



The Oral History of Gary Mowad

April 28, 2016

Interview conducted by Deborah Holle

Austin, Texas

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Gary Mowad

Date of Interview: April 28, 2016

Location of Interview: Austin, Texas

Interviewer: Deborah Holle

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 25 years (1988-2013)

Offices and Field Stations Worked and Positions Held: Special Agent/pilot GS 5 in Anchorage, Alaska; Special Agent, Chicago, Illinois; Special Agent, Denver, Colorado (1991-1999); Senior Special Agent, Washington D.C.; Assistant Special Agent in Charge, Region 2, Albuquerque, New Mexico; GS 15 Special Agent in Charge, Denver, Colorado; GS 15 Deputy Chief for Law Enforcement Program, Washington D.C.; Texas State Administrator for Ecological Services, Texas.

Most Important Projects: Operation Whiteout; establishing the Environmental Contaminants Program, which is now a national program.

Colleagues and Mentors: Terry Grosz, Dale Hall, Jamie Clark, Wally Soroka, Joe Budzyn, Nando Mauldin, Dominic Domenici, Rob Lee, Frank Shoemaker, Greg Langer, Benito Perez, Allan Strand, Edith Erfling, Tom Cloud, Al Crane

Brief Summary of Interview: Gary Mowad was born in El Paso, Texas, graduated from high school early, started attending the University of Texas at El Paso before transferring to Stephen F. Austin State University with a Bachelor of Science degree, specializing in entomology. He worked for USDA as a plant protection and quarantine inspector before going back to school at the University of Texas at El Paso to get his master's and his teaching certificate. Mr. Mowad taught at the local high school and community college upon learning from a student that the Fish and Wildlife Service was looking to hire special agents. He would apply for and was offered a position to start with the Fish and Wildlife Service as a special agent/pilot (he already had his pilot's license) in Anchorage, Alaska. He and his girlfriend would marry before leaving Texas, have been married ever since, and have one daughter together. Mr. Mowad talks about his career and the various locations he worked, highs and lows, changes to the Service, and having his own consulting firm after retirement. He absolutely loved working for the Service, through the ups and downs, and still feels he helps the Service through his consulting firm.

THE INTERVIEW:

DEBORAH HOLLE: (The tape is running but Deborah is just giving some guidance to Gary here.) You can give us personal information; I'm not supposed to talk on this very much. Your birthplace and you've got, I guess the next page or two over, at the third page if you want to use that.

GARY MOWAD: Yeah, that's a good [start].

DEBORAH: You don't have to use everything but just kind of perk your memory.

GARY: I'm Gary Mowad, that's spelled M-O-W-A-D. I was born in El Paso, Texas on May 1, 1957; that means in two days I'm going to be 59, which snuck up on me. Both of my parents were from El Paso and worked locally there and never left, but I wanted to be a wildlife biologist and that's just not the place for most wildlife biologists. I only went to high school two and a half years; I graduated early and went to college; I started there at UTEP. I did okay except I discovered you could drop classes without any penalties, so I had few W's on my transcript early on when I was a youngster. Then I honed in on wildlife biology, exactly what I wanted to do, and I transferred from UTEP, which is the University of Texas at El Paso, to Stephen F. Austin State University in the piney woods, way over in east Texas. At that time, they had the number one school of forestry and wildlife management in the state of Texas.

I absolutely loved it, culture shock though; went from the desert to the piney woods and swamps and mosquitoes and affluent people. I grew up with what I guess you'd consider middle class to lower middle class folks; that's pretty much what El Paso was. And getting into east Texas, I met folks with lots of old money, fast cars, sororities, fraternities, none of which took with me; I was the guy running around the campus with a bug net and waffle stompers in a lumberjack shirt and loved every minute of it. I specialized in entomology, actually, in my undergraduate work as wildlife biology, but I just gravitated toward the invertebrates. I loved entomology, took every class they had on it and graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University with my B.S. in wildlife biology in 1979.

I then went to work with the USDA, at the Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, where I actually got to work with bugs. I was a plant protection and quarantine inspector on the Mexican border back in El Paso and inspected agricultural commodities coming across, either cars, trains, trucks, cargo docks, things like that. Our job was to intercept plant pests and protect American agriculture from all of those foreign plant pests that have infested Central America. I always got a kick out of that we got all kinds of money from congress for combating the Mexican fruit fly but the truth is the Mexican fruit fly had been on the continent for millions and millions of years. It comes up this far north every year and gets beat back by the weather but we took credit for it, so the weather wasn't there to defend themselves; so, we in USDA took credit for protecting American agriculture from the Mexican fruit fly.

But that was my first introduction into federal service, learned all the ins and outs, the do's and don'ts, what it meant to be a government employee, to have a badge, to have responsibility, to be able to seize items from people, and just learn about, again the responsibility that comes with being a government employee. I enjoyed every minute of it, it was a lot of fun, but while I enjoyed counting spiracles on a maggot's butt, you know that got old after a while and I started gravitating more toward wildlife biology. So, I went back to UTEP and got my master's degree there where I specialized more in vertebrates and

in particular comparative anatomy. So, I was kind of the “what begot what guy” for a long time; I really enjoyed the vertebrate side of it and again evolutionary theory.

No complaints enjoyed every minute of my graduate career and then when I got out of graduate school, like so many people about that time, this was 1984; it was very difficult to get a job as a biologist, so I went to work as a teacher. I actually spent an extra couple of semesters getting my teaching certificate; I taught high school biology and then honors biology and anatomy and physiology in El Paso at the high school during the day and then in the evenings and on weekends I taught at the El Paso Community College; freshman biology, freshman chemistry, and anatomy and physiology which was always my thing. And it was kind of funny because I had required all of my students in freshman biology at the community college to put together an insect collection, so they could learn taxonomy and what taxonomy meant, to actually pin insects and turn in a collection. And at the end of the year, this one girl turned in this collection that was just phenomenal; it was a lot of exotic bugs, and I knew that those weren't local insects. I asked her about it and turned out her dad was an entomologist with USDA, and so I just happened to mention, “Well, if he ever hears of a job open in biology, let me know.” And you know it was probably only about six months later that she came up to me and said, “Hey, my dad told me that he knows the special agent for the Fish and Wildlife Service in El Paso, Texas and they're going to be hiring.” And she said she knew I was a pilot; I was already a private pilot and that they needed pilots in Alaska. So, I went down and met an agent named Chente Bustamante, who was the agent in El Paso and told him how interested I was. I think he was feeling me out, I was feeling him out. Long story short, I filled out all the paperwork, got all the transcripts in, applied for the job; I was interviewed by the special agent in charge out of Albuquerque, who came down to El Paso to do the interview, which I was pretty impressed with.

But then I found out there were 2,000 applicants for 26 positions, so I knew it wasn't that promising but I was absolutely flabbergasted to get the phone call that said here's a job offer for you. I was already, at that time, let's see, I started with USDA as GS 5 with a master's degree, typical government, you know you pay your dues. And after a year I was a 7, and then I was just about to get my 9 when I went back and started teaching and then when I was offered the job by the Fish and Wildlife Service, it was back to a 5, take it or leave it, we're picking off of the 5 cert. and of course I took it, this is what I wanted to do; it wasn't for the money, none of us in biology do it for the money. So, I went ahead and took the GS-5, and first duty station was Anchorage, Alaska. And my wife and I, she wasn't my wife yet, we'd been dating for a few years, and she's a very smart lady. We're still married; we've been married 27, 28 years now.

DEBORAH: Congratulations.

GARY: Thank you. She said, “I'll follow you to Alaska, I'll follow you anywhere but not as a girlfriend. You want me to come; we're going to get married.” So, we got married at a J.P. and I went off to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Brunswick, Georgia, in 1988. In fact, it was May 8, 1988, and I just loved it; loved the training, loved the people, the camaraderie, I loved being part of it. As I looked around the room at the other, they hired 26 [people], at the other 25, I was just in awe with the people I was in the room with. And that brought out the best in me; I felt like I had to give a 110% to just live up to the standards of these guys in the room, it was absolutely amazing. And that's when I learned about the esprit de corps and the camaraderie that comes with being in the Fish and Wildlife Service and being a special agent.

That was, I think, nine weeks of criminal investigator school and you're lumped into one school with IRS agents, ATF agents, you know, all the federal bureaus all go through the same criminal investigator school. And then after that, there was a follow up; I think at that time it was only six more weeks of special agent basic school. Had an absolute ball, just loved it, graduated from special agent basic, I think, distinguished graduate if I remember right. And [my] first duty station was Alaska, so packed up my bride and we drove to Seattle and caught the ferry and got off in Haines, made it to Anchorage; culture shock. It was definitely cold, definitely different, definitely dark; took a little bit of getting used to.

Right away, in those days we still worked waterfowl, my special agent in charge, a guy named Wally Soroka, had me out in the duck marsh in no time checking duck hunters, and that was all foreign to me because I'm a west Texas kid. I had never really done any duck hunting but really enjoyed it. It was about that point that I realized, *wow, the stuff that I got to do and to see as part of the job, you couldn't pay enough to actually get to do that, but yet you were getting paid to do it*; loved every second of it. In fact, my early nickname was Gary 'I love it' Mowad because no matter what they told me to do, I loved it; I never pushed back. They asked me to go, I'd go; I didn't care how many days or weeks I was going to be out there, I did it. And that includes surveillances, out in the woods, camping out, going to sea on the Fish and Wildlife Service's 58-foot boat they had up there, the "Surfbird" is what it was called, it was a tender boat from the Korean vintage period. We'd take that boat and then launch zodiacs off of it to go check duck hunters down in southeast Alaska. But whatever they threw at me, absolutely loved every minute of it, it was just a great group to be with, an honor to be part of it, never regret a second of it and I would do it again tomorrow; I would tell my daughter to do it as well.

It evolved over the years, we went from just in the field all the time catching bad guys to all the bureaucracy that came in over the twenty something years including all the computer training for this, and time sheets for that, and Quicktime for this. It went from we caught bad guys, and we wrote reports for with a chief pad and a number two pencil, grand juries, search warrants, just all the fun stuff to, near the end, I can certainly see where the administrative burden had just taken over the vast majority of what we did but loved every second of it.

Learned about politics real quick. I did a big ivory case in Alaska involving the trade of walrus ivory for whiskey, marijuana, cocaine, and guns. And I started working a bunch of walrus captains from the village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, and they were hunting walrus in a wasteful manner, they were shooting them and then just taking an axe or a chainsaw and cutting off the nose with the two tusks and let the rest of the meat just sink to the bottom, and so I worked that case, and indicted thirteen individuals. And that's when I started to learn about politics. The Alaska natives were not happy with the fact that they had been busted for wanton waste of marine mammals, put the pressure on the regional director to make this go away and make me go away. I think Fish may have caved a bit to their pressure, they wouldn't let us indict a lot of the Alaska native boat captains, but they did let me indict the Mexican national who was running the drugs into the villages and his wife, a guy named Sergio and his wife Adele.

We indicted them. We did a whole bunch of search warrants, we convicted them, and then I actually got Sergio at a prison a year or two later to act as an informant for me and sent him back into the villages to work undercover for me and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. And it was at that point that the case was taken over by the special operations unit and it became what's known as Operation Whiteout. It was a great case, made a lot of press, made *Newsweek* back when, you know we didn't even have the internet then, but it came out in *Newsweek*.

As soon as that case had come out and it hit *Newsweek* and I made a comment in there how disgusting it was that they were wasting all these walrus just to get the ivory and trade it for marijuana, it wasn't soon after that I was asked to transfer to Chicago and get out of Alaska, which probably isn't a bad thing. There were only two Mowads in Alaska, myself and my wife and my wife was working at the Alaska Native Medical Center at the time and I had just busted a whole bunch of natives and my name was in the paper all the time, and she was called in by her head nurse and asked to take off her name tag.

So that's part of, I guess, I'd say the tradition, when all of our spouses who are married to Service employees, I mean they're married for life as well. It impacts their lives and their careers. She took off her name tag and she was just Lou after that and nobody brought it up again, but it was soon after that, that I was transferred to Chicago. And in Chicago I worked a totally different round, import/export stuff, bird smugglers, got into some more ivory smugglers; a lot of African ivory items being smuggled into the US in one form or another. So, working in Chicago, my case load shifted from marine mammals and hunting in Alaska to import/export kind of stuff.

DEBORAH: Is that mostly elephants?

GARY: Mostly elephants, that's correct, and some just general wildlife stuff that folks were buying in Ethiopia and Kenya and Nigeria; Nigeria was the worst. And the Nigerians would always be bringing in smuggled stuff and so basically my case load was there to basically support the inspection program and adjudicate those cases either through abandonment or issue a civil violation notice or a civil penalty. That was a full-time job.

What I found challenging about that was, I was working a 9-hour day, supporting the import/export program out of O'Hare Airport, but my resident agent in charge, a guy named Joe Budzyn, he still loved to work waterfowl. In those days, we would still work waterfowl. So come the fall of the year, you'd put in a 50-hour week doing import/export work, but then at night and on the weekends, you were out in the duck clubs checking duck hunters. And it was challenging, you lost weight; you worked hard, there was no doubt about, you were gone a lot, didn't see your family a lot. My wife was a nurse at the time, so the more I worked, she just picked up extra shifts.

We worked in Chicago for just about 18 months. And then I transferred to Denver; got picked up by the special agent in charge in Denver, a guy named Terry Grosz, who is just a legend in his own right and he liked my work. He knew that I was forced, moved out of Alaska, busting bad guys and that didn't sit well with him, and so as soon as he had an opening in Denver to work in the Rocky Mountains, he reached out to me and picked me up, and I moved to Denver in 1991, and loved every second of it. Going back full circle to the camaraderie and the esprit de corps, working for Terry Grosz was like working for General Patton; I mean the guy was a legend, he is the best story teller in the world, big heart, supports his people, I learned all about top cover, I learned all about supporting your people, what a manager should do; I mean it was just an honor to work for the guy. And you work ten- or twelve-hour days and when there's nothing left and you remember well, I'm working for this guy, and I need to give even more.

DEBORAH: So, his book is true.

GARY: Many of his books, yeah, he's written probably eight books.

DEBORAH: I didn't realize it was that many.

GARY: A little-known fact that every dollar he makes from those books goes to the Danny Thomas Children's Hospital.

DEBORAH: Oh, that's good to know.

GARY: And his heart as big as the rest of him, he's just a great guy. I was actually the only special agent on the Front Range in Colorado, '91 to '92. Somewhere around '93 we got a new guy to help us out, but then we started this huge case involving elk ranching and we were trying to stop the movement of captive wildlife back and forth across state lines because that was about the time we started to have tuberculosis outbreaks in domestic elk herds, chronic wasting disease, meningeal worm; a whole host of these diseases started popping up about that time. So we, the Fish and Wildlife Service, actually set up a 1,100-acre elk ranch in western Colorado and I was the case agent on that and my undercover agents were Nando Mauldin, who's a legend from an earlier time - worked Operation Trophy Kill; [that] guy was just smooth, really, really smooth, and then Dominic Domenici, those were the two main agents, and then we had some support staff as well. But we worked that elk case for three years and we put up fence, I mean it was just like we were ranchers, we put up the big, tall, game fence; we fenced in maybe 400 of the 1,100-acre ranch. We leased out and raised our own alfalfa.

We had the entire ranch house wired with cameras in every smoke detector and any place you could think of, there was a camera there, so you're always afraid to spend the night or go to the bathroom in the place because it was always, could be recorded at any time. And we did record a few of our guys in compromising situations, so we got big laughs, later on, it was a lot of fun, especially Terry Grosz flipping burgers in the kitchen keeping us all fed, you know; just a great experience working for him and working in Region 6.

I was in Region 6 as an agent from let's see, 1991 to 1999, so for those eight years I was a special agent there in Front Range and just loving every minute of it. Supporting Colorado and Utah and Montana with Lacey Act cases involving big game hunting, and that's where I started my work in the Environmental Contaminants Program. For whatever reason, one of the great things about working for the Fish and Wildlife Service Law Enforcement Program, is whatever floats your boat or turns your crank, you can normally gravitate towards that; if you like the import/export work, then you can work in ports and work smugglers. Many agents spent their whole career just working guys smuggling exotic reptiles and birds, amphibians, snakes and things like that. And if you like big game hunting, you can gravitate to the states where you work big game cases - Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Utah; a lot of elk, deer, those kind of cases that are unlawfully taken wildlife is transported in interstate commerce.

But in my case, what really turned my crank was just environmental contaminants, wildlife mortality linked to pesticide misuse, oil spills, oil pits. I saw how damaging those patterns were to our trust species. I mean I checked duck hunters every year on the Platte River in Colorado and probably saw 20, 30, 40 unlawfully taken ducks, but in one case I had 2,000 mallards poisoned by Furadan. So, I quickly learned that pesticides and oil spills and oil pits, contaminants were killing a lot more of our trust species than poaching was. I started to concentrate my work on environmental contaminants, and it wasn't long before I was actually hired as the Environmental Contaminants Coordinator for the region where I set up programs and protocols for addressing problem oil pits.

DEBORAH: Were you still in the Division of Law Enforcement?

GARY: Still within the Division of Law Enforcement, but actually my title was Environmental Contaminants Coordinator. I was one of the first field grade 13's and so I was a 13, working exclusively in oil pit and pesticide issues. And what I would do is I would fly surveys and I could do one or two states a year and I'd fly surveys in those two states and GPS technology was just coming online, and I would take a GPS coordinate for an oil production pit that was covered with sludge that represented a threat to migratory birds. I would come home after flying eight hours a day and copy down, by hand, all of those GPS coordinates for all the bad pits and then, and this was before GIS, I would actually then mark them on a map, put an "X" on the map and when I'd get to about 250 pits, we would form a task force and I would bring in maybe six teams and each team would get forty or fifty pits to go to.

DEBORAH: Now you had to adjust the GPS coordinates because this was when the military still scrambled the signal.

GARY: Well, every so often people would get to where there was supposed to be a pit and there wasn't one, and my only explanation is they must have pressed the button and scrambled it at that time; for the most part, no, folks did get to where they needed to be. Although in the first year all I did was give them GPS coordinates and some guys would get there and they weren't sure exactly where the pit was. Sometimes they're hard to find. The second year I did this, I upped the program's efficiency by taking a picture also. So, I'd make an extra pass with the airplane. The first pass would be taking a GPS coordinate, the second pass would be taking a photograph. Then I could give them a GPS coordinate and a photograph and that was very, very helpful. And we literally cleaned up all the eight states in Region 6 in no time by doing this. It was a little bit controversial because when I had all the GPS coordinates, I would actually publish them in the trade journals, like the *Colorado Oil and Gas Association Newsletter* and let everybody know that these are the problematic pits that we found and we're coming back in thirty days and if they're not cleaned up or there's dead birds in there then they're going to be cited.

A lot of the agents pushed back. They didn't like the idea of giving somebody a bite of the apple, they didn't like the idea of having a possible violation on the ground, yet someone's given the opportunity to clean it up or cover it up, but I realized then that I needed to change the culture within the Office of Law Enforcement a little bit. It wasn't just all about writing tickets or making cases, but it was about the bigger picture, the environmental picture, about the conservation picture, about getting these things cleaned up and if we got them cleaned up that was far more important than writing a ticket.

DEBORAH: Did the oil people know that their pits were as deadly as they were to waterfowl and other wildlife species?

GARY: Yes, I think they did, but there wasn't any enforcement. The state regulators, who were supposed to be regulating this or on federal land, the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) - they knew.

DEBORAH: They knew.

GARY: They just weren't going to do it; they were not going to enforce Fish and Wildlife Laws or turn in any of these oil producers. They're in a difficult position. They're supposed to be promoting oil and gas development on federal lands and at the same time regulating it. Well, anytime you have to promote it or regulate it, you know it's a lot easier to promote, so that's what they would do.

DEBORAH: Can you estimate the percentage of your success by giving people a grace period to clean it up?

GARY: Yeah, I think I can. I actually have PowerPoint [presentations] on this that I used to give to Fish and Wildlife Management. I'll give you an example, in Colorado, when I first started flying surveys for problematic oil pits, 90% of the pits that I would see would have oil sludge on the top, meaning they represented a threat to migratory birds. And then when we would give folks time to clean them up and then come back and then prosecute the bad actors who didn't clean up their act, within just a matter of a few years, the non-compliance rate, that is to say the rate of pits with oil on the surface, which they're not supposed to have, went from about 90% to about 30% and in the subsequent years it got down to about 18%.

So, we were very, very successful in cleaning up oil pits across the landscape and we did it state by state. And that seemed to be repeated over and over again where the problematic oil pits would number in 80 to 90% on state land, federal land, tribal land, it didn't matter, it was always the same, 80 to 90 % of them had oil on the surface that were killing birds. And after a year or two of working with them and prosecuting the bad actors and giving the good actors time to clean up their act, because they knew we were serious, every one of them we had below 20% by the time I left the region. When I look back on it, I think that was my greatest conservation achievement throughout my career within the Fish and Wildlife Service. I did that for about five years. And in all eight of those states in Region 6, again, we dropped the non-compliance rate from 80 to 90% to below 20%. And then pretty soon I exported that program out of Region 6. I was asked to bring it to Region 1, I was asked to bring it to Region 4 and to a degree into Region 3. And then soon that became the national policy; that was the national protocol, that's how we did business.

DEBORAH: But not Region 2, with Texas and Oklahoma as big gas and oil states?

GARY: We did; we had a lot of success in Region 2. There's an agent down here named Rob Lee, who was thumping the oil companies pretty hard for killing birds in open tanks and open pits. What we did down here in Region 2 was simply make him more efficient because he was just driving around checking pits. And one thing that I used to always tell people that you could check 50 pits a day and that's it, you're exhausted, that's a ten-hour, twelve-hour day. In an airplane, I could check 50 to 100 pits in an hour and then you only come back to the bad ones. So, using the airplane as a tool, we showed how much more effective we could be and I was always proud of the fact too that for critics of the Service Aviation Program, this was a splendid example of how showing them how an airplane, even though they can be expensive, they're not in the big picture. Instead of having crews out there checking 50 oil pits in a twelve-hour day and paying for all that hotel and per diem and all that, where we could check literally a thousand pits in a day: it's a huge difference. What I brought to Region 2 was use of the airplane, use of the GPS, and then pretty soon GIS was a big help. I can't tell you how thrilled I was to then have a GPS that I could download; I could trap 259 points, that's all they let you trap in a day. And I could come back to my hotel room, plug in a cable, and then transfer those into my laptop. Boy, that was so much better than writing them down by hand. And then I could take that laptop and the GIS people could then actually plot them on maps. So this evolution was just incredible and it occurred over just four or five years going from flying in an airplane and putting a dot on the map to come back to, to flying in an airplane and having a GPS coordinate that you would then have to copy and hand plot on a map to where you literally just trapped them all, downloaded them, gave them to the GIS folks, and then had maps to hand everybody. We got very efficient over those five years, and again I think that's my proudest achievement as a field agent, is the amount of clean-up we got in the oil production patch and the number birds that we saved. And to this day, you know we've got problem actors in little areas

you've got to go back and (unintelligible) slap to make sure that they don't backslide into their old ways, but they know we're serious.

The biggest threat to that, that I've had to watch is three circuits now, three federal circuits, the 2nd, 8th, and 9th Circuits have ruled that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act is a hunting statute, and industrial and agricultural take from pesticides and oil pits no longer apply. And to me this is very disheartening because this is how I made my living; I know how detrimental industrial take, pesticide take, and oil spills and oil pits can be to migratory birds, but the 5th Circuit is Texas, Louisiana here, we can't write tickets anymore for what I used to do. So eventually this issue is going to get before the Supreme Court and the Division of Law Enforcement is looking for a very good fact pattern to get in front of the Supreme [Court] to rule on this. Then we can only keep our fingers crossed that they rule in favor of the Service to allow this kind of work to continue. Again, that's kind of the evolution of this over my career from 20 years ago, 27 years ago till now. It's from very, very important work to work now that we can't even prosecute, very troubling.

DEBORAH: I had no idea.

GARY: Oh, yeah, yeah, that's a tough one.

DEBORAH: Where'd you go after Denver?

GARY: Well, here's the thing. My wife moved - I like to tell people my wife moved 7 times for me in my career - so the last one had to be for her. Let's see, [I] went from Alaska to Chicago, Chicago to Denver, I was in Denver for eight years, and then I went to D.C. as a Senior Special Agent to get my mind right to learn the business side of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Like they used to tell us, the work of the Fish and Wildlife Service occurs in the field, the business of the Fish and Wildlife Service occurs in Washington. I went there for two years as a desk officer and paid my time in the cubicle farms. Learned a bunch but again was presented with great opportunities. I went to Africa when I was there, represented the Office of Law Enforcement with the Lusaka Agreement Task Force. We trained anti-poaching rangers in Kenya from eleven different countries, made some great connections, got some memories that I cherish to this day. And so even though it was a difficult place to live, you're definitely sacrificing, your family's sacrificing, but there are opportunities to represent the government on a national scale are there as well. And so, I did two years, which was the minimum you could do, loved every minute of it, except the commute and then from there I came out to Region 2, to Albuquerque as the Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC) in Albuquerque. And I just enjoyed that as well.

My SAC at the time was Frank Shoemaker. The SAC's which are ARD's, they do the political side of the office and when you're the ASAC or the Deputy ARD, you run the region. You're the nuts and bolts, you go to all the meetings, you make sure everybody gets paid, you make sure all the undercover money is accountable, policies are complied with, disciplinary actions come to you, whereas the SAC does more of the political side, interacting with the other ARD's and the Regional Director. I was in Albuquerque only two years as the ASAC. Again, great memories, loved every minute of it, learned a bunch, just learned a bunch about managing people, because before I was a special agent or biologist, you know I was in my element. Now all a sudden in Albuquerque for the first time I was a manager and that's a huge transition to deal with people and to manage people and to learn how to treat people right, to learn how to discipline people, to discipline them, to learn how to do it in a way where you don't deflate them

or bust their spirit or be overzealous or let that power go to your head. There's just so many things that occurred over those two years.

DEBORAH: Do you think the Service gave you enough training to be able to do that?

GARY: Yeah, I do. Back in those days I went through the mid-level management program, which was the precursor to maybe ALDP (Advanced Leadership Development Program) or—

DEBORAH: SUTL (Stepping Up to Leadership.)

GARY: SUTL. I went through mid-level management, and it was good training. It wasn't, I mean as extensive as they get now, they get SUTL and ALDP and everything else, but still I felt like I was adequately prepared; even though you're adequately prepared, it doesn't change the fact that it's not easy. It's difficult making that transition from special agent and biologist to manager; now my job is managing people and managing money and vehicle fleets and it's a different kind of job and you've got to kind of ask yourself do you really want to do this, is this what you want to do? Or you ask yourself *maybe I should go back to being a field agent; that was fun, managing people maybe isn't quite as much fun*. But despite the challenges I made the transition from field agent and desk agent to supervisor. I probably stubbed my toe a couple times but learned. Each and every one of those experiences that you think you could have done better, you learn from and as long as you learn from them, not a waste of experience.

DEBORAH: Do you think you're an extrovert or an introvert?

GARY: Well, I'm definitely introverted, I'm an INTP on the [Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator.]

DEBORAH: Oh, that's a scientist.

GARY: Yeah, INTP. And I think that's why sometimes I would come home just exhausted because as INTP, I couldn't be that at work, so at work I had to be more an extrovert. I had to be a leader, I had to make decisions. And so yeah, I think that did wear me out, there's no doubt about it. But after the two years in Albuquerque, learning and growing and developing, I was selected as the Special in Charge back in Denver. My wife was thrilled. We got to go back to Denver; we were there nine years the first time and this time I went back for five more years as the special agent in charge or ARD for the program. And again, I continued to grow. Totally different job from being a field agent. My job was managing people, managing budgets, vehicle fleets, interaction with the other divisions, working with all the state agencies. I had eight state wildlife programs I had to deal with, working with the tribes. Region 6 has a lot of tribes, so I had a lot of tribes. It was a huge challenge but a great job and I think I did great at it.

DEBORAH: Did you work with many refuges in Region 6?

GARY: I did. I worked with Greg Langer, who was the refuge LE guy at the time there; worked with a number of the refuges on Native American issues in South Dakota actually and how the Native American, tribal lands, and refuges interact and things like that, so yeah, we definitely did. One of the things that was the most challenging to me - and I thought about this many times - I always like to think I'm a team player and the team comes first and you can do what you're going to do for your team, but the biggest challenge for me during the five years as the SAC in Denver was picking my team. I was part of a group of seven other SACs, you know we had seven regions in those days. So, the seven SACs would come together for meetings all the time and those seven SACs and the chief and Deputy Chief, we would

divvy up the budget, divvy up the FTEs, vehicles, things like that. But that group of SACs was pretty much dysfunctional. They were pretty mean spirited. There were rich regions and poor regions, the money wasn't divvied up equitable. I have a very strong sense of justice, and I thought that my region was the recipient of injustice.

DEBORAH: Who divvied up that money, the Washington office?

GARY: Yeah, the Washington office, the Chief, Deputy Chief, and Circee Peters, the head bean counter for Law Enforcement. They would all devise the system that would, again, allocate the funding to the regions, but it was very, very clear that Region 3 and Region 6 got the short end of the stick just by how they prioritized who should get the money.

DEBORAH: Was that based on the waterfowl, endangered species?

GARY: No, it was based on FTEs, number of agents that you have, you got so much per FTE. But then regions with import/export programs could augment that money with user fees. If you didn't have big ports like Region 3 and Region 6 don't, then you lost out on all that import/export money. The inspectors weren't fully funded; you had to pay for those out of agent money. And by the end of my first year, I guess not cognitively, but I just made a decision based on, I guess my sense of fairness, again I was a team player, but was I going to be part of the management team, the seven SACs and the Washington crew, or was my team going to be my region? And I chose my region and the twenty-something agents and then the wildlife inspectors and the admin staff for my region. They were my team and I supported them every chance I could. I tried to make sure that they had the funding they needed to get the job done, and I pushed back against the other SACs quite often.

I don't think I was popular with that management group at all; I was always viewed as an outsider and looking back on it, I can live with that. I made the decision, I made the decision to support my region, my staff versus being part of the management crew, which I think to be part of the SAC group and to have been accepted there would have been accepting an unfair system that hurt my people. And to me it would have been throwing my people under the bus just to make me a popular leader and advance my career and I just wasn't going to do it. It was a very difficult decision. I think a lot of folks end up in the position - you have to choose. Do you want to be a part of that management group, and again this was a very mean spirited, dysfunctional management team of other SACs at that time. They did not play well in the sandbox together and my region got the short end of the stick and so I chose to fight that group, side with my region and I think I did great things for them. We really overcame budget deficits; we had enough money to operate and during those five years, I think Region 6 thrived. And then I made the choice to go back to D.C. one more time. I chose to leave the SAC position, which is a 15 position in Denver. I took a lateral to another 15 in Washington to become the Deputy Chief for the Law Enforcement Program. I did that because the Chief was going to retire in a year, we needed somebody to step up and run the program.

DEBORAH: Who was the chief?

GARY: Benny Perez.

DEBORAH: Benny?

GARY: Benito Perez. We called him Benny. He was the Chief. He lives right here in Texas, down in Alice. And he was going to retire in a year. So, I went ahead and took a lateral, which was actually a pay cut

because the locality pay was higher in Denver than it was in D.C. We sold our house, moved to D.C., just rented a place because their market was tanking, and you don't want to buy in D.C. on a downturn. It was kind of a crappy house. I felt bad making my family live like that but you know when you got to D.C., that's the way it goes. I applied for and was accepted to the SES (Senior Executive Service) Program; I'm the only law enforcement person, I'm aware of, that's ever gone through the SES Program and successfully completed it. I completed my SES Program about two years after going back to D.C. as the Deputy Chief of the Law Enforcement Program. And about that time, Benny Perez got an extension. We're all mandatory [retirement] at 57 in the Law Enforcement Program. He got an extension and so I stayed another year waiting for Benny to retire so I could step up into that position. And then he got a second extension, and I wasn't sure how long these extensions were going to just keep coming.

About that time, I got a call from Region 2 asking me if I would come to Texas to be the Texas State Administrator for the Ecological Services Program. Even though it represented about a \$25,000 a year pay cut, because you lost your law enforcement availability pay, my wife and I made the decision that we would go ahead and do that so that we could come to Austin. They had great schools for my daughter and I would no longer have a mandatory retirement age of 57. I could stay as long as I wanted. The plan was to stay to age 60. So, I came to Texas and stepped into the ES position. I don't think I was really well received. I was the first person I think ever to come from law enforcement into another division like that. I could feel some resentment from some other state supervisors wanting to know what this guy is doing in this position.

DEBORAH: You were an outsider.

GARY: I was an outsider. That's it exactly. So, I wasn't made to feel welcomed really, and that was new for me because once again all of my experiences in LE were good, even bad experiences in LE were family fight; that was still my family, still loved every minute of it, even the people you didn't like, that's like your odd cousin but they were family, that was part of it. You probably experienced the same thing in refuges. Then coming into ES, now, that was not a warm fuzzy feeling, these were people who didn't know me, I didn't know them, I wasn't made to feel welcomed.

Then it became very clear as soon as I got here and got settled in that the state comptroller who manages the law enforcement program, excuse me, the ES Program... Let me back up. The state comptroller who manages the Endangered Species Program for the State of Texas was used to getting preferential treatment for her and her friends and her cronies. I was getting a lot of pressure to make decisions that benefited friends and acquaintances of the state comptroller. And I would say no. Again, integrity is everything to me. And I used to always tell everybody that your integrity can never be taken from you, you have to give it up and I was not going to give up my integrity after all those years in law enforcement so that the state comptroller in the State of Texas can see her friends benefit. And this is everything from conservation banks, to who's going to work on HCP's (Habitat Conservation Plans) to whose going to do Section 7 consultations for Fort Hood. There's just this whole onslaught of folks that were in a tight circle around the state comptroller. They were asking for preferential treatment and I wouldn't give it to them. So, then I became unpopular within the State of Texas to people that we're supposed to work with. Now the folks at Texas Parks and Wildlife, we got along great because they understood I was saying no for a reason and they loved it; they've never seen anybody with enough guts to say no to these people.

DEBORAH: Do you think maybe the ES staff people that you were supervising, it wasn't that they didn't like you because you were from Law Enforcement, but they were just suspicious because of what they were forced to work under?

GARY: Could be. There's some good people in ES, but actually my heart goes out to them. It's a very difficult state to work in. Politics reigns and powerful politicians, state comptroller's click; they know what they want and if you don't give it to them, they don't hesitate to call Senator Cornyn and call Congressman Carter, call the regional office and talk to Joy or Benjamin. They know what they wanted. And it got to be fairly common for me to be flipped, and that was kind of, I think, an ongoing joke. As I would say no to people, "No, you can't do this, we have to keep the landscape level and fair for everyone." And then they would call the regional office who would flip me and give them what they wanted. And I actually had one guy here actually say, "Why do you do this, you know we're just going to call Joy at the regional office and she's going to flip you." And I go, "Yeah, well, I'd rather get flipped but I told you the right thing the first time, than to cave in and give you what you want because that's not right."

So needless to say, after a couple of years - I came down here in 2010, by the end of 2012 - this job wasn't fun at all anymore. I couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe working for the Fish and Wildlife Service wasn't fun because for all of my time in law enforcement, it was phenomenal, it was incredible, I loved every second of it even the bad moments were still good. And I remember just feeling exhausted, deflated, I couldn't get stuff out of my head, I couldn't sleep at night. And I told my wife, "I'm eligible for retirement at any time, I'm not getting that much more for each year that I stay, and at this point I don't think it's worth it for my family, my health to just continue to put up with this." And it got to the point where I had stood up to the State of Texas and pushed back against the regional office on so many issues that I'd been pretty much put in the penalty box and I knew that, and so with that said I knew it was time to retire. They always say you know when it's time for you to retire; well, I believe I knew when it was time for me to go, they didn't have to show me the door, it was there and I took it.

I retired and even though the last few years weren't fun, and actually quite stressful and I witnessed what I thought was a lack of integrity within the Fish and Wildlife Service management in this region, I look back still fondly on the career and what I got to do and the people I got to work with, the good we did on the landscape, the good we did for the resources. It was all good and it breaks my heart to see how political the Fish and Wildlife Service has become.

I'm going to go back full circle and say that I worked for some of the best managers that ever were, starting with Terry Grosz; he was an incredible manager that I just, I'd take a bullet for that guy, to this day I'd take a bullet for that guy. And Dale Hall, one of the best managers. I had a governor of South Dakota trying to get me to fire my agent in South Dakota for, the public didn't know it, but my agent had busted his brother. And a lot of pressure was put on me to transfer that agent out of South Dakota and I wouldn't do it. And I learned about top cover, I received top cover for some awful, controversial decisions and things we had to do and I always felt like managers had my back. And so, when I was in management, I always wanted to make sure my people knew I had their back, and Terry Grosz and Dale Hall, they always had our backs and we really appreciated that. What I've seen now within the Fish and Wildlife Service many of the people are completely demoralized because they feel like their management will not have their back. If they make tough choices and those choices aren't popular, they get transferred, demoted, whatever it might be. But there's an overriding feeling throughout the Fish

and Wildlife Service now. I still work with those people on a daily basis in my consulting business. They are all very, very much so demoralized.

I think some of the changes that I've seen within the Fish and Wildlife Service, I guess I'll focus in on the perspective area here. As I mentioned to you, the high point of my career was the inception and development of the Environmental Contaminants Program in Region 6 that later on went to become the National Environmental Containments Program for the Law Enforcement Program and how it evolved over the years. Again, we saved millions and millions of birds. And one of the things I will say that was amazing to me is, unlike an agent with ATF or Customs, just a few Fish and Wildlife agents can make a huge difference on the landscape. And cleaning up all those oil pits and saving all these millions of birds, that wasn't the actions of a huge bureaucracy, that was an action of about 20 guys made all that happen. So, we saved millions of birds year after year, based on, again, the actions of just a very small group.

I learned early on in my career; you can't just blend in and blend into the wall paper and just get a paycheck and not do your job. Within your very first year or two, people know if you pull your weight and you're good or if you're not. And that's because Fish and Wildlife in Law Enforcement, we were so small; you had to pull your weight. It was very, very clear; we knew who was good and who wasn't good and who was mediocre. And so, you always had to put on your best game when you were working in law enforcement and pull your weight because we didn't have room for deadweight. We just really didn't. So that was the highlight of my career, I think, honestly, was the Law Enforcement Environmental Containments Program.

The low point of my career, again, was probably, you know, I was ill advised to take on the challenge of moving into ES, Endangered Species, Ecological Services. There is a lot of political interference there. Going through the SES Program, I learned that political influence is to be expected, but political interference is not. Here in Texas, that line between political influence and political interference, it's been crossed, it's blurred, doesn't even exist. Politicians in this state want what they want. If you don't give it to them, they'll find a way to hurt you or get to you. And that was probably the low point to see that my regional managers did not provide the top cover that I always provided to my people. They would make sure the state level politicians got what they wanted at the expense of hurting their own folks, not supporting me and completely demoralizing my staff. Again, my staff in all of Texas was completely demoralized by lack of top cover or support from management. And I'll point out that after I retired within months, Allan Strand retired, who was the project leader at Corpus, Tom Cloud retired, who was the project leader in Arlington, Texas, and then a year later Edith Erling, she retired over in Clear Lake, Texas. So, three of my four project leaders retired within a year of me retiring, and they've all said the same thing; they retired because they were completely demoralized, they had nothing to do. Decision making was no longer delegated to the field and that was just totally demoralizing to them.

I'll point out that that's a point that I don't want to miss, is that when, in this section of perspective, when they say, "How did things change, what did you witness change over the years?" Here's one of the most concerning to me - number one - the support from superiors, courageous leadership, that's going to the wayside. Field level staff, the folks in the trenches, day in and day out, they're not getting top cover anymore and they know it and that's very demoralizing to them. And then decision making, along those same lines, managers used to always push decision making down to the lowest appropriate level so that the field supervisors, refuge managers, even field agents, they felt empowered to make decisions based on their judgment and that they knew that those decisions would be supported. Well,

now it's not that way. Managers within the Fish and Wildlife Service lack the ability to delegate decision making down to the lowest appropriate level. I don't know if it's because they want to control everything and it's a control issue; what I've seen of Texas is that's exactly what it is. They have an outcome that they want to see, the way that you get to the outcome, if you control who touches the process, you make all the decisions, and you get the outcome that you want. They don't trust their people to use the best science and let science dictate the outcome; they know what they want.

DEBORAH: Do you think that's really a national problem with the agency in Ecological Services?

GARY: Yes. I've seen it. Now as a private consultant, I'm working in almost every Fish and Wildlife region and without exception the decision-making ability at the field level is weaning away. You just don't see it. And that's a common complaint that I hear time and time again when I ask somebody to make a decision. They go, "I can't make that one, that has to be run up the flag pole and somebody else will make that decision."

DEBORAH: Is that in all issues, or is it mostly focused on endangered species?

GARY: Mainly ES, mainly ES, but even in law enforcement now, we're seeing where a lot of decision making is being stove piped into the upper management. And that's very, unfortunately, we need to get new leadership in the Fish and Wildlife Service who will restore the faith and confidence in the field workers, you know all the folks in the trenches. Be it biologist, be it agents, be it wildlife inspectors, refuge officers, refuge managers; doesn't matter, whatever you're doing, we need to push down, push decision making, empowerment, push it back down and I think that will restore morale, esprit de corps, and it will bring the Fish and Wildlife Service around to, I think, a much better place than it is now. That lack of ability to, for even a refuge manager to make a decision, is demoralizing, it just really is. It's gotten to the point where in ES, I couldn't even hire a GS-5 secretary without getting that run by the regional office and having somebody throw holy water on it; it would never have been that way in the old days. So that's kind of some of the sad transitions that I've noticed.

What would I have done differently in my career? Actually, nothing. Within law enforcement, again I just loved every minute of it. I have all happy memories, glad to have been part of it, would like to think that folks think of me as a guy who pulled my weight. I have had people tell me that the thing they like about me the most is when they knew me as a new recruit, and then they knew me as a field agent, and as a low level manager to a special agent in charge to the deputy chief, I was always the same guy. It never went to my head; the power never went to my head. I was the same guy from the beginning to the end and I take a great deal of satisfaction in people saying that and recognizing that.

What was the most dangerous or frightening experience? Well, I always like to tell people that I almost had a wildlife management area named after me in Wyoming, which isn't what you want, because I was flying low level surveys over these oil production fields looking for problematic pits. And I was out there probably on a day that I shouldn't have been out there. It was gray overcast skies, light snow, over gray landscape and it was basically gray on gray day; the light was really bad. And the guy who was in the plane with me wanted to take a long pass back by another pit to get a better look. When we took that low pass, we fly over it about a hundred feet, and I saw this gray streak go by the wing tip - missed it by about three feet. It was a tower, we just didn't see it, and I missed that tower by about three feet. And it's funny because you say your life flashes before you, I cringed immediately because I knew we were going to hit a guide wire, which would roll us up into a ball of aluminum, but this particular tower didn't

have any guide wires, so I got really lucky. But I can tell you the bolts holding the tower together are square, not hex headed bolts. It's funny how your eyes can lock in on that. But it was just a gray tower made out of that gray angle iron looking stuff that's see through, so it's just gray on gray on a gray day. And literally what's so scary about that is that I had a daughter at home that was less than one year old and the guy in the plane with me had a newborn at home and we both thought, you know we just about orphaned our kids here, so we learned to be a lot more careful.

Two other times that I almost gave it all for the Service is in Alaska - I broke through the ice, went under the ice; that was the most terrifying experience because you have more time to think about it than just missing the tower. But I was chasing an injured raven, and it went into like a neighborhood pond and it was on the other side of the pond and I was new to Alaska; I didn't know that much about cold weather existence and ice and what not. And I was walking across what felt like solid 10, 12 inches of ice and man, I took one step too many and just broke right through, went completely under. And what I didn't realize is that you can't breathe, people don't recognize that if it's so cold your lungs, your diaphragm, I guess, collapses and you can't breathe; you can't get any air into your lungs. And then I was trying to get out and I couldn't get out. I was by myself and I knew I wasn't going to last very long like this. And I just got lucky that in those days we didn't have key fobs, we had real car keys and I had a roll of car keys in my pocket and I was able to get the car keys out and use it as kind of like a pick, to pick my way up and pull myself out of the water with my car keys.

DEBORAH: I'm surprised your fingers functioned.

GARY: Oh, it was scary. So that was probably the closest. And then one other time that still to this day I'll wake up with a cold sweat was during a search warrant in Anchorage in 1989 or '90. We knocked and announced. Nobody came to the door. We entered the house. I was on the entry team and as I was going upstairs to do what's called a clearing sweep to make sure nobody was in the house upstairs. I'm just going up the stairs and not looking up like I should have been. When I looked up, there was a lady there with a shot gun pointed right at me. I had to tell her, "Don't shoot, don't shoot! Just executing a search warrant, we'll be in and out in no time." But still to this day I think eight pounds of pressure on the trigger, and it would have been all over, my career would have been pretty short-lived. Very exciting times.

Actually, there was one more, so I guess I had many of these. I was flying in a Cessna 185 with Al Crane and we had just taken off from Fairbanks and we were heading north to do aerial wolf patrols. We would be looking for guys who were gunning wolves out of airplanes. And we got about maybe an hour, hour and a half out of Fairbanks, so we're like in the middle of nowhere and we both smelled fire at the same time. We had an inflight fire and smoke started coming up from under the dash. Al Crane did an incredible job; we opened the windows and kept it where we could still at least see and he landed on a frozen river and we bailed out onto this frozen icepack. The plane didn't erupt into flames, we just burned up all the electrical stuff, but it made me realize that when you have a fire in an airplane, you just can't step outside; it takes a while to get down, you're not going to get down real quick. And you know our eyes were burning, we smelled like smoke, I mean it was horrible but if it would have erupted into flames we would have actually been burned as well.

So, some of those close calls that I think back on, but again it was all part of the job and I was willing to accept those risks because I loved what I was doing. It was a part of my identity. I'll say this looking back on it - one of the things I did right, is my wife and I, we didn't have a child until late in life. I was so in

love with my job and my job was everything to me, that's where I got my self-esteem, my self-worth; it was all coming from the job, which I'm not saying that's right or wrong, I'm just saying that's the reality. And I think if we would have had our child earlier in my career, I would have been not as good as a father as I was later on. By the time we did have a child, which was ten years later, by then I realized how important family is and being a good father was everything and someday I was going to be retired and they'd be saying "Gary who?"

DEBORAH: You have one daughter?

GARY: Yeah, we stopped at one because we had her late. It's a lot of work but love her to death; she's 18 now but I'm glad that we waited because when I first started, again, the job was everything. I also need to salute my wife for that because I was gone all the time, in the fall, every weekend I worked; when they called, I jumped, I always went on any detail I was ever assigned to, volunteered for details. When I was the regional pilot, in addition to everything else I was doing, if somebody needed aerial surveillance or problems addressed with an airplane, I was there for them. And my wife is the one who suffered during all that time. I was gone all the time and many agents end up divorced because of that. They called the wife the mistress, you know you're married to your job and your wife is your mistress. Well, my wife stayed with me, so I'm glad she did and I'm glad it worked out and it's my turn now to pay back.

DEBORAH: And your daughter is very successful too, correct?

GARY: She's a merit scholar. Just got a full ride to the University of Arizona. She's pre-med, so the smart genes in my family skipped a generation but I'm glad they ended up with her. And she's a great kid with a great sense of humor and I think part of that is because we did have her later in life where we realized that's what was important; raising our child was more important. And when I did start saying no to some things so I could be home for a weekend, I realized my paycheck was still coming and I was still giving a 110% but you had to have balance, you had to have a work life balance and by having her later in life, I think I did have that; I had a pretty good work/life balance.

DEBORAH: Did you work with many refuges when you were a pilot?

GARY: I'm trying to think how many times I flew for refuges in Region 6. If they suspected they had trespass cattle, I flew for them. I flew for the Bear River Refuge every year for looking at all the pits, the goose pits and all that stuff; they have a lot of waterfowl hunting out there, so I would always fly for Bear River every year. Flew for some refuges up in South Dakota, mainly poisoning cases, trespass cattle, things like that. And then I helped with refuges, but it was more like refuges and their interaction with BIA but I flew for marijuana eradication up there and they taught me how to spot the different colors of green and look for marijuana on the refuges and mainly along the rivers and stuff. It wasn't a daily occurrence, but whenever they asked I certainly did it. I wanted to fly what they call the four squares – it's easement enforcement but it seems like it never worked out because you had to be up there for like two weeks straight or something like that to fly what they call the four square but tried to help refuges whenever I could because I just always enjoyed working with refuges. I still think LE and Refuges are the two best programs within the Fish and Wildlife Service. I mean its two incredible programs that do great things for the landscape.

I'm trying to think of any of the funniest experiences I've ever had; there were lots of them. We laughed hard, that was the good part; we had a sense of humor and we could laugh at ourselves. I remember in

Region 6 we had the traveling toilet seat award and if somebody did something foolish or stupid that we could make fun of them with, you were the recipient of the traveling toilet seat award. I got it twice, so I guess I was the brunt of jokes for a couple of those times. And you know, it would be stuff like if you drove your car into the creek or a moat or things like that. You'd end up with the toilet seat award; you could count on it.

What would I tell people and others about my career is I highly recommend it, I still tell people even as demoralized as the Service appears to be because of leadership, still apply, still try to get in there, try to make a change and maybe we will see changes in leadership that will bring us back to our old glory if you will. I mean all the stuff about the no fear training and this security training and that security training, they've got to do something with that; I mean it's just nonstop computer training that drives people nuts.

DEBORAH: One of the questions was, in your opinion, who were the individuals who shaped the Service while you were working?

GARY: I clearly, without hesitation, have to say that I think Dale Hall was one of the biggest influences on the Service, with just a simple motto of "Do the right thing." I mean you would think it would be something more than that, but simply saying, "Do the right thing." And he meant it, "Do what's right in your heart and do the right science and do what's right by your people, do what's right and fair." You know people can accept bad news if they feel they were treated fairly, but when it's when people aren't treated fairly that you get discontent amongst the ranks. And Dale was very good at thanking people, who even end up with the short end of the stick, know that they were treated fairly. Again, Terry Grosz just a phenomenal leader, he absolutely shaped the Law Enforcement Program. Jamie Clark, I still work with her; she's at Defenders now. I think she was another excellent Director and certainly shaped the Service in many ways and many of them similar to Dale and that's just "do the right thing and support your people." So those are probably the three that I think had the greatest influence on me and my career. I actually witnessed them making a difference, a positive difference, in the Service.

The biggest change that I've observed is just again this lack of ability to delegate decision making down. It's horrible. They need to learn to delegate decision making back to the field, empower those people, so that the folks that work with landowners, who kick the dirt and close the gates, those people need to be empowered to make decisions and mean something. You know you lose all your credibility, as you know, Deborah, you go to a meeting on somebody's property and you're kicking the dirt with them and talking about something and they ask you, "How about this?" And you say, "Well, let me check with Albuquerque and I'll get back to you." Well, you just lost all your own credibility; you have to be able to make those kinds of decisions and right now folks, they just can't do that and it's hurting us.

Thoughts on the future? Again, the mission is noble, the laws haven't changed that much over the years, we just need to enforce them, we need to comply with our policies, we need to be good neighbors. We need, I think, a change in leadership, we need to get rid of the political leadership that we are currently experiencing and get a real leader in there who's going to support the people, support those who are going to enforce the laws and the policies and represent the Service on the landscape because right now I think the Service is being run by those who are more interested in seeing a political outcome achieved and making some politician happy than seeing good conservation on the landscape or supporting their own people. I find that very troubling.

DEBORAH: Why are those people in charge of the Fish and Wildlife Service?

GARY: That's a really good question. I'll say at the upper levels, as you know, it's political appointees, so the Dan Ashe's of the world, those folks are political appointments. One of the things that I'll say I know will be controversial, but I saw it and I witnessed it, is that we have people in management positions who shouldn't be in management positions. We have people who have been moved into management positions because they're an underrepresented group and they're just not qualified. We have good, qualified people in all groups, we need to recruit them, get them to feel the need to move up, make changes, but we don't; we'll settle for anybody from any underrepresented group who's willing to step up and that's been very problematic, I think, for the Fish and Wildlife Service. We need to do a much better job of recruiting good folks from all backgrounds to begin with and then nurturing those folks and then let them get into positions that they can handle. I definitely without a question, I've experienced this. I was forced to promote people into positions that I knew they couldn't handle and would do a really poor job and everyone under them would suffer. And I think those are people who are fearful of making the kind of management decisions that would support their people and so they make political decisions; no cases, no problems, that kind of thing and that's a very bad way to be. Fish needs to change that. There's so many who want to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service, we can pick the good ones, and we can make sure those really good people that are really highly qualified and highly motivated and highly skilled, need to then train them into the leaders of the future.

But I will say this, on a positive note, I think Fish has done an incredible job with leadership and management development. The Stepping Up To Leadership Program, and more importantly ALDP Program, they're phenomenal. I coached in the ALDP Program twice and grew both times, leaps and bounds, and that program is, I don't have enough accolades to tell you how good that is. Going through the 18-month SES Program, I can tell you without any hesitation that the ALDP Program is superior to the SES Program in so many ways. So, for all of those who get to go through ALDP, again they're fortunate and it does prepare people to be good leaders. But again, there are some folks that are just in the pipeline now, that don't have the personality to be a leader but they're going to be so let's keep our fingers crossed they do a good job.

DEBORAH: These oral interviews will be archived and made public and other people, historians, will use them. If someone would read it and find out that you already mentioned you were a consultant, I think you mentioned a pipeline company?

GARY: I'm consulting with a number of them, yes.

DEBORAH: Okay. If someone would say, "Oh he's just sour on the Fish and Wildlife Service. He's now working against the Service." How would you explain what you're doing for the Service, which you love so much and you love the resource, yet you're working for companies that appear to be damaging habitat?

GARY: It's a good question, and what I like to tell people is I'm still doing the same job, the exact same job. My job when I was in law enforcement was to tell people what the law was and to help them comply with it, and as a private consultant I do the exact same thing. I only work for companies that want to do the right thing, I help them do the right thing, and I actually help the Fish and Wildlife Service many, many times get much more than they would have from my clients. I will tell you openly, I'm very proud this. I'm going to put it on my website here very shortly, but one of my pipeline companies, I

convinced them to make a million-dollar voluntary donation to the Fish and Wildlife Foundation to offset habitat impacts.

Another one of my pipeline companies, I convinced them to make a million-dollar donation as well if the Fish and Wildlife Service can get their permits issued and in time where they don't have to spend that money paying people waiting to dig. And then on a Houston Toad Program or project I'm working on now, same kind of thing. Fish was asking for around five hundred thousand in mitigation, I was able to convince my client to sweeten the pot, up to a million, to help things more along, to give the Fish and Wildlife Service incentive to get their clearances done in time. I've actually facilitated and mediated this where more money is going onto the landscape for conservation had I not been involved, or said another way, because I'm involved, more money was going towards conservation. And so, I think I'm helping the Fish and Wildlife, I think I'm helping the resource.

I don't represent bad guys, I get those calls all the time, "Will you help me, my client did this or that or has alleged to have done..." I don't do that, just don't do that. I think I do a lot of good for Fish and Wildlife and my clients. Now what I will do also, and I did the exact same thing when I was the Texas State Administrator, sometimes the biologists within the ES Program asked for more than they're entitled to. They ask for mitigation for things that are perfectly legal and don't need to be mitigated and I'll bring that up on a regular basis as well. I had one recently where Fish was asking for mitigation for impacts to candidate species. Well, candidate species don't have any legal protection under the law; you don't have to mitigate impacts to candidate species until they're listed. That's where I'd come in and say, "No, we're not going to do that, that's not right. There's no legal precedent that would require us to do that so we're not going to do that. If we decide to make a voluntary donation later, that will be because it's voluntary and it shows good environmental stewardship, but the last thing we want to do is to have you force us to pay something like that when it's not required by law."

It's kind of good; it's a set of checks and balances, but for the most part, for the projects I'm working on, Fish and Wildlife Service will end up with more money than not by me being present. I'm proud of that. And one of the ways I can do that, just so you know, when I'm working on these projects, like I tell my clients, I say "Alright, I know what you want," as a pipeline company or a wind farm or a highway project, "I will make sure Fish knows what you need to make this work for you like timing and things like that, but you need to know what Fish and Wildlife needs to support a decision or not likely to adversely affect decision or biological opinion. Fish has to support their decisions, defend their decisions as well, so you're going to have to give this to them so they can get you what you want." And there's a real need for somebody who knows what both sides need to make sure that happens, so that's basically the role I play right now on any given day. I get on the phone to my client and go, "Hey Fish needs it, I know you don't want to pay it but Fish needs this, and they need or you can't dig during these two months; I know you want to but Fish can't defend that. If they let you dig in these two months, that could be challenged, you're going to lose. As your consultant I need to tell you, you need to listen to Fish and Wildlife and don't do that."

There is a need, an actual need for folks who know the rules of the game to help both sides get to where they need to be, because again I will tell you, in the ES program, I feel so bad for those guys. I was in North Dakota just last week where they used to have 17 biologists working on this kind of stuff; they have three. That's where I come in. Every office I go to, whatever number they used to have they now have half of that. There's just enough biologists on the landscape to get the job and that's part of why it's so demoralizing for the Fish and Wildlife Service employees. They're doing so much more with so

much less than just five or ten years ago. So as a consultant, I can come in and help cut through the red tape and just tell my clients, “Just give it to them. Don’t make them fight you on this. Let’s don’t do letters back and forth. Let them concentrate on getting you your permits on time, so just do it.” And I will have to say, I don’t know if I’m important anymore or not, but people listen and if I say you need to pay a million bucks, they pay a million bucks and I’m pretty proud of that.

DEBORAH: Anything else you want to answer on?

GARY: No, just that I really appreciate you volunteering to do this for Fish and Wildlife and for our legacy and time goes by fast. It seemed like I was just a new recruit yesterday and now I’m an old, retired guy.

DEBORAH: Well, you’re not quite done yet. We’re, I guess, through with the interview, but we need to get all these spellings down of these people. So, thank you, Gary, and we are done, thank you.

GARY: Thank you so much.

End of Interview

Key words: aviation, budgets, contaminants, GIS, hunting, law enforcement, migratory birds, native lands conservation, oil production, pesticides, poaching, pollutants