

## Oral History Cover Sheet

**Name:** Cyndi Perry  
**Date of Interview:** December 3, 2015  
**Location of Interview:** Oakton, VA  
**Interviewer:** John Cornely

**Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:** 28.5

**Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:** Fishery contaminant work, Great Lakes Fish Lab in Ann Arbor, MI; Contaminant biologist, New England Field Office in Concord, New Hampshire; Contaminants Program in Washington D.C.; Migratory Bird Program, Washington D.C.; Ecosystem Coordinator, Region 3, Minneapolis Office; Chief, Branch of Bird Conservation, Migratory Bird Program, Washington D.C.; Chief Branch of Policy & Partnerships Division of International Conservation in Headquarters; Chief of Division of Bird Habitat Conservation in Headquarters.

**Most Important Projects:** Working on Superfund sites while with Contaminants Program, lead sinker toxicity by avian species, Migratory Bird permitting (scientific collecting, education, rehabilitation & falconry) expanded inreach & outreach for International Conservation projects (Elephant & rhino poaching, wildlife trafficking & USPS conservation stamp, strategic plan).

**Colleagues and Mentors:** Dora Passino, Bud Griswold, Ken Carr, Gordon Beckett, Mark Pokras, Gary Jackson, Paul Schmidt, John Blankenship, Bob Bloom, Jon Andrew, Jamie Clark, Herb Raffaele, Deb Roque, Jerome Ford, Steve Williams.

**Most Important Issues:** Working with Mark Pokras at Tufts Veterinary School on ingestion of lead sinkers by loons and other wildlife.

**Brief Summary of Interview:** Ms. Perry grew up in Michigan near Detroit – Motown, muscle cars, and the Great Lakes - roaming around the farms and fields that were near her parents’ suburban house. She would go to Michigan State University where she received her undergraduate degree from the College of Natural Resources in Fish & Wildlife, to Eastern Michigan University for her masters in Biology, and would end up at University of Maine to work on her PhD. She eventually would forgo the PhD for another master’s to accept a job offer from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Ms. Perry talks about her time with the Service, projects she worked on, issues she dealt with, and other various activities that she and her husband are involved with.

JOHN: This is John Cornely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Heritage Committee working on the oral history project. And I have the pleasure today to be visiting with Cyndi Perry in her home in Oakton, Virginia. And without further ado, we'll just let Cyndi get started and tell us about her life and career with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

CYNDI: Thanks, John. I was born in the Midwest, in Pontiac, Michigan on a cold March day in 1958 into a Polish-Catholic family. My grandparents lived in Hamtramck, which was sort of the Polish enclave of Detroit back then. My parents moved out to the suburbs so I was mostly raised in a suburban setting while spending summers and a lot of time with my maternal grandmother, Grandmother Jdrzejewski in Hamtramck. So it seemed kind of odd that I would choose wildlife as a profession, but I always felt comfortable outdoors whether we were in the city or country. My parents' house back then was not too far away from farms with horses and cattle, streams & trees just begging to be climbed, so I would get on my bike and ride into the fields. I was the third child of Robert and Loraine Perry. My sister was first born, five years later my brother, and then five years later I was born. Having been through the rigors of two children, my parents allowed a bit more freedom than my siblings had (plus I believe Mom got tired of me always asking questions!). Recalling the '60's were a much different time – for example on a Saturday morning I could get on my bike, say, “See you later, mom and dad” and ride out to the countryside, streams and lakes with no particular destination in mind just knowing I had to be back by

dark. This freedom to explore the natural world, be out into nature, climbing trees, looking for amphibians in vernal pools, snakes under rocks instilled a great love of the natural world. Growing up in Michigan we spent a lot of time enjoying the lakes and forest of the state. I attended Catholic schools for all twelve years of my early education (some who know me say that explains a lot ☺). High School was spent in an all-female institution, which was a wonderful thing back in the '70's because it allowed a freedom to think, question and act. The student governed the school - we were encouraged to excel in academia, sports, politics, clubs, art & music. It was liberating to have that freedom. I graduated in '76, and excitedly went off to Michigan State University, the College Agriculture and Natural Resources.

JOHN: What was the name of the high school, the all-girls high school?

CYNDI: Marian High School.

JOHN: Okay.

CYNDI: Funny, it was located right next to an all- male school.

JOHN: And what city or suburb was that in?

CYNDI: Birmingham, Michigan. When they built the women's school they actually dug a moat between the two, which was filled with water most of the year unless it froze, just to keep the two groups of students apart! As a child I had enjoyed running through the fields/woods but the high school did not have a track team. Title nine had only been passed in 1972 (and it took a few

more years for the enabling regulations to be put in place). However the boys school had a track and cross country team, so a few of us somehow talked our way into training with their coach. We eventually got the psychology teacher to act as our sponsor/coach to enable us to start a team at Marian, which continues to this day. So after all of the small, private, Catholic schools, I decided to attend a large school where I could be exposed to a wider variety of thought and chose Michigan State, which at the time had about 40, 000 students. I just knew I wanted to be doing things with animals and conservation. I took a few classes in animal husbandry and biology and decided to go into the school of Fisheries and Wildlife. At the time I was the only female undergraduate in the Fisheries Program - which was clearly unusual. I enjoyed the class learning, but more exciting was the field work. I took advantage of internship opportunities - one studying the effects of shipping barges on invertebrate populations in the St. Mary's River located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. After graduating from Michigan State and was ready to go out and find a job and realized with an undergraduate degree in Fisheries, jobs were few and far between, neither the state nor federal government was hiring. So I decided to further my education, entering a program at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan. It was a program with a great deal of flexibility that suited me as I was unsure of what I wanted to do when I "grew up". At first I thought marine biology would be an exciting field for me. I took a few classes and interned on the Regina Maris (a three- masted topsail schooner originally build in 1908) with the Ocean Research and Education Society and the College of the Atlantic. I spent a few

months in the north Atlantic studying humpback and minke whales. It was an incredible experience but I realized I might enjoy studying critters, on land. While there were times I loved being at sea, it was a tough life being on a very small ship with 30 people and few places to get away. Growing up in Michigan in the 60's & 70's one was always hearing about food consumption advisories related to great lakes fish. So I decided fisheries contaminants work would be a worthwhile endeavor. At the time the Great Lakes were dealing with many contamination problems - PCB's, DDT, and others. Posted signs at lakes stating: "If you're a pregnant woman, you should not eat any fish from this lake. If you're a child below the age of 5, you shouldn't eat the fish. But if you are 7 to 24 years old, you could eat one fish a day", etc. were common. I just thought if it isn't good for one person, why is it good for another? So that led me to study contaminant loads in Great Lakes fish. Eastern Michigan University did not have the facilities to conduct contaminant research, so my major professor introduced me to a woman at the Great Lakes Fish Lab in Ann Arbor and we agreed that I would work there. I started as a GS 4 bio tech working about twenty hours a week on contaminant uptake in daphnids (an aquatic invertebrate) – a major food source for great lakes fish. It was a perfect partnership of what I was interested in and what information the Lab was also needing. So I conducted my experiments at the Great Lakes Fish Lab and that was my first encounter and my first understanding of what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service really was all about; great work/mission and great people. I finished my degree but was unsure of what I wanted to do next when the lab

director, Bud Griswold, suggested that I go into the Co-Op Unit Program. Sounded like a good next step and was excepted into the doctoral program at the University of Maine. So I graduated with an undergraduate degree at Michigan State in 1980, then a master's from Eastern Michigan University in 1985. While working at the Great Lakes Fish Lab in Ann Arbor, I met a young man also doing Fisheries research who eventually became my husband. He work involved collecting lake trout and other fish samples on the Great Lakes during the summer and running chemical analysis to determine the contaminant loads. Those contaminant loads actually determined the compounds for some of my experiments. We both wanted to continue our education and since the University of Maine excepted both of us with funding in areas we were interested in we moved to Maine. It was an interesting time in Maine, there were very few, actually three female doctoral candidates at the time in the Department of Zoology. Maine was a wonderful and interesting place to live. I was doing research on the effects of acid rain Atlantic salmon gills as well as working with a couple of folks from the Columbia, Missouri Fisheries Lab and the Wellsboro, PA Fishery Lab. We were exchanging samples and doing a lot of microscopy work. After about four and a half years, I ran into some difficulties with my committee and had an offer from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to do contaminants work in their New England Field Office. After working in a lab (mostly in the basement of the zoology building at the electron microscope) for so long I was anxious to get out in the field.

JOHN: Where was that located?

CYNDI: New England Field Office was located in Concord, New Hampshire. I decided to forgo the doctorate, got a masters for the work that I had done up to that point; Rick received his doctorate and we moved to New Hampshire. There I start a contaminants career with the Fish and Wildlife Service. In the New England Field Office, was put in charge of a number of the New England Superfund sites as part of my contaminants work there. An amazing, amazing experience in the late '80's, early '90's to be a part of the analysis and the early ecological risk assessment on some of these sites. Human health was often better documented than environmental health, the ecological risk assessment was still in its infancy. We, the FWS Contaminants folk nationally, were evaluating how to put a dollar value on lost pairs of birds or ecological functioning of soils and plants, and those kinds of things so it was a very, very exciting time to be working in that field with the amazing field biologist in the FWS. The Region 5 contaminant folks worked very close with one another, we shared a lot of information, talked about various scenarios, or when someone needed a hand doing surveys, electroshocking, collecting samples, we would step up and go to wherever site needed assistance. Wherever a contaminant person needed help with collecting samples, that's what we spent our summers doing, helping each other. I have a distinct (and fond) memory of helping the folks from the New York Field Office collect samples at Love Canal. It was eerily desolated along the canal w/rusting out buildings along the shore & abandon neighborhoods. We collected sediment samples and fish samples - an awful lot of bullheads and

catfish with tumors on their heads and barbels.

JOHN: Got a couple of quick questions. Who was your supervisor in New Hampshire when you started this work?

CYNDI: Ken Carr was my immediate supervisor and Gordon Beckett was the New England Field Office supervisor.

JOHN: Okay. And the other question that just came to mind when you were talking about Love Canal, and, of course, we've heard a lot about how contaminated that area was. When you were collecting samples, you and the other biologists there, did you have to wear a lot of protective equipment and take special precautions because of the, at least the thoughts or the knowledge that things were pretty bad in the area?

CYNDI: They had done a fair amount of clean up at Love Canal at the time, but all the contaminants biologists have to go through a variety of training in personal protective gear and sampling collection. Depending on the level of contamination, where you are and what you're doing, you wear different things from simple plastic gloves to being fully suited. And so yes, we were wearing, in fact all my contaminant work at Superfund sites, we always wore protective gear. Unlike some of the stories that some of the old guys told us about, of just kind of sticking their hand in a stream and getting some water on it and smelling it and being able to tell you what the contaminant was. Because the cleanup process take so long to this day it's still gratifying to read about Superfund sites projects finally coming to closure - winning the legal battles, awarding of settlements, restoration and

repopulation of wildlife to the areas. A few years back one of the FO biologist sent me a newsletter from a restoration site that was based on some of the work that was done by myself and the contaminant folks who came after me there, which was wonderful to see the final outcome. On of the other projects I took on was lead fishing sinkers. Dr. Mark Pokras at Tufts was looking at lead sinkers being ingested by loons, which was a very new topic back in the very early '90's. A decade earlier waterfowl ingesting lead shot and dying of acute lead poisoning was well documented. But the lead sinker ingestion by aquatic birds was not well documented. What we were finding was more chronic toxicity from birds (loons and diving ducks) ingesting lead fishing sinkers.

JOHN: And who was the vet, do you remember?

CYNDI: Mark Pokras, out of Tufts Veterinary School.

JOHN: I work with Mark today on lead issues, he knows all about the Trumpeter Swan lead issues. And I thought maybe it was somebody, somebody earlier or somebody different, but that's exactly; I know Mark.

CYNDI: Yeah, he's a great guy and he is the one you go to for lead issues. And throughout my career when that comes up, I still direct people to Mark.

JOHN: Cool.

CYNDI: Yeah, it is cool, or rather an interesting problem to tackle (pun intended). Lead sinker ingestion was one of the issues I continued to work on when I moved to headquarters. So you

know it was only, retrospective in my career, a short period of time that I spent in the NEFO compared to other places. It was really probably one of the most influential pieces of my Fish and Wildlife Service career is working in the field. Ken Carr, to this day, is a good friend and I have the utmost respect for this man who was able to help me really understand federal processes, federal regulations, working as a team, wearing the “white hat” to protect “Birds, bunnies, bass, birch trees and butterflies!”. Working in research as a graduate student, I was not exposed to some of the core duties of the Fish and Wildlife Service – policy, regulations, permitting, etc., nor what it’s like to be a day-to-day federal employee. Ken helped me understand what it meant to be a public servant; he guided me through that process and really formed the employee that I became. I enjoyed and learned a tremendous amount from folks in the FO and the Region. One last tidbit from the early years - I conducted quite a few surveys on these Superfunds sites and contaminate free sites nearby that might be used as examples for what was lost. This was to put together parts of the risk assessment, restoration and compensation plan. On a coastal New Hampshire site, I got a tick bite. In Region 5 the contaminants biologist had a full blood screen annually - just to see if your possible exposure on any sites lead to detectable levels in your blood. One of the things they always checked for was Lyme disease, and unfortunately, it was detected about six months after I had been bitten. At that point I was already having some neurological issues. Thanks to the screening the Fish and Wildlife Service provided and the hospitalization and treatment of Lyme disease I have

relatively few side affects, but will carry the disease for as long as I live. As most field folks are, I was asked to bring my field experience to the workings of the Washington office. Gary Jackson made a persuasive argument. After nearly 3 years in the NEFO Rick & I packed up & moved to Virginia. Back then it was frowned upon for married couples to work in the same Fish and Wildlife Service Field Office, so headquarters was the only opportunity for us to both work for the FWS. In late 1992 we began working in the Washington Office for the first time. Rick went into the Fisheries Program and I was with the Contaminants Program. There were just some great contaminants people in HQ at the time, Mary Gessner, Don Steffeck, Linda Lyon, Ron Britton, Jeff Underwood, to name a few. I continued working on Natural Resource Damage Assessments - developing risk assessment regulations, the lead sinker ingestion issue and developing contaminant base training classes. After about four years with the HQ Contaminants Program, I was feeling the need to try something different. It was still difficult as a married couple to find FWS positions for both of us, whether it was field offices or regional offices. I felt the need for a move and Paul Schmidt offered me a job in the Migratory Bird Program, which was still part of Refuges. Later MB was separated out as its own program with its own Assistant Director. Paul hired me for a couple of very specific tasks: 1) to prepare a group of presentations for the Directorate to educate them about the Migratory Bird Program (this was done at a quarterly Directorate meeting, which unfortunately is not a practice that continues); 2) to provide the framework & process for receiving the permit

program from Law Enforcement. Both were amazing opportunities to have an impact on the people who affect resource conservation. In addition I worked with the “Non-Game” Program.

JOHN: Tell us, again, the time frame when you started with Migratory birds.

CYNDI: Late 1995 through January of '97 in the Migratory Bird Program. We had been in Washington for five years and the old joke was, you spend a couple years in Washington and then you go back out into the field and I was very antsy to get back into the field. So after completing the tasks Paul had asked of me we took positions in Minneapolis, MN - Region 3's regional office. John Blankenship hired me as one of three Ecosystem Coordinators. Rick had switched to Endangered Species in the Washington Office and was hired into the Regional Endangered Species Program.

JOHN: And why would a region hire an Ecosystem Coordinator? There must have been some reason, something going on that resulted in that.

CYNDI: Under Jamie Clark's Directorship the Service enhanced their “Ecosystem Approach”. Regional leadership positions were divided into Geographic Assistant Regional Directors and Programmatic Regional Directors. The idea of having an Ecosystem Coordinator was one who could work across programs and state boundary's - full ecosystems. There were three Ecosystem Coordinators in Region 3. My responsibilities were the Upper Mississippi River, the Lower Missouri, and the Ozark Watershed. We were to act as liaisons bringing different parts of

the Fish and Wildlife Service and affected partners together working for conservation in these specific geographic areas. A great concept, and obviously one many people had been working under already. The implementation struggled mostly because of structure, not so much because of unwillingness of people to do that kind of work. But after a couple of years, the ecosystem structure began to collapse. The Directorate decided the implementation wasn't working as well as they expected, so positions and people were reabsorbed or reinvented. The Regional structures eventually went back to being program based.

JOHN: Was that period of change also under Jamie Clark's watch?

CYNDI: Yeah.

JOHN: Okay.

CYNDI: Yes. At the time that we went up to Region 3, Gritman had left and Tom Melius had come in as the Regional Director. When the ecosystem structure began collapsing people moved into different jobs. Paul Schmidt had the wisdom to give me a call and ask if I was interested in coming back to Washington D.C. and applying for the Branch Chief for the Non-Game Program. I think Paul worked with Laverne Smith, then Endangered Species Program Chief, who encouraged Rick to apply for an ES Branch Chief position. We did and were offered the positions. The two programs were able split to costs of moving us down there. I walked into the Branch of Communication and Coordination, however after realizing the breadth of activities the branch was responsible for we held a contest and

renamed it the Branch of Bird Conservation. I was in the position for nearly seven years. It was a wonderful position and I was fortunate to work with some of the most dedicated and intelligent folks. When I was a staffer in that program a few years before, we had been working to garner funding for the song birds, water bird, part of the program. This included briefings with the Appropriations staff and some of the Congressional staffers. And most folks in the Service know, you plant seed that can take a long time to grow and come to fruition. And so oddly enough it was about two years later, when I'm now in a position of being Branch Chief, that a staffer from Loretta Beaumont contacts me (after five o'clock on a Thursday), and says, "If we appropriate this money for this program, what are you guys going to do with it?" have something to me by tomorrow. I immediately start contacting all the Regional non-game coordinators trying to garner compelling projects and stories on how we would use this funding. They Regional biologist could not have been more helpful feeding me information (they're all just amazingly dedicated biologists) and by eight o'clock that night I had sent a response to Ms. Beaumont's office. A few months later we got several million dollars to fund several of the Regional partners in flight positions, and a few water bird, shore bird positions in the field as well as help fund the first All Bird Joint Venture! That was exciting to be part of that success.

JOHN: Tell us what Loretta Beaumont, what her position was.

CYNDI: I believe Loretta was the lead staffer for the Appropriations Committee Chair. My impression was she held lots

of sway in that arena. And she was always willing to listen to the Fish and Wildlife Service and believed in the Service mandates. It was very exciting to then call folks back in the regions and say, "Wahoo, yippee, you're going to be getting some funding to really promote some of these programs and move them forward." So that was fulfilling to play a role in preparing the initial package of material for the Committee and then two years later being on the receiving end of that call, which eventually lead to increased funding. The Migratory Bird Program, really blossomed in those years under the Directorship of Steve Williams (circa 1999 – 2003). It was nice to see the program really start to flourish. I came back shortly before Steve Williams become Director and Bob Bloom was the branch chief for the hunting regulations side of the house. Bob & I had given a great many tandem briefings to a lot of people (anyone who would listen!) and we'd walk away just shaking our heads because we knew, they just didn't get it. Fortune smiled on us when we had the first briefing with Steve Williams after he was formally approved to be Director. After Bob Bloom and I had given our spiel about these great programs and how underfunded they are and the history of the program, Steve Williams just shook his head, stared at us and said, "You're woefully underfunded." I think Bob and I were in such shock, we just stared at each other for what was probably thirty or forty-five seconds thinking, "Oh my goodness, somebody understands, somebody gets us!" It was also a very fun time to have Steve Williams as Director; because he did pay attention to what was going on in the migratory bird world and some of the changes the FWS was going through. You know, having the permit function

became a really huge deal for the migratory bird program, there are thousands and thousands of permits that are issued every year. We were able to change the regulations to increase the permit fees and the funding to go directly to the regional MB program. It was a dynamic time and a challenge to keep up with the changes in the program. The biologists and permit examiners in the field/ regions were wonderful folks who could not have been more helpful and kind when we needed something in Washington. In return we tried to reciprocate whenever they needed something from us and do it quickly. We had such great programs, we started the urban bird treaty; there was a lot of outreach going on realizing that we had to reach not only just the public in general but we had to reach an urban public. Back in 2000 we started Migratory Bird training courses that are still going on today. This involved an incredible cadre of co-instructors from you, John, Dave Sharpe, Terry Rich, Marie Strassburger, and a lot of guest speakers who came for an afternoon or a day to really help educate the rest of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Eventually reaching out to other agency folks to help educate them on how phenomenal the MB program is and how important it is to citizens of the United States. As I said it was a very fun and exciting time to be in the Migratory Bird Program. After about seven years with the Migratory Bird Program I was approached by Herb Raffaele to work for him in the International Program. The Division of International Conservation, which handles the multi-national species programs and technical assistance to developing countries around the world who have some of these very special and unique species; Asian Elephants, African

Elephants, rhinos, tigers, great apes, marine turtles. Herb hired me to help move the program from numerous small grant programs to one program with consistency. And to expand the outreach and education aspects of the Division's programs so Service employees & others would start to understand what the International Program is all about. Even though the International program had been around a while CITES (Convention on International Trade and Endangered Species) was principally what came to everyone mind.

JOHN: Okay. John asks about our Service Dog training.

CYNDI: I'll digress for a few minutes and thank you for that clue, John. Prior to returning to the Washington Office in '99, we lost our golden retriever, Mackinac, of 12 years. He died of liver cancer. The loss was so heartbreaking I said no more dogs at that point. We enjoyed our first few months in the DC area going to concerts, plays, dinners and doing things after work because we didn't have to come running home to a dog, but after four or five months it was a little depressing to come home to an empty house. Still not wanted another dog of our own I decided to volunteer for a group called Canine Companions for Independence. They needed puppy raisers, so I decided to take the plunge and become a puppy raiser – raising and training dogs for people with disabilities other than blindness. We set into motion the formal process of asking permission from our supervisors, their supervisor, all the way up to the Director to raise these puppies at work in the Service community. I agreed to work an extra hour each day for the time needed to take the pup out to urinate, etc. As luck

would have it we received the final signature from Director Jamie Clark, the day before the puppy was to arrive on a plane at Dulles Airport. The Director said, "Yes, this is a good worthy cause and you can certainly do this in the work setting and the dog is just there when you work." That started a long string of nine service dogs trained by us, within the Fish and Wildlife Service. It also encouraged a lot of other people to be puppy raiser-trainers at the Fish and Wildlife Service. At one point 13 different Fish and Wildlife Service employees were raising and training service dogs across the country. Nice to think that we had an influence on helping some folks with disabilities get their service dog. Currently, in headquarters there are two folks using wheelchairs who have Canine Companion for Independents service dogs. HQ employees had the privilege of seeing the "work in progress" and the "final product"! Everyone was so wonderful and kind about having the service dogs around, about not touching, playing or purposely distracting them.

JOHN: Well, almost everyone.

CYNDI: [chuckling] Almost everyone. Yeah, there were a few nights at NCTC where the dog was hanging out in the bar, and I'm not sure that was exactly professional behavior.

JOHN: As I recall, I think I know about when you started, you had a tremendous amount of success with the dogs, the first several, as I recall. I think it would be interesting to folks to know, take one and give us a story about who they ended up with and how they helped that person.

CYNDI: Sure. Yeah, we've had, four out of nine dogs graduate and become service dogs. The first three graduated, then we had a few that didn't make it through the program and then we had one more who graduated later on. The first one, Janus, was a golden lab cross who graduated with a gentleman by the name of Javier who is a quadriplegic. Janus, as his service dog, would open doors for him, pick things up that he dropped out of his wheelchair, carry and put his lunch away in the refrigerator, etc. At the time, Javier was working for the state of New Jersey and if he sent something to the copier, Janus could go to the copy room and pull the paper off of the copier and walk it back to his office for him. Javier himself has said that he could not function without having Janus by his side, just amazing the things that he was able to do for him. Janus just died about two years ago at the age of 15. Our second dog, Kenwood, who no one in the office believed would ever graduate, actually did graduate. Kenwood was like a surfer dude dog, he took things in his own time and was very mellow. He knew his commands but he'd look around and go, wow, cool, maybe I can do that later; seriously no one thought he would graduate. But lo and behold, he graduated with a young girl who had a degenerative spinal disease and used a wheelchair. His mellowness was perfect for her, and he became her companion for many years, picking up things that she would drop, bringing them back to her, opening doors for her, and probably more important for a child, she became popular at school. Instead of people ignoring her or not picking her for teams, people would now come up and talk to her and even if it was just to talk about the dog that was next to her

wheelchair. So he helped both physically and mentally. A few of our dogs that did not graduate have gone to fellow Fish and Wildlife Service employees, and I believe those dogs have also helped each one of those people through a tough time in their personal life or with their family life. I know all of them have been true service dogs and served in one way or another. I trust I will continue raising service dogs because the gift of seeing these dogs with someone and really making a difference in their life and helping them function independently, is well worth the heartbreak of turning them over to someone else. There is truth to the statement “someone NEEDS this dog more than I want them.”

JOHN: So you currently don't have a pup that you're training, but you're intending to do some more of this work?

CYNDI: Yeah, we'll continue to get new pups; right now we've got a keeper pup, our first keeper pup since Mackinac (who died in Minnesota).

JOHN: You might introduce him, since he's monitoring this interview.

CYNDI: He is, he's busy chewing on his chew toys but this is Molson, who's actually a nephew of one of the service dogs that we trained and graduated who is now with a soldier who suffers PTSD.

JOHN: Great.

CYNDI: So back to the International Program. I had done some international work in the Migratory Bird Program, dabbled a little bit in the Joint Ventures and the North American Waterfowl Program and done some water bird work

with Canada and Mexico but not a whole lot. Thinking it might be pretty exciting, I agreed to go and work with Herb Raffaele, in the Division of International Conservation and start up some things for him. I spent just about seven years in DIC. It was an eye opening and amazing experience. Herb taught me a different way to look at and think about conservation. Here in the U.S. we're very privileged to live wealthy lives in terms of what we've been doing for conservation for years; the National Wildlife Refuge System that we have, parks and National forests, and all this land that we have in the name of conservation. In most developing countries, they don't have that luxury. And so he really helped me understand and see the different facets of conservation depending on where you are and what the circumstances (or resources) are. It really adjusted my thinking and approach to conservation. As a biologist and conservationist we think of the animal or the habitat, but the human factor affects everything on this earth. As humans we put value on things and if we can't find a high enough value for certain species and certain ecosystems, then those won't survive. A great deal of international conservation is really finding that balance between economics and saving species or saving ecosystems and lands for groups of species. While challenging, the experience advanced my thinking to better conserve resources. I was able to spend some of the time getting back in touch with the field when we talked to different programs around the country when designing a strategic plan for the international program. Getting feedback from various folks in the regions and the field offices about what they think the International Program is, where should

the International Program be heading was enlightening. Herb had a number of ideas/projects in his head and on paper that I was fortunate enough to work on that have matured over the years – awareness of the ivory crises, tusks & rhino horn. We now have people stationed, both law enforcement and other Fish and Wildlife Service staff, stationed in key areas to help developing countries learn the law enforcement side, the prosecution side of cases, anti poaching, etc. Working in DIC allowed me to see some pretty amazing, amazing places around the globe and being involved in treaty conferences, seeing world heritage sites, and protected areas was just a phenomenal experience. And the people I was fortunate enough to meet and work with were truly remarkable and dedicated. Herb is really a visionary when it comes to this kind of conservation, so having the opportunity to work with him, all of the people in the headquarters office who spend weeks and weeks away from home in these countries trying to help people conserve these amazing species they live among, so many of which are on the brink of extinction, are just incredible; just amazing folks that they have working there. I was not sure I would ever leave the International program, but when I was encouraged to apply for a position back in Migratory Birds I did. I returned to the Migratory Bird Program as Chief of Bird Habitat Conservation, which was the sister division of the division I had worked in earlier. That program oversees the grant programs for NAWCA, the North American Wetland...

JOHN: Conservation Act.

CYNDI: ...Conservation Act, thank you. And NAWMP, the North American Waterfowl Conservation [Management] Plan. And also the Duck Stamp and Junior Duck Stamp Program. Three very important programs, that are some of the oldest programs in the Fish and Wildlife Service. It was a time of change for each of those programs. It was (is) a time to morph and shift to where the world is now, in terms of human involvement in conservation, biological conservation and how Congress views us really. These programs are facing the same thing that a lot of the rest of the Service has been facing – our constituency is changing, there are fewer and fewer hunters, children are not “connecting” with nature any more. Conservation as an issue, is becoming less and less important and we don’t have the ear of the congressional men and women that we used to, and so funding for these programs is becoming harder and harder; so we’re having to be more and more creative about advising, educating, showing people how valuable these programs are. And then I retired.

JOHN: So tell us, you haven’t been retired a long time, but tell us a little bit about; I don’t know if you’re working for International Conservation, maybe not triggered this, but certainly encouraged you to do probably some travel that you wanted to do for a long time and I know you started doing this while you were still working and you’re still doing it. And some of that is, certainly must be, conservation-oriented or at least the interest, so tell us about some of it, what you’ve been doing. Every year you’ve been going to Africa, as I recall, and I get pictures of strange looking fish and stuff, but you must be

doing something over there, too. Tell us why, how you got interested in that and why you're doing it and I know that it's one of the reasons why you always are smiling.

CYNDI: About ten years ago was the first time that I went to Africa, It was 2006. And I went for a personal safari trip actually through the Virginia Wildlife Center, a wildlife rehabilitation center in Waynesboro, VA.

JOHN: Okay.

CYNDI: There was also some work that was going on in Mozambique at the time, so what we were able to do was, I went on my personal trip and paid for that and while I was in South Africa, jumped over to Mozambique. FWS biologists were invited to visit Gorongosa National Park, formally one of the grandest National Parks in Africa. This Park was decimated during the civil war and a wealthy individual has made it his life's work to restore the park to its former glory.

JOHN: So was the Fish and Wildlife Service involved in some way in that, or?

CYNDI: Yes. Some folks from the Fish and Wildlife Service Africa Branch were providing some guidance and advice. The Park was also considering applying for several grants through the African Elephant program. At the time they hadn't gotten any grants so I went over with a fellow Fish and Wildlife Service biologist from DIC and a person from International Flora and Fauna to look at the possibilities to rehabilitate the flora and fauna in the park, look at his plans the reintroduction program. Seeing both

S Africa and Mozambique that first year was a great influenced - seeing the diversity of wildlife and habitats w/in a relatively small area and how humans must live in proximity to wildlife and their effect. I can't think of one single place in N American that you could take a tourist to see such an array of mammals, birds & reptiles as you can in a number of countries on the African continent. You would have to hop around to a bunch of different places to see polar bear, cranes, eagles, elk, grizzly bear, condors, wolves, and various other wildlife. Management of protected areas seems far more complicated in Africa than in N America. Many National Parks in Africa are paper parks, you can draw them on a piece of paper but there are people that have been living there for generations and generations in some cases, thousands of years. Human-Wildlife conflict is, unfortunately, all too common. You must take people into account when working with wildlife on the land. Generally speaking we here in the US have a much easier time dictating what happens in our Parks & Refuges. What I have noticed recently is the increase protected area (refuge) managers and anti-poaching patrols/park guards on both public and private reserves. We've chosen to return to Africa every year - sometimes different places and sometimes the same place. Each trip we take a suitcase or two of "gently used" FWS uniforms for the park guards and anti poaching patrols. Thanks to the generosity of many Service employees. Many years ago I put out a call to a few refuge managers I knew and asked, "If you or your staff has any gently used uniforms, please send them to me at the office." Word started to spread and much to Herb Raffaele's surprise, we

actually filled one person's office with nothing but boxes of gently used Fish and Wildlife Service uniforms. On the weekends I would bundle those up into a set w/the size and whenever anyone from the International Program was going overseas they would take these uniforms for the field folks. So basically they're Fish and Wildlife Service uniforms across the globe helping other park rangers and anti-poaching patrols. We've ripped the patches off of them, but the pride in so many of these people that now have an outfit that makes them look professional, makes them look the same. At one point, the Ambassador from Angola took with him in the Ambassador's plane, twelve or fourteen boxes of gently used and discontinued uniforms. The Ambassador was quite pleased to present the uniforms to the Administrator of Natural Resources - the uniforms were going to a newly established National Park created to protect the giant sable, which had just been rediscovered in Angola. A small way to help our fellow conservationists. I still take suitcases full of uniforms when I travel to Africa. Last year it was to save the rhino in Tanzania, this year it went to a group called Lion Guardians in Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. We've got a couple suitcases packed next year going to Save the Elephant field biologists in Kenya. The uniforms are getting a second life! We still keep in touch with several of the conservationists in Africa. Each year we take small groups of people who haven't been to Africa, who are interested in wildlife and conservation. They come back as advocates for African conservation issues. Recall Cecil, the lion that was shot by the Minnesota dentist outside Hwange National Park? When we were at Hwange just a month

ago, we were at the area where Cecil was lured out of the park and killed. Near there Cecil's widow, Kathy, one of the females in the pride and her cubs were at that location. Many in our group could relate to something that they had seen before in the news and now were actually at the spot looking at the dead lion's offspring and widow - that is something they will remember. I believe everybody becomes an advocate for conservation once you have gone on safari in Africa. I would encourage everybody and anybody to go to Africa, the more conservation dollars that go in, the more they're going to be able to fund some of these parks and these protected areas as well as the private reserves. The pressure for land, the pressure for ivory, for horns, is just going to continue.

JOHN: Well, this has been a really interesting visit, and at this point this is when I ask if you can think of anything else that you'd like to mention or wrap up?

CYNDI: You know, I've mentioned a few people along the way that have been of great assistance in terms of making suggestions and guidance in my Fish and Wildlife Service career. I didn't start off wanting to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service; I don't think I even knew it existed as an undergraduate and certainly not in grade school or high school. But I am sure glad I was introduced to the Service in graduate school! It's just been a very serendipitous career. I have taken advantage of opportunities, thinking "Well yeah, that might be fun to go work there, or I could make a difference working in that program, so sure I'd love to work for you." And it's been truly a wonderful ride and I'm grateful to Bud

Griswold, Ken Carr, Gery Jackson, Steve Williams, Paul Schmidt, Herb Raffaele, Jerome Ford, those folks who have been there providing suggestions and a guiding hand. But really, the people who I most fondly remember (and don't keep in touch with as many of them as I would like to) are just the field folks and regional folks that I've worked with. Those who do the day to day hands on field work. I missed field work a great deal in my years in Washington and constantly encouraged my staff to go out with someone in the field or go do something to remind them why we have such passion for our jobs and the agency. For this is why we're knee deep in paper & process for regulations or to add land or start a new refuge, to once again "touch" the critter we want to save. No matter what program I worked in, whether it was research, contaminants, migratory birds, the international program, the FWS has some of the most dedicated, hardest working folks of any government agency. They are truly a phenomenal group of people to know and work with and call friends - that has made it a wonderful career overall. All those dedicated people are the heart and soul of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

JOHN: And I agree, of course, and you know it's an extended family and it's some of the best people in the world. And it really, you know, when Congress or the public are criticizing public employees and workers, it really grates because we've worked with such great people and such dedicated people. And it's kind of like what you said that the more people you can get to Africa to see what the issues and conditions are, the more people that get out with some of our extremely talented biologists and managers and see what good people they

are and what good they're doing, I think the better off everybody is.

CYNDI: Yeah, what true gems the National Wildlife Refuge System has in it. And you know, that's one of the sad things about retiring is we, at least once or twice a year when we would have meetings, we would have them at or next to a National Wildlife Refuge.

JOHN: Yes.

CYNDI: So I was able to visit refuges that I probably normally wouldn't see, but now in retirement, I'm just going to take my refuge pass book and plot a little course and just stop and see various refuges.

JOHN: It's always amazing, that's one of the, when I was on the Refuge Association Board, our meetings were always someplace where we could go tour some refuges and get to know the staff people. And we were always, at least some of us board members wanted to be sure and connect with everybody from the maintenance people to the refuge assistants and it's, you know, on top of everything else it's; well, first of all, the resources, the resources themselves are amazing, the people are amazing, and it's so much fun besides, to do those things.

CYNDI: It's really is, I think it is important to re-stress that point - I know a lot of people in work situations make friends with people they work with, but the Fish and Wildlife Service is like an extended family and when people from other agencies or some private sector people would ask me to explain that; I told them if I was traveling around the country and whatever state I was in, if I

had car trouble, if something happened, I know I could call a Fish and Wildlife Service employee, even if it might not be one that I know or have a relationship with, but just say, “Hey, I’m so and so, I also work for the Service, I need help.” And they would be there. It’s an amazing group of people that you stay connected with in a lot of ways. It’s been a really fun, remarkable, amazing career. I know every Service employee has a multitude of stories, things that have happened to them when they’ve been out in the field or even being in Washington, the people that you run into, the things that happen, working for the Fish and Wildlife Service has allowed me to have so much fun and so many unique experiences that I couldn’t have dreamed of as a kid growing up or even as an undergraduate in college. The FWS is really is a phenomenal agency to work in.

JOHN: Well, thanks for taking this time to share your life and career. You know part of what we’re trying to, because just as you said, we’ve got all these fantastic people and their stories and their experiences; part of the reason that we have this project going is to preserve some of that for future generations of Fish and Wildlife Service people and other conservation people. And so thanks, I appreciate your time and I’m sure you enjoyed this almost as much as I did.

CYNDI: My pleasure, it’s been great talking with you, thank you, John.