

INTERVIEW WITH RAY ST.ORES
BY DOROTHY NORTON, NOVEMBER 6, 2002
HUDSON, WISCONSIN (TAPE 2)

MS. NORTON: What was your most dangerous situation while you were working?

MR. ST.ORES: When I was in Lansing, Iowa I did a lot of Law Enforcement work, especially with trappers. I found out after I was there that there was a young man who had been there ahead of me, sometime before. As I recall he was either drowned by Indian trappers, or well, he died out there. He must have been killed out there on one of the sloughs. They caught him in the wintertime and shoved him under the ice. Those same Indians were trapping there when I was there. I was always very careful. I carried a [side] arm, which was supplied by the government in the event that I would need it. But I was always uneasy out there when I was in that Indian area because of what had happened before I got there. That was the scariest part. I was warned a couple of times, to "leave my traps alone!" Some were illegally set and I had to do something about it. The owners would come along and say, "Leave my g— d----- traps alone!" There was one in particular I remember where the guy had a mink in his. He [the mink] had gotten out of the water and was running away with the trap with the drag behind it. I killed it for him and put it back in the hole where it had come from. He didn't like that at all. Sometimes you don't get any thanks for when you think you're doing a good job for somebody. That's the only time I was really frightened, was down on the Lansing District when I was working with the Indians. They used to come down there every wintertime from up north, and trap. I had the same thing out at Waubay, but I didn't have any big concerns. Part of the Waubay Refuge was Indian Reservation; they were over there quiet often, so I had to be very careful. Other than that, at my age, there wasn't much that scared me...having been in the Army and all that.

MS. NORTON: What do you think was the most humorous experience you ever had?

MR. ST.ORES: You know, I was just thinking about that the other day. Now I can't remember what that funny thing was. At seventy-eight you can't remember everything!

MS. NORTON: What would you like to tell others about your career, and about the USFWS?

MR. ST. ORES: I think that it's a very worthwhile thing. You have to be sincerely interested in the resource and not in what it's going to do for you. It has to be a passion with you, to do something with the resource. The USFWS is a good place to do it. It may not be quite the organization that it was. It's getting a little bit more political. But it still is a good place to do something significant for the resource. Again, I say you really have to have the heart for it, and not expect anything. You have to be happy with what you've done rather than looking for the rewards from others.

MS. NORTON: What were some of the changes that you observed in the USFWS, like in personnel and the environment?

MR. ST. ORES: Well, one of the things I objected to most was that they would take Directors for USFWS from outside. That's the thing that I just thought was terrible. Of course I didn't like all the reorganizations, one after the other. Whenever there was a change in administration, you'd get reorganization. It was so disheartening. As a result of that there were people who should have been fired who got promoted. That's my opinion only! A lot of the people, who should have been promoted, didn't. They just kept working, and working hard at a job they wanted to do. Like I said, you have to want to do something for the thanks you get from doing it; not for the thanks or rewards that come from someone else. That's about all I can add on that.

MS. NORTON: What are your thoughts on the future? Where do you see the USFWS heading in the next decades?

MR. ST. ORES: Boy, that's a tough one. I really think that waterfowl was the thing that brought them about to start with. And I think that their future lies with waterfowl. They have got to keep pushing on all of the time. It's got to be waterfowl. It can't be anything else. There's been about of things like working on the Environmental Policy Act; well, that's fine because if some project was going to affect waterfowl then you could say that. If it wasn't too political they'd do something about it. But if it was, why, I remember one situation where orders came down from the President to the Secretary of the Interior that "This project is going to go through! There's a Congressman up in Michigan who's got to get reelected. And he can't get reelected unless this project goes through. Whatever you want to help allay the damage it's going to cause, you'll probably get, but this project is going to go through"!

MS. NORTON: Do you have any documents or photographs that you'd like to donate or share?

MR. ST. ORES: I have given most of them away to some of the people that I worked with. I remember when I went to Jim See's thing [funeral?] out at Waubay I took a picture along of the group that he belonged to. I asked if she had it. It was a nice picture. I had it all framed. She told me "No". And she was so happy to get it. And there was Jim, right in the middle of the things. All the habitat preservation crew who were working at the time were right there on the picture. I have a few other things downstairs. They don't mean a lot to me but....

MS. NORTON: If you should decide that there is something that you think might be meaningful to the Archives, just let me know.

MR. ST. ORES: Sure, I can do that.

MS. NORTON: Well, we're just about at the end now. Who else do you think we should interview?

MR. ST. ORES: Larry DeBates. He's out in Oregon.

MS. NORTON: Yes, you know his wife has cancer now.

MS. ST. ORES: Oh, does she?! Awww...that's a shame!

MS. NORTON: Was there anybody else that you can think of?

MR. ST. ORES: Not right off the top of me head. But, Larry was a good man. He always had the resource at heart. All of the people in that wetlands program were great people. They were totally committed to the waterfowl resources, and "To hell with the rewards" was their motto. There was a lot of them who became Regional Directors; Ken Black, another one out in Portland, Oregon.

MS. NORTON: There was Lynn Greenwalt.

MR. ST. ORES: He even ended up being the Director of USFWS as you remember.

MS. NORTON: Well, we'll try and get as many as we can get. And we're also trying to go by the older they are. We're trying to get them before something happens and we no longer have them. I want to thank you for your time Ray, and...

MR. ST. ORES: The pleasure is mine.

MS. NORTON: It is so nice to have Joan here with you too. We'll be sure that you get a copy of this when it's finished.