INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM J. MOBLEY
BY JERRY FRENCH, JUNE 4, 2001

MR. FRENCH: Good afternoon. It's June 4th, 2 pm. I am interviewing Mr. William Mobley. This is Jerry French. We are doing the interview on the front porch of his brick home in Maxwell, New Mexico. Bill is a longtime Service employee and recently retired after spending thirty years. The interesting thing about Bill's background is the Maxwell Refuge. Much of this refuge was built on his family's property. Bill, tell us about your parents and grandparents and what it was like to grow up on that property.

MR. MOBLEY: My parents and grandparents came to this part of the country around 1920. My grandfather bought this property. Originally, it was 215 irrigated acres, which at that time was sufficient for two families. He passed away in 1943 and my father took up the payments on that piece of property. He was living there at the time that the government bought it. Although he wasn't farming it, I had begun to farm it in 1962. We didn't sell to the government until 1966. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it, I went to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I count my thirty years with them as some of the most valuable time that I have ever spent anywhere. I really cherish every day that I worked for them. As far as growing up on the farm; my earliest memories date back to probably 1939. 1939 was the tail end of the depression here. Nobody had anything. Everybody was reasonably well satisfied because nobody had anything. Everybody was broke. We were pretty well off. My Dad had diary cows and he separated the milk and produced cream, which was shipped to the creamery. Mother had chickens and she sold eggs to the local store, and traded them from groceries. That's how we got along until probably 1943 or so. Some of the earliest work days that I remember were following a pair of workhorses behind a corn cultivator. At that time, cropping is this area was pretty diversified. We had sugar beets, corn, small grain, and soybeans. Of course the root crops suffered pretty much because of the introduction of European vine weed. That was introduced into the area in the sugar beet seed, as I understand. When that exists, it's hard to raise anything without using chemicals. Now, it's gone now to alfalfa cropping, or alfalfa rotation systems. Soon after the refuge was established, we discovered that we had to either farm it, or find somebody else to farm it. I inherited that job for this refuge. I established the system of sharecropping, the cooperative farmer agreement system. This worked very well until 1977 when we ran out of cooperative farmers that either got too old, or too lazy to farm. We began to farm some of it ourselves then. We did farm a lot of the acreage up until the time that I retired in 1994. I had to stop and think about it a little bit. [What year] It seems like about two days ago, actually.

MR. FRENCH: Bill, there's a lot of wildlife here. Maxwell is very well known for the Eagles that come out there, and for the Goose populations. What were the wildlife populations out there when you were a child?

MR. MOBLEY: When I was child waterfowl populations were pretty good. Probably because of the diversified farming methods. But then in later years, about the time that the refuge was established, you had to really look to find a Canada goose. There were quite a few ducks, but the Canada goose was nonexistent. I never saw an Eagle for about ten years during that period, either bald or golden. It is unusual not to see Golden Eagles in this part of the country. Anything that looked like it might fit on the dinner table went. Pheasants, quail, we had a fellow at one time who raised "franklins" out there. These are Partridges. They lasted about six months I think, before somebody got a hold of them. You never saw a deer. I never saw a "coon" until I was probably sixteen years old. Of course, Prairie Dogs have always had a place. They were more under control then, than they are now. Really that's about it.

MR. FRENCH: One time, years ago; Bill and I have known each other for many years; [to listener] we were eating lunch of something and you were telling me how as a child, your parents sent you out to the fields with two clapboards.

MR. MOBLEY: Yes.

MR. FRENCH: And you would go out there to keep the ducks of off the crops.

MR. MOBLEY: Yes, that's right.

MR. FRENCH: Would you relate what that experience was like?

MR. MOBLEY: Well, years ago we used to cut our grain crops with a binder. This put it in nice little bundles that weighed about twenty pounds apiece probably. We came out and piled the bundles up into shocks. The shocks would have seven to nine bundles in them depending on the kind of grain. And we always put a cap shock on the top, flat. The ones that you put on the side, you stood upright, with the butt end down. You put the cap shock on top to keep the hales from shelling it down. This was an ideal place for mallards. At that time, at the tail end of the depression, money was short and nobody had money enough to buy ammunition to scare these things off. They did come out with a kind of a cracker shell that they used. They weren't too effective. But I used to have two boards about maybe six inches wide and about two feet long. And it was my job to go down to the grain field at about sundown and whack these two boards together. It made a sound like a gunshot to scare the ducks off. Then I got sophisticated. We hinged the two boards together with a handle on the outside so all you had to do was put your hands together.

MR. FRENCH: Just keep you thumbs out of it!

MR. MOBLEY: Yes, keep your thumbs out of it! You didn't have to be told but once! But anyway, that's the way we would keep the ducks off. If you could keep them off until after the sun went down, they didn't seem to bother it much, but there was about an hour before sundown that you had to keep them scared out. They would just clean a grain field in two or three days.

MR. FRENCH: Aside from waterfowl, you talked about how there were no deer; tell me about the coyotes and rattlesnakes and some of these other creatures that people are always interested in.

MR. MOBLEY: I never saw a coyote or rattlesnake until I was probably about eighteen years old. So that will tell you about how many we had. As I say, we saw prairie dogs pretty regular, but I don't know that I ever saw a coyote until I was eighteen. That would have put it at about 1952 or somewhere in there.

MR. FRENCH: For the interest of the transcriber, Bill and I can go back and relate stories that we have talked about before. Would you tell us a little bit about the country following the dust bowl days of the 1930s?

MR. MOBLEY: I don't remember all that much about the 1930s because I was born in the mid 1930s. In the late 1930s we were just sort of recovered from the dust bowl days. What made it hard here was that in 1941 we have an excessive amount of moisture in the fall and it washed out several of the irrigation lakes, including the one at Hebron where our irrigation water came from. That made us for several years there, dependent on floodwater only. We didn't have a storage facility and the only way we got any water was when it would rain in the mountains, and a flood would come down. And you'd best be ready for it when it came because they turned it out in large quantities, for a short time. That's kind of how I got broken in to irrigating I guess, the flood irrigating, through that method. I can tell you quite a bit about the 1950s. I can remember three years with not a tenth of an inch of rain. All of the fences that had any sort of weeds growing in then collected blow dust and we would find a fence at original ground level, and another fence on top of a sand dune, which covered up the original fence. That was quite a mess. It took about twenty years to get all of that blow sand scattered out again. And in places on the refuge, there are still sand dunes from that. Along about the winter of 1955 it started to get some moisture again. It started to rain, and finally turned into snow. We had pretty good years through the late 1950s, and early 1960s. You have to figure on periodic droughts in this part of the country, it's just a part of the ecology of this area. It has been proved that about every twelve or thirteen years, you get a dry one and maybe more than one, sometimes as much as five or six in a row. If you don't have sufficient water in storage to cover those dry times you're out of luck. You don't raise anything. During the time that I farmed for the refuge, I can only remember one year when we had trouble.

One year we had one fortieth of an acre-foot of water allocated. Needless to say, we put it all in one place, but we still didn't raise very much! That would have been in the late 1970s.

MR. FRENCH: When Maxwell Refuge started, you were the only employee for quite some time. I know that you answered to other people, but you were the only employee on the ground. Would you like to relate some of those experiences and what it was like to take this farmland, which had been so devastated by the 1950s and try to turn it around and try to make it productive and restore it again?

MR. MOBLEY: Well, it was quite an experience. I'll say that! The hardest thing about those years that I was by myself, it was seven years; these were the years immediately after the refuge opened. The hardest thing about that was trying to convince people that they couldn't do anything that they wanted to on the refuge. Their philosophy was, "Well, the government owns it, and we own the government, therefore it belongs to us, and we can do whatever we damn well please"! That was a little bit of a problem. Plus, in those days we didn't have a law enforcement Academy. When I went to work, the Refuge Manager came up and he brought me a book about three quarters of an inch thick. It said, *Law Enforcement for the Fish and Wildlife Service Officer*. He also brought me a pistol and a badge and said, "Go to it"! I put in a lot of sleepless nights trying to figure out if I was doing the right thing, or not! I think that was the hardest part of it. A lot of the land had been over used. It had been over grazed. There were many places where there were natural stands of grass and climax vegetation had occurred and been dry for so long that that vegetation had died. And that all needed to be restored, mostly to keep it from blowing away. We had an area around where the office is now located that was particularly bad. It took a lot of manipulation to get that back to where it didn't blow away and to get a little grass started on it. We used several different methods on that. We used a method of strip florigation. [Sic] The idea being, that if you rough it up a little bit, it catches the sand and doesn't have a chance to get started. We piled dead trees in windrows to break up the wind so you didn't just devastate the land. We used clover as a cover crop whenever there was enough moisture for clover. That worked really well. We finally got some grass started, and I think it's pretty much grassed over now. It's safe now that I don't think we have to worry about it blowing away. But when I first went to work for them I put in many days at the office where you couldn't see Lake 12, which is about a quarter of a mile south of the office. You couldn't see that lake at all, for the blowing sand. That is not good advertisement for any land owning agency, regardless of who they are. But like I say, it was interesting. It took a lot of work. For seven years, I was here by myself. Anything that I couldn't do by myself didn't get done. In 1975 I believe, we got an Assistant Manager up here, and he was able to do a lot of the office work. That let me out into the field and I could get a lot more done. Plus, he could help me with the things that took four hands instead of two.

MR. FRENCH: If you go out to the refuge now you would never be able to envision what it looked like then. Most of the refuges anymore have lots of people, and nice buildings. They have good equipment. Would you relate what your buildings and equipment were like during your first few years?

MR. MOBLEY: We had seven farmsteads, I believe. The best one of those buildings would have made a good outhouse. That's about the best I can say for those. The houses were all right. The barns and outbuildings had been left to go to rack and ruin. We couldn't do very much in the way of salvage but we finally managed to get rid of all of those. Some of the old houses, which had not been occupied for several years, were without windows, doors, roofs or floors and just a shell. Those had to be gotten rid of. Where the office site is now; that was an old farmhouse. It had four rooms and a bathroom, I believe. It served us very well until the new office was built. The shop was a converted chicken house. At one time, the man that had lived there raised chickens on a large scale for the eggs. He had this big building and it was all right except that it only had about a six-foot plate on it, and you couldn't get anything but a pick up into it. We had a little problem with that. But we got it to where it had three bays in there where we could park our pickups in. Our fire truck that we had at the time was parked in there and keep it heated to that it didn't freeze. It wasn't the best, but it served its purpose.

MR. FRENCH: Would you describe some of your other equipment? I've seen pictures of you on some pretty ramshackle old farm equipment. Relate some of your equipment.

MR. MOBLEY: During the early years we had what nobody else wanted. I think our first tractor was an old Farmall. It was a pretty good machine, I guess, for the day it was built. But it didn't really serve our needs all that well. We got real prosperous along in the late 1960s when we got a little Massey-Ferguson front-end loader with an box blade on the back of it. We just worked the heck out of that thing. We had a lot of use for that. We didn't really get any real good equipment until the early 1970s. The bicentennial year gave us funds for a lot of those. But the old equipment, we didn't have much of it. The first fire pumper we had was a fifty-five-gallon barrel mounted on a missile dolly with a little pressure pump. It ran off of a gasoline engine. You could get about forty pounds of pressure out of the thing. It was a little positive displacement pump. It could put out a fire if it wasn't any more than five feet across. At that time we had a lot of problem with people smoking. Smoking was a popular thing, and throwing a cigarette out of the window was the thing that everybody did. You could see a little column of smoke along a public road, you would right quickly get the little fire pump in the back of your pickup and see if you could put it out. As far as I know we never did have to call the fire department during all of those years. We managed to get it done every time. It was mostly luck though mostly luck.

MR. FRENCH: I've seen pictures of you pushing an old bulldozer around. What was that?

MR. MOBLEY: Well that was a surplus. Actually we had two of them at different times. One of them I got from Rocky Mountain Arsenal in Benford, and that was the better of the two. One of them came from Lubuck, as surplus equipment. It didn't last very long. It had sat out for a while and down in that part of the country if full of red sand when the wind blows. So it didn't last very long. But with the one that we got from Rocky Mountain Arsenal, I did a lot of that moving the blow sand out of the way. And pieces of old buildings had been left there just rotting. I pushed them together and burned a few, and buried a lot of them. Before I left, I tried to make a kind of a map with the areas where these landfills were. I sure hope that somebody doesn't go out there and try and dig a well or something in one of those, because they have everything in them. There are rocks, concrete, a little bit of wood. It's not anything that would taint the water I don't think; it's all just building scrap.

MR. FRENCH: During the time that I worked with you, I know we found several old cisterns. I believe we dropped a tractor into one of them one day. Would you tell people what it's like to work around all of those old homesteads?

MR. MOBLEY: The first that you do is to walk about a three-foot grid through the whole thing. And then if you don't find anything that way, get on the equipment. You'll soon find it then. As Jerry says, I fell into several cisterns. I thought that I knew where a lot of these areas were around these old farmsteads but apparently I had forgotten. It used to be a popular thing for everyone to have a well house that was built underground. When they left most of them just piled straw or something on top those well houses, so when you moved the bale of straw, you went into the well house. If the well house was of any size at all, you had a little trouble getting out. The wells here don't produce the quality of water that is potable. You can't drink it. It is so hard that it bounces. So people use these cisterns to either catch rainwater, or to haul water from the village for their needs. Everybody had at least one cistern, sometimes two. Sometimes they would fill one cistern from the irrigation water and another from the town water so that they had water to cook and take a bath in. All of those had to be filled up. A lot of the old ones were brick on the inside. It is quite a job to tear one of those things up. They are pretty well constructed. They are made sort of like a Greek urn, about that shape. There are curved sides and the top locked together on top. They usually had about an eighteen inch round hole in the top. [Unintelligible] So when you hit one of those, you knew that you had hit something. It seems like to me that I counted up one time, twenty-six of those cisterns and wells out there. I think that there might have been maybe one or two that I didn't get covered up!

MR. FRENCH: I know of one that sits there just north of Lake 12. We went out to cover it up one day and we sank the tractor on our way out there. In fact, not only did we sink the tractor, but I think we sank the tractor that was going to go and rescue the tractor.

MR. MOBLEY: We almost sank the Maintainer that we were trying to put the other two out with! Yes, I remember that!

MR. FRENCH: Bill, one thing which we suffer in this part of the country; and I'm not sure other people can particularly appreciate it, is being hit by hordes of grasshoppers. You've seen them come all of your life. Would you like to relate a little bit about what it's like to farm around these things, and suffer these devastating hordes?

MR. MOBLEY: The Bible tells us about the swarms of locusts and it's about the same as that. It takes a certain type of year for the grasshoppers to hatch. Apparently the eggs stay in the soil for several years. And when the conditions are just right, they hatch out. When you've got them, you've got a lot of them. And there's really not a whole lot that you can do. When chemical insect controls first came out, everybody sprayed. Chloredane was the insecticide of choice at that time. I believe that if Chloredane would kill you, you ought to be dead by now because I ingested quite a lot of if from the time I was probably fourteen years old up until it was banned in the late 1960s or early 1970s. We had to spray about every third year for grasshoppers. In later years, they came out with a biological control for them. It was protozoa that worked on their alimentary system. It proved to be about at effective as the pesticides. I used to enjoy seeing the salesmen that sold these pesticides. I enjoyed them coming around because they would say; "Now this product is the answer to all of your prayers! You use this, and you won't have any grasshoppers"! I used to tell them that I had been spraying for twenty years and we've still got grasshoppers, "So somebody's not telling the truth"! One or two of them got a little sore about it too! But that's ok. Well, there's just no way that if you've got that many grasshoppers; if you can figure out a third of the crop and that's it, at best.

MR. FRENCH: Well, my first year at Maxwell was 1988, and it was a particularly hard year for grasshoppers. Bill, maybe between us we can describe what it is like to have the sidewalks, the sides of buildings crawling with them. They are eating every green thing that they can get their hands on. Without seeing it, it's hard to describe what it's like to live in those kinds of conditions.

MR. MOBLEY: It really is. There just isn't a whole lot of ways to describe it, other than "a plague of locusts". I have seen them eat all of the leaves off of trees, even. You know, a Chinese Elm tree, or a Mongolian Elm is a particularly robust type of tree, and I have seen them take the leaves off of a tree and leave if just like it would have been in December. Not a leaf, anywhere. I have seen that many of them! I really don't know, but the most effective thing that I can remember, years ago, and this is way back before they even had pesticides, my dad and granddad built what they called a "grasshopper catcher". What it was, was a sort of a wall made out of galvanized steel, with a kind of a slide and a cage on the bottom. It's really hard to describe. But anyway, you had to pull

this thing across the field, with a horse on either side of you. It was about twenty feet wide. When the cage got full, you would clean it out with a scoop shovel, and put it in a burlap bags. And at that time we had a lot of turkeys. We had a couple of hundred and the neighbor had a couple of hundred. One of our neighbors had five hundred turkeys. We would feed them those grasshoppers. You would be surprised at how many grasshoppers that many turkeys will eat. We actually sacked them up, and that seemed to slow them up a little bit.

MR. FRENCH: That's a lot of protein in a sack of grasshoppers!

MR. MOBLEY: That's a lot of protein. Of course, you had to feed them pretty quick, because they would start to smell pretty bad in those sacks after the second day. But that was about the most effective way that I can remember of getting rid of them. Chemical sprays were never all that effective. Grasshoppers are pretty hardy anyway. It always seemed to me that if you killed one, two or three came to his funeral! You just can't get rid of all of them that way. Then, I can remember when they used to put Arsenic- [unintelligible], which is an arsenic derivative in bran, and spread that out. It killed the grasshoppers, but it killed everything else too. Anything that ate it of course was gone. It was not at all selective. The farmers finally came to the conclusion that it as doing more harm than good and they quit that practice. There's just no way to control them. You just have to do the best you can with what you've got. I heard to old-timers say that "The grasshoppers wouldn't crawl across the rope". I've got news for them; they'll eat the rope! Not only will they crawl across it, they'll eat it!

MR. FRENCH: There's another thing I'd like to get you to relate a little bit. A lot of people look at farming and they don't think that there's much of. Our climate here is high and harsh and short. Would you describe what it's like to farm in this kind of a climate?

MR. MOBLEY: A lot of people have failing here simply because they didn't realize that they've only got a one hundred and five day season. That doesn't allow any time for mistakes. You have to do it right the first time or it doesn't get done at all. You run out of time at the end of the year, if your crop is immature when it frosts. Usually from about mid May until about mid September is all the time that you've got. You've got to get your crop in early, and you've got to get your irrigation water to it when it needs it. At the same time, if you put it in too early you'll lose your seed because it will rot. It's not warm enough to germinate. About the best way that I could describe it is that you farm by the seat of your pants. I guess you do everywhere, but more so here I think. I've seen numerous farmers come in from other climates and say, "Oh, this is fine, we can make a lot of money here". Three years later they leave broke, wondering what happened to them. One of them that I can remember in particular took about a two-week vacation in June. He went to Florida. When he came back is grain crop was all laying on the ground and it was just as dry as it could possibly get. There had been no rain, and there had been harsh, hot winds from out of the southwest. It just dried it up, and he lost his

whole crop. He stayed one more year after that, and then he was gone. I always thought that it was kind of funny. I would see these guys come in here in a Cadillac, and leave in a Greyhound. I wonder if they did good, or bad!

MR. FRENCH: While we are talking about the harshness of weather, do you want to touch on hail a little bit?

MR. MOBLEY: Well, we got hail too. At high altitude there's always a lot of cold air around, especially this close to the mountains. Early in the season, and late in the season that rain hits these cold air currents and freezes coming down. We can get hail anywhere from the size of a pea, to the size of a baseball. And I have seen all sizes. I have seen big chunks of ice frozen together that would be as large as a baseball, I'm sure. The main thing is that you learn to watch for hail clouds. You watch the clouds for hail. If you see one coming, get under something. Several years ago, I worked for the water distribution company here before I started farming on my own. I made the mistake of getting maybe one hundred and fifty yards away from the pickup one day when some hail clouds were coming up. I darn near got beat to death before I got back to the pickup! I was black and blue for a week! Once you get a hail like that, you are out of business for that year. If you get lucky, and can scatter you crops over a wide enough area you'll raise something. This was my idea on the refuge; to try and farm in different areas, enough that if we got hail in the east side, maybe we didn't get it on the west side. And if we got it on the south, maybe we didn't get it on the north. I scattered our food plots out that way and it worked pretty well. I think that there was only one year that we were hailed out completely. It cleaned the whole country out that year. There was nothing left anywhere.

MR. FRENCH: I believe you technique worked well because during the twelve years that I was at Maxwell we continued to use the crop rotation system that you had set up. We might loose a field here or there to insects or to hail or something else, but there was always sufficient food. I remember one of the techniques which you taught me was; if you get a hail storm early in the year, after you have already put your seed out, get out there and harrow that because the hail will actually compact the soil so hard that seed can't push it's way up.

MR. MOBLEY: That's right. It will pack that soil. The soil is wet anyway. It's a clay soil and when you put a little compaction on that, it's a whole lot like a road. If you don't get out and break that crust, your seedlings will never be able to penetrate it. They will never go through it. It will dry up after a hailstorm. Usually when one would come, we wouldn't get any rain for maybe a week. What you've got is this; however big your field is, you've got adobe brick that size. It's just that hard. Those little clay particles really do compact when that hail hits them. The only way that I have found that is satisfactory, and I have tried a lot of things, was to get a [unintelligible] out there and try to break it up, and see if it will come through. This is one part of farming that is peculiar

to this area. It's not like any other place I've ever been. This is one of the things that makes it difficult. There are other things too. It is quite different. I was pleased with our production of crops over the years. The first year or two that we had the refuge, we didn't do very much good. We had sixty-five, or sixty-six Geese the first year. I watched those populations build up into the thousands, and it was very gratifying. I would recommend that experience to anyone that has a chance to have it. Regardless of how hard you have to work, it is worth it to see the results of your efforts.

MR. FRENCH: As long as I have known Bill, he has worn "umpteen" hats. He has been the farmer, mechanic, welder, plumber, and carpenter. One of the titles that he had when we worked together was Biological Technician. He kept track of the wildlife populations. Bill, you've got an advantage over other people because you saw this thing change through time. Would you relate what it was like? We have discussed waterfowl a little bit, but of course, wildlife is songbirds and everything else. There is quite an impressive record of birds that use the area. Would you talk a little bit about that progression? You saw it happen day by day.

MR. MOBLEY: When I first took it over this was the beginning of the period when we used chemical insecticides. There weren't a lot of songbirds around. They would come out and eat a grasshopper, and they were gone. As a matter of fact, I think it was more deadly to the songbirds, than it was to the grasshoppers. During the years that I was there, we got species that I could remember seeing when I was younger and didn't know what they were. I had no way to identify them. My father was a pretty good amateur ornithologist. He had done that all his life. He would say, "This is a Thrasher, and this is what makes him a Thrasher. And this is a Thrush". I got a little basis from that, and maybe a little incentive from him to work on it a little more that they began to reappear. I wouldn't hazard a guess as to the percentage increase that we have had. We just didn't have anything when we started. And when we got through, I think we had one hundred and twenty-four species. Is that right?

MR. FRENCH: I believe so.

MR. MOBLEY: Those were the different species that had been seen here and verified. During the early years it was particularly hard for me because I was not an ornithologist. I had had very little formal training in that area. I bought a camera, and when I'd see a bird that I could not identify, I would take a picture of it. When I went to Albuquerque, I would look a friend of mine up and say, "Hey, what is this"? He would look at it and say, "Hell, I don't know! How did it act"? I finally got reasonably good at it. I still do that as a kind of a hobby. When you have to say, definitively, which species it is, and you've got people who know the difference, you'd best know what you are talking about. That was kind of tough for me. But we got through it some way. We bluffed a lot!

MR. FRENCH: There is always a lot of interest in shorebirds, birds that don't impact farming, and are just there and are not a game species. You would relate some of your experiences in the change in the shorebird populations?

MR. MOBLEY: Years ago everyone had cattle. And they grazed every bit of vegetation that they could off of the lakesides. Of course, that didn't have a very good impact on the shorebird population. They really had no place to nest. Plus, the livestock disturbed them and people could see the nests, and they would go and see what they were. Once we closed the livestock out and kind of controlled the people, we began to see a definite increase in shorebirds. There were Killdeers, Avocets that both nest here. We saw species that people who had lived here all their lives had never seen before. They began to use the area because of the improved habitat. Again, I would not want to hazard a guess as to the percentage increase, but it was a lot.

MR. FRENCH: I know from my own experience that many local people had never seen a Pelican before. They did not believe that such a thing as a Pelican could land in northeastern New Mexico.

MR. MOBLEY: That's true! I can remember seeing Pelicans, and Swans both when I was just a child. I could not have been over six years old, I'm sure. There were these big white birds on the lake, and I would say, "Hey Dad, what's that"? He would say, "Oh, that's a Swan". Of course, we would see maybe five or six Pelicans over the course of a year, at the most. In later years, just before I retired we saw several hundred Pelicans at one time. A lot of people have kind of changed their attitudes toward wildlife refuges because of that, I think. This is an interesting thing for me. Whenever I first went to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service, a wildlife refuge was unheard of. That's a place where the State puts some signs up that say "Wildlife Refuge" and you did whatever you wanted to. But when the "feds" came in, that was a different story. You couldn't hunt ducks anymore, and you shoot at geese or the shorebirds. They didn't particularly like it, over a period of years they realized that this was something that was coming. We actually got the most support out of people that we had had the most trouble with, earlier. People can change their attitudes if they want to.

MR. FRENCH: Along with your other hats, I know that for many years, being the only employee on the Refuge, you did a lot of public education and what they now call "public outreach", working with kids. Do you want to relate some of that early work that you did with 4-H, and with the local school groups?

MR. MOBLEY: Gosh, I don't know exactly how to relate that. I just tried to show them the benefits of wildlife. I gave probably one hundred and fifty or two hundred programs a year. For a while there it was about three a week, and I was beginning to not get much else done. I went into the local schools at about the fourth grade level and started to tell these kids why they needed wildlife. I did the same of course with 4-H.

The 4-H is more of hands on type thing. So I had them build several shelters with discarded Christmas trees out there. The little Quail just loved those things, they could dart in there and get away from the Hawks and that was fine! Now, with the decrease in the local rural population, 4-H is not a big deal anymore. But there is still room in the schools for a lot of that, I think. For about ten years we continued the program and we got to actually see some of the benefits. We had a young people's YACC Camp on the refuge for several years and a lot of the kids that had worked YACC could remember me giving those programs in school. They were just really gung-ho for doing anything they could for wildlife. They even worked a little once in a while!

MR. FRENCH: For the benefit of those who don't know, YACC was Young Adult Conservation Corps. These were about eighteen to twenty-two year olds. It was a little old group than what they YCC is. I am sorry to interrupt, but I have to make these notes for the transcriber, and whoever may hear this every once in a while.

MR. MOBLEY: Oh, that's O.K. I'm glad you do, because I am a assuming that the transcriber knows as much about it as you and I do, and I shouldn't do that. I apologize to the transcriber who ever that may be. I am sure that the transcriber, when you send this in is going to say, "Where did you dig this nut up"? [laughing]

MR. FRENCH: Well, sometimes we tend to talk in acronyms. And it's like our own language. We know what we are talking about, but for somebody else, that is a foreign language to them.

MR. MOBLEY: Completely! We've done it for so long, it's a habit. We don't even think about it.

MR. FRENCH: Do you recall when you put out those old Christmas trees into shelter?

MR. MOBLEY: That would have been in the early 1970s until the late 1970s.

MR. FRENCH: I can still go out onto the refuge today, and tell you where those because the Christmas tree stands were still attached. You can find these little "Xs" of wood. The trees have gone, but the little wood crosses that support the Christmas tree are still there. That's how slow things rot here in this dry, high altitude.

MR. MOBLEY: That's another thing; in this altitude, we talked about grasslands a little earlier and anything that you do to the detriment of the land shows up for twenty years afterwards. If you work for the government, and don't make too many mistakes, people are going to know it from now on. They never forget. If you make a mistake, people never forget it. But if you do something right, people say, "Well, anybody could have done that"!

MR. FRENCH: I know that on the refuge you did a lot of restoration work on those blown out sandy areas. And I can go out there today, and show you a place were you drilled grass seed. And the only place that grass is growing is still in those rows. It's still just as perfect, and lined out. It was a pretty harsh place to try and recover.

MR. MOBLEY: Yeah, it was tough. A lot of it, we had to fertilize. It had been blown out for so long that it was down to where the topsoil was completely gone. It was down into the secondary soils. They were so raw that we you couldn't get anything to grow, so we had to fertilize a lot of that. We put a lot of nitrogen in those places, and it paid off. I don't know, twenty years from now, people will wonder what that's for I'm sure. They'll say, "Gee, why did he go around the hill like that? Why didn't he go straight over"?

MR. FRENCH: Well Bill, we have discussed quite a number of things, but again, you have, as nobody else here does, the ability to look from the past, into the present, do you want to talk a little bit about people's attitudes towards the refuge and towards wildlife from what it was say fifty years ago, or sixty if you dare?

MR. MOBLEY: I don't go that far back! We'd have to find some old man to tell them about that! The attitude towards wildlife, from as far back as I can remember, was that it was to be exploited. It was something like, "If you can get it, fine" to help with the food bill. I ought to also explain that at that time this little farming area was surrounded by coal camps. And you know, there's nothing that a coal miner won't eat unless it eats him first. I don't care what it is. If they see it, they're going to put it on the table. Of course, a lot of the wildlife went that way. At the time that Refuge was established, people weren't at all sure about what their attitude wildlife should be. Before I retired, I saw it turn one hundred and eighty degrees. As I said earlier, people who didn't really support the Refuge very much to begin with, actually began to support the Refuge and even once in a while, praise some of our efforts. That was very gratifying to me. Whenever there's a lot of poor people around, wildlife is the first thing that is going to suffer. And we probably need to keep that in mind for future times. As long as we are all pretty well fed, wildlife is going to do pretty well. But once it turns to the point where times are a little hard, we will start having problems again, I'm sure. That's my personal experience.

MR. FRENCH: We have looked at your career, and how pretty much, you have spent it on one piece of property; the changes and the things that you have seen. Before we conclude this interview, it there anything that you would care to add?

MR. MOBLEY: I don't know. I've already talked more than I have for a month! I probably better quit before I get my foot in my mouth!

MR. FRENCH: O.K. Well thank you Bill.