



The Oral History of Greg Brown

April 30, 2021

Interview conducted by Tom Worthington

Stillwater, MN

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Greg Brown

Date of Interview: April 30, 2021

Location of Interview: Stillwater, MN

Interviewer: Tom Worthington

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:

20 years with FWS, 12 years NRCS

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:

Slayton, MN (Soil Conservation Service), Soil Conservation Technician

Ivanhoe, MN (Soil Conservation Service), Soil Conservationist

Windom, MN (Soil Conservation Service), District Conservationist

Stillwater, MN (Soil Conservation Service), District Conservationist

Spirit Lake, IA (FWS/IPA w/ Iowa Natural History Foundation), Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Twin Cities Regional Office (FWS), Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Chief Partners for FW

Most Important Projects:

Regional Chief Partners for Fish and Wildlife

Duffey Marsh Restoration

Conservation Reserve Program, Wetland Reserve Program

Colleagues and Mentors:

Rick Schultz, Steve Kuffrin, Bob Misso, Dick Toltzman, Nita Fuller, Lance Kuester

Brief Summary of Interview:

Greg Brown was born and raised in Eau Claire, WI. He attended college at University of Wisconsin Eau Claire then Utah State University from which he graduated in 1974 with a BS in Forest Recreation. He worked for the Soil Conservation Service in Slayton, Ivanhoe, Windom, and Stillwater, Minnesota. He joined the USFWS in 1990 on a project in Spirit Lake, Iowa, then worked in the Twin Cities Regional Office (MN) in the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Branch. He developed policies and guidelines for implementing conservation practices contained in the 1985, 1990, 1996, 2002, and 2008 Farm Bills. He worked closely with NRCS and FmHA staff on Conservation Reserve Program, Swamp Buster, and Wetland Reserve Program elements. He became Regional Chief of the Partners Program in 2000, consolidating its form and function within the Region. Greg retired in 2010.

INTERVIEW

TOM WORTHINGTON: All right. I've started to record now. And okay, so today is April 30th, the year 2021. This is Tom Worthington, and I'm speaking today with Greg Brown. And I am speaking from St Louis Park, Minnesota. Greg, you are in Stillwater, Minnesota. Is that right?

GREG BROWN: That's correct. Okay. And Greg, you understand this is an oral history for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Oral History program, and that the transcription and the tape that we make may become public at some point in time. Not sure when, but after all, the transcriptions get reviewed and processed.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Okay. Start off with some questions. Greg, where were you born and what year?

GREG BROWN: I was born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in 1951.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you grow up in Eau Claire?

GREG BROWN: Yes, I grew up in Eau Claire. Went to grade school, high school in Eau Claire I left when I was 21 and went to Utah to finish my college education.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Where in Utah did you go?

GREG BROWN: Logan, Utah. Utah State University. Go, Aggies.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What what prompted you to head to Utah for school?

GREG BROWN: I went for the first two years of college in Eau Claire at the University of Wisconsin there for two years, and I knew I would have to transfer to another school because I was interested in Forestry, and they didn't offer a degree in the state of Wisconsin at that time. I knew I was going to go out of state. I looked at Michigan, I looked at Minnesota. I always wanted to go west. So, I looked at Montana, Colorado, Utah, and settled on Utah. They had a good forestry program out there. So that's where I wound up.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you know you wanted to study forestry from early on or what? What prompted you to pick that major?

GREG BROWN: I knew the arena that I wanted to get involved with was the out of doors type work. Environmental type work. Ever since I was a younger kid when I grew up in Eau Claire hunting and fishing and enjoying those outdoor activities. So that's the direction I headed.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did your dad take you hunting and fishing?

GREG BROWN: My father and I went fishing occasionally. He wasn't big into it, but we did go down to the local lakes and catch sunfish, pan fish, things of that nature.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What did your parents do?

GREG BROWN: My father was a machinist. He worked at a Uniroyal Tire plant in Eau Claire. It was in the 1950s, I believe is when he started working there. Prior to that, he had lived up in the Twin Cities, Minneapolis, Saint Paul area during World War Two. He was a machinist at the Army ammunition plant. I think it was in Arden Hills where that was located. And then they moved to Eau Claire after the war.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you have brothers and sisters?

GREG BROWN: I've got three siblings. I've got an older brother, an older sister and a younger brother. So, I'm kind of wedged in the middle.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Okay. One of the forgotten middle children. So, when you got to Logan, Utah, to finish up your college degree, did you have any particular classes or professors that you would say influenced you more than others?

GREG BROWN: Well, I certainly remember Doc Daniels, whose name was Ted Theodore Daniels. He was kind of the top dog in the forestry department. And he taught silviculture. It was said that he preferred to thin students than to thin trees down. He was a tough teacher, and it was a tough degree. Roy Moore was another fellow that worked there for a very long time already, and by the time I had arrived, they had a younger cadre of instructors as well that were up-and-comers and were very interesting people. I enjoyed the experience very much. We had a forestry camp in the summertime prior to starting my junior year. I had to go to Logan for, I believe it was six weeks to up into the mountains and had outdoor exercises, learning how to survive, things like that, and did tree measurements. Cruise timber, all the things that foresters do.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was the program silviculture oriented or conservation oriented? Or it was a mix?

GREG BROWN: It was more forest oriented. However, I graduated in 1974, and that's about the time multiple use became kind of a thing that resource management agencies were starting to get more involved in. They encouraged some of us. We were interested to get out of this super heavy-duty forestry and take some courses related to outdoor recreation. So, my degree and technically you want to look at it that way, was in forest recreation versus forest management, With the idea that this would lead to new and more job opportunities that were occurring at the time.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So, when you graduated in 74 in Forest Recreation, did you think about going on to graduate school or did you look for a job right away?

GREG BROWN: No, not at all. I went for a job right away. Actually, I wound up working for the USDA, Department of Agriculture. I was a conservation technician at Slayton, Minnesota.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you apply for a certificate with OPM, or how did you get that job? Do you remember?

GREG BROWN: Oh, what were those? S.F. 171s we all filled out back in the day. Yeah, you did, you know, indicate your interests and what have you. And I guess your names went into a big pool. They gave

a rating to you, and then every now and then you'd get a letter from some vague agency that you had not heard of, inquiring about your availability, and if you're interested in a position with them. And that's how they handled that.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So, soil conservation, was that like a GS 5 or 7 position or do you remember?

GREG BROWN: It was a GS 5 in 1974, in Slayton, Minnesota, a whopping \$8,055 a year. That's less than 4 bucks an hour. It was funny. I made more money when I worked summers at the Uniroyal Tire plant.

But it was a permanent. It was a permanent job. And you got your foot in the federal door. So, it was a good thing. So happened I stayed with them for 12 years.

TOM WORTHINGTON: In the same location or just.

GREG BROWN: Just one year in Slayton, and then they moved me over to Ivanhoe, Minnesota, on the Minnesota South Dakota border. We were there for one more year. And then after that, this was interesting. This is about 1976/77. The area conservationist calls me at home one evening and says, we'd like you to move to Windom, Minnesota, and be the district conservationist. I hadn't even applied for the job, didn't even know it was opening up. But, you know, back in that time, that's kind of how they move people around. They just say, hey, we'd like you to go here. And that means like you are going to go. There was not a lot of debate. Right. But anyway, it turned out great.

So, we wound up in in Windom, Minnesota, in 1977 and stayed there for seven years until 84.

TOM WORTHINGTON: As the district conservationist?

GREG BROWN: Yes. Yeah, GS 5 in Slayton, and GS 7 in Ivanhoe. GS 9 nine in Windom and eventually a GS 11 in Windom.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And what are the duties of the district conservationist?

GREG BROWN: In wintertime duties were working on farm conservation plans, meeting with farmers talking about their operation, how they might want to consider more Soil conserving friendly operations, to put it that way. In spring and summer and fall out in the field doing a lot of survey work, engineering type work, building terraces, grass waterways, farm ponds. We even we're doing quite a few manure confinement systems for livestock operations at the time.

Big things that we did it in Windom, was conservation tillage which was becoming the big thing. We kind of zeroed in on ridge till farming, which was a relatively new and unique concept as farming, and quite a few farmers in our area bought into it. We had a lot of very good times encouraging other people to give it a try.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was it a big office? How many people were in in Windom?

GREG BROWN: It was an office that was co-located with other federal agencies. The Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service. Federal crop insurance was in there. The county extension service

was in there, as well as the Soil Conservation Service and the Soil and Water Conservation District are on my staff. I had one soil conservation technician working with me and we also had a district secretary and a district employee in our office. So, I guess you could say we had four people that were focused on the soil conservation aspects of the job.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you know much about farming growing up in Eau Claire, or is this kind of learning on the job for you?

GREG BROWN: This was very much learning on the job. The only thing that really impressed me for a supervisor when I got to Slayton in 1974 is I knew how to use an Abney which is sort of a survey device, if you want to call it, is handheld. You use it to determine the height of trees and estimate board footage of lumber in such and such a tree at that point.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Were you aware of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at that time?

GREG BROWN: Not at that time. I was not. I became aware of them when I was in Windom.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Okay. And so, after you become the district conservationists in Windom, how long did you stay in Windom? Did you say seven years?

GREG BROWN: Seven years.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And so, in 84, about you moved on?

GREG BROWN: In 84, I transferred up here to Stillwater, Minnesota. Took the district conservationist job here.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was that a bigger office?

GREG BROWN: Not people wise, but it was a completely different outdoor experience, let's put it that way. I don't know. I came from a very rural environment. Everything was farming coming from Windom, Minnesota, and you come to Washington County and everything's pretty much urbanizing. At the time a lot of farmlands being converted into housing developments and things of that nature. So, it was just a whole different animal.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So, what were the typical jobs you might be doing in the Stillwater office? What were the big duties there?

GREG BROWN: A lot more erosion control practices primarily associated with developments, things like that. Yes, we still have farming then and we still have farming now. But it's nothing like you see in southern Minnesota, where it's a lot of times its fence row to fence row farming.

TOM WORTHINGTON: The farm bill been implemented at that point.

GREG BROWN: No, the 1985 farm bill was passed in December of 1985. I actually left the Soil Conservation Service in July of 1986. So, I never got involved with the aspects of the 85 Farm bill when I worked with the Soil Conservation. It came later when I worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Okay. So, if I could go back, what prompted your move to Stillwater from Windom? Was it a promotion or just wanted a change bigger city?

GREG BROWN: I wanted to change. It was a lateral transfer. So, there was no promotion involved. It was the GS 11 slot.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you still have to apply for it or was it one of those transfers?

GREG BROWN: You had to apply for it. By that time, they had kind of gotten rid of that old way of working.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Okay. And when you left in July 1986, what were those reasons and where did you go?

GREG BROWN: I was ready for a big change, and I just thought I would like to get away from government. And I went to work selling real estate. How was that for a change!

TOM WORTHINGTON: That's a big change. But you probably had gotten quite a lot of real estate experience working with Department of Agriculture, understanding land transfers and.

GREG BROWN: Well, some of that's true. But this was a whole new animal. It was fun learning it, but not so much fun implementing it.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you have to go to back to school to get credentialed?

GREG BROWN: Yeah, but not heavy-duty school. I mean, it was like a 40-hour course that you would do in the evenings. Over a two-week period of time.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you work for yourself or work for real estate firm?

GREG BROWN: I worked for a broker. A real estate firm. Selling houses, primarily residential. Some farmlands. A little bit of commercial here and there, but primarily residential sales.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Well, that must have been a risky move to go out on leaving a comfortable government job. And the benefits?

GREG BROWN: Well, it was, but and in the end, everything turned out good.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So how many years did you sell real estate, then?

GREG BROWN: Oh, about three and a half.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And that takes us up to the late 1980s? Where does that put you?

GREG BROWN: Walking down the hallways of the regional office at Fort Snelling of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. I was looking to apply for a job in the realty program at the regional office. They had

advertised. I picked it up because of my prior government experience. I was eligible to apply as former federal employee, I guess. I had my application in hand, and I thought I would hand deliver it up there. So here I am, on the sixth floor of the building and I run into this guy, Dick Toltzman.

I knew Dick from Windom. That's how I got to know something about the Fish and Wildlife Service. I believe at the time Dick was the manager at the Benson Wetland Management District. He actually encouraged me to apply working with the Fish and Wildlife back in the day. But I did not at that time. So, I happened to run into him in the hallway and he says, Greg Brown, what the hell are you doing up here? And I told him I was delivering this application for a job, and he said, "What have you been doing?" And I describe my history since I left Windom and the real estate experience. He says come on I want to talk to you about a job.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So, he pulls you into his office and he talks about Private Lands?

GREG BROWN: And he did. He pulled me into the office, wanted to know more about what I've been doing. I remember he took me down to meet John Eadie, and he brought me down to meet Rick Shultz. And they were in the process of negotiating a position with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. An IPA (Interagency Personal Act) assignment. So that's what he had his eye on for me because it involved working with private landowners, my knowledge and background of having worked with farmers in southwest Minnesota, the real estate experience so I could know my way around real estate.

It was a new position they were in the process of creating. I was eventually hired for it in the fall of 1990. The job was located in Spirit Lake, Iowa.

TOM WORTHINGTON: I remember that. I remember when that happened. I was in the regional office, in visitor services. And I remember when the partnership program was getting all stood up and when Bob Lang first came and then Rick Shultz taking over.

GREG BROWN: But it was a partnership between the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Iowa Heritage Foundation, the Dickinson County Soil and Water Conservation District and other NGO type groups to the Iowa DNR. There were a lot of players that were involved in this. And that's the position that I was put in.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was that a GS 11 job?

GREG BROWN: Yes, it was a GS 11 position, Fish and Wildlife biologist. The paperwork was handled out of the Union Slough Refuge (IA).

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you report to Union Slough Refuge, or did you report to Rick Shultz? Do you remember?

GREG BROWN: I reported to Union Slough, but the person I had the most contact with worked with the Iowa Heritage Foundation, a fellow by the name of Duane Sands. I would talk to Rick Schultz occasionally, when I came up to the Regional Office for some meetings now and then. That kind of interaction.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was the goal to get wetland restorations done on private lands? What was your assignment?

GREG BROWN: The goal of the project was the Clean Water Alliance with the Iowa Great Lakes. That's what it was called. The concept was to work with private landowners in the watershed of the Iowa Great Lakes to do habitat restoration that would benefit the quality of the water that was entering into the Iowa Great Lakes. And at the same time providing habitat for fish and wildlife. My job was unique, and I was to meet with landowners who actually lived on the Iowa Great Lakes, that had homes there, whether year-round, or summer homes, and encourage them to reach into their pocketbooks and support this effort so that more restoration work could be done and preserve the quality of the lakes. Improve the quality of their real estate investment and so on and so forth. That was the theory. It never materialized.

I had a handler; I can't think of a better word than that. I don't think I ever met that gentleman. In fact, I'm sure I did not, because by the time I arrived, he had already headed south for the winter. I believe he wintered in Arizona, and he and I were supposed to work closely together when he returned in the spring. And he would be my contact would introduce me to people who lived in the area, make the introductions, give me the opportunity to do the spiel, if you will, and attend gatherings and what have you, and just encourage their participation in these efforts. But he never came back from Arizona. He became involved in the purchase of savings and loans at the time. Remember the big fiasco with savings and loans all going under? Now, he got involved with purchasing savings and loans that were going under. So, he was wrapped up in that, as I understand it. That's what was explained to me at the time. He didn't come back. That kind of left me high and dry. In August of 1991, we pulled the plug on that project, and I moved back up to the regional office, and was under Rick Schultz's supervision.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you have to buy and sell a house?

GREG BROWN: No, I rented an apartment down in the Spirit Lake area. I would go down on Sunday night and come home on Friday afternoons. Back to Stillwater.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Well, that must have been a bit discouraging. Did you feel discouraged at that time or regretted your decision?

GREG BROWN: Well, I was certainly kind of wondering what the hell's going to happen to me now. I did not know what would become of my position if I would just, you know, get a pat on the back and thank you and see around or if they would actually keep me around. But they did keep me around. And I started working primarily on the Farmer's Home easement program at that time and working directly with Rick Schultz in the in the Partners Program.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And were you still a GS 11 at that point or did you get a promotion?

GREG BROWN: Yeah, I was initially when I started there, I was just an 11 and somewhere in between 1990 and 2000, I became a 12.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Describe some of those duties working in the Farmers Home Program, Farmer's Home easement program. What was the main task there?

GREG BROWN: Oh, boy. There were so many aspects to it. First of all, we'd get a list of properties from the Farmers Home Administration that had been foreclosed upon. And there were some Executive Orders that were signed by President Carter. I remember the numbers because we quoted them a lot. Executive Order 11988 and 11990, one was the protection of flood plains, and the other was the protection of wetlands. Any government owned property, before it could be sold or divested to the public, had to be inventoried for important natural resources that would benefit migratory waterfowl, endangered species, whatever the issue might be. So, when these farms were foreclosed on as a result of the farm crises of the 1980s, there was an agreement between Farmers Home Administration and the Fish and Wildlife Service that we would inventory these properties. We would go out and do an inventory of these properties that had come into possession of the Farmers Home Administration, do it at the foreclosure and identify any wetlands or habitat for endangered species that should be protected. And then easements would be placed on them. We worked back and forth with the Farmer's Home Administration to select areas that could be protected. And then, of course, cataloging all of that information and getting it back out to the refuge that would be put in charge of managing that easement into the future.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Were these inventories done on the ground by you or by other Fish and Wildlife staff?

GREG BROWN: They were done on the ground by other staff. And then sent back to me.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Okay. And then if you did identify some resource value or some ecological values on some of these properties, what would then happen?

GREG BROWN: Well, then we would negotiate back and forth a little bit with the Farmers Home Administration about where to draw the lines and how to protect these areas on the deed. You know, to still have a saleable piece of property to the public. In some instances, the entire farm was encumbered with an easement, and you can transfer it to the Fish and Wildlife Service in fee title if that's what we desired and could agree to. So, I mean, there was a lot of moving parts going on there.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Were you working with multiple FHMA officers or just with the state office in these negotiations?

Well, we have one main contact at the Farmers Home in each of the states in Region three.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did they have kind of different philosophies in each state office or was it consistent?

GREG BROWN: Some were very aggressive in protecting these resources and some were very hesitant to go down that road at all. Some states we had a lot of I guess you could say a lot of cooperation in the effort. And from a couple of states, we received a lot of pushback.

TOM WORTHINGTON: How would you describe Minnesota? Was it a cooperative state or a pushback state?

GREG BROWN: Yes, Minnesota was a very cooperative state. There were a handful of very cooperative states.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What would be an uncooperative state? Possibly Ohio?

GREG BROWN: This might be one of those things you regret saying.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Well, I don't know. It's I think it just shows some of the challenges that that we have.

GREG BROWN: I think the numbers probably speak for themselves. We have some states that have very few easements. Ohio being one of them. And then a couple of other states that have very few easements. But in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, we have a lot of easements and a lot of lands that have come to us.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What was the reception like with our Fish and Wildlife field staff when they were given these assignments to inventory properties? What was the reaction that you got and how cooperative were they?

GREG BROWN: Well, it varied between the Wetland Management Districts, which were given the territory, which always coincided, of course, with their WMD duties. But for them it was no big deal. It was, hey, we do this all the time. Thank you. We appreciate it. We like to have more land, you know, add to our inventory at the office. In Minnesota where you have a lot of the wetland management districts, it was very well-received. And some of the other states where we have fewer easements, where the refuges were not used to working outside of the boundaries it was a harder sell, but I mean, they accepted the fact that this was their assignment. They had to perform it. But they grumbled a little bit about it.

I can understand, particularly when they were given large swaths of the state that they had to be responsible for the easements within that area. And it's a 100-mile drive from the refuge office to go out there and you know, take a look at it, see what's going on, check it out and make sure the habitats are being protected in the proper way. And it didn't come with a lot of money to help them do it. They're always hard pressed for money anyway. So, this certainly didn't make them smile.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember who else was working in the partnership program with you there in the Fort Snelling Regional Office?

GREG BROWN: I worked with Rick Shultz. I remember shortly after I started working there, Dan Stinnett moved up from Oklahoma to become Rick's primary assistant to work and was working in the program. Joe Artmann was working in the program, Steve Kuffrin was there. Bonnie Podloger was the secretary.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So, you worked on the Farmer's home program for a number of years. What came next?

GREG BROWN: Well, Swampbuster. The 1985 Farm Bill changed a lot of things on the ground out in the rural countryside. It gave us the Conservation Reserve Program, CRP, which was a great program for wetland restoration. Farmers were given the opportunity by the USDA to retire some marginal crop land for ten years for an annual payment. Fish and Wildlife could come in behind that and say, well, as long as you're retiring the land for ten years anyway, how about if we restore these wetlands out here for you? Break [drainage]tiles, plug a ditch, you can return it to what it was before after the ten years if you want to, or you can leave it there, whichever you desire. So that was our ten-year agreement.

I can't remember if I answered your question. I got off on a tangent.

TOM WORTHINGTON: You implemented the FHMA easements and then Swamp Buster and the CRP programs. Those were part of the 1985 Farm bill?

GREG BROWN: Right. The Swamp Buster was part of the 85 Farm Bill too. It said to farmers, essentially that if you drain wetlands or otherwise destroy habitat on your land, you would be ineligible for farm bill benefits, payments, what have you. The Soil Conservation Service was in charge of mapping all of the farmlands and identifying wetlands, and they had different categories. They had prior converted wetlands that were already drained, and then they had farmed wetlands, and then they had natural occurring wetlands. And they were told to coordinate, consult, and concur with the Fish and Wildlife Service on all of these determinations that were being made out there. For our Private Lands staff who worked in the field, this was a major task for them, working hand in hand with soil conservation service people to identify these wetlands. And it was very important work because a lot of times the farmers livelihood depended on how many wetlands, you're going to map out now or in the future on his property. A lot of wetlands were protected through the Swamp Buster program and still are being protected.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember at this point in the mid-nineties, were you paid out of refuge operating funds or was there a separate budget sub-activity for the partners program at that time? Do you remember that kind of detail?

GREG BROWN: I remember we had 1121 money, which I believe came under the Ecological Services Spending Authority.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember at what point in the nineties that came about?

GREG BROWN: No, I really don't.

TOM WORTHINGTON: In Region 3 this was all managed by the refuge program. Were you aware back then of how other regions were implementing the farm bill, if at all?

GREG BROWN: Oh, I know it was in refuges of course in region three and I knew what was in refuges in Region six at the time. Back in the nineties I was not far enough up the private lands ladder to really get involved with all of that. I didn't have the opportunity to pay attention to it. I was pretty much focused on the FHMA stuff and the swamp buster and CRP wetland restoration and then WRP came along in 1990.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So, what came next in your career, what was the next position that you held?

GREG BROWN: I was in the private lands program for my entire 20-year career with the Fish and Wildlife Service. And the next big thing that came down the road was the 1990 Farm Bill. That gave the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), formerly called the Soil Conservation Service, gave them the Wetlands Reserve Program, which was an easement program. It was a fabulous program and gave them a lot of money. The NRCS, not having ever been in the position of acquiring and managing land, were a little bit lost for a while. There was a big hole there that Fish and Wildlife Service was able to fill early. I think we taught them a lot of things about acquiring property and managing easements.

And I remember we did easement enforcement training for them, things of that nature; recording easements, courthouse work, all of the things that go into a real estate transaction. I think that made us feel pretty good about cooperation between with the NRCS and us and helping them get that program off the ground. It was a big important program.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you help with the training of their staff?

GREG BROWN: Yes. And our Realty Office as well, the folks in our realty office were very good about it. Bill Swanson was the realty chief at the time, and he was fully on board. It was great. I remember one project in Wisconsin. We call it the Duffy Marsh. There's actually a Duffy Marsh Waterfowl Production Area right adjacent to the Duffy Marsh itself. That was over a thousand-acre project that the NRCS got involved with early on in the program and Louise Gerber, do you remember Louise Gerber who worked in Realty. She was put in charge of helping the Wisconsin NRCS, a state office to get this project carried through to fruition. I remember her working closely with several of the people down in the Madison Office of the NRCS. And I remember being out on the Duffy Marsh helping with the survey. Showing folks, we need to know this and that corner.

Of course, the NRCS was very capable of handling the survey work, marking corners and such, but it was the Realty aspects of it that they needed assistance. It was it was a gratifying experience. I think we protected not only that, but all across the states, lots, and lots of land. But yeah, that was one of the first ones.

TOM WORTHINGTON: I think I remember touring that project, it was that not far from Horicon Refuge. I think I made a visit over there during one of the inspections at Horicon. There was an unusual crop that was grown over there. Mint?

GREG BROWN: Mint. Yes, mint. Old farmers told us stories of how they used to come up from Chicago with tanker cars and buy the mint. Take it back there and make Wrigley Spearmint gum.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Wow. Interesting. Well, that must have been very satisfying work, given your NRCS background, dealing with farmers and your interest in conservation kind of coming together.

GREG BROWN: It was very, very happy times.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember any particular training that you got from the Fish and Wildlife Service to help with this, or were you learning as you went? Any formal training on habitat evaluations or negotiations, even?

GREG BROWN: No, I don't recall that. I think that's what made this job so much fun because the program was new. Nobody knew where it was going. We didn't have any rulebook to play by it. In many respects, we were flying by the seat of our pants. That was fun.

TOM WORTHINGTON: I remember that you kind of wrote the rule book as you went. I remember those binders, the "Farm Bill Update" binders you prepared. You had these memoranda and every couple of weeks or every other week, there'd be a new one that came out.

GREG BROWN: They were flying off the press. That's true. I think the next big thing that happened to me was I became a Regional Chief of the Partners program, and I think it was 2000.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was that after Rick Schultz left?

GREG BROWN: It was after Rick left and it was after the Dan Stinnett left because Dan became the chief after Rick went over to manage the Minnesota Valley Refuge.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Dan left to become kind of an ecosystem person. And the new GARD/PARD (Geographic Assistant Regional Director/Program Assistant Regional Director). Do you remember that?

GREG BROWN: Yes, I do. And that's correct. He did go over to the Ecological Services office and became an Ecosystems Area Special Assistant, or something like that. I don't know what they call them at the time. Yeah.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So that left the opening and then you applied and became the Chief of the Partners Branch. And you think that was about 1990?

GREG BROWN: Yeah, I'm pretty sure. No, not 90. I'm sorry. Yeah, 2000. 2000. That makes more sense.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Yes, because that's about when the "ecosystem approach" was trying to be implemented. We lumped the Programs under the geographic area ARDs and the program area was there for budget and policy formulation. In 2000 we were still over at Fort Snelling. And you're right, the Chief for the Partners program, was part of our (Refuge Program) staff, do you remember who, who was on the Partners staff then?

GREG BROWN: We still had Joe Artmann, Steve Kuffrin, I think Bonnie Podlogar was a secretary by that time but then had just gone over to refuges. Marjorie Maladonado was a secretary that provided us assistance as needed. And at some point, Dan Sobieck came into the picture, but it wasn't quite in 2000. It might have been a couple of years after that.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And were the duties still implementing all these different program elements or had it changed by then?

GREG BROWN: Um, yeah, some things started to change over time. I remember I mentioned the 85 Farm bill as Swamp Buster. I said that the Service had to coordinate, consult and concur. We did such a good job that the powers that be in the legislative body of the United States decided that it would pare that down a little bit. They would just say, okay, you need to coordinate and consult. And finally, it was just coordinate. And then after that, it was, well, you don't even have to talk to them anymore. The NRCS was telling the Service, they didn't need to have us holding their hand, as they put it. We need to learn to ride our own bicycle.

TOM WORTHINGTON: As the chief of the Partners Program, were you working with the Headquarters staff in D.C. on implementing private lands?

GREG BROWN: Oh, yeah. That came with the territory. In fact, I've been working with them even before that. Implementing the Farmers Home Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program. So, I made numerous trips to Washington. Before I became a Branch Chief.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Who. Who did you work with? Do you remember who in headquarters you were working with?

GREG BROWN: Oh, Charlie Rewah, Martha Nayley, and Bob Misso, and Dallas Minar.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And did you work with other regional offices as well?

GREG BROWN: Well, yeah. Once you get up there, then you start talking to the regional Coordinators from the other region. We'd have meetings once or twice a year where everybody got together as far as the regional Coordinators go and I got to know all of those people.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you cooperate with other regions or was it just more information sharing? Did you any share any projects with them?

GREG BROWN: It was more a matter of sharing information with one another. This is the way we do it. You might want to consider it. That's just what we did and worked out well. You might want to consider that those kinds of things. But as far as cross regional projects, no. And we had some joint meetings with our entire partners program staff members with Region 6.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Budget negotiations. I presume you were involved in the allocation of the budgets nationwide and then as the allocations were sent to the field. Can you talk a little bit about how the budget splits were being made from headquarters to the regions?

GREG BROWN: Well, let's see. We had (sub activity) 1121 monies. Some of it was designated as TA (technical assistance) and some was considered HR money or habitat restoration. I honestly don't recall if it came down with those TA and HR already attached to them or if we added them once it got to the region. But initially, when we started out the program, we had a policy that 70% of the money we received would go for habitat restoration. And then only 30% would go for technical assistance. But as the program grew and got bigger and more people were added to staff, it was harder and harder to maintain a 70:30 split. So, it gradually became 50:50 and probably 30:70 now. Things have changed over time.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was there competition between the regions for the funding?

GREG BROWN: Very much so. It was all based on production or restoration numbers. What have you. And some people became very creative with their accomplishment numbers. We had a lot of bickering back and forth between ourselves. They finally came up with some new formula for divvying up the money that everybody agreed to. I remember that meeting was over at Minnesota Valley Refuge Conference Room, and everybody was there from all of the regions, the Regional coordinators, their ARDs, and the people from the Washington office and we hammered out a new formula which everybody agreed on and some smiled and some didn't, and some were kind of neutral.

But the other programs in other parts of the country, I mean, they grew too. They were late to the game. Let's see, Regions 3, 4 and 6 were well in front of everybody. And the other regions finally picked up speed and they started doing very good things, to be frank about it. And it's kind of hard to keep holding them back. So, they wanted a little bigger piece of the pie. So that's what happened.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember the reporting database that was used to report accomplishments?

GREG BROWN: Yes, we called it “Habits”, habitat accomplishment reporting systems, something of that nature. And that was the basis of the numbers that were put into the formula for the allocation.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What would you gauge the attitude of the field, the refuge field staff or the other program field staff towards the partners program when you were chief, was it an accepted program by then or was there still resistance in some pockets?

GREG BROWN: By that time, let's see, by the year 2000 anywhere. I think it was very well accepted by everybody in the field. In fact, everybody wanted to have a private lands biologist on their staff at that point. I think we had around 50 people working in the program region wide at that point. You know, we were kind of tapped out on salary money and we couldn't really hire any more people. Every ES Office, every refuge wanted a private lands biologist. So, you know that they liked it. They saw the value in it. So, it became very well accepted and very popular. That's my opinion!

TOM WORTHINGTON: What were some of the challenges you faced as the chief of the program? Did you have any hiring challenges or issues with management?

GREG BROWN: I think some of the big challenges that came with the program are as the program grew and got bigger and as far as allocations from Washington increased, we became more visible. And so, we kind of drew a target on our backs and we got involved in things that we needed to be involved in that we hadn't been involved in up to that point. I'm thinking about historical preservation, NEPA compliance, the whole raft of checklist items that you need to go through when you do a project. Contracting became more difficult as we kept getting bigger. We used to just send money to a field station, and they'd write checks to a contractor when they finished doing some restoration work. I mean that that's all gone by the wayside now. So, things are a lot more difficult to get done. We used to be able to turn on a dime and now you need a \$20 bill.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And I remember there was one element of the funding that was granted to us as matching dollars for other conservation efforts, something that Steve Kuffrin worked on particularly well. Do you remember what that was called?

GREG BROWN: That was Challenge Cost share.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Yes. Talk a little bit about that.

GREG BROWN: Well, that was refuge money (sub activity 1261). I mean, right from the get-go. And Steve was in charge of the challenge cost share program, and it was an annual appropriation of funding that was available to refuges. We'd submit projects that they wanted to carry out either on the Refuge or off the Refuge. So, a lot of times they were visitor service type projects.

And they would submit those, and we'd get this big list of projects and had to review them and select the ones that we felt had the most merit or add funds to the refuge so they could carry them out accordingly.

TOM WORTHINGTON: That's right. That was refuge funding. I remember And Steve was always provided a great list that had amazing matches. If I recall, it was like a 3 to 1 or a 4 to 1 match of partner funding. that now. How many years were you the Chief of Partners program?

GREG BROWN: I believe ten years. Yes. From 2000 to when I retired in 2010, January 1st.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you have State Coordinators in 2000? or did you hire the state coordinators as the states increased their activities?

GREG BROWN: I'd have to go back. Just go back a ways. When the private lands program started, when we needed people in the States. And this was actually before I showed up on the scene in 1990. Lance Kuester, who was the gopher choker? What did they call those guys?

TOM WORTHINGTON: Animal control. Animal control staff.

GREG BROWN: Well, that's when animal control was moved over [from FWS] to USDA. I think our people involved in animal control were given the option of staying with the Fish and Wildlife Service or moving over to USDA. Those who stayed with the Service, I believe, included Lance Kuester and Eldon McClaury in Wisconsin, and Len Schulman in Michigan. I think the others went to USDA. I'm not 100% sure of that, but I know these three guys stayed with the Service and they became by default the state coordinators for the Partners program. Lance was in Minnesota, I think. And it was in Duluth, then they moved the office to Saint Cloud, Minnesota. Eldon would have been in Wisconsin. And Len in Michigan. They were the state coordinators pretty early on. We didn't have anybody in Iowa at that point. Because I know Lance did both Minnesota and Iowa. I think I remember that Jim Munson was the first state coordinator that was hired for Iowa

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you hire him?

GREG BROWN: No, I think Rick Schutz did. And then the other four states like Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, the state coordinators were someone who worked for the field supervisor at the Ecological Services Field Offices state office. That's how it started. Let's put it that way. And over time, that evolved. After I became the regional coordinator is when we decided that it would make more sense if... Well, let me see.

Let me back up a bit here. We had 8 state coordinators supervised by six different people. In Refuges, a Refuge Supervisor supervised the Partners State Coordinators in the northern states [Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin], a different Refuge Supervisor supervised the State staff in southern states of the Region. And the Partners staff in Illinois, Missouri, Ohio and Indiana were supervised by staff in the Ecological Services Office. I was the chief for the private lands program, but I didn't supervise any of the state coordinators.

So, we approached the refuge ARD (Assistant Regional Director) Nita Fuller, we approached Charlie Wooley who was the ARD for Ecological Services at the time and laid out the idea that we wanted to make all of these state coordinators, Project Leaders in their own right, and have them all supervised by the regional Partners Coordinator.

So, we did that.

TOM WORTHINGTON: That was under your watch that all the state coordinators came under the one partner's branch? You were Regional Partners Coordinator when those state coordinators shifted their supervisors, you became their supervisor. That happened under your watch.

GREG BROWN: That's correct.

TOM WORTHINGTON: That must have been a very political move, a difficult one to get agreement on. Or was it?

GREG BROWN: I didn't think it was that hard. I must be a fabulous negotiator. You can delete that when you're done.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Well, I think. I think that was that was obvious by the results.

So, you have this program now with each eight-state coordinator reporting to you. That must have been much easier for those state coordinators to get streamlined policy and allocate their budgets. It seems like it must have been easy all around.

GREG BROWN: That's what the selling point was. Yeah. That and the fact that the state coordinators, any one of the eight, they worked very closely with their counterparts at state DNR offices, the State NRCS offices and with the NGOs in their states. They were the people that were front and center going to the whole to work with our partners of government partners and NGO partners on private lands. You didn't want to have a person that had to say, well wait, I got to go back to my office and talk to my boss before I can say yes or no to this. We wanted to give them the authority and with that the status, if you will, that they were a project coordinator, just like a refuge project leader or an ES office project leader.

So that sold well.

TOM WORTHINGTON: You retired in 2010. What did you feel? It was just time to leave the service. You looked at the finances and thought it was a comfortable time, or was there any particular reason why you retired?

GREG BROWN: No, no overwhelming or overriding reason. It seemed like a good time. Nita Fuller had just retired, and Rick Schultz was coming in as the new ARD, I just thought it was a good time for a change. I thought, Well, why not? The numbers worked.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Looking back, are there any particular highlights that you want to mention that we haven't already talked about?

GREG BROWN: Well, one highlight for me since I, I never really worked in the field with the Private lands program. I was always the office guy was the Duffy Marsh that we talked about earlier. I felt really good about that.

I felt really good about the money that we brought in to Region 3 from the NRCS, a WRP program, Bob Misso, who used to work in the partnership Program for Fish and Wildlife in HQ, had moved over and was in charge of the WRP program in Washington for the NRCS. He always managed to keep some money in the bottom drawer of his desk, and Bob and I had a very good relationship. So, he would call

me sometimes and ask if I had anything I could burn up some money on, or I could call him and ask if he had anything extra because we had a really good project ready to go. So yeah, a lot of the WRP easements now are even managed by the Fish and Wildlife service. That was another big thing we were able to do we. Built relationships with the NRCS State offices that were in charge of monitoring and managing the instruments that were in the WRP program. And if they had some that were of particular interest or value to the service, we offered to do that for them. So, we developed an administrative transfer jurisdiction document where, yes, they still were the owner, if you want to call it, of the easement, that Fish and Wildlife would be responsible for the management and upkeep and what have you with the easement.

So that was a big factor. In many of those easement cases the underlying fee title was bought out by an NGO and then they sold it to the Fish and Wildlife Service. If I'm not mistaken, I think Glacial Ridge Refuge is built on top of WRP easements. Is that correct?

TOM WORTHINGTON: I think that is correct, yes. In fact, there are several other refuges that have large land acquisitions that had initial easements underlying. We may have purchased the remainder of the value of the easement to fee title that was called a piggyback, right?

GREG BROWN: Yeah. I remember making a number of trips up to the Glacial Ridge Refuge (MN) with the WRP people from Washington because that was a huge investment on NRCS' part with the easement areas that were put under at that area there.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And that may have been one of the only refuges established under that new administration. I believe at the time 2001, 2002

GREG BROWN: Was that under President Bush?

TOM WORTHINGTON: Yes, that was President Bush and Gale Norton. Secretary Norton. There was a new crowd in D.C. that was very hesitant to approve refuge expansions at the time, but that [Glacial Ridge] was a very popular project with everybody.

GREG BROWN: One thing I remember too, was a meeting back in the nineties that must have occurred somewhere around 94, 95, 96, because Molly Beattie was our director. And Paul Johnson was the chief of the NRCS. We had a meeting in Washington to work out rules and regs for publication relative to the WRP program.

Fish and Wildlife was cooperating with NRCS to develop those rules, so there was a group of regional coordinators and NRCS people all working together, and we were addressed by Molly and Paul. They were up there at the podium together. You know, it was just very gratifying to see that the service and the NRCS were working together in partnership like that. And I don't know if it's happened again since, but we lost Molly in 1996. I just read where Paul Johnson passed away this February (2021).

Those were two fabulous people. They didn't spend too many years being the heads of their agencies. But when they were together and the time that they did spend there, they did a lot of good for conservation.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Yes, you're right. And you got to witness that. That's great. Anything else you want to talk about, Greg?

No, not at this time.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Well, we've been going in about an hour and 15 minutes, and this has been a really, really good interview. I appreciate that you've got a great memory of the details of the program. I'll stop recording right now.