

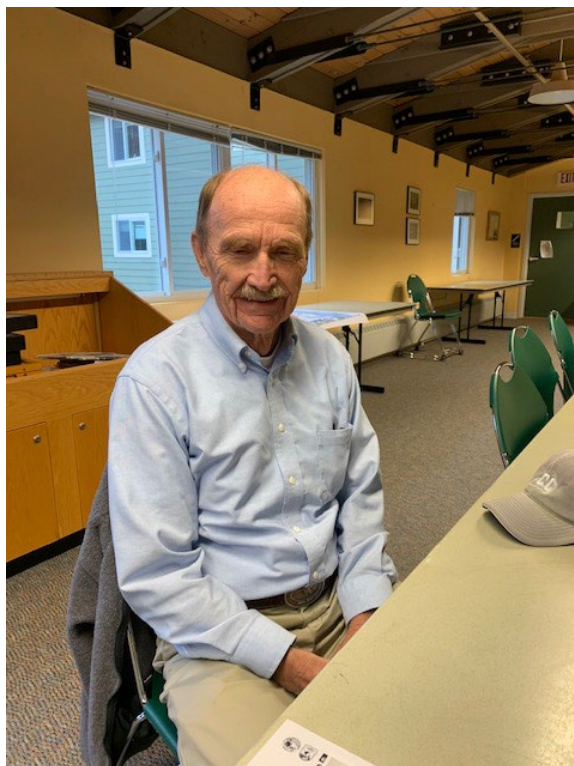


## **The Oral History of Tim Prior**

November 5, 2018

Interview conducted by Peggy Hobbs

Great Meadows NWR, Sudbury, Massachusetts



## Oral History Cover Sheet

**Name:** Tim Prior

**Date of Interview:** 11/5/2018

**Location of Interview:** Great Meadows NWR, Sudbury, MA

**Interviewer:** Peggy Hobbs

**Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:** 14 (1992-2005)

**Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:** Environmental contaminants specialist; refuge manager at Oxbow and Assabet River National Wildlife Refuges; assistant manager for Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

**Most Important Projects:** Working with the Navy and Army to clean up Nomans Land and Assabet River to transfer them to the Fish and Wildlife. Also working with Army to help clean up and transfer land associated with Fort Devens. Worked on several comprehensive conservation plans including Nomans Land, Oxbow, Monomoy, Assabet, and Great Meadows.

**Colleagues and Mentors:** Bud Oliveira, Gaylord Bober, Ken Carr, Libby Herland

**Brief Summary of Interview:** Growing up in Oswego, Mr. Prior hunted and fished as a youth due to the influence of his grandparents being interest in hunting and fishing and organizations they belonged to. He attended the University of New York in Oswego with dual majors in biology and secondary science education and would teach a few years before attending the University of Hawaii studying oceanography in the graduate program there. He worked for the state of Hawaii and Department of the Army before joining the Fish and Wildlife Service, noting that the people and organizational reputation of the Service is what drew him to want to work for the Service. Mr. Prior gives his opinions on how the Service has changed from the time he started to the time he retired, high and low points of his career, and advice he would give to those coming into the Service today.

## INTERVIEW

**PEGGY:** This is Peggy Hobbs and we're at the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge headquarters in Sudbury, Massachusetts with retiree Tim Prior. Today is November 5, 2018. Tim, do you agree to be interviewed by the Fish and Wildlife Service?

**TIM:** Yes.

**PEGGY:** All right. So just some basic information before we dive into things. Where and when were you born and where did you grow up?

**TIM:** I was born in Oswego, New York, up on Lake Ontario in April of 1943. And I grew up basically in Oswego, I only spent five years down in Long Island for my father's career before we moved back up to Oswego.

**PEGGY:** And that's what I was going to ask next. What did your parents do for a living?

**TIM:** They were both educators, my mother was a teacher, and my father started out as a teacher and then went into school administration; finished his career as the assistant superintendent of schools in our hometown.

**PEGGY:** And what influenced you the most as far as hobbies, books, people, early jobs, et cetera?

**TIM:** I'm not sure there was anything in particular. I had grandparents that were very active, grandfathers that were both very active in hunting and fishing and some of the organizations associated with that. My father had been, when he was younger, but

after World War II he just kind of gave it up I guess because of some of the experiences there in the Service. So, he didn't hunt too much after that, but both grandparents did so that's what really got me interested I think in wildlife.

**PEGGY:** Did you hunt and fish as a youth?

**TIM:** I did, yeah, not a whole lot but I did, yeah.

**PEGGY:** Any other outdoor interests when you were young?

**TIM:** I played a lot of sports, did a lot of swimming, of course living on Lake Ontario.

**PEGGY:** So, you were active. What high school did you attend and when did you graduate?

**TIM:** I attended high school in Oswego, and I graduated in 1961.

**PEGGY:** What colleges did you attend, when did you graduate and what degrees did you earn and in what majors?

**TIM:** I graduated from the New York State University there in Oswego with a dual major in biology and secondary science education in 1965. And then I taught biology for a couple years and then went to graduate school at University of Hawaii in oceanography. And completed everything I needed for the Ph.D. except I had problems with dissertation and had the dissertation research and finances and so I had to go find a job.

**PEGGY:** That happens. So, you didn't quite get there.

**TIM:** Yeah.

**PEGGY:** Who or what influenced your education and career track?

**TIM:** I just think, I've always been interested in wildlife and fishes, I think just from the time I was young, and I don't think there was any one person other than family that influenced me.

**PEGGY:** Did you serve in the military; you mentioned your dad did.

**TIM:** No, I didn't serve in the military. I worked for the Department of the Army for nine, no fifteen years.

**PEGGY:** Oh, that's right.

**TIM:** As a civilian.

**PEGGY:** Were you ever married?

**TIM:** Yeah, still am.

**PEGGY:** And still am, how many years?

**TIM:** This time, 35.

**PEGGY:** Wow, that's great.

**TIM:** 36 now.

**PEGGY:** 36, that's a long time. Do you have children?

**TIM:** I have one son.

**PEGGY:** And did he follow in a career of conservation or something else?

**TIM:** No, he didn't. He got involved in computer management and corporate security.

**PEGGY:** There's probably more money in that.

**TIM:** Quite a bit.

**PEGGY:** And how did your career affect your family?

**TIM:** Well other than the fact that we moved a lot in my career, which was enjoyable for us because it was something we really wanted to do, it didn't really affect us very much.

**PEGGY:** That's good. So, what do you think attracted you to Fish and Wildlife Service?

**TIM:** The Service itself, I think the people that I worked with in other jobs; I worked for the state of Hawaii for a while and then I worked for, doing wildlife work with the Department of the Army. And the people that I came in contact with that were Service members always impressed me with the professional ability and the organizational reputation that went with the Service. So that's why I really wanted to work for Service.

**PEGGY:** Nice. When did you actually start working for the Service, and what was your job title and where was it?

**TIM:** I started working with the Service as an environmental contaminants specialist, and I was in the Rhode Island Field Office to begin with.

**PEGGY:** Do you remember what year that was roughly?

**TIM:** It was 1992.

**PEGGY:** And what kinds of positions have you held in your career?

**TIM:** Well, when I was working with the state of Hawaii, I was doing environmental enforcement for them. And I started out as a field person assigned to Maui County and then went to work back in the main office in Honolulu and was the chief of their field enforcement branch. So, we did a lot of water quality investigations both in the field and also from wastewater discharges.

**PEGGY:** What years did you work there, do you remember, roughly?

**TIM:** I worked there from '70 through the end of '76. And then I went to work as a wildlife biologist for the Department of the Army at Fort Carson, Colorado.

**PEGGY:** And what years would that have been?

**TIM:** So, I was there from the very first working day in 1977 through late 1985.

**PEGGY:** And that was in Colorado?

**TIM:** That was in Colorado, yeah.

**PEGGY:** Yeah. So, you did move around. And how long did you work for the Service, Fish and Wildlife Service all together?

**TIM:** All together it was, I think 14 years; a little over 14 years.

**PEGGY:** So, what year did you retire?

**TIM:** I retired in 2005.

**PEGGY:** So right prior to retirement, what were your day-to-day duties, what was your position?

**TIM:** I was the assistant manager for the Eastern Mass. Refuge Complex. So, I was doing a lot of the planning, some of the personnel management, and some of the physical facilities management type things. We were heavily involved in doing the comprehensive conservation plans for individual refuges at that time. So that was a large part of the work at that time.

**PEGGY:** Do you remember which CCP's you worked on?

**TIM:** Yeah, I worked on Nomans Land, Oxbow, Assabet, Monomoy to some degree, and a little bit on Great Meadows.

**PEGGY:** Wow. Are there any major projects, issues, or stories you'd like share, and how were any issues resolved?

**TIM:** Well, when I first came to work up here in Great Meadows, we were in the process of acquiring Nomans Land Island from the Navy, and Assabet River property from the Army; both of those facilities were being excessed by the Army and Navy during the base closure acts of the mid '90's, early '90's to mid '90's. So, the Service, because of the habitat values of those areas, wanted to acquire them and did acquire them from the Army in transfer. So, we were working with the Army and the Navy on doing their environmental cleanup of the facilities; both of them had issues.

**PEGGY:** Both of them did?

**TIM:** Yeah. And then getting them ready for acceptance into the refuge complex system.

**PEGGY:** And did you do that work as assistant manager here or was that prior to that?

**TIM:** Well, when I first came here, I was actually the refuge manager at Oxbow and Assabet River, and then I became the assistant complex manager after three or four years. So, I was doing that work pretty much right from the beginning because that's when the transfers were started. So those are two big projects.

**PEGGY:** I'd say.

**TIM:** Added quite a bit of land to the Service. And we were also, forgot to mention, we were also acquiring additional properties through the Army up there at Fort Devens to add to the Oxbow Refuge, so that was another; there were those three big projects.

**PEGGY:** And this all would have been in the early 2000's or late '90's?

**TIM:** They started in '98, '99 timeframe and continued through 2002, when the transfers were completed, of course we were still doing work on those properties after the transfer was completed.

**PEGGY:** Right. Do any other come to mind? Did you work with the Friend's groups at those refuges?

**TIM:** Yeah, the Oxbow Friend's Group and the Assabet River Friend's Group were and still are very active in assisting the Service. The Assabet River Friend's Group actually started and incorporated two years before we finished acquiring the property and helped us quite a bit both politically and in completing the transfer, and helped us get local town support, and then physically helping us get the refuge ready to open.

**PEGGY:** That's pretty amazing. You mentioned Nomans Land Island, so there were containment issues there.

**TIM:** Nomans Land Island was primarily an issue with the possibility of unexploded ordnance. The Navy had used that island as an aerial gunnery practice range beginning of World War II. Although the Navy stopped using live ordnance in the early '50's and had crews of Seabee's that would go out there every summer and check for anything that had come to the surface from earlier training activities, there was a possibility that there's still something there that was dangerous. So, the Navy hired a company that were specialist in ordnance disposal, and they came out over a period of about five months and did a surface clearance of ordnance. And they actually removed from the island over 11,000 items that were ordnance.

**PEGGY:** Wow.

**TIM:** They found quite a number that were suspicious, and they would put a small, shaped charge on them to explode them to make sure there was no problem. And at that time, they had no secondary explosions, which kind of supported the fact that there was no live ordnance.

**PEGGY:** Nothing live.

**TIM:** So that was the main issue, and then there were follow up investigations that the Navy did for any contaminants that might have been associated with the ordnance, metals in particular or explosive residues. And it turned out that there wasn't much there that was a problem, there was one small area that they did a soil removal on that was associated with a storage area, but nothing very serious.

**PEGGY:** Well, that's good. Were there contaminant issues at Oxbow?

**TIM:** In the last transfer that occurred in the late '90's, early 2000's, Fort Devens itself had been designated a super fund site and the Army was doing a number of investigations there and clean ups on Fort Devens. But on the lands that they transferred to the Service, there was nothing that was a very serious nature in their investigations. There was one small arms firing range that had lead contamination issues that required soil removal from the backstop or on the range, that's all that I can remember that affected the land that they transferred to us.

**PEGGY:** Well, that's not bad. And they also have a strong Friend's group at Oxbow.

**TIM:** Yes, Oxbow has had a Friend's group up there for any number of years, they began back in the late '80's I think, early '90's as an informal group. And then when the Friend's groups kind of came into more formal fruition, they became a Friend's group. Bill Ashe was instrumental in getting them going, he was a resident up there and really helped them get organized and get going a long time ago.

**PEGGY:** So, compare the science, processes and work climate when you began your career to the time-period when you retired.

**TIM:** I think, you know when I began my career a lot of what was happening in the way of habitat and management activities was based on science, but a lot of it was based on personal experience. And over the years the science behind wildlife management really progressed a lot and the background and the research that went into making decisions and what kind of activities we were conducting became a lot more science based over the years and kind of less on personal experience and what people did in the past.

**PEGGY:** Less objective.

**TIM:** Right.



**PEGGY:** Did you happen to witness any new Service inventions or innovations during your career?

**TIM:** No, not that I can think of.

**PEGGY:** And what support did you receive locally, regionally, and federally?

**TIM:** Well, the local support from the Friend's group and the communities that the refuges were located in was tremendous. We had a lot of support from the surrounding communities, and from a local standpoint, that was terrific. Through the Friend's groups and the nature, personal preferences I guess of some of the congressional representatives that served our areas whose districts included our areas, were really also very helpful in supporting the Service and supporting the refuge. They were very instrumental in helping us effect the transfer of those lands from the Army and from the Navy over the years from a political standpoint in Washington working with the headquarters of the Navy and the Army down there. So, we had a lot of support.

**PEGGY:** That's great. What was the highpoint of your career, do you think?

**TIM:** Besides coming to work for the Service, [chuckling] I think coming up here to Great Meadows was the high point. I'd been down in the field office in Rhode Island for five years and commuting back and forth on weekends because we didn't ever sell the house up here in Massachusetts.

**PEGGY:** Where did you live then? Where were you in Massachusetts at that point?

**TIM:** We lived in Leominster and while I was down in Rhode Island too. But in the time, I was at Rhode Island, one of the projects that we were working on was contamination in the Sudbury River from Platte in Ashland. So, we were doing some interagency work with EPA because it was a superfund site and had been involved in collecting and analyzing fish and other aquatic resources for contamination. In that project we were working out of the shop here at Great Meadows and I ran into the refuge manager at the time, Bud Oliveira, and was talking to him about what was happening, where I was working, where I lived. And he said, "Well why don't you talk to your supervisor and have you transfer up here."

**PEGGY:** It was easier back then wasn't it [chuckling].

**TIM:** So, I did, I transferred up here and I was still an environmental contaminants specialist for a year and then I took the newly created Oxbow and Assabet River manager job.

**PEGGY:** Nice. And just as important, what was the low point of your career, not as pleasant?

**TIM:** I don't really, didn't have a low point; I'd been very lucky and the people that I worked with and the places I worked, I just had wonderful career.

**PEGGY:** You sure did. Is there anything you wish you did differently?

**TIM:** Looking back in hindsight, I had a chance to become a refuge manager with the Service earlier on in my career and I should have done it but for one reason or another, I didn't; I think I would have been happier in the long run, but I can't complain.

**PEGGY:** No, you would have been a great refuge manager. Was there any major impediments to your job or career?

**TIM:** No, no there were no major impediments at all.

**PEGGY:** That's good. Do you remember who your supervisors were along the way?

**TIM:** Yeah, I remember all my supervisors. As a matter of fact, when I first went to work with the Army in Colorado, I had a supervisor whose name was Gaylord Bober, and after years old Gaylord left the Army and went to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, and that would have been in late '70's, '79, I think. And in 2002 or 2003, we had an employee here working with us whose first job was working for Gaylord Bober in Minnesota. Can you believe that? [laughing]

**PEGGY:** How ironic. Wow! Small world.

**TIM:** Yeah, small world. But I remember all my supervisors.

**PEGGY:** Are there any others you remember?

**TIM:** Well, working with the Service as an environmental contaminants, Ken Carr was our supervisor. We had three of us doing that kind of work, one in Maine and one in the Concord, New Hampshire field office, and my position down in Rhode Island. And Ken was a great supervisor, taught us a lot; he had been one of the first environmental contaminant specialist in the Service, so he has a great background in science and the work.

**PEGGY:** And you mentioned Bud Oliveira.

**TIM:** Bud Oliveira here, and Libby here after Bud.

**PEGGY:** Oh yeah. We kind of asked this one already, but who the individuals that helped shape your career?

**TIM:** I had a lot of folks that helped shape my career that were very supportive, taught me a lot. I mean we didn't really talk about being mentors or mentoring in those days, but I learned a lot from people that were very good in their work, and I was very lucky in that respect, I think.

**PEGGY:** Yeah, that's important. Do any names come to mind?

**TIM:** Well, we just talked about some of them.

**PEGGY:** Okay. What Presidents, Secretaries of the Interior, Directors of the Service did you serve under, or maybe regional directors as well?

**TIM:** Way too many Presidents.

**PEGGY:** Yeah, I know, decades. Any that stand out maybe.

**TIM:** No, I wasn't that close to that level of folks.

**PEGGY:** How did changes in administration affect your work, if at all?

**TIM:** I don't think; changes in the federal administration?

**PEGGY:** Washington, yeah.

**TIM:** Washington. You know over the period of my career; we have gone through periods where we had hiring freezes and budget cuts and some challenges in those times. Usually, it happened when a new President came into office and lasted for a year or so until that administration became familiar with the federal programs and what they wanted to do. So, it was temporary, and it happened particularly during when Ronald Reagan first came into office, didn't affect us when I was working for the Department of the Army and Department of Defense at that time. I know it did affect the Fish and Wildlife Service, as a matter of fact I had friends and people I worked with that worked for the Service out of Denver, Colorado that he had an employee that had been newly hired and was in transit to report for his first day of work, and he was told to stop, turn around and go back because of the hiring freeze.

**PEGGY:** Wow.

**TIM:** So, they couldn't pick him up for like six months, he eventually did come on board. And it happened again between the initial year or so of the Bush administration, we had a big hiring freeze, you probably remember that.

**PEGGY:** Yes.

**TIM:** Had to account for every penny for a year or two, a year, about a year, but then things went back to normal.

**PEGGY:** What were some of the changes you observed in the Service and who were the individuals who shaped the Service that you thought?

**TIM:** Well, I think definitely over the years the Service started to realize that we needed to do a lot more outreach and education and visitor services to help support us in the public's eye; I think that's the biggest change. When I was first working with people that worked for the Service and when I first really came to work for the Service it was more oriented towards just the resource management end of the business. So that was a big change, and I think that was helpful, a helpful change.

**PEGGY:** Yeah.

**TIM:** And I think, we mentioned the fact, over the years the science base decisions really increased.

**PEGGY:** How good. What are your thoughts on the Service's future and what advice would you offer new hires?

**TIM:** Well, I hope, we're kind of in a period of time right now where we need to really keep our nose to the grind stone and not get discouraged; stay the course right now and things will change. And stay with the program, the Service has got good programs, and we just need to stay with it and keep trying to improve.

**PEGGY:** That's good advice. Was there anything else you'd like to add or anything we didn't touch base on, any thoughts?

**TIM:** No, I think we covered an awful lot.

**PEGGY:** Did we cover everything?

**TIM:** Yeah.

**PEGGY:** Do you have any photographs or documents to donate, share, or copy that you might have?

**TIM:** I have a few photographs I could go through.

**PEGGY:** That would be wonderful. Let me know. You can either scan them or—

**TIM:** Just let you know.

**PEGGY:** Yeah, sure. That would be wonderful.

**TIM:** Yeah, their mostly slides; I don't know if you can still get slides reproduced.

**PEGGY:** There is a way, yes, we can convert them to digital photo.

**TIM:** We converted them to digital, a lot of them here to digital.

**PEGGY:** Yeah, yes, we can do that, that would be wonderful.

**TIM:** Where I live now there's one library in the next town that has, you can go there and do it yourself, otherwise it's kind of expensive to do it.

**PEGGY:** Oh yeah. Well, you could either try to do that or we can do that if you provide the slides, that would be great. Can you think of anyone else we should interview, and do you have any contact information? And if not, even if you don't have contact information.

**TIM:** You know people may have already done this.

**PEGGY:** Oh, that's okay.

**TIM:** I think Bud Oliveira would be a good person. Of course, Libby, she may have already been interviewed, Ken Carr, Steve Mierzykowski would be a good person. Steve's career and mine were very similar. He started as a wildlife biology for the Army at West Point, and he commuted back and forth from West Point to Old Town, Maine for twelve years.

**PEGGY:** Wow!

**TIM:** His wife was on the faculty at the University of Maine, so they never moved [chuckling].

**PEGGY:** Wow!

**TIM:** And he worked for the Service for quite a while in Maine.

**PEGGY:** Okay. Anybody else you think we could interview that's retired now?

**TIM:** No.

**PEGGY:** Good. Alright, so if there's nothing else, I think we're good.

**TIM:** Okay.

**PEGGY:** Thank you very much Tim.

**TIM:** Alright.

Keywords:

Hunting and Fishing  
Department of the Army  
State of HI  
Water Quality  
Environmental Contaminants  
RI Field Office  
Eastern MA NWR Complex  
CCP's (Comprehensive Conservation Plans)  
Nomans Land Island NWR  
Oxbow NWR  
Assabet River NWR  
Monomoy NWR  
Great Meadows NWR  
Acquisition  
Navy  
Base Closure  
Environmental Cleanup  
Fort Devens  
Friends of Assabet River NWR  
Friends of Oxbow NWR  
Unexploded Ordnance  
Superfund Site  
Habitat Management  
Science  
Congressional Support  
Sudbury River  
EPA  
Fish  
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Hiring Freeze  
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Education