



The Oral History of Steve Rideout

May 7, 2018

Interview conducted by Libby Herland
Lincoln City, OR

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Stephen G. Rideout

Date of Interview: May 7, 2018

Location of Interview: Chinook Winds Casino, Lincoln City, OR

Interviewer: Libby Herland

Approximate years worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: 1977- 2005; 28 years of service

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: In Region 5 - Federal Aid, Connecticut River Coordinator, Fisheries supervisor, southern zone; Headquarters - Fisheries Assistance, National Ecosystem Approach Coordinator; Region 7 ARD for Fisheries and Federal Aid; Conte Anadromous Fish Research Laboratory in Turners Falls, MA (U.S. Geological Survey)

Most Important Projects: Salmon restoration including fish ladder construction, initiation of fish counts, shad passage, and construction of an adult holding facility; Appropriations Committee detail; ecosystems approach implementation at the national level; supporting anadromous fish research

Colleagues and Mentors: Cheney Dodge (Mass Wildlife); George Pushee; Ben Rizzo; Congressman Silvio O. Conte; Dave Goldwithe; John Rogers; Bill Palmisano (US Geological Survey)

Brief Summary of Interview: Steve grew up in Maine, and after the Service and graduate school at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, he was hired by Mass Fish and Wildlife in 1974 and did fisheries work in the Quabbin Reservoir. He was hired into the US Fish and Wildlife Service by George Pushee, working in Federal Aid at a time when they administered the Endangered Species Program. As the Connecticut River Coordinator for almost ten years, Steve worked with New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut on the restoration of Atlantic salmon in the Connecticut River including overseeing the construction of fish ladders. He also worked with engineers to design modifications to existing fish ladders that would allow the passage of shad on the Connecticut River. As a participant in the Upper Level Management Development Program, he had a nine-month assignment to the Appropriations Committee, where he worked with Congressman Silvio O. Conte and his staff to appropriate funds for fish hatchery or other fish related projects in the Connecticut River watershed. Steve wrote the first draft of legislation creating what ultimately came to be known as the Conte Fish and Wildlife Refuge while on his Capitol Hill assignment. Steve served as the supervisor in Region 5 of fish hatcheries and fisheries assistance offices in the southern part of the region. While there, he served on a national fisheries program review panel. Steve transferred to Region 7 to be the

Assistant Regional Director (ARD) for Fisheries at a time when Geographic (GARD) and Programmatic (PARD) positions were being developed. He then went to Washington to help implement the new ecosystem approach as the first national ecosystems approach coordinator and oversaw the national evaluation of the program by a contractor. After a brief stint back in the Regional Office in Hadley, MA, Steve left the FWS and joined the U.S. Geological Survey as the director of the Conte Anadromous Fish Laboratory in Turners Falls, MA. He worked there for six years before he retired in 2005.

INTERVIEW

LIBBY: Hi, this is Libby Herland. I'm a member of the Fish and Wildlife Service Heritage Committee - the retiree representative from Region 5. I am here today with Steve Rideout who is former Fish and Wildlife Service retiree and also a retiree from the U.S. Geological Survey. It's Monday, May 7, 2018. We are on the Pacific Ocean at the Chinook Winds Casino in Lincoln City, Oregon. Hi Steve!

STEVE: Hi!

LIBBY: Good to see you again.

STEVE: Same here.

LIBBY: Thanks for doing this oral history with us. Just want to start with you telling us a little bit about yourself like where are you from and some of your early influences.

STEVE: I am originally from Maine, so I am a Maniac through and through in a lot of ways. Grew up in northern Maine, sort of rural Maine. Went to high school – graduated from Lee Academy, a small private school north of Bangor. I wanted to go to the University of Maine and I really wanted to get into fisheries. My way into fisheries was through wildlife management because that avoided taking a foreign language in the liberal arts or liberal science program. I was in ROTC so as soon as I graduated, I was right into the Service. I did two years, including a year in Viet Nam.

LIBBY: Was that the Army?

STEVE: Yep. Came back, and my brother-in-law at the time – I was married and had a son while I was in the Service – my brother-in-law was going to graduate school at UMASS. He encouraged me to talk to professors there and see if I could get into graduate school which my grades didn't warrant but the military service was a key factor in them saying "give it a try, throw a full course load at you, if you cut it, fine, and if you don't, sayonara". So, I decided I better make it work this time. I did, got my masters in fisheries there and ended up getting a job after graduate school with Mass Fish and Wildlife. I worked for about three-plus years, I started with them in 1974, and in 1977 - I was always interested in trying to connect with the Fish and Wildlife Service – a position became open in the Federal Aid program administering the Anadromous Fish Conservation Act grants program, which had been vacated by Larry Stolte, because Larry had taken on the job of being the New England Atlantic Salmon Coordinator for the restoration of Atlantic salmon. By that point, the Connecticut River, Merrimack River, all the rivers in Maine were involved in that program. My first job was actually with George Pushee, but the key guy that helped me out – facilitate in a way – was Dr. Al Eipper. I don't know if you know of him or not. He was, in fact he worked for Dave Riley. Dave Riley can tell you about Al. I called him Uncle Al because he was very well known as a fisheries professor, had been at a coop unit out in New York for many years, written a lot of scientific publications. One of those rare individuals that I can probably count on one hand that you just say "gentleman". It's a perfect description for him.

LIBBY: Now, who did Dr. Eipper work for?

STEVE: He worked for Dave Riley but in the hydropower program under Ecological Services. The old OBS program, I don't know if you remember that? Office of Biological Services. Actually, I think Lynn Greenwalt was the one that kind of got that started. It was science but not actually in the research program and it was sort of to develop research and science initiatives that directly spoke to issues in Ecological Services and particularly in the power program. He – Al – was in that. Turns out he lived a mile up the road from where I did, so we ended up being commuting folks.

LIBBY: Before we go into Fish and Wildlife Service, let's just go back a little bit. Is there anybody in particular from when you were a child or any experiences you had as a child that or with Mass Wildlife that were informative?

STEVE: It was just living next door to a brook trout stream and fishing and my father having a camp on a pond in Maine. So, I lived there all summers – it was just sort of that lifestyle and particularly the fishing part that I really enjoyed. That was kind of my motivation. My dad owned a grocery store. I think he would have loved if I followed in his footsteps and all that. But he took a total hands off – “you are the first one in our generation to go to college, and so you go on the path that you are interested in.”

LIBBY: Did you have brothers and sisters?

STEVE: No.

LIBBY: Any friends that kind of went into natural resources either or were you....?

STEVE: Well, the next-door neighbor went into college the same time I did, but it was in animal science and everything, so not immediate folks, but some that to this day that I was in class with I still maintain an association with actually.

LIBBY: Sometimes those early childhood experiences...interesting to see where people go and if anybody kind of goes along the same path that you did. So, at Mass Wildlife, who hired you at Mass Wildlife, do you remember?

STEVE: That would have been Pete Otis who was the chief biologist for the Mass Division of – in the fish program – at that point. He and Rocky Bridges, who at that point was head of what was called the field office in Westborough.

LIBBY: You were out of Westborough?

STEVE: I worked out of Westborough, yes. The job opening was created by a guy who had been the biologist for Quabbin Reservoir. He had gone down to the southeast district. That was the job that opened up. It was just a – it was a dream job. It was just absolutely spectacular. So, I loved that. A guy that technically worked for me was a long-time creel agent – Cheney Dodge – was again just one of these really phenomenally nice people and everything. Learned a lot from him in terms of interacting with people in sort of an interview situation because early part of the season I'd do creel surveys in conjunction with him. It was really kind of funny, in my

first year, particularly my first season, I'd go up and introduce myself to some folks coming off the reservoir, ask what you caught and everything, do you mind if we look at your fish? I'd probably get rejected 3 out of 4 times I'd ask. Cheney would catch them after me, and they'd always talk to him. You kind of learned both how you needed to go about it and about the fact that they needed to see your face around for a little while before they decided that, yeah, we can talk to you.

LIBBY: Working for Mass Wildlife was great when you went to work for Federal Aid.

STEVE: Exactly, and the key factor was the person who hired me there was George Pushee. He had the Federal Aid program, and back in those days, Endangered Species was under Federal Aid because it was largely, in those early phases, a state grant program as well. They used the Federal Aid grant process for both the anadromous fish program that had been around for a bit and then the endangered species as it came on-line. George Pushee was the key person there.

LIBBY: This is in Newton Corner?

STEVE: Newton Corner, yeah, and George's key hiring philosophy was "I want someone who's worked for a state. I want somebody who's seen the other side of the grant process."

LIBBY: Exactly.

STEVE: So, when you went to other state folks, they knew that you had been in their shoes when you were going through grants with them and performance – how they were doing. That was very helpful.

LIBBY: Right. How long did you work in that position and who was your mentor in that?

STEVE: It was really George as much as anything. I was about two years in that, and then one of the projects that I had was actually the Connecticut River Coordinator. That was an Anadromous Fish Conservation Act program. I had been out, had seen the project work, knew Roger Lance who was the coordinator at the time. In December of '78, he literally out of the blue up and left. And when he did, initially, I wasn't all that interested in the project itself. I knew about it and it was just like, "No, I don't think so". I hadn't really thought about it, even though I had gone to graduate school at UMASS and knew the area and everything. Then I got wind of other folks who were applying for it that I knew were clueless about what the responsibilities of the job were, so I did. We had area offices there. Do you remember Charlie Maloy at all?

LIBBY: No.

STEVE: Oh, you missed one (inaudible).

LIBBY: I missed the area offices. Barely.

STEVE: Charlie Maloy was the area manager. "One L" Maloy. When the applications came in, a guy who worked in Fisheries Assistance up out of Montpelier – Ted Meyers – he selected Ted for the job and told me that I was his second choice. I was disappointed but I knew Ted well enough and his background that it's like "that's not an irrational selection." So, I was

disappointed but ok, that's the way it was. Ted ends up getting a job with National Marine Fisheries Service up in Alaska, and so I am doing the math, let's see, I was two, number one just left, so this should be my job. Well, what "One L" says is – he shook up the barrel, and I came out second again. He picked a hatchery manager from North Attleboro, which doubly pissed me off.

LIBBY: (laughter)

STEVE: That can be edited out as necessary. (More laughter)

LIBBY: That's fine. You don't have to mention the person's name. (More laughter)

STEVE: So, that person ended up taking a different hatchery job. So, ok, bottom of the barrel, there's old Steve, he's still down there. I guess it's yours now. I ended up staying in it for 9 and a half years, I think. That was the longest position that I was in. I started in May I think it was of '79 and had that until actually February of '89.

LIBBY: What were your major responsibilities there?

STEVE: It was still a grant program but now I am back on the side of being the receiver of grants and having to do the performance reports and that sort of thing. So, it was coordinating all four of the state agencies as well as our own agency on...clearly the focus was salmon restoration, but it involved shad too that was already there. I came in the middle of what had been concluded legally for construction of the fishways, redo of Holyoke, doing Turners Falls, doing Vernon, doing Bellows Falls, doing Wilder, which were all the mainstem dams that were important to how we envisioned salmon restoration going. The fact that that construction was going to happen was a settled deal by the time I started, but the actual construction of it and the beginning operation happened while I was still there.

LIBBY: Was it fish passage?

STEVE: Fish passage, yeah.

LIBBY: Vernon is in...?

STEVE: Vermont.

LIBBY: Bellows Falls I know is Vermont. Wilder is also in Vermont?

STEVE: Yeah. And so, technically, New Hampshire and Vermont. So, in fact if you go in Vernon Station from - the entrance is from the Vermont side of the river - but you go in about from here to your doorway there, and there is a line on the floor, that's the state line. Most of the old generators are in New Hampshire.

LIBBY: Ok, great. That's so funny. OK, so, you had to oversee the construction?

STEVE: Yes, I worked heavily with Ben Rizzo who was our hydraulic engineer at the time. That's – I hope Ben is still around and if he is, that's an interview that needs to be done.

LIBBY: Yeah, you're right.

STEVE: So, I worked with him, worked with the State fish and wildlife biologists from all four states and everything. At that point, like I say, seeing that the ladders are getting done, starting the fishway counts and everything in cooperation with the state agencies, I recall reminding Vermont primarily that – oh, by the way, now that Turners Falls is open, you need to make sure that you’ve got fishing regulations set up for shad, which they didn’t have any at the time. It like, “oh yeah, that’s right, we do need to do that.” New Hampshire was set because they had them for the Merrimack River already, but not Vermont. So, they went ahead and set them. And then we had all the passage problems at Turners for many years.

LIBBY: As the coordinator, you headed up an office?

STEVE: A one-person office.

LIBBY: It was a one-person office. Out of Sunderland?

STEVE: It started in Hadley on Whalley Street. That contract ran out and we moved over to West Street in Amherst. We were getting ready to move the coordinator office because the Wildlife Assistance program – Ed Ladd, I don’t know if you ever might have heard of him – he retired and as he did, they kind of phased out that office. We had shared an office and a secretary. With the construction of the - proposed construction of the research lab – the plan was to move the coordinator’s office, which they did for a period of time, up to the research lab. So that was just happening as I took my next position in 1989 in Fisheries Assistance staff office in D.C.

LIBBY: OK. What do you think are your greatest successes and what were some of your biggest challenges when you were the Connecticut River Coordinator?

STEVE: Probably biggest successes is we got an adult holding facility funded. Conte was instrumental in that.

LIBBY: Oh, Silvio Conte, when he was on the Appropriations Committee.

STEVE: Exactly. I remember when he came to the dedication ceremony for that. That was maybe a million, million plus facility or something like that. And basically, to paraphrase, he said “nice cute little facility, but I really want to see a major research lab” – which ended up being the Conte Lab. Well, bells went off in old Steve because by then, I kind of learned the hard way that what we thought we knew about shad passage in fish ladders primarily designed out here – west coast – for salmon, but were passing shad primarily on the, on the – oh, I just lost it – the big river coming through Portland...

LIBBY: Yeah, the Columbia?

STEVE: The Colombia! Yes, so they were passing shad on the Columbia through several of the lower ladders but they had done some modifications so when we had problems in the early 80’s with shad not passing up at Turners Falls, in similar designs, physically smaller ladders but designs based on what had been working out here, I came out and toured all the ladders to see “what are you folks doing that is different than us?” That turned out to be a fruitful trip. Then I worked with a biologist – a retired actually major fish guy – Lyle Thorpe – from the State of

Connecticut. He was retired, had been for many years, and he was under contract to Northeast Utilities. He and I and one of their engineers worked – tried several different modifications to the main ladder at Cabot Station. Came up with a flow pattern that we felt this is definitely what I was seeing out on the west coast, and should work, and it did. It wasn't as good as we liked but going from less than 100 fish over the previous three years per year to over 10,000 the first year we implemented it was – it's like “ok, we've kind of cracked this!” I actually co-published that in a technical fish and hydraulic engineer technical manual with both of those guys.

LIBBY: That's pretty impressive, that's pretty great! Now you – did you know Silvio Conte personally through your work? He was – for our readers or listeners – he was the Congressman from the 1st district in Massachusetts which encompassed Berkshire County and counties to the east. And he was an avid fisherman. He was from Pittsfield, Mass, which is my hometown, so that's why I know this. He was on the Appropriations Committee. So, he was a very good friend to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

STEVE: Exactly. And very strongly supportive of the restoration program on the Connecticut River including the fact that he was instrumental in getting some of the funding support to build the White River National Fish Hatchery up in Bethel. Even though it was in Vermont, his whole attitude was “you folks tell me where's the best place for it, and I'll help you get the funding.” And he did that. So, I go to D.C. in '89. Lynn Starnes was my supervisor and the one who hired me into that program. I had been active and remained active in the American Fisheries Society. She was too and was supportive of my remaining so, but additionally, the second go around of the Upper Level Management Development Program – sort of its second year came into being – and I got a chance to participate in that. A quick backup, cause its directly related to that – when I took the coordinator's job, which was a lateral for me in terms of grade and everything, Howard Larsen, who was the Regional Director – did you know Howard, at least by reputation?

LIBBY: Yes. He was the Regional Director when I came to the region.

STEVE: Howard was not happy that I took that lateral. He had me set to head right down to D.C., check off that box, and start ladder climbing.

LIBBY: So, even in Fisheries they really wanted you to put time in Washington? OK.

STEVE: Oh yeah. I ended up literally getting on his list, which is not the list you wanted to be on.

LIBBY: How did that happen? Because of this?

STEVE: Yeah, because of that. Exactly. So, 9 ½ years later, the Departmental program, which had always been around, opened up. I applied for it. Dave Goldwaithe was my supervisor, strongly supported me. I get this call one day from Dave and he says “you remember how Howard felt about you not taking the lateral out there? He won't support your nomination for the Departmental program.” So, I ended up just applying literally for a staff job, took it, and then Dunkle still continued the Upper Level. It was his way of “I'm going to do it my way instead of through the Department” because he had some issues with the Assistant Secretary at the time,

and so I got into that program. Part of my training was a nine-month assignment on Capitol Hill on Conte's Appropriations Committee staff.

LIBBY: Wow! That's great!

STEVE: I will never forget. I was down there -at this point I think it was before that assignment started – and in comes Howard and meets me in the hallway up in the Fisheries thing, and we both just cracked up at each other. We saw how things had gone. (Laughter) He laughed, and I did too. Hey, you know, whatever is whatever! I enjoyed that staff job including probably the best learning experience in a lot of ways, the most stressful experience was working on the Appropriations Committee. He was the ranking member, which is to say every single appropriations bill went through his staff. I worked with Tim Shea who was his main staff person on Interior and Related Agencies and by virtue of that position, was able to assist in getting him to support a million dollars or so for White River National Fish Hatchery for a redo of the water intake structure into the White River itself. More significantly, I took the opportunity while I was there to get some background information from Hannibal Bolton, who was one of my classmates in that program, on the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge and got that and wrote the first draft of the Conte refuge. We called it the Connecticut River Fish and Wildlife Refuge then. So, I wrote the first draft of that!

LIBBY: Tell me more about writing that. When did you write that?

STEVE: During the last couple of months or so that I was on the detail. Tim was supportive of it. Basically, if Tim was, it's because either he knew Conte was or would be. That it would be an easy lift. So, in the "how sausage is made category", just as that legislation is getting ready to be introduced, Conte passed away. He succumbed to cancer. Legislation can't get submitted in either branch except under the original signature of a member of either the House or the Senate. Conte hated the sig mac machine, rarely used them, always wanted his own signature done, but Tim for sure, and there may have been several other staff members, with his knowledge, perfected his signature. I saw Tim sign his name several times, and I know that he signed it and submitted that legislation. He personally took care of that. It went in as the Connecticut River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge but became the Silvio O. Conte and I think, Gerry Studds was instrumental in that.

LIBBY: That's interesting. Were you – so at the same time that this is going on – the Regional Office was in the throes of moving from Newton Corner to another location, and they picked Hadley. So, do you have any inside stories on that?

STEVE: Yes. For a little bit of this story, you do need to do a quick pause...

LIBBY: (laughter) Well, let's not pause, we will just do that separately then, unless you can just omit that part.... because of the interest of time.

STEVE: It's brief, very funny, but it's a tad off color.

LIBBY: (laughter) Well, tell me what you can, and I'll hit the pause button.

STEVE: OK, so while the move was going on and everything, you know who, on behalf of Ron was his front person in the Regional Office.

LIBBY: Yes.

STEVE: So, one day about the umpteenth call, and they knew 90% of the time you worked through staff – you were never going to get directly to Mr. Conte – I think it was Tim who came to me and said, “who’s this Coggeshall guy?”. So, I said “he’s the right-hand person – let me put it this way. You will not find any daylight between” is it off?

LIBBY: No.

STEVE: It needs to be. (Recorder turned off at this point.) You know, folks’ staff there sort of understood sometimes how personal relationships with a key boss need to work, so there was an understanding sort of on that level. But it was more, I think, when I was asked, it was just somebody becoming an irritant. Part of the stress for me in that job – even though it was a great learning experience – was to see the incredible amount of work those folks did, the hours that they put in and the pressure they were under. Ninety percent of the time I couldn’t help them at all, because I didn’t know the issue that was causing them the stress at the moment. Now there were two or three that I was working on, but those were generally easy lifts for me, the stuff they wanted to do, and I could take care of for them.

LIBBY: What a great experience.

STEVE: Oh, it was, it was.

LIBBY: So, this is around 1989-1990, something like that?

STEVE: Yes.

LIBBY: And you are working in Washington and you are in this Upper Level Management Development Program. Let’s go back. So, you finished the program.

STEVE: I finished that program and got pleasantly surprised - an opportunity to come back to the Regional Office. Dave, Dave Goldwaithe – I think he was the deputy ARD at that point under Jim Weaver – he had gotten a chance – I don’t know if somebody left or it was just a new position, but basically, supporting the hatchery part of the program in terms of consolidating their information for the Maintenance Management System, and you will know that from the refuge side as well probably. I came up to the Regional Office, took that position. I don’t think I was in it, probably less than 2 or 3 or 4 months at the most, when Nancy got selected to be the Deputy Regional Director.

LIBBY: That would be Nancy Kauffman.

STEVE: Kaufmann, right, and so her position came open, and I applied for it, and Dave selected me for that. I started in that...

LIBBY: That position was?

STEVE: Manager for the southern portion of the fisheries program in Region 5. We had two – Dan Kimball was the north, and I was the south. He basically had all the stations involved with salmon restoration and everything and I had everything else – both Fisheries Assistance and Hatcheries. They were good positions. I enjoyed that position. It was new for me in terms of fish species focus and everything but good folks. I enjoyed that. We made the Regional Office move, and I was still doing that, and as part, and I can't remember if this started while I was still in D.C. or started after that, but in any rate, I was put on a fisheries program review - a national fisheries program review panel. We evaluated fisheries programs in all of the regions. Jim Hanson from Region 2 was my partner on that. He and I actually ended up with three regions to evaluate. You didn't do your own, so we did [Regions} 4, maybe 3, because he was from out there. But 4 was one and actually Alaska was one. So, we did – it might have been 6. But I can't remember, but we did three anyway. So, Alaska was the last one that we did, and compiled our recommendations and everything, I can't remember if Ralph Morgenweck was sort of the captain of that group or not. I might not have that right, but at any rate, our recommendations went in and everything. Then back to our regular job. I end up getting a call from Gary Edwards who was still the Assistant Director for Fisheries. He says "They're going to create an ARD position for Fisheries and Federal Aid in Alaska. It will be at the same grade that you are at now." I was a 14 then as a program manager. "So, it will be a lateral, but it will be a peer level with the others and everything. Would you be interested?" And I said, ... I was right at that point in my life, that it's like, if I don't do this now, I will never do it. You know, the age was sneaking up and everything. So, I said, yeah, let's do it.

LIBBY: So, what year was that?

STEVE: That was 1993.

LIBBY: Now, you haven't mentioned anything about being married, but you were married at this time, to Carol?

STEVE: To Carol, yes. One son, Glenn. He was born while I was in the Service out in Ft. Riley in Kansas.

LIBBY: So, they are moving all around with you?

STEVE: Yes. If you want to meet someone who doesn't like moving, I will introduce you to Carol. (laughter)

LIBBY: (laughter)

STEVE: She has had her share of it. But despite that, and involved in many moves, we ended up with over 30 years living in Shutesbury, Mass.

LIBBY: Really!

STEVE: Between the Coordinator job, and the Regional Office move, and back from Alaska, and then taking over the lab up in Turners. So, we both... I mean the Alaska move was like major league stress move for her, but to this day she will tell you that the house that the male in the family found is still probably her favorite one that we've lived in.

LIBBY: Was that in Anchorage?

STEVE: In Anchorage. A lot of people thought that because socializing isn't her thing, and you know I've known that and everything, so that was a stress part of the move too, knowing that there wouldn't be any people that she would know there. So that was hard, and a lot of people thought that when we moved back to the east coast, it was because of her, and that really unfortunately, in terms of how folks may have misinterpreted the reason I did it, it wasn't the case at all. Turns out that in both our cases, her mother had gone into a nursing home, her father had passed away years earlier, and my parents both living in northern Maine, Houlton, were not mobile in terms that they could not travel to us. So truly Alaska became the famous "you can't get there from here" and we both decided that we at least have to get back to the east coast, so that if something comes up, we can get to the family. That's when I got the opportunity to take the ecosystems coordinator thing – those positions had evolved. I actually knew what my GARD position was going to be in Alaska. It would have been interesting. I was actually kind of interested in it, but it was just like "really can't do it for family reasons." So, we came back and I took the ecosystem approach coordinator position.

LIBBY: So, when you went to Alaska, that was when the GARD and PARD system was in place?

STEVE: No, it happened under that, while I was there.

LIBBY: You would have been the Geographic ARD for parts of Alaska?

STEVE: Yes. I think in those very first evolutions, if you were the Geographic one you were also the PARD initially until they actually did the full advertising and made the position two separate ones, so I still would have been Fish/Federal Aid and then geographic for the northern part of Alaska.

LIBBY: I have you went to Alaska in 1993. How long did you stay there in that position?

STEVE: Actually, just barely shy of two years. I left in the end of September of 1995.

LIBBY: So, was that a challenge for you to be working in Alaska in a really different environment? With different cultures, certainly.

STEVE: It truly ended up I can remember we literally left at the end of the fiscal year and that was partly by design. I can remember both of us driving up to Flat Top. There is a parking lot there and then you can climb Flat Top Mountain which is sort of the thing that locals did in the Anchorage area. But there was also some trails out of there. I can still remember it was just a gorgeous September day, walking up Powerline Pass, and both of us "you know, do we really want to do this?". Definitely we were having some second thoughts at which point it was really too late. That horse was too far across the stream. It was – we had both adjusted. Probably the toughest part, 'cause the winters frankly in terms of severity if you will, are less than we tend to see in New England, especially northern New England. Anchorage itself is relatively dry. Most people don't realize that, they don't get that much snow, with the minor exception because of my wife's situation, she was putting her mother into a nursing home just as I was going up. I said

just wait until next spring when they turn the lights back on. So, she was only there one winter, and it turned out to be either the second or third snowiest on record for Anchorage. We had over 10 feet up at the house. We got through that, got used to the drive-through espresso coffee shops and everything. So, we kind of enjoyed it. It's interesting that, like I said, we liked the house where we were at. I'll never have a mountain and ocean view again in my life. (laughter) It was kind of a neat spot, and I remember not only being fortunate finding the house but as we were looking, we looked up around Eagle River. That was kind of growing as a suburban area but because of the highway, it was an easy commute to the Regional Office and everything. I had a guy that worked for me in the office. He says, "If you're thinking Eagle River," he says, "let me tell you something about that." He was describing where a lot of the folks and new construction was happening. He says, "in that valley going up the Eagle River where a lot of people are building and everything," he says, "you got mountains on the south side of you." And he says, "you are going to have about six weeks to two months in the dead of the winter where you will get daylight, but you will not get direct sunlight because it is so low on the horizon." He says, "you can't imagine how that will affect you." So, we ended up where we were, but literally I noticed that effect and because it was far northern even than northern Maine, but I still have it to this day in northern New England. That is, come September for me now it's on the eating side. Come September, daylights getting shorter. You can't put food anywhere near me. I am now officially type 2 diabetic so it's not only quantity it's the type I got to pay attention to. But I just don't want to. Up there, it wasn't just that. It was my whole attitude change. I mean I started getting p. o'd about the slightest things. I could not believe it. This same guy, they worked down in the basement in the lab, and he says, "they never wrote the specs for full spectrum lighting". He says, "we have to get that." So, we ended up taking it out of our own budget to put it in. It was like, at that point, I knew what they were talking about. It makes a big difference.

LIBBY: Wow. That's very interesting. All right. Well, is there...so you moved back?

STEVE: Yes, moved back to D.C.

LIBBY: Oh, back to D.C.?

STEVE: Back to D.C.

LIBBY: So, you are staying in touch with people all of the time and obviously, if you are an ARD, you are probably talking a lot with folks in Washington.

STEVE: Yes, right. So, I was offered that position, the ecosystem coordinator thing.

LIBBY: Which was the first?

STEVE: Yes, the first one. Just as it was coming on-line. So, I took that. Worked directly for John Rogers. Told folks without hesitation it was probably the highest profile, least satisfying job I had in my career.

LIBBY: (laughter)

STEVE: It was primarily related to the fact that the story between what you were hearing from folks in the field versus the happy talk at the higher levels on the assumption that that's what the Director wanted to hear, were miles apart.

LIBBY: (An aside – feel free to close that if that is too much on you.) So, was this like 1994, 1995?

STEVE: Now we are talking 1995 through 1997, but basically 1995-96, that time period. You know, the fun part was I got to see some of the programs that were really, had sort of been involved with in anyway. Got to see the ACE Basin - really enjoyed that. Taught a little - a couple of classes at NCTC and enjoyed that. But after I had been doing that about a year and a half or so and realized there is a big difference between what high level thinks how well its going versus what's really going on, I wrote – it's probably a 2 ½ page single space report for Mollie. I routed it through John, he read it, he passed it on to her. It's now at the point that her cancer is real severe, real serious. Well she read it, got a hold of me, and said “I want you to come in and talk to me about this.”

LIBBY: Oh, my goodness.

STEVE: I said, “It's your schedule. You just say when and I will be there.” I went in, I'm going to say this was probably no more than 10 days before the end. She went through – we got maybe two-thirds, three-quarters of the way through and just the fatigue set in. Totally understood. When you say it's enough, and she says, “we are just going to have to stop for now, but I still want to finish this.” I did not hold anything out about what was going on. She was just sincere in “I want to know, because if we've got things, then we've got to see if there's, what there is that we can do about it.” And literally, I suspect, I certainly wasn't the last, but I was probably one of a handful of last ones to meet with her one on one.

LIBBY: Nobody else was in the room with you?

STEVE: No, no, no.

LIBBY: I was going to ask if Dan Ashe?

STEVE: No, no, no, no, just me and her. Like I say, John had read it, knew and that was the way she was on something like that. It's like...

LIBBY: Wow. That's really something. Yes, I know there was a disconnect in the field, although some people really embraced ecosystems. I was on two teams so, you know.

STEVE: And it was weird because, you did – you saw the positives and the negatives all the way around and you know I experienced those. But as everybody knew sort of from the get-go, as always, it boiled down to “so who controls the money?”

LIBBY: Right. That's exactly right. Yeah. So, the program continues even after Mollie dies.

STEVE: Yes. And actually, I enjoyed that part to. So, I actually helped develop the contract and worked with the successful bidder on the whole program evaluation. I can't remember the lady's name now who had it. She was a protégé and professor at Ohio State who was the nominal lead

but this lady who was contracting on her own ran the whole thing. She was really, really good. At that point, I had actually moved back to Region 5 but was still finishing up just that contract and everything, so I got invited to the Directorate meeting where they reviewed her report and everything. I can still remember with rare exception a number of the RDs saying, as far as they were concerned, it was the best evaluation of the Service in terms of people's attitudes about X, Y, Z and everything.

LIBBY: So, what happened then with the program?

STEVE: Well, that's when they went forward with advertising for the PARs and the GARDs. So that is what initiated that.

LIBBY: Right, and yes Jamie Clark wrote an article, it was in Fish and Wildlife News in 1998, and it was basically saying, yes, we are still doing this. And this is the evaluation.

STEVE: I knew because she was close to Mollie, so a) it wasn't a surprise to me that she would get selected and if so, that she would be supportive and felt almost emotionally compelled to follow up in the whole faith to Mollie's thing. I will say conceptually initially I was a strong supporter mainly for one reason. It was right as I thought about it, it was like it did not seem to me to be inherently a strength that the first position anybody has where they are obligated to learn other programs is at a deputy regional director level. It was like that can't be the best way to develop a strong organization. And I don't want to suggest that the GARD way was so substantially better, but it was like somehow, you've got to get down to at least one more level to get folks committed to learn. Now some folks wanted to on their own, and more power to them, but there wasn't any structural incentive to have that happen.

LIBBY: Right. And of course, we all remember the bowling shirts.

STEVE: Exactly.

LIBBY: But you're still there. So, all right, now you are back in....

STEVE: That was envisioned even when I took it, as not being a long-term position. I thought that there was conceptual maybe some problems with that, but from a purely personal basis, I didn't want to do it any longer. Like I say, I was finding it so unsatisfying that that was even more and it's like "no, you know, just...". I kind of had a commitment from John to get me back to Region 5 and so I started working with them, and nothing happened till John kind of made the call up there, and then all of a sudden - things happened instantly.

LIBBY: Hmm. That was John Rogers who made the call, 'cause he was the Deputy Director, right? So, you come back to Region 5.

STEVE: Came back to Region 5 as...

LIBBY: What year?

STEVE: That now is 1997. Was just on staff then. I think Rick Bennett was still, yeah, he was still the Deputy then in Fisheries. And so, he would have been my supervisor. I think at that point, because of the, they still had the GARD thing going on, that the field stations were

supervised by whoever the GARD was for that, so the program manager positions that we historically had kind of went away, but not the FTE and the grade and everything, so they had them doing other related stuff. That's the position that I had when I got back there including a part of it was finishing up the contract that resulted in that. They did all the applying for it, and I applied both for the northern GARD and the program ARD for Fisheries. Ended up not getting either, I think to the chagrin of both Ron and Cathy Short.

LIBBY: Cathy Short was the deputy at that time.

STEVE: I think, I think I was in their books to be that program ARD, and it was based on their assumption that Jaime was probably going to get the Geographic ARD in the northern region of Region 4. And at the last minute, that didn't happen.

LIBBY: So, Ron Lambertson was the Regional Director, Cathy Short was the Deputy Regional Director and Jaime Geiger, so he was the, he was the...

STEVE: He was the program ARD at that point for Fisheries

LIBBY: The PARD for Fisheries.

STEVE: Yeah, but he really wanted the geographic job in Region 4. Sam Hamilton was the RD at the time. I suspect – now this is totally suspicion on my part – but I suspect that Sam called... the Director that followed...

LIBBY: Would that be, ok, Steve, uh John Warner or Steve Thompson? No, not Steve Thompson.

STEVE: The Director that followed Mollie.

LIBBY: Oh, Jamie Clark.

STEVE: Yeah, so he called Jamie I think and said, I don't want this person. So, all of a sudden everything got plugged up and backed up and...

LIBBY: You know, that's the way things go though.

STEVE: Oh, I know, exactly.

LIBBY: That's the way they go.

STEVE: And literally, I was very seriously investigating taking one of the last early outs that was still available. I mean I was that close, when the position up at the Conte Lab came up.

LIBBY: Yeah, I remember when you went to the Conte Lab. So, I am looking at the time, we probably have about 10 minutes.

STEVE: I think we are close.

LIBBY: OK. All right. So, yeah, at the time, was the Conte Lab still in the Fish and Wildlife Service or by that time, it already had...

STEVE: It had already gone to USGS.

LIBBY: Yeah, tell us about that.

STEVE: In probably 93-94, somewhere like that. So, Henry Booke had retired.

LIBBY: I remember- I knew Henry.

STEVE: I applied for and Bill Palmisano was the center director down in Leetown. I had known Bill from Alaska. We had overlapped a bit there. Now again, he was a center director, but they were physically in the same building so he and I kind of knew each other a bit from up there. I didn't have a PhD, didn't have a history in research per se, but he really wanted a manager and he kind of knew that I had the management skills and everything. I remember him calling me up, actually I think by that point the selection had been made official, and just said, "You think you are going to be able to deal with some of the PhD egos and everything?" And I said, "a) I generally know these folks" but I said, "probably the most important thing is I know the issues and the state and other federal people involved with those issues". So, I said, "I may not have the technical knowledge on some things, but I know which issues are important and how they ought to be trying to tackle them." That part of it never was a heavy lift. The worst part of that position was sort of the traditional one. I'd say I was there six years until I retired. The first three years were probably, almost probably the most enjoyable of my entire career.

LIBBY: Oh, wonderful.

STEVE: Yeah. And then the last three, it was sort of heading in the other direction - exclusively budget related.

LIBBY: So, you went to the Conte Anadromous Fish Lab, now is USGS because the fishery, the research part had been taken out of the Fish and Wildlife Service and ultimately ended up in USGS. So, what year did you go to the Conte Lab?

STEVE: 1999.

LIBBY: And that's in Turners Falls. OK! So, and you retired then in 2005. That lab is a pretty special place.

STEVE: Yeah, like I say, I sort of knew the issues. Probably one of the main things that I got involved in there is they had never held any open houses 'till I got there. I knew there was a strong public perception that all it dealt with was salmon. And by then, there was starting to be some really growing concerns about whether the salmon restoration was ever going to be successful in the Connecticut River. They had for a long time worked on many other things, and I knew that to be the case, but it was like no one knows. I said, "we've got to have open houses and let people in here so they can see the scope of things that are done." The reason I chuckle a little bit is that thanks to Henry but particularly Kathy Petricca, his secretary, she had kept in touch with Mrs. Conte after he had passed away. Always a couple of times a year would update her on things, so we invited her to the first open house that we held. It was late October. It turned out to be like this kind of weather. It was just spectacular weather. And so, we hosted her in the office. Carol had made a coffee cake and we just had a good visit. Her daughter was there

with her. I took her around and showed her, and great weather and everything, and to this day I can remember her saying, “Well, I never knew you did all this stuff. I thought you just counted salmon.”

LIBBY: (laughter) Well Silvio, or “Sil” would have been proud. He would have been so proud. Right?

STEVE: Yeah. We got his daughter, who was with her, took a nice photograph of she and I standing by one of the exhibits and everything. So, it’s still a special one. Actually, that reminds me of one other thing. Back when I was down in D.C. the first time, and had started working on his staff, he had a birthday party and they always held it at the botanical garden just off Capitol Hill. I got to go to that and everything and went through the receiving line. Conte shook hands with everybody, and they had the official photographer taking pictures and everything. So, they, I’ve got this framed picture autographed by him and it’s Tim sort of in the background, but you know it’s him, and then Mr. Conte and I shaking hands, and he’s just has this spectacular smile on his face. I tell everybody it’s not because of me and who I am, it’s because Tim has just said, “He’s the salmon guy”. (laughter) And that’s all it took. He just lit up like, oh ...

LIBBY: (laughter) What a great story. Oh, that’s so wonderful.

STEVE: I still have that photograph. It’s just really...

LIBBY: That’s great. That might be a nice one for the archives - to get a copy for the archives, because of who he was. So, why did you decide to retire?

STEVE: I had always planned to retire in 2005, because I had to go ‘till I was 59 to get my full 30 years in and everything. So, literally the October before, I called Palmisano just to give him a heads up. I said, “I’m going to be going next year. I don’t know if it’s going to be the end of the calendar year which financially would have some plusses to it. Or,” I said, “potentially the end of the fiscal year. If it’s going to be any sooner than that, I’ll let you know.” I said, like two days after the election, I called up and I said, “Here’s the new date.” (laughter) And you probably know what I mean, ‘cause I knew which way the budget was going to continue to go. I mean, the guys were finally - some were doing good already, but they got a lot better at bringing outside money as challenging as that was, because at first when I got there, we had a pretty healthy budget on our own. So, we could go to partners and not only throw a PI [principal investigator] in that was fully paid for but actually put a little money on the table for the project, too. And that pretty much went away and part of it was just the nature of the design. My goal when I got there was to get every PI who was in a research grade position promoted at least once while I was there. And that happened. A couple of them got promoted twice.

LIBBY: That’s great.

STEVE: But that had enormous budget impacts on us. I can still remember. Somebody left. Actually, I think it was Mufeed who left and that was a different set of issues, but he had left and so in Palmisano’s mind it’s like “that just freed up a hundred thousand dollars. “I said, “Bill, that hundred thousand dollars went away in RGE promotions over the past year.” And then we went

through, you probably remember this, we went through the pay scale thing where instead of being “Rest of the U.S.”, we got thrown in with Hartford.

LIBBY: Right, it increased your salary.

STEVE: And I lost way over a hundred thousand there, and I remember having quite a tussle with Tinker Brill who was our budget person down in Leetown. Fortunately, I had known her for a long time. She had been with the Fisheries Academy back in the old days and everything. And, as I explained it to her, finally she said, “Oh you’re right, that’s the same thing that happened to us”, because they had got thrown in with the D.C. thing.

LIBBY: Did you get in trouble for all these promotions that you gave people or...?

STEVE: No, you had no control over it. In other words, they earned it. That was the nature of the RGE. So, they got evaluated by their peers and

LIBBY: What does RGE stand for?

STEVE: Research Grade Evaluation. So, they got scientifically reviewed and if their scientific peers said, “this person is working at this level,” so literally by the time I retired, I had Steve McCormack, a scientist, that out-graded me.

LIBBY: I know him.

STEVE: And, like I said, I knew that was going to be the case. He was a 14 when I got there, and my goal was “I want you to out-grade me by the time I leave here in six years.”

LIBBY: Now did he become the center director after you?

STEVE: No, maybe just in an acting thing. So, after me actually it was Steve, Steve, Steve, Steve Garabedian who was actually from Water, Water Resources out in Northboro. He was there for about three years and then he left, and then I think Bill Lellis came back to GS and did sort of the same thing I did. He supervised both Wellsboro and Conte. And then they brought Barnaby Watten up. And he did it for a while, and then for the past two years, actually Adria Elskus who I had hired to fill Terry Haines position up in Maine when he retired, and it was actually a contaminants funded position, but had been under Leetown and was under their Ecological Branch but was historically had done quite a bit of stuff on salmon, so I made a pitch to Bill that he shift the position to me at the Conte Lab, and that I fill it. He agreed with that. I did it, so she was up there for 10 years until they decided to move her down to Conte which happened, and, in the process, she is now the lab director.

LIBBY: Oh, ok.

STEVE: So, it came to a point in her life where she wanted to do something different. She is doing a great job there.

LIBBY: I’m looking at the time and thinking we need to wrap it up. This has been fascinating interview. I had no idea that you had this career path and really some great stories there. Is there

anything you would like to say sort of at the end here about your career, how you feel about your career and ...

STEVE: I wouldn't give it up for anything. You know, I don't, I can't speak to your time period or anything, but I think in a lot of ways, I was fortunate to be there during close to as good a time as I think folks in a Service career had. But also, you could start to see the handwriting on the wall. Again, primarily from a budget point of view because it was sort of like, well we may not be able to take authorities away, and their theoretical responsibilities, but if we turn grapes into raisins they will be doing less and feeding less. At some point, they just won't have the capacity that they wish they had and remembered that they had.

LIBBY: So, you returned to Maine.

STEVE: Yes.

LIBBY: And now you are living out your last years (laughter) back in your hometown?

STEVE: My wife absolutely loves it. No, actually not too far from the University in Bangor but in a lot of ways, it's almost a way station because we literally from as soon as we can get in in May to close to Thanksgiving, weather permitting, are up at the camp. You will see pictures of that. I am going to be putting that out at the silent auction.

LIBBY: Right, I heard.

STEVE: So, between that and now we do snowbird down to South Carolina. Actually, as a result of a retiree meeting that we had in Charleston, and got introduced to that area, so we have been going to Kiawah Island just south of Charleston for about five years now. And now, last year we were there for a month. This past winter we were there for six weeks. And we may push it to 8 next year.

LIBBY: What a great life. Well, Steve....

STEVE: Yeah, it's not bad, it's not bad. Again, thanks to good times with the Fish and Wildlife Service and meeting a lot of folks.

LIBBY: Well, not that I have any authority but on behalf of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the American public, I thank you for all your service and your great work for the Fish and Wildlife Service and the USGS. It's been great. All right. Thank you, Steve!

KEY WORDS:

Dams, ecosystems, fish, fish hatcheries, fish management