flown in and then we were picked up.

We got caught in a blizzard there and stalled out the Beaver aircraft and went crashing through the spruce trees. We had a canoe strapped on the pontoons and a lot of gear. My dad and I were in the back and our friend was in the front. The Beaver was completely loaded with that canoe strapped on the side and we were flying low level and low speed. The pilot had never been in this area before.

He was looking for the lake and he was trying to read a map. He kept his foot on the rudder pedal to compensate for the drag from the canoe and made a sharp turn and his foot slipped off the rudder and we stalled! Luckily, we were heading right into the lake to land when we stalled but we clipped the tops of two big spruce trees, hit the propeller and then hit the water. I swear, the front end of the plane went into the lake. Water came in the aircraft up through the windows and the doors and we bounced around for awhile and

finally uprighted on the pontoons. The prop was bent. The only thing the Canadian pilot said was "sorry 'bout that."

No one was hurt just a bit shook up. A lot of stuff that we had in the back, canned goods, etc., came forward and ended up in the cockpit. The pilot finally got the plane over to shore and another pilot flew in with a prop. He put the prop on and away we went. That was an experience to share with my dad. We hadn't hunted together for a few years and that was our last hunt together. He shot a moose, his first one. He had hunted deer in Colorado for about 25 years and other big game but never a moose. I have a lot of pictures and slides and I look at them periodically.

Dad didn't like airplanes very much and we were loading the Beaver. The pontoons usually have a red line and you really don't want to load your plane so as to make the red lines go below the surface of the water. We were on the dock loading up the airplane and the red line kept getting closer and closer to the water line. The last thing that we were going to put on was a case of beer, if we had room. If we didn't have room, then that would be the item we left behind. Dad kept saying, "I think we ought to leave this beer here, I think we ought to leave this beer here." He kept looking at the red line go under water. The pilot said, "no, you gotta have your beer!"

When we took off, it took us forever to get airborne. We would get one pontoon up and then the other. We finally made it but we were definitely too heavy. About the time we were just climbing out over the trees, I could hear this pop of a beer can. My dad had reached over and grabbed a beer and I said, "what are you doing, Dad?" He said, "I'm lightening the load!" We got snowed in and we were there a little longer than expected.

Another crazy thing that happened – I was doing a deer survey. I had my plane up west of town, about 10 miles, at 5,000 feet. All of a sudden, I began to smell gasoline. It kept getting stronger and stronger and I couldn't figure out where it was coming from. Finally, I looked down at the left side of the cockpit where the magneto switch was and gas was

just pouring out of this switch and running down on the floor and my feet were in gas! I thought if I ever get on the ground, I'm never going up again. I could just see the plane exploding. I was trying to decide whether to set the plane down right there but it was not a good area to do so. It was all pretty much rolling hills and rough country. I decided that I would just try and make it back to the airport. The gas kept leaking and getting deeper.

I made it straight in to the airport and landed and I was never so glad to get back on the ground in my life. That was 10 minutes of the most intense flying I've ever done.

Someone had worked on the plane before I bought it and had taken a long screw to tighten up the magneto switch and the screw went right over the top of the gas line and the rubbing back and forth and the vibration formed a leak.

I spent 1970-73 at Des Lacs. Looking back on it, it was again a real neat positive experience. The family was growing. The boys were in school and doing well. We had a lot of friends and were a part of the community. We look back on that with good feelings.

Diana: Did you find yourself doing less scientific work and more management or did you still do a lot of overall duties?

Jim: I think this was when it started to become apparent that the higher you go up the chain the less fieldwork you will have the luxury of doing. I found myself desk-bound a lot more than I really wanted to be. I could see what was happening. I tried to get out as much as I could. We had a relatively small staff. The whole administrative workload was changing, the rules, regulations, reports, reporting requirements and other things that occupied your time in the office. We were busy with budgeting, planning and things were getting more complex. I remember when I left Des Lacs thinking the good days were probably over – the real fun days. That was just the evolution of career development. You can't be a GS-5 biologist doing fieldwork forever if you plan to advance.

Even though this was a waterfowl refuge, I wanted to get back to the lower part of the mid-west, closer to our families. We still had parents, brothers and sisters living with their families.

The DeSota Refuge job came open on the Missouri River, just north of Omaha in 1973. That was right at the eastern part of Nebraska and we would be close to our families.

--end of Side A, Tape 5—
--beginning of Side B, Tape 5—

I had just reported on a Monday morning to my new position as Refuge Manager. There waiting at the door was a reporter from the Omaha World Herald. He had gotten wind that we were about ready to trim back some of our recreational programs. He wanted an interview. I didn't have a clue as to what was going on. My former supervisor was in Kansas City. I couldn't get in touch with him. I was just "winging it." The reporter wanted to know what was going to happen to our recreational program. I told him that I just didn't really know that I had just arrived. The next day, my picture was on the front page of the paper and the headline read "DeSota Bend to Cut Back Recreational Programs for the Summer." What an introduction I had! I was hit "cold turkey" with this.

As soon as my supervisor got back from Washington, D.C. later that week, I flew to Kansas City to talk about the programs and some of the changes that were going to take place. I still regret that. It was a traumatic experience to have your picture plastered on the front page. The paper was statewide, also in Iowa, northern Missouri, and southern South Dakota. Lots of people that recreated in that area saw that there were going to be some changes.

The phone started ringing, of course, as soon as people started reading it. People who were used to coming there to water-ski, boating, and picnicking. It generated lots of

phone calls and the conservation departments from Nebraska and Iowa were calling wanting to know how it was going to affect their users, their clientele.

That is all I did that first week, was to try and respond to media groups and conservation groups. They had a mid- west Water Skiers Association out of Omaha that were real vocal. All of a sudden you were dealing with people that were well off financially, those holding high positions in the Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, etc. It was such an abrupt transition from what I had dealt with in North Dakota. I began to wonder what I was doing there.

Diana: Did you get any support from anyone?

Jim: There was really no one to support me. I had called the Washington Office and they said what they were trying to do was get rid of some of the recreational programs that were not compatible with the refuge objectives and that involved water skiing. This created a real problem because it was a very narrow ox bow. There was a lot of conflict with motors and bank erosion and that was a conflict with the fishermen who wanted to go out and have a quiet day of fishing. You just couldn't do that with water skiers going around you, beside you and over the top of you! Those were non-conforming uses that they were trying to get rid of.

I was kind of the scapegoat, being a new manager and all of a sudden the money is jerked away. Getting rid of those things was a good objective and that had to be done, eventually, and it was done eventually. It needed to be done over a period of time, phased out rather than an abrupt change. The threat was, they would take the money away and no dollars would be available.

That threat backfired because right away, the people called their congressmen, their representatives and told them that DeSota Bend needed money to run these programs. There was an outcry of the users. All of a sudden, we had all kinds of dollars to re-instate

those programs that we were trying to get rid of! The whole thing just wasn't well thought out.

That was in March and we went through the next summer. We had our swimming program, boating program, picnic program, and also the International Convention of the Hells Angels that summer. There were over 200 of them from all over camping on a state park recreation area right abutting the refuge on the south side. We didn't have camping on a refuge and camping was not permitted.

There could have been problems so we had meetings with the heads of the Hells Angels. I had several meetings with them trying to get it across to them that we appreciated them being there but would also appreciate them abiding by the refuge rules and not disrupt the public and keep their motor bikes out of the campgrounds and don't drag race on the roads within the refuge. I was trying to establish a means to accommodate them but not to cause any real problems. It worked out fairly well except for a couple motor bikers playing "chicken" and they collided right on the refuge. Both of them died.

Right away all the Hells Angels came to the scene and they wanted to make sure that we were doing every thing that we could as law enforcement people to save the pieces of their bodies so they could put them back together again. It was just crazy.

I was beginning to wonder what I was doing at this refuge. It really wasn't what I thought it was going to be. Everything still had to be kept in perspective. This was in the summer time and the real value of that refuge came in the fall when the snow geese started migrating out of the Upper Hudson Bay area on their way to east Texas and southern Louisiana wintering grounds.

This was one of about four strategic refuges where they stop during their migration. We had about 200,000 snow geese that would start coming in there in October. We farmed about 4,000 acres on the refuge and part of that crop was left for the geese. It was a

beautiful place in the fall. Being the unique refuge that it was, the gate was opened at 8:00 in the morning and closed it at 10:00 at night. From that standpoint, it was basically for the ducks and the geese that came through there in the fall. It was an amazing sight to see all those waterfowl concentrated in one area.

That fall helped to put everything into perspective for me. I understood that this was a critical area. Most of the things that we had to put up with during the summer was just part of what goes with the territory. It wasn't our mission but the refuge was established that it would be a recreational site for people of western Iowa and eastern Nebraska. They didn't have any places to recreate. The Missouri River was not a desirable place for water skiing because it was usually high and had logs floating down it and sewer, and it was dirty.

When they created this ox bow, it was just an ideal place for the people to water-ski, even though it wasn't a conforming use and it was certainly one that we wanted to get rid of.

The second year that I was there, we started reducing the number of people that could use it at any one time. We were going to have a slow phase out of the water skiing. It was totally non-compatible use for a wildlife refuge. The ox bow was so narrow. You had people going in opposite direction water skiing, and getting their ropes crossed. We had a couple fatalities and a number of injuries. It was just a chaotic situation so we started phasing it down. I always thought the refuge would be one of the jewels of the system if we could ever get rid of the water skiers. This did eventually happen but not during my time there. I was there for four years and we kept the phasing down program going.

It was a real political hassle. The states of Iowa and Nebraska both felt that we had an obligation to provide recreational opportunities to the people of those respective states. We held our ground but it was not an easy task. We had numerous public meetings with the various interest groups, screaming and hollering. Congressional delegates would

come and give their talks and they called us a bunch old federal mossbacks that didn't have a clue as to what the public really wanted.

It got to be very tense and uncomfortable. I was in an arena that I had not really dealt with before – all these competing public uses. It didn't seem to be wildlife-type work. I wasn't doing the things that I was trained to do but I had to come to the realization that this is the real world. This was a wildlife refuge right in the heart of the midlands that had a very special place for quite a few people. They viewed it entirely different than we did.

We still stuck by our guns and said, "damn it, this is a national wildlife refuge and we are going to run it this way." I think we were successful but it was painful. There were a lot of things that happened there that many times, I think I could have walked away from that place but there again, you can't run from the problems, you have to face them.

Another thing that added to DeSota was the fact that an old steamship had been discovered. It sunk back in the 1860's right in this bend of the Missouri River that was cut off. The people had known for years that the steamship called the *Bertrand* was on its maiden voyage from St. Louis up to the gold fields in Montana. It was actually headed for Ft. Benton, Montana in 1865. It got north of Omaha in this little ox bow, which was a dangerous area in the spring of the year with high water. This steamship had sunk right in this area and for years, the rumor was it had gold on board, whiskey in kegs and a lot of mercury. The mercury was going up to the gold fields in Montana which they use in the amalgamation process of separating gold from the ore. Those three elements were pretty valuable. The rumors accelerated over the years.

Two guys in Omaha, Jessie Purcell and Sam Corbino, decided in the mid 60's that they were going to look for that old steamship and see if they could locate it. They came to the Fish and Wildlife Service for a permit to explore and search for the steamship because the

best they could tell, it had sunk on a refuge. This happened before I got there but they had been granted an exploratory permit.

They brought in the equipment that measured the metal under the ground and they were permitted to do some core drilling with just a regular drill. They had gridded out a good portion of the refuge in search for that in 1966-67. They couldn't find anything so they were just about ready to cancel their permit. On their last day of working, they were going to fold up their search when they put that magnetometer across the cornfield and all of a sudden they got this tremendous analogy reading.

By the use of the magnetometer, they mapped out where the readings occurred and it came out the size of the lower part of a ship or steamboat. Then they started doing some core drillings and all of a sudden they found fragments of wood from the deck, pieces of leather, glass, metal, so obviously, they had found what they were looking for.

They started digging but they had to get another permit to do the actual excavating and then they got the National Park Service involved. Fish and Wildlife Service wasn't in the archaeologist business. That was totally foreign to our mission so they contracted with the Park Service. They had a regional office in Omaha.

After 3-4 weeks of digging, they were pumping water and mud out of the hole right in the middle of a cornfield. One wouldn't have thought that to be part of the Missouri River but it was back in 1865. The channels had changed and the old maps showed where the channels once were but there was no evidence of this in 1968.

They finally located the *Bertrand*. Unfortunately, they didn't find any gold and no whiskey in kegs, the two things that they were entitled to a certain percent of. They did find nine 76-pound carboys of mercury. The mercury had a value of approximately 5,000-6,000 dollars. They found several tons of stuff under the top floor deck. When it sank, the floor deck stayed intact but all the super structure of the boat had washed away

and people had probably gone to the site during low water in the summer time and taken off everything they could get. The rest of it just settled in the silt and it was preserved in the silty, non-oxygen, anaerobic environment over all those years.

When they started the excavating and taking the deck timbers off, they found like a floating Sears & Roebuck store. There were all kinds of shovels, picks, boots, raingear, canned goods and tons and tons other stuff on the market. It was all well preserved.

They did a real detailed job of taking all that material out. We built an air-conditioned building on the refuge right at the headquarters site. They brought all this stuff to this building where they had a conservation laboratory established under contract with the Park Service. They were pioneering and researching on how to preserve stuff that had been sealed since 1865.

When I got there in 1973, all of the cargo had been pretty much excavated and all the stuff had been put in the warehouse. The warehouse was about 100 ft long by 50 ft wide. It was segregated out by shelving. The leather was in one section, the ceramics in another part, etc. They just found a heritage of an accumulation of life back in the 1800's. It was probably one of the most significant finds of life in the 1860's than had ever found in one area. These guys really found a treasure, even though they didn't get any money for it because they weren't entitled to it. They eventually brought suit against the government claiming that they should be rewarded for at least finding this material. This stuff is now on display in a nice visitor's center and museum on the lake right on the refuge overlooking the ox bow. It is priceless.

There was an out of court settlement. I don't know just what they received out of it. It was all settled after I left there. They did get some compensation eventually for the material but in no way the amount that they had put out of their pockets for this search. These guys had mortgaged everything they had to finance this project and they lost

everything that they had. One of the guys stayed in business as a flight instructor. I am not sure what happened to the other one.

That added a new twist to refuge work that I had never been involved with before. So between the steamship, the Hells Angels, the swimming beach and the boaters, DeSota was a real unique experience plus being in the shadow of half million people within a 30-minute drive. Every day seemed to be a new challenge. A lot of the day-to-day activities didn't relate to wildlife-type management. It had to do with politics and the use of refuge lands that people had historically used.

The swimming area always worried me. We had about a 200-yard beach and we had three lifeguards on duty during the summer. There would be as many as 5,000 people swimming out there at one time. There was no way three life guards could even begin to know the things that were going on out there. We had it fenced off and the swimmers could only go so far but we did have a young boy drown while I was there.

When that happened, it seemed to be the crowning blow and I just felt it was maybe time to move on. So many things had happened there from a non-conforming use.

--end of Tape 5, Side2—
--start of Tape 6, Side 1—

I think that everyone of us that have a career, probably at some point, has a turning point; something that changes either your concept or the way that you think about things or where you go forward. I guess this drowning at DeSota was one of those events. As I mentioned, I never did feel comfortable with the swimming area and I didn't think that was something that we ought to be providing. I had a negative feeling all along toward the swimming program. We were only funded to hire three lifeguards.

In the summertime, the temperatures got to 100 degrees, plus. The people flocked the swimming beaches. That was the main activity. There would be several thousand people out there with their kids, dogs, cats and whatever else they could bring to the beach. We didn't allow alcohol on the beach but we didn't restrict it from the picnic areas which were only a "stone's throw away" from the swimming area.

We had meetings with the lifeguards every day. They had megaphones and they would get people out of the water on a regular basis every hour. There would be a 10-minute timeout so the lifeguards could look at the beach and see if there was anything that looked like it was a problem.

The day of the drowning, two of the lifeguards called in sick so we only had one lifeguard. I had been faced with the decision of closing the beach, knowing that we didn't have the protection that we should have had. It was a very hot day, about l05 degrees.

We had no guidance as to say when to close the beach. It was a managerial type decision. I had talked with the lifeguard and told her to get everyone out of the water every 30 minutes rather than every hour and make sure everyone was accounted for. It usually worked very well but on this day, it was near 4:00 p.m., and she was having quite a hassle with some kids playing on the ropes and pretending they were drowning and yelling for help, etc. We were just ready to close the beach. I had been on the radio all day and she was getting to her limit of toleration with all the stuff going on. We decided we would close the beach at 4:00 p.m.

We had three buses of inter-city kids from Omaha come to the beach that day, about 50 per bus. These were disadvantaged kids. They had come all the way from Omaha. They got there late. One bus had broken down so the other two buses stayed with them until the broken down one got fixed. They got there late and they wanted to swim. We agreed to let them swim for an hour or so. When they got done and everyone got out of the water, we closed the beach.

I was home eating supper and I got a phone call from a policeman from Omaha letting me know that there was one person missing, a 14-year old boy. I told him that we weren't aware of that but that we would go down and take a walk around the swimming beach and take a look.

Come to find out, the person who was missing was not scheduled to be on the bus at all. His brother was on the bus. He sneaked on the bus and he wasn't even counted. He finally told the police that his brother sneaked on the bus. We looked all night, brought divers in but we didn't find anyone. The parents continued to call that their son was still missing.

The next morning at daybreak, we got together with one of the state conservation departments. They had a boat with a drag on it and grappling hooks. We made a real thorough search of the swimming beach and we did finally find him, about 9:00 a.m.

It was a long night. Your hurt went out to the people. The guilt thing was hard to deal with because we could have closed the beach earlier as we had intended but because, here again, we were trying to accommodate an extra three bus loads of kids that came in late. You can't really harbor the guilt that I was feeling. That has had a real lasting affect on me, personally. I didn't have the same feeling for the place after that. It was just a combination of things – the Hells Angels, the drowning, the problems we went through with trying to regulate the power boating, water skiing and all the political hassles.

Diana: How was this affecting your wife?

Jim: I was able to mask that. I tried not to take my work home. That was a concept that I developed early in my career. I could have taken all my woes home but I chose not to do that. Looking back, I could have asked for some professional help, just to talk through and work through some of these decisions, but I didn't do that. I didn't want to

burden anyone else and as a result, I think it affected me a lot more than I really thought it did.

This is about the time the job came available in Alaska. I had been to a conference in Denver just after the drowning. I had this friend that was telling me all about Alaska and the Kenai Refuge. That is when I really started thinking about moving. I also had this feeling that I was leaving my problems and not dealing with them.

I was intrigued by Alaska. I always had been. My dad always wanted to come to Alaska. He wanted to go to Barrow, to Nome, etc. I remember as a child that Alaska always had this allure to me but I hadn't thought about it a lot until this friend of mine told me about the opening at Kenai. I think the timing was right to leave DeSota. It was something totally unplanned but everybody reacts differently to traumatic situations.

I felt that I had accomplished a lot at DeSota while I was there, such as the phase down of a lot of the non-conforming activities. We had made a lot of progress in other areas.

Diana: Were you interacting with the non-user groups?

Jim: Oh, yes. From the Audubon Society to the National Boaters Association. That ran the gambit, from the conservationists to the users. I dealt with a wide diverse use of users which was good. Every refuge has that spectrum of user groups. They all want a piece of the action. Trying to balance those uses is the real challenge and still meet the objectives and mission of the refuge.

The refuge system was going through a pretty trying time back in the early 70's. We were still struggling with all the user groups that wanted to do their thing on public lands. We had the Refuge Recreation Act that was passed in 1962 that established the fact that we would be in recreation business. We would accommodate to where it was compatible and that opened a whole floodgate of activities and challenges for managers.

Once you try to conform with the Act and set up your picnic areas and then try and close them then you start to have problems. We opened the floodgates, brought everybody in, and then a few years later, that was not compatible, so we were told to get rid of them. There was a 10-year span where we were giving and then taking away. That made it quite difficult. You just don't give people something and then take it away without consequences. Those consequences usually come in the form of a public that doesn't understand your mission. They get totally upset with what you are trying to do.

The positive and negative aspects sort of balanced each other out. You had the Audubon Society that wanted to get rid of everything and then you had the other groups that wanted to keep everything. I think working with all the diverse groups kind of balanced each other out.

We were in the center trying to figure out what was compatible. Our objective was, first of all, to accommodate the 200,000-300,000 snow geese that come in the fall. As long as the snow geese were accommodated, we were fulfilling the major reason for which the refuge was established in the first place. It was only a three-month period that it was really a waterfowl refuge. The other nine months, it was just pure hell trying to deal with all of the other things.

The interesting thing about DeSota was when the Corps of Engineers cut the bottom the ox bow off. The state boundary went right up through the middle of the ox bow. You then had two states that we were dealing with, Iowa and Nebraska, on the refuge. Each state had their own regulations like fishing and hunting. You could be on one side of the mythical "center line" and you were allowed five bass; the other side of the "center line" you were allowed six bass a day. Iowa limited the number of horsepower you could have on a boat; Nebraska allowed 10 more horsepower.

These regulations were too confusing for users out on this lake so one of the things that we tried to do was come up with common regulations for this particular area. That was one of the pluses that I had a hand in. Even though there were two states involved, we got the states together and worked through some common regs that both agreed upon. I can't think of another refuge that had that same unique aspect to it.

DeSota was and still is one of the jewels. It is only 8,000 acres; a third of the size of Skilak Lake. It is just a small refuge on the Missouri River but when you have a half million people within a 30-minute drive, of 8,000 acres of public lands, you got problems.

So, after four years at DeSota I was ready to move. The opportunity to come to Alaska came up at the right time. I thought it was time to move on and try something else.

--end of interview #2-- September, 2002

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