



The Oral History of Rick Johnston

Date: May 10, 2024

Interview conducted by Robin West

Location: Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center



Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Richard (Rick) Johnston

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Location of Interview: Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center

Interviewer: Robin West

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 1979-2012 (34 years).

Offices and Field Stations Worked and Positions Held: Recreation Planner in Anchorage, Alaska - Bureau of Land Management; Outdoor Recreation Planner and Park Ranger/Pilot, Kenai National Moose Range, (renamed Kenai National Wildlife Refuge with passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, 1980), Kenai and Soldotna, Alaska.

Most Important Projects: Public use planning and wilderness protection (Kenai National Wildlife Refuge); Russian River fishing and boating; Special Use Permits – guides and outfitters, utilities, special events, furbearer trapping, black bear baiting, and tent camp management (trumpeter swan protection).

Colleagues and Mentors: Ted Bailey, Tom Ballou, Ed Bangs, Rob Barto, Jerry Cegelske, Dave Cline, Jim Frates, Linda Gintoli, John Hakala, Mike Hedrick, Steve Hudson, Chris Johnson, David Kenagy, Bill Larned, Andy Loranger, Clay McDermott, John Morton, Norm Olson, Dave Purinton, Bob Richey, Wally Soroka, Dave Spencer, Rich Stowell, Denny Strom, Will Troyer, Candace Ward, and Tom Worthington.

Brief Summary of Interview: Rick Johnston grew up along the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers in Peoria, Illinois. He came from a family of outdoor enthusiasts who enjoyed camping. He initially went to Southern Illinois University for two years and then graduated in 1973 from the University of Illinois, majoring in outdoor management. He spent time engaging in a US Forest Service internship in the Cascade Mountains and worked during the following summer for the US Forest Service. He participated in a graduate program studying management and social science in the Forestry Division, specializing in outdoor recreation on federal lands. After graduating with an MS degree, he received his private pilot's license while working for the Bureau of Land Management.

In January of 1979, Rick started working at the Kenai National Moose Range, later renamed Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, where he worked as an Outdoor Recreation Planner and eventually as a Park Ranger/Pilot. He attended FLETC in 1980 in Georgia, was certified as a government pilot in 1987, and incorporated law enforcement and flying into his duties on the refuge.

In this oral history, he tells several fascinating stories of his time working at the refuge: one involving an upside-down aircraft transporting several lynxes, and another visiting with President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalyn.

He retired in 2012 from the Service. He continues to live on the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska.

The recorded interview was transcribed and reviewed by the interviewer and interviewee, and some edits were made for improved context and clarity.

THE INTERVIEW:

ROBIN WEST: Well, my name is Robin West, and I'm here with Richard "Rick" Johnston at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, doing an interview with Rick today. It's May 10th, 2024. And Rick, it's a pleasure to sit down with you and hear a little bit about your history with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and you've been retired a few years now, but you've got some stories to tell. Why don't we start with you sharing a little bit about your background, your childhood, where you grew up, early education and early career items. And then maybe a little bit about how you got your start with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and we'll take it from there.

RICK JOHNSTON: Thanks for having me today, Robin. I'm from Illinois. I grew up in Peoria, Illinois. My family's roots were from the Pike County, Illinois area along the Mississippi River, just south of Hannibal, Missouri, along the Mississippi River. We grew up camping at kind of a generational campsite on the Mississippi. It's actually not too far from some parts of what's now Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge. And a lot of my uncles and great uncles were [commercial] fishermen and kind of outdoors people, in that [part of the] Mississippi River Valley.

So, we, at least once a month, and usually for a month a year, spent a lot of time there in the Mississippi River area.

I went to Southern Illinois University for two years, and I had some exposure to Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. And as a student, I got involved a little bit in some of the inventories for the Eastern Wilderness Act there in [Shawnee National Forest and Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge] near Carbondale, Illinois. I transferred after two years to the University of Illinois to their outdoor recreation management program and was a student there and graduated in 1973.

I think some of my earliest Influences, besides the family camping and growing up along the river, and some of the people that I met at the University of Illinois, were my mother, who was an educator, and her friends, that every year went on a trip out to the western United States. And we did a family [trip] in 1957. My dad built a camper in the garage, and we took that camper (kind of reminds me of a Ken Burns National Parks movie) where we went to Yellowstone and Carlsbad Caverns and probably spent a month on the road before the interstate highway system [was established] - so driving the back roads, and it really opened up my eyes to just what was out there besides the flatlands of Illinois.

I think I knew from an early age that I wanted to be a ranger. I didn't know what to call it, but I know I wanted to work in the outdoors and in recreation. So that's why I pursued the program I did at the University of Illinois and the first two years at Southern Illinois University. I did an internship when I was attending the University of Illinois – kind of like student teaching in the North Cascade Mountains, where I got to work on a variety of US Forest Service programs and associated planning, and it further kind of teased my interest in federal and large land area resource management.

And from there, I took a summer job in Colorado working for the National Park Service. I also, after a second season out in the Cascade Mountains, joined the graduate program at the University of Washington in management and social science in their forestry college, to specialize in outdoor recreation, and primarily on federal land [later graduating with an MS degree from the University of Washington, College of Forest Resources].

My first summer there, I took a job back at Curecanti National Recreation Area – Colorado, and went through a great seasonal training program there and had a great mentor in Tom Griffiths, who was the District Ranger. I'll talk about it a little bit more - about Tom later. He was a colleague here in Alaska in later years. He worked at Denali National Park.

And then the next summer, when in graduate school at the University of Washington, I started hearing rumors of Alaska and running into people who were coming and going from Alaska. So, I applied for a job up in Alaska and I initially got hired on the Chilkoot Trail. And then about a week after I got that offer and accepted it, I got a more appealing offer here on the Kenai Peninsula to work with the Chugach National Forest [as a as a Fire prevention and Recreation Guard].

Just a sense, about the decisions we make, influence a lot of things going forward, so I took a job here adjacent to the now Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, former Kenai Moose Range, on the adjacent Chugach National Forest – that has a shared boundary with the refuge. So that was a little bit of my first exposure to the Kenai, where I would later work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

ROBIN: Well, great. So, when you got to come to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, you said it was the Kenai National Moose Range then. And it was renamed in 1980 with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. And maybe you could speak a little bit about those early years when you came here, about ANILCA and the Moose Range, and maybe even the headquarters' move over from Kenai to the big site here [in Soldotna].

RICK: Let me just kind of retreat a little bit. The summer of 1976, I worked on the adjacent Chugach Forest. And following that summer, I went back to graduate school, and then I came back up and I worked for the State of Alaska with the Willow capital planning site. It was a new town-type planning program associated with the then plans to relocate the Alaska State capital to Willow, Alaska and I worked for State Parks. I'd been hired by somebody who had been a previous graduate student there at University of Washington.

I came up and worked that summer there. And I spent a lot of my weekends coming down here to the Kenai. And got further acquainted with the upper Kenai River, what was then the Moose Range, in general. And then that winter I moved to Anchorage, and I got a job with the BLM in Anchorage. So, the BLM managed the 5,000-acre Campbell Tract in Anchorage, as well as a lot of the BLM lands in southcentral Alaska. And when I was there at BLM, there was all this commotion, all these comings and goings associated with the Alaska lands bills being debated in Congress ... with planning and specialists,

biologists and wildlife people, and field trips associated with prospect parks and refuges ... a lot of whom later became colleagues at Fish and Wildlife Service - Mike Hinkes, for who became a USFWS biologist/pilot, Pete Jerome, people that I later would have as colleagues in Alaska refuges.

And so, there was a lot of the ANILCA, the pre-Alaska lands bill stuff going on there at BLM. I got involved a little bit with resource inventory and so on and so forth. But I was just kind of in a seasonal position there. And then when I worked that summer before in 1976, the first time I came to Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was on a USFS helitack crew on a wildland fire that occurred on the Moose Range. And we came over and put out a fire in the Mystery Hills portion of the Range ... and then about a week later, there was a fire just adjacent, what is now the Upper Skilak Campground. And our helicopter on floats landed there in the lake and kind of scooted to shore. And we helped put out an escaped campfire of about a ½ acre. Our fire suppression activities were part of a joint agreement at that time with the BLM and refuge, and our activities were my first exposure to that part of the refuge [as well as related duties] in the Russian River boundary area that I patrolled when I worked that summer for Chugach National Forest, so I had a little bit of exposure there [to the refuge].

So later [in 1978] I somehow or another - I saw that there was a job open at Kenai National Moose Range for a GS-9 outdoor recreation planner. And I had just gotten my private pilot license when I was working with BLM in Anchorage as a seasonal employee. [Coincidentally] they had a program at Fort Richardson where you could get your private license at the Fort Richardson Flying Club and so, I got my private license, bought a little airplane, and was building flying hours. So, I fly my 1947 Aeronca Champ down to Kenai, land at the Kenai Airport, walk over to the old Moose Range headquarters, which was a Quonset hut building, with an attached newer addition.

And so, it's the first time I met Refuge Manager Jim Frates and his assistant, Linda Gintoli, who had been the first woman refuge manager in the country [at Parker River NWR]. And then for her second job, she had come to Kenai [as assistant manager and] as a recreation specialist. And so, I interviewed with Jim and Linda there and told them about my previous summer adjacent one of their primary recreation areas. They said, "Well, how did you get here today?" And I said, "Well, I had flown my airplane down and landed at Kenai airport." So, they kind of looked at each other and I imagined they thought, *hmmm, here's a pilot; he's got a master's degree in recreation*, and so on and so forth.

So ... it went well. They called me about a week later and they said, "Well, we'd really like to hire you, but the regional office in Anchorage has kind of got somebody they have in mind." They said, "Well, they don't have a recreation resource management background - they're a former biologist," but apparently there was a lot of pressure to hire [the biologist]. And I said, "Well, I appreciate the consideration," and then ... I found out about a month later that Linda and Jim had canceled the position because they wanted me so badly.

In the meantime, I took a [permanent] GS-9 recreation planner job with the Peninsula Resource Area, [BLM] maybe about a month after I heard that I wasn't probably going to get the job at Kenai. I also

found out they didn't hire the other candidate. They just let it go vacant. And then, I had maybe been a recreation planner for six months with the BLM in Anchorage area, and I got a call [from Linda Gintoli] saying, "You still want this job down here?" And they told me how they'd kind of moved things around and hadn't hired the person that they were getting pushed to hire ... I took the job ... and so, the rest is history.

I got the job here ... basically it was a transfer because I had already gotten on full-time with the BLM, and I started January 1st, 1979, here at Kenai. Within the first week they brought a lot of projects over to my desk and my office was in the basement of the old small headquarters in Kenai.

ROBIN: So, you were kind of a unique hire it sounds like as the outdoor recreation planner and yet Kenai, was kind of an open slate for work - hunting, fishing, canoeing, just a great place for recreation. So, what did you find when you came here? And how do things kind of transition in coming years?

RICK: Well, what was interesting is having the projects I worked on in graduate school, which was a professional paper on Wilderness and also a professional paper on the law enforcement of federal management areas. I had a lot of exposure to the USFS Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Research Station associated with the University of Washington. And I had all these ideas about how some of the other [federal] agencies, and how they were doing things.

I landed at Kenai, and it was just like landing in a Petri-dish of outdoor recreation management, wilderness, and previously passed [1971] Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act issues. It was just abuzz with all these things and a lot of problems to solve. Like the previous summer when I was working on the adjacent Chugach Forest, I took my USFS fire crew and basically was working at the adjacent, very busy and high recreation use area, which was on Kenai National Moose Range lands and I used my fire crew (when not on fires) to work on a lot of the outdoor things going on there.

And I hardly ever even saw a refuge person there. There was [I expect] a little bit of a fear by [the refuge] staff of those high use recreation areas, and they just avoided the area ... so I already knew that there was this real need to kind of tackle some of [these high public use area] issues.

So, within the first six months at Kenai, there were two projects. One issue - they had all of these [commercial] air taxis from Anchorage establishing remote camps. We called them tent camps. And there were a lot of issues there that had been identified by some of Dr. Ted Bailey's work and who was my new colleague at Kenai ... he had realized where these tent camps were located, they were displacing historically nesting [trumpeter] swans and so on and so forth.

And just about every time they [refuge staff] turned around, they had a new air taxi that came in and said, "Oh, hey, I just put a tent camp up at so and so lake; can I get a permit for it?" So, the first project we did was trying to take a comprehensive look at the tent camp program, [establish] some kind of sideboards on the program, and try to reduce this conflict with nesting trumpeter swans.

And the other thing was working on a plan at the Russian River area where I had that previous exposure with my Forest Service job tackling all the social management issues, from litter control to conflicts with bears.

It was just a wild, wild west at that campground. We wanted to try to control it. So, we went in there with a plan. And that's all within the first six months of being here at Kenai. It's one of the reasons that I ultimately stayed at Kenai so long. It was one of those places you didn't have to transfer and go to a new area to have all these interesting challenges and issues that you just dreamed about working on if you were a professional in outdoor recreation management.

And when I first arrived, we were at this smaller historical office in Kenai. At one time, I think [historically] it was even a base for a lot of the [Refuge] operations throughout Alaska. It was a small building, but it was really interesting that it had a really good centrally located file system [within the Quonset hut building]. And except for the ventilation in the basement, where a lot of staff had offices and were smokers - that [and a shortage of office space] was the only negative thing about that office. It was a really quaint and interesting little office. Just before I came, they had commissioned this construction of a new visitor center and refuge headquarters [in nearby Soldotna, Alaska, which is adjacent where we sit here now, and is located on Headquarters Lake]. It was a new facility that they had master plans for expanded office space ... plans even included a floatplane basin, a new shop, a new visitor center, and so on and so forth.

So, we moved over about nine months after I arrived in Kenai to this new office building. And I got what I thought was the best office in the building because it was the only room that wasn't wired for a phone yet and so, none of the more senior people on the staff, like Bob Richey or the head of biology, Ted Bailey, or the refuge manager assistant - they all wanted a phone.

I could care less ... it was a downstairs office away from the commotion with a beautiful view of the woods and Headquarters Lake in the background. And so that's how I got my first office. I took the one without the phone.

One thing I think is really interesting about a lot of the office culture and how an office works sometimes can be as a result of real simple things. The office files, maps, permits, records etc. at the old [City of] Kenai headquarters were centrally located, so after hours or weekends I could peruse old annual narratives. I could look at the same files that the land specialist or the fire specialist were looking at. But when we moved into this big, beautiful new office, while it had great offices and a space to plan a visitor center and all the bells and whistles, it didn't have any good centrally located office records, files, maps and storage.

So, when the files all came over to the new office, the previously centralized and accessible files that had been available to everyone in this "peckerwood" Quonset hut - all those records and files went into the

offices of the individual specialists; like the land's person took the files into their office, the recreation person took the files associated with their duties into their private office space. The manager and others did the same.

And so actually, even though it was this great new office, access and kind of how the staff interacted with those files was not nearly as good as the old Quonset hut there, especially for a new person like me that had his nose in a lot of other interests and business in the office there. So, a little logistical thing like that [affects a lot of interactions going forward]. And to this day, I don't think, when they redesigned the office, they realized how it affected the office dynamics. It may have changed since, but the lack of centrally locating the files was such an issue; like I say, if I wanted to look at lands or right-of-way files or a recreation file, I would have to go into someone else's private space and office area to do that at the new headquarters. That's an interesting side note, but it really kind of changed the culture of how people looked at the files and interacted within the office.

ROBIN: Sure. Maybe switch gears a little bit and talk about wilderness, because that was maybe a huge change for managing the area with the passage of ANILCA. So, kind of your view on how that was done, maybe within the organization, and how even the local community looked at that proposal.

RICK: Well, all through the early 20th century and all the different agencies ... whether it be the BLM or particularly the Forest Service, National Wildlife Refuges, Park Service - everybody had an administrative [wilderness designation program that predated the 1964 Wilderness Act]. They were called "primitive areas" in the Forest Service, and I think they were called L1, L2 areas in the Park Service ... I'm not quite sure of the kind of colloquial name for it in the Park Service for administrative wilderness, but every agency had an administrative designation to manage their most wild areas. But of course, environmental groups, the test of time, and politics ... resulted in the Wilderness Preservation and Management Act.

Many times [prior to the Wilderness Act] the salvation of wilderness was in some ways protecting and preserving those values from the managers themselves. And so, just the whole thrust of getting the Wilderness Act established was as much to put some sideboards on how the public used and preserved wilderness as well as how the managers used it, what kind of fire program they used in it, the access, whether they used chainsaws or motorized vehicles, whether there's permanent structures, whether an official could build roads and so on and so forth.

So, every agency had their method of preserving administrative wilderness before the Wilderness Act and the Fish and Wildlife Service and Kenai Moose Range were no exception. Dave Spencer, the early and first refuge manager, in conjunction with a robust local environmental group and former guides [and long-time users], realized that wilderness and wild preserved lands on the Kenai Moose Range were important.

And there had [historically] been damaging efforts to have new homesteading and withdrawal of refuge lands and more recent Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act withdrawals ... and some [efforts] were successful to take big parcels of land out of the Kenai Moose Range or to have uses that maybe weren't consistent with refuge purposes and the preservation of species of wildlife that needed those wilderness situations and conditions. So, Dave Spencer had the vision to use Research Natural Areas (RNA) designations. I don't think any of the other agencies used RNAs or administrative Research Natural Areas to protect wilderness values. [Research Natural Areas had been an interagency management land designation primarily for smaller scientifically significant areas.]

But at Kenai, Spencer reasoned that they would suffice to protect larger areas. There were a couple small areas like in the Forest Service's Tumwater Research Natural Area, [Washington state] that I had been familiar with. They historically tended to be small - little "museum piece" designations, like maybe a small unique natural fall, or a localized spawning area. But using Research Natural Area [designations] for big, vast areas, was something Refuge Manager Dave Spencer came up with [and was unique to the Kenai]. And so, he established the Andy Simons [Research Natural Area], using the namesake of an early Kenai guide, a preservation of big game and wilderness proponent [and an early advocate for establishing the Kenai National Moose Range]. They call it the Andrew Simons Research Natural Area. It was about 830,000 acres between Skilak and Tustumena Lake.

And the rest of the Research Natural Areas [on Kenai] were mostly the more traditional kind of smaller ones. The Kenai Moose Range used that as their "administrative designation" for protecting wilderness. So, after the Wilderness Act was passed and different agencies were charged with coming up with wilderness proposals and so on and so forth, the Andy Simons area, and other areas such as the Swan Lake and Swanson River Canoe trails area, became the core areas for formal [USFWS] Wilderness proposals as required by the 1964 Wilderness Act. And when I came to the refuge these proposals were in place and of course, I looked at the records and was familiar with these kinds of proposals because of my graduate student work.

But they [FWS staff] had done a pretty thorough wilderness study review, and they came up with the other proposals as well such as the Mystery Hills. They came up, of course, with the [Andrew Simons] Research Natural Area and those Research Natural Area designations still exist today as an overlay and exist simultaneously in place with the 1980 ANILCA Wilderness area designations. So, the wilderness study team came up with a pretty good set of proposals that included the Andrew Simons RNA during their early 1970s review. Leading up to the passages of ANILCA those core wilderness proposals would only increase in size and protection [in] the final 1980 Alaska Lands Act ...

So, when they were coming up with the ANILCA proposals, not only on established game ranges like Kenai National Moose Range, [which had been established by Franklin Roosevelt in the 1940s, just before the start of World War II] they [legislative and Interior Department staff] were also looking for other expanded and qualifying refuge areas and on adjacent BLM lands associated with and contiguous to the refuge that would be included in the Alaska lands bill.

So that foresight of early Refuge Manager, Dave Spencer, to establish those administrative areas, was kind of the springboard for the Wilderness areas on the refuge we have today.

ROBIN: A lot changed in some ways then with ANILCA - changed the name, obviously, to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and added some things, created Wilderness, changed some purposes. Tell me a little bit about the transition with the planning and regulations, because there were some big transitions in the way the area was gonna be managed.

RICK: Well, a lot of the new ANILCA areas were from previous federal Bureau of Land Management lands. They didn't have any [intensive] previous management. So, when the Alaska lands bill was passed, it was a combination of new refuges, parks and provisions for existing National Forests. As it turned out, the Forest Service didn't get much new land in ANILCA [but lost land to other agencies, but it did get Wilderness area and national monument overlays in other areas]. Kenai Refuge got a significant addition in the Two Indians area, a roadless watershed of Chickaloon River. The national parks and refuges were the primarily target in the Alaska Lands Act and it was a combination of existing historical refuges that had been established by Congress or Executive Order, like the Kenai Moose Range, that experienced redesignation, as well as added new areas.

And so, Kenai was kind of a hybrid, both in terms of what regulations were there before ANILCA. For example, the refuge was already managing the Swanson River and Swan Lake Canoe Trails, kind of as "Wilderness". And they thought, well, whenever our Wilderness proposals go through, Wilderness will be managed a little bit like lower 48 Wilderness - no aircraft landings, no motorized boats, pretty strict by Alaska standards. And so, Kenai had a combination of those types of areas, including the previous existing Andy Simon's Research Natural Area [receiving a pretty preservation-oriented management scenario, and the new areas from Chugach National Forest and BLM south of Kachemak Bay].

And they had, the foresight of early refuge staff, particularly Bob Richey, who was there when I came - they came up with aircraft landing restrictions within the canoe trail area [no motorized use for any boats, or aircraft except in emergencies] - think of the Boundary Waters type Canoe Area which was an initial inclusion in the Wilderness Preservation and Management Area System ... There was kind of this muscle memory with existing administrative restrictions and regulations already in place when ANILCA passed, of how things were being managed, like the more restrictive access programs anticipated in lower 48 designated Wilderness. And with the last-minute compromises when ANILCA was passed, which included caveats for use of motorboats, snow machines and aircraft, etc. in Alaska Wilderness that would loosen existing regulatory access for Kenai Wilderness. So, there was tension between existing Kenai Refuge wilderness management pre-act, and the less restrictive Alaska "compromise" final act.

Well, did that mean that Kenai was going to go to less protective regulations for areas that had been managed as Wilderness for decades already, or at least a decade, but decades in some cases to aircraft use and other motorized use? So, Kenai had places that were really much more like the management of

the Jim Bridger Wilderness down in Wyoming, or the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Minnesota. And so would Kenai Wilderness designation result in kind of backsliding a little bit on motorized access and now having those compromises that were for all of Alaska [ANILCA lands].

Well, when we were doing the step down [access regulation] package, we said, no, we're going to keep the existing regulations that were in place at the time where we intended for management to be more like lower 48 Wilderness - much more restrictive. We would keep those, but we'd take the theme of ANILCA, which was to have expanded aircraft, snow machine and motorboat access that would apply to some places on Kenai. But it wasn't just the areas that were already being managed that way that we would have more restrictive access regulations.

That whole area, like the canoe system, actually got the Wilderness that was established by ANILCA around the original wilderness [theme]. Although the actual final Wilderness designation and follow-up regulations were much greater than the original Wilderness proposal acreage and boundaries from the refuge; the Andy Simons Research Natural Area was about 830,000 acres in the proposal from USFWS however the Wilderness that was established by ANILCA was more like 1.3 million acres [with the Andy Simons its core] and so, it was much bigger than the original 1970 Refuge Wilderness proposals. We took, for the most part, the access regulatory theme of Kenai being a little more restrictive than all the compromises for motorized access within Alaska Wilderness and expanded it out to the new congressionally designated Wilderness boundaries there.

Kenai is probably the only National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska post-ANILCA that has actual Wilderness management units that are kind of similar to what Wilderness management would be in the lower 48 states, but with caveats. For example, in big areas like the larger areas between Tustumena and Skilak Lake, we implemented a theme of having selected lakes that were open to aircraft landing. So, kind of think of it as aircraft access to designated remote lakes as a Wilderness trailhead but only to those lakes. While in the rest of Alaska, more liberal use of aircraft and motorboat uses, and so on, was allowed within designated Wilderness [at large].

So, at Kenai, we used more of a trailhead approach where [specifically] Iceberg Lake, Green Lake and certain places were open [and other areas within reasonable hiking distance remained closed]. There were other areas, like Tustumena Lake, that were still open to motorboat use and aircraft landings that were managed with the less restrictive access and principles of ANILCA and all of this wasn't easy because when the Reagan Administration and appointees of the various bureaus and were appointed, there was a lot of reluctance to let Kenai, or any place, have any kind of restriction on Alaska motorized access uses like snowmobiles, aircraft, watercraft, that were contemplated by the original Wilderness Act.

When the Kenai Comprehensive Plan was started in '81 - '82; finished in about '84 - '85, and then the regulation package after that in 1987, at every step of the way, through political pressure from Washington and the Interior Department staff, they attempted to sidetrack the access regulation

package the refuge and regional refuge staff had developed. In the end they couldn't say "no" because the different planning groups came up with reasonable access programs that reflected historical refuge regulations, public support, and ANILCA intent and text. And the Kenai Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) was in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) format ... and so, when they put it out to the public, there was great support for keeping the more restrictive Wilderness management for the canoe system, and for the remote areas. And there wasn't a successful push to say, well, you couldn't have only these certain lakes open to aircraft landing and motorized use. It was hard for even a less than supportive administration to sidetrack our compromise access strategy and overwhelming public support, but that didn't stop them from trying ... kept putting up roadblocks.

So, we initially had the Environmental Impact Statement of the draft Kenai CCP as it went through, and then the final, signed Kenai CCP. But then when we started to do the post plan regulation package, they said, well, you've got to do further justification and so on. They wanted us to do some kind of a resource justification document for our more restrictive regulations, some of which, as previously discussed, were for new lands - areas that had not been in the pre-ANILCA Kenai Refuge.

Ted Bailey and I drafted what we titled the "Resource Needs Justification Document". It was another administrative hoop to jump through but in all honesty that was the point - delay. It seemed to satisfy Interior Department leadership, and we ultimately got the regulations moving forward. And I'm surprised that there's still interest in referencing our 1984 document. Recently, current Refuge Manager, Andy Loranger, called me and asked if I knew where that "Resource Needs Justification Document" was. And I told him where to find it and so on and so forth, because there had been some kind of recent efforts to rollback certain regulations, and he wanted to review that resource justification document.

Going back to around 1985, when we got done with the resource justification document, the Washington office of the Interior Department said, "Well, now you need to do an Environmental Assessment on these new regulations."

And we kind of said, "Well, we already did an Environmental Impact Statement [in the CCP], a much broader document." In fact, that was the third set of hurdles they were proposing. And they just kind of figured we'd give up, but we stuck to our guns and were persistent. And then we completed an Environmental Assessment to establish the new regulations and they went into effect in 1987. So, since that time, Kenai NWR has had a well-received and balanced access regulation program. It doesn't really impinge on the kind of Alaska lifestyle and liberal access methods that were contemplated by the compromised Alaska lands bill, [or] theme of ANILCA.

The Kenai CCP and follow-up programs and access regulations have stood the test of time. I think it's been 40 some years now and although there have been some recent efforts to kind of roll it back a little bit, it's still in place. And you can still go in the files and find the original [CCP] Environmental Impact Statement format plan. You can find the Resource Needs Justification document and the Environmental Assessment for those regulations.

ROBIN: That's great. Rick, I really appreciate that. I want to go back a little bit here. When you said you flew to your initial interview in Kenai in a personal aircraft, and I know you went from outdoor recreation planner title to a park ranger/pilot, law enforcement, dual function employee over time. And I thought maybe you could tell us a little bit about law enforcement and being a pilot - your early job and the training and the transition and how that kind of worked into the job down here.

So, both your time at FLETC way back when and onto getting your full-blown pilot's certification working for the refuge as a park ranger/pilot.

RICK: Well, by the time I retired ... I started in 1979 and retired in December 31st, 2012. I was a private pilot before I came to the refuge, but I got my commission to fly [for the Refuge] in 1987. It took me a little longer than I had originally anticipated. I also got my law enforcement commission [at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center] - kind of had two irons in the fire ... flying and refuge officer commission.

But they were balanced [and important attributes] in my position. I was a long-term pilot at the refuge as well as in law enforcement and resource protection. And so, I had the pilot certificate before I came here. To be a Department of Interior pilot, you needed to have an instrument, commercial, and seaplane rating, 500 flight hours, and check rides and so on and so forth. And then different check rides and approvals for other kinds of flying that you might undertake or new types planes you might fly; or landing gear such as ski plane certification. You also, of course, had to receive training and recurrent qualification for the law enforcement part of it - you had to have training, that was required at the time. It started out just being a few weeks, prior to my time at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC). The course was 12-weeks when I went through in 1980, then [after a time] ended up what it is today - I think 16-weeks, and another month or two of field training.

I had kind of two things going there. And just before I came to the Kenai, I mentioned before, I worked as an outdoor recreation planner and before that, as a seasonal ranger there in Anchorage. And they had a program where civilian employees over at the Elmendorf Air Force Base, and the Fort Richardson Army Base had a program where civilian federal employees could join their flying club and get their flight training.

So, I took a private pilot class at University of Alaska (UAA). I got my private pilot certificate there at the Fort Richardson Base and met a few bush pilots and so on and so forth along the way. And then I bought a 1947 7AC Aeronca Champ [tail dragger] and started building hours. There were some training programs and there were some situations in the Refuge System where they would let a private pilot, with maybe a couple hundred hours, enter a training program - kind of build flying hours and experience in a ladder type position and have the Service actually pay for the training. But those kinds of positions were few and far between and I built flying hours and experience in my own plane.

Kenai, and Alaska, has quite an aviation history and a lot of the early pilots got their wings (literally and figuratively) by flying in the military. Dave Spencer was a World War II bomber pilot. Former Refuge Manager, John Hakala, was also a World War II pilot. So, a lot of those early refuge pilot folks did it associated with the military. Assistant Refuge Manager/Pilot Bob Richey got his pilot certification after he was stationed in the Army in Germany and during his follow-up service with the National Guard in Fairbanks. I forget exactly what kind of training it was, but he was in a situation where he could get flight training in Fairbanks and get it through the military.

I was in a situation where I was just building the hours on my own, so I started that way. And so, when I came to Kenai for my original interview down here, I flew down in my little Aeronca Champ. When I first came to the refuge, I still had my plane, and I was building hours. I spent a lot of time actually flying out on the refuge in my Aeronca Champ on skis and wheels. I couldn't fly it for official business, but on my days off, I did a lot of "visits" to the refuge cabins and different haunts on the refuge. So, I kind of got experience in the flying aspect there and just kind of started building the hours.

And then switching back to the law enforcement a little bit, in the summer of 1980, they arranged for me to go to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, and I think I started in September and went through almost Christmas.

And that was where a lot of Interior folks were going, in Glynnco, Georgia. And before that, a lot of the programs were 5 or 6 weeks and stuff. And so, they decided they had developed a new comprehensive resource managers law enforcement program. My particular class was about 35-40 people. A third were US Forest Service, a third were National Park Service and a third were Fish and Wildlife. It was called the Land Management Officers Training Program. Now, a lot of times a class is made up of just Fish and Wildlife people.

But in that time, it was just kind of a slurry of the three or four agencies that used federal law enforcement officers that I went through. It was about 12 weeks. And there were two of us that were [Fish and Wildlife Service]; the other was probably the only person I've ever met in Fish and Wildlife from Harvard – Tom Worthington, and myself; we graduated one, two in the class [and Tom was number one]. And it was a really good group of people. And a lot of them were already refuge employees or journeymen resource people that were there [getting their law enforcement commissions].

And it was a pretty good experience. And one thing that was kind of interesting when I was there - the FLETC was carved out of a former Air Force Base there, and so, there was a private, small flying school and plane rental there. And so, I got approved to fly at the flight rental service when I was down there attending FLETC. And one day, I took three Park Service classmates on a flight, and we flew over to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. They have a lot of forestry and associated slash burning in that area of Georgia and it got kind of hazier and hazier, and it was kind of hard to tell where we were ... so, we flew down and looked at a water tower in the adjacent town there and figured out we were at Folkston, Georgia and then we're able to fly our way back from the weekend trip to the aircraft rental

place where we had taken off from. And what was kind of interesting is of those three people, all three ended in aviation - two of those classmates ended up being National Park Service and USFWS [pilots]. And one ended up as the high-altitude rescue ranger at Denali [National Park] flying in high altitude helicopters. I kind of put the bug of flying in their heart - I guess kind of inspired a couple of aviators there. And all three ended up being pilots and/or rangers here in Alaska with long flying careers in Alaska as well as in the lower 48.

So anyway, after graduating, I returned from the FLETC course and then the next summer I went to what they called the ROB's course, the Refuge Officer Basic, and actually got my badge and commission in the summer of '81.

And then I had that, my LE commission until 2008, when I hit my age 57 retirement [requirement], because along the way I'd gotten the federal firefighter law enforcement retirement.

And then jumping back to the refuge aviation program, when I got back [to Alaska], and continued my private pilot flying, it actually took me until about 1987 to get enough hours to be a pilot here at the wildlife refuge. I initially was not a dual function pilot until several years later ... I was classified as an incidental pilot, meaning, I met all the Interior Department qualification for pilot duty, including low level and special use flights - I just wasn't getting the extra pilot GS and salary level since there wasn't a GS 12 position open. I immediately started doing lots of the wildlife flying and some of the longtime pilots there, like Bob Richey, they had been flying biologists out doing a lot of wildlife stuff and they were glad to kind of pass the baton along and I was glad to get the flight hours.

So, I spent hundreds of hours flying - supporting the recreation program, law enforcement, and wildlife and fisheries programs, etc. I also transported refuge staff out for work projects. While I did the wildlife flying, I flew a majority of my flight hours associated with my refuge law enforcement duties because I continued to have my badge along in those times and until 2008.

In about 1991, after building up a couple thousand hours, I actually was switched over to a dual function park ranger/pilot, GS-11/12, and was in that position here at Kenai doing law enforcement and flying work thereafter. With just a small staff, and a limited number of pilots, I actually got to do as many hours doing wildlife program flying, or flying people that were visiting the refuge, as I could handle - from flying *Good Morning America* reporters, to staff from the regional office, to low level surveys, I experienced a real interesting variety of aviation situations associated with a federal conservation area.

ROBIN: One of the things I just jumped to – retirement ... and then we'll go back to some other things, but I know, Rick, you were one of the very few people that got 6 (C) retirements as a dual function officer, collateral duty and not a full-time officer. Any comments or thoughts on that?

RICK: Well, it was interesting. The Fish and Wildlife Service, just after I went to FLETC, they were having people, depending on the situation, they were having probably a half a dozen people who were here at

Kenai: Bill Larned, who was the fire specialist/pilot, Candace Ward, who was the interpretive naturalist and the visitor center specialist, and lots of other people, maybe when they first started their career, they sent them all off to FLETC.

And so, there was kind of a Fish and Wildlife Service refuge culture where they kind of “morphed” up from hardly any law enforcement capability to having a high number of [law enforcement] staff. They kind of got “out over their skis” a little bit and had a lot of people going to FLETC that were perhaps not suited or committed to law enforcement operations. There was a lot of money committed ... it was a big commitment. Maybe you'd send someone off to FLETC and maybe in the three or four years after they got back, they wrote one case or something. And so, there was a sense that maybe we shouldn't be using so many collateral duty folks to become officers and so on and so forth. So that really fit the bill in a lot of places; a lot of National Park or even some Forest Service places and a few refuges had people that, between their law enforcement and their firefighting, maybe they were kind of over a little bit more than fifty percent [of their time].

In 2001, after the World Trade Center thing, there was a lot of soul searching going on. It kind of shook a lot of apples out of the tree associated with law enforcement within the different agencies. So, Fish and Wildlife Service commissioned a report and analysis of Refuge law enforcement. It was the Association of Chiefs of Police that conducted the law enforcement review. The long and short of it is, the final report, and a lot of other little details - [the report] tended to push toward full-time law enforcement officers.

Before that, and throughout the National Park Service and in federal agencies, there were a lot of people who had other resource duties but also were really involved in wildland fire and law enforcement. Whether it be at Yellowstone or whether it be at some of the other places in Alaska or a place like Kenai, many conservation areas had a lot of law enforcement issues and need for commissioned staff and many of those collateral “rangers” did in fact spend a lot of their duties with law enforcement situations. Many also spent considerable time with wildland fire duties. The enhanced federal retirement system addressed both firefighters and law enforcement staff but had not traditionally contemplated combining those collective duties to equal a percentage of duties that would qualify them for the enhanced retirement benefits, including early retirement. But it wasn't just the collateral duty resource employees that were not getting the enhanced retirement designation, federal uniformed law enforcement generally were excluded in lieu of federal non-uniformed agents conducting investigations and such that were included in the system ... and even a lot of federal resource agency employees were saying, “Well, wait a second, I'm a uniformed officer and I do a lot of law enforcement, and I do a significant amount of wildfire details, shouldn't I be getting the extra benefits of the 16 USC 6 (C) federal employee retirement system?” And most wildland firefighters were also excluded while structural firefighters were included in the system.

That statute quote might be off; I forget maybe the exact quote of the regulation. Basically, it was the personnel law and associated regulations that created the enhanced retirement program for people that had law enforcement and/or firefighter duties. Primarily set up for an earlier age retirement (age 57); it included enhanced multiple calculations for the earlier retirees.

And so, you began to see a lot of claims being filed, like I actually called up and talked to a few National Park Service colleagues that I knew from whatever background. And there was a real growing movement in the National Park Rangers Association for members to put in for this 6 (C). So, they would, and the whole idea that was is to have a young and vigorous law enforcement or firefighter workforce and have them have early retirement while they're still young and vigorous but still have an enhanced and more favorable retirement multipliers and so on and so forth.

And it seemed that being in a job group that had the law enforcement special retirement...and just the whole culture tended to open up a little bit better training opportunity. And so, whether it [special retirement] classification was a fit with National Wildlife Refuges, and so on and so forth, was still the question. If I recall, I started looking up my paperwork at Kenai and the things I did. I thought, *should I be getting a 6 (C) thing?* So, I started kind of keeping good track of records. There were some people, and most of those people were former National Park people who had transferred to US Fish and Wildlife Service as collateral duty law enforcement or dual function law enforcement, and they were particularly interested in pursuing a claim.

Anyway, there became a little bit of a movement to kind of put in for that. And there were some regulations that were examined and revisited. The OPM was getting inundated by claims by National Park rangers and the Forest Service, also by wildland firefighters that also didn't have the law enforcement retirement based on their law enforcement duties. And so, the OPM established a format and framework to see if your position qualified, if it wasn't previously classified that way. With all the individual claims, and some being successful, there was within OPM and agency personnel offices, legal discussions - whether to begin including 16 USC 6 (C) language and qualification in similar descriptions.

So, I just started keeping good records and good notes and was a little bit of an advocate for it for at least some people who were dual function law enforcement people. It didn't fit everybody. And it was a "catch 22" because it required a mandatory retirement at age 57. And in some cases, if you didn't want to retire, then it could kind of "bite you in the tail end". Actually, one has to watch out for what you ask for ... because it might come true."

So, I actually put in a claim. And putting in a claim ... it became common practice among collateral duty refuge officers as rumors of some success spread. There was a law firm that specialized in 16 USC 6 (C) retirement claims, from Boise, Idaho. I forget the name of it ... that you could send your whole records and package when you were intending to apply for the 6 (C) benefits, and the law firm reviewed your claim and offered advice, and so, I spent the \$500, put a real good claim together. And low and behold, I got the 6 (C) retirement. I don't know how many refuge officers were successful with their claim; there

was kind of a push at the time, and a growing movement within the Refuge System to apply for the special retirement - like at our annual wildland fire or law enforcement training there was a growing number of refuge employees considering their options and individual cases. There was a little bit of buzz in the air about people applying for that and if it was appropriate.

And the Department of Interior had actually even set up an office out of Boise that would receive claims and look at them. There was some guidance and training regarding the issue at LE in-service training as well. And I know they got a couple dozen claims, maybe even just from Alaska. But as far as I know, I'm one of a handful of people [that got] approved. And so, it certainly enhanced my retirement annuity, particularly since I had fairly modest GS [grades] during my time at Kenai ... It certainly helped. For example, I was able to retire at 82% of my high three [yearly average salary]. So that was one of the good parts about it.

And following an unfavorable ruling the following year in front of an OPM administrative judge, few collateral-duty refuge officers thereafter received a favorable special retirement ruling. However, uniformed full-time officers were almost uniformly successful [with their claims], and personnel departments began including "special retirement" in all full-time officer position descriptions [in general] ... and I think in part, along with the Association of Chiefs of Police Report, the multi-year commotion regarding special retirement accelerated the refuge policy move to using only full-time law enforcement officers on national wildlife refuges.

ROBIN: Yeah. Good. Thanks. So, clearly with the law enforcement commission and as a pilot, you did a lot of compliance work on the refuge for many years. And you also oversaw the special use permit program, I understand, and maybe you could tell me a little bit about the variety of the special use permits you were issuing and some of the work entailed. And also, the limited entry guiding permits that I know you oversaw for years.

RICK: Kenai was a very complex area. Kind of think ... like county government [variety of functions]: there's roads, there's gravel pits, there's different projects. So, there were also a lot of special use permits associated with outdoor recreational services. At one time we probably had up to a hundred, maybe 75 permits on the refuge, that provided big game guiding services, floating, rafting - all kinds of outdoor recreation things.

Then also in the case of the Russian River Ferry, initially a special use permit and then later a concession [contract]. So, there was all those goods and services related to outdoor recreation that we did special use permits for. And then there were utility lines, things like cellular towers, repeater towers - just any kind [of proposal] that had a potential to require special use permit approval - encroachment, or management or something that needed to be evaluated related to how it affected the refuge, required a special use permit - firewood cutting, rights-of-ways, buried pipelines; you name it.

And then there were also special events, like a cross-country race, dog mushing contest, or like a wilderness survival-type race, or anything like that. And some requests were denied, like, for example, maybe if someone wanted to have some kind of, say a field trial in a place affecting sensitive birds or something. Maybe you could make it work with certain special use permit conditions. So, if there was, just any refuge involvement, there was quite a variety of special use permits requests.

Before 1980, when I first came, I initially got heavily involved in all the special use permit evaluations and oversight. There was an increasing number of guided recreation proposals and some serious issues of overuse going forward to consider and I went back through all the files [regarding existing permits]. There had been a small number of special use permits issued on the Kenai Moose Range going back to about 1950. Later on, the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, after the Alaska lands act in 1980, there was a significant increase. Although the refuge had its history of issuing special use permits, there was a growing catalog of different permits and situations.

And I was the first one to put together a comprehensive permit program for outdoor recreation services. Instead of having to write these permits all the time from scratch, I put together a set of addendums, like A, B, C, E, F, G, each for common issues and recreational situations. There was a general set of recreational and outfitter guide permits. And then depending on what they were doing, they might also say "see attached" for different things, for example if they had watercraft, requirements for safety regulations were included, or if they had an aircraft component to their specialty, a separate addendum was included for that. The pre-written addendums were increasingly used as the burden of special use permits grew. I put that comprehensive set of addendums together for recurring and similar type requests and not so much for unique requests, but particularly predictable resource needs associated with outfitter guides. I think the first time we put that together was about '83 or '84 and it was based on going through the records and looking at 20-or 30-year history of special use permits on the refuge. So, I was very involved with recreational and visitor use.

Bob Richey, the assistant manager/pilot here at Kenai who had started here as a seasonal in '64, he kind of grew up with the whole permit program, and he was actually in charge of the Swanson River Oil Field [the first-place oil was discovered in Alaska]. He was doing all the lands, oil and gas [type] of special use permits and non-recreation special use permits.

When he retired in 1990, I had been increasingly interested in a lot of the non-recreational land issues - sometimes I'd go along with him on an inspection or some kind of a "show-me" trip associated with a permit issuance. And I had really kind of kept up with what he was doing. He was kind of a mentor.

And so, after 1990, I began to do most of the general land permits, like rights-of-ways and such. I didn't ever do the oil and gas permits associated with the Swanson River and Beaver Creek oil fields. [After Bob] retired, our former refuge manager, James Frates, came back as a facility specialist and also an oil and gas specialist. He did all the oil and gas [permits]. But I did take over most of the land things

associated [with non-program uses] like dealing with ENSTAR Natural Gas Company, Homer Electric [Association] and so forth.

And I did that from 1990 until I retired in 2012, and there was always a lot of “cross pollination”, depending on what was going on with the permit, where you would include a biologist or assistant manager or engineer or whoever in discussing what you wanted to do to try to make that activity work on a national wildlife refuge - be compatible. And it was really interesting.

ROBIN: So, I know there are two permits required by the refuge that deviate from the State of Alaska requirements that have been controversial, you've had some involvement with. And one is for trapping furbearers and other one is for bear baiting. Would you just give me a little bit of comments on those two permit programs?

RICK: Well, when I first came to Kenai, there was a national [Refuges] regulation against bear baiting and also use of hounds for hunting on a national wildlife refuge. Because bear baiting was prohibited nationwide on refuges, it wasn't something we had been required to consider based on just Kenai issues. After the national refuge prohibition was lifted, individual states in some cases began to consider allowing bear baiting; national wildlife refuges [had to evaluate hunting over bait on a refuge on a case-by-case basis]. And I can't remember specific studies, but the State of Alaska was doing a lot of black bear research out at the Moose Research Center [which was on the refuge] - besides researching moose, they also did bear research. Dr. Chuck Schwartz was doing a lot of bear research [his studies showed a considerable moose calf predation by black bears].

But at that time there really wasn't a state bear baiting program on non-refuge Alaska lands and [in part based on Dr. Shwartz's research] ... and so sometime, I can't remember when the State of Alaska proposed bear baiting, both on non-refuge lands and refuge lands that were otherwise open to hunting; there was a little bit of a switch in their philosophy on that, and they wanted to establish a bear bait program. Associated with their research indicating that bears were one of the primary predators on moose calves, they also determined that black bear harvest was minimal and that bear baiting would facilitate increased black bear harvest. And about that time, I think there was one other refuge where there was an interest in bear baiting. I think it was Seney Refuge in the lower 48 states, which in part may have influenced the lifting of the nationwide regulation prohibiting bear baiting on refuges. That regulation change regarding baiting in the CFRs [Code of Federal Regulations] now left it up to the individual refuge to consider, and subsequently experience pressure for refuges to be included.

The refuge was politically not quite up to the task of keeping bear baiting closed on Kenai Wildlife Refuge and there were some people on the staff there, who thought [baiting] would be okay. They thought we will just require the state regulation and state permit and a refuge permit if necessary, and perhaps that would be adequate. I probably was the least supportive of baiting bears on a national wildlife refuge. I didn't like the idea of having ten bears visit a bait station with maybe only one or two being the harvest

targets of the hunters, and the rest being sows and cubs or smaller bear yearlings; or brown bears that would not be legal over bait - all visiting baiting sites and becoming habituated to human foods.

And they would be getting habituated to what was essentially garbage and so on and so forth. I just thought it was antithetical to what the national wildlife refuge was. And so, Refuge Manager Bob Delaney knew we were gonna end up having to go along with the State of Alaska because we allowed hunting in general consistent with state regulations on the Alaska National Wildlife Refuges. And he said, "Rick, I know you don't like this program very much. Why don't you establish the permit requirements for it?" And I'm like, ... of course, but in conjunction with the biologists, and I said, "okay."

I didn't like it [bear bait hunting], but I came up with a few ideas - establishing bait station buffers from roads and trails and campgrounds and perhaps limiting bear baiting station density. I, for example, remembered as a kid, we had drawings for duck blinds back in Illinois and ways to manage entry where a lot of people wanted to access and hunt in a relatively limited space, whether it be similar to a select number of duck [hunting] blinds on a busy hunting area, like state hunting areas adjacent Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge in Illinois, or other situations, I knew there was a way to limit the bait stations on the refuge.

I said, hmm, what we'll do is, we'll not allow it in Wilderness; we will not allow it in areas that have particularly a lot of public use. During the regulation package and the ANILCA plan [development], we also had an area of the refuge, the 44,000-acre Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area, we wouldn't have it [bear baiting] there [either]. So, we're going to go along with this, but were going to do it in a limited fashion.

And also, of the areas that we would allow bear baiting, we will only allow one permittee per square mile. So, we divided up the [open to baiting] map in kind of a checkerboard framework. And a person could have one permit per square mile, and they could put their bait station anywhere in that square mile unless a portion of the square mile had an additional buffer, but nobody else could be there. So, it was a way of keeping the density of the bear baiting stations manageable.

Again, I didn't like the program, but we came up with this and of course, in conjunction with Ted Bailey and I think with, now Refuge Manager and then Biologist, Andy Loranger. I think biology assistant Ed Bangs was also involved before transferring, when we came up with this bait station allocation and permit idea and it has basically stood the test of time. And so, what happens now I think is an online [drawing for permits], but before that, it would be like a duck blind drawing on an opening morning. There would be people camping out in the parking lot [at the Refuge headquarters] and it was first-come-first-served regarding who got the [preferred] squares on the map.

And there were certainly "squares" that were closer to structures and recreational facilities than other more remote square miles. The buffers were set up where there was at least some distance between any of those available areas and campgrounds. Not that it was perfect, but [the program] tried to keep conflicts down where you wouldn't have bears coming onto a stale pile of Winchell's donuts at a bait

station or whatever, just outside a campground or trailhead. What was common for bear baiters was to use dog food, or honey on dog food, or some kind of scents - including old donuts or food attractants for bear bait.

There were certain square mile areas otherwise open to the permittees but that were partially covered by buffers, near roads, salmon streams, etc. where baiting was not allowed; our buffers might be a half mile in, so maybe on that whole square mile, there was only a two, three, or 400-yard corner of that square that they could place a bait station on.

And the [primary] controversy that's really comes up ... is leaving garbage, bait barrels, and tree stands, after the permit period. Officers could get a list of the permittees, who have to show their bait station placement on a map within the square mile, so officers can visit it. And there's always been a lot of citations and compliance [issues], verbal warnings or whatever in managing the program. So, it's been high maintenance, but again it's stood the test of time. This [whole] discussion is for black bears. There hasn't been a lot of follow-up research on how many visiting bears, both black and brown bears, that have become problem bears by visiting bait stations.

And then several years ago, this is after I retired, I think or maybe just a little bit before I retired, the State had gotten more and more harvest-oriented toward brown bears. So, the refuge really drew the line at hunting brown bears over bait. There's been quite a lot of controversial push by the State to allow brown bear baiting on the refuge as has now been allowed by State regulations on non-refuge lands on the Kenai. As of now, pretty much 70-80% of the original program to manage black bear baiting on the refuge remains in place.

And then let's switch over to the trapping program. There was a refuge permit required historically for trapping, but there really wasn't any comprehensive set of permit stipulations or requirements that mitigated issues with trapping on the refuge. The refuge trapping permit prior to the mid-1980s was really just a registration program and wasn't enforced and the State of Alaska had no trapping permit requirement on the Kenai or statewide. You can go to Europe, you can go to Sweden, you could go to Quebec, you could go all through northern Canada and so on and so forth, and you could not find a more laissez faire trapping program than the Alaska state program, a program with hardly any sideboards - just pretty much left to the discretion of the trapper in the State of Alaska. And the State of Alaska has really hung with that. The refuge needed a program that mitigated and prevented trapping conflicts with visitors and non-target wildlife.

There had always been, (like in the Anchorage urban area and near communities like Cooper Landing) issues of hunting dogs being trapped; and there and in more remote areas, traps left after the season, catching non-target wildlife like moose and migratory birds - just no accountability of individual traps and stuff.

And at Kenai, there was some [viability and population] concern for different wildlife species, whether it be marten, lynx, particularly in certain years; wolves in some situations, and non-target species - I mean ... quite a few issues with the trapping program in the early '80s. It wasn't compatible at all.

[For example,] I had two girlfriends back then, [at separate times] both of them didn't know each other and used different parts of the refuge. Both lost their dogs to traps on traplines. [It was quite common and] a lot of eagles [were] being caught. For example I wrote [a ticket for] one of the first Bald Eagle Act cases I think in the United States, involving a trapper ... that was very irresponsible, because the illegal take conviction, under the Bald Eagle Act, required intent, and would require a trapper to be so negligent in their trapping that it met the requirement of "intent" [under the Act] ... trapping multiple eagles in a knowingly illegal trap set. In this instance, the trapper was using a technique that made it impossible to not attract an eagle [visible meat and blood] to the set, and he had not checked his traps for three weeks.

So, the issues with refuge trapping were [many] ... too liberal a length of seasons, catching non-target species, catching lynx in closed season, out-of-season abandoned traps, catching many types of wildlife, catching eagles when you're just trying to catch a coyote ... inability to identify trappers, etc. There were a lot of issues. And Dr. Ted Bailey did research and examined programs all over the world, from Czechoslovakia to Canada, and did not find a program that didn't have at least some measures of professional "best practices" included in it, except in the State of Alaska.

And so, they [refuge staff] decided to come up with a program here based on completing a furbearer management plan - that they did in the mid-80s; and then, come up with a trapping program here on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge [that was a reasonable attempt to ensure refuge compatibility]. It would require a trapper orientation class. It would require teaching, using private [mentor] trappers, and cooperative, knowledgeable people in the state. And when it was implemented, it was very controversial with the State of Alaska, but they kind of went along kicking and screaming.

There had been a previous problem ... of a classic tragedy of the commons situation where you had maybe eight or nine trappers trapping on top of each other along the main roads. Some people had a trap line all the way from Sterling, Alaska clear to Turnagain Arm and trapped on top of each other. So, there was a lot of [trapping] hardware out in the field. There was a lot of inexpensive snares left after the season because there weren't any tags on them. There was no accountability or ability to identify those trapping after the season.

I can still remember my grandfather kind of sniveling when he had a trot line on the Mississippi River and new Illinois state regulations required that they mark their individual trot line and they didn't like that idea of invasion of privacy, I guess. The Fish and Game, and a lot of trappers didn't like it [individual trap device identification] either, but we required an identification on the traps. They didn't have to put their name, but they had to pick a number like 007, or 82924 or similar - usually it was a number - and it would be only known to the refuge people and officers for compliance and that was required.

And like just two years ago, eight years after I retired, the State of Alaska had a real big push [though ultimately unsuccessful] during the last administration, to roll back Kenai 's trapping program. Some of the features that they didn't like, when we put the furbearer management plan and the trapping permit program in place, including required buffers, were re-debated.

And [the roadside buffer requirements in the 1985 Refuge trapping permit] were a way to get rid of that "tragedy of the commons" situation by having a buffer; the chances of two trappers trapping on top of each other at a random place along the road system where they had parked their car and walked in, was much less than when you could trap along the corridor of roads and trails.

So that solved the problem, and the State didn't want to go along with that originally, but they finally decided to because the refuge had an alternative plan which they liked even less and which would implement exclusive trapping areas; and [refuge staff] maybe didn't really get to the point of how those [exclusive] areas would be awarded, but probably grandfathered in for longtime trappers, and maybe they could have an apprentice program, which is used commonly through the Northwest Territories in Canada, or in other places. The theory being that well known longtime experienced trappers, and those they mentored, would be less problematic. But the State of Alaska, (and I kind of agree with them on this) didn't like that idea of having a private kingdom for individual trappers and they wanted it open to the public. But the refuge reasoned that they had to come up with some method to disperse the users and where there was some ownership in the area, and husbandry by the trapper.

And so, one of the things the refuge staff did was establish a permit program that required buffers - buffers along the roads; double-size buffers around [public use] areas. The State went along with that. And a part of [achieving] that cooperation there, I attribute to [Biologist,] Ed Bangs and Deputy Manager, Mike Hedrick. He was a hunter's hunter. Ed Bangs was too. He, Mike, had kind of cut his teeth at CMR, [Charles M. Russell] National Wildlife Refuge [in Montana] and he knew how to talk redneck. He knew how to talk very harvest-oriented and whenever there was some kind of a wolf darting or "wild kingdom" hands-on wildlife research or project on the refuge, Mike was always right in the middle of it.

He did a yeoman's job of working with the State of Alaska, but there were still a lot of conflicts. And so, one of the more interesting cooperative and collaborative things that occurred, and I think it was about 1986, is they had a disagreement resolution meeting, and it was [called] a "charette". I guess that's a French word.

But they had Dave Cline, former fish and wildlife biologist and then representing the National Audubon Society as a regional Alaska representative; they had trappers [from the Kenai Peninsula Trappers Association]. They had maybe someone from the Sierra Club [or Alaska Wildlife Alliance]. They had State of Alaska representatives. They had people from our Anchorage office, maybe like the migratory bird office because of the non-target species issues sort of [eagles]. They had a couple of people from the refuge. And some of these folks from the State were just fire-breathing harvest-oriented biologists.

And so, it was really interesting. And Mike [Hedrick] was right in the middle of that. I don't know if it was Norm Olson who was an ANILCA planner at the time, or somebody else who came down and kind of facilitated this "charette". And so, it was like a whole two- or three-day kind of thing where it was kind of like arbitration and a legal thing.

And they had this "charette". I was not involved in it except just [to observe] ... to kind of look at people's eyes swimming in circles when they would come out of the meeting. But anyway, what came out of it was a Final Furbearer Management Plan. And probably to this date, it the most restrictive and best practices model of trapping plan in the whole State of Alaska. You might have thought that the State of Alaska would have adopted that successful program for statewide use. And I think there's been some other refuges and maybe Robin, maybe you could prompt me on this, but maybe Kodiak Refuge has some type of trapping program like Kenai.

Partly the reason for [concern is that] Alaska is such a vast place, but like right now, if you're a state trapper, there's no [real or substantive] regulation. I mean, you're [technically] responsible if you accidentally catch an eagle. But in a practical matter, there's not much responsibility there. But by placing the methodology of how the trap is placed, [as a requirement] decides whether you have a more frequent chance of catching non-target species or even the target species you want, instead of something you don't want. And what was happening here at Kenai, they were catching moose all the time, and we'd have to have biologists get into the tranquilizer supply and try to tranquilize a moose that was caught in a snare by the snout [for release].

And part of [the problem] was just the proliferation of the snares and traps that were put out ... but also, they were putting them out in such large numbers and that they [the trappers] couldn't keep track of them. The orientation classes really helped with that because you had longtime experienced trappers come in and talk and so on and so forth. With the success of the orientation program, even those most opposed to the more restrictive program, reluctantly went along with it. And the trapping orientations classes got to be almost kind of like an annual gathering of trappers, much like hunters having coffee at a deer hunter check station where people would trade war stories and so on and so forth.

But the State has just down deep opposed the trapping permit and furbearer management program on the Kenai NWR - has always just been a bee in their bonnet about that trapping program and just, never [has] given up on trying to foil it or roll it back, even after 35 years.

One of the few times I've gotten off the couch since retirement was an effort a few years back to end the refuge trapping permit requirement. I was on a radio program with now retired, but then [supervisory] refuge biologist John Morton ... and I got into some of my old files [in preparation]. I really kind of woke up and kind of got involved in speaking to the benefits of the permit program. There was an attempt to roll back those roadside buffers, the requirement for trap checks ... just everything. The State, and some within the Interior Department [political appointees] wanted to just go back to pre-1986 absence of a

trapping permit program. Andy Loranger, the refuge manager, was recalcitrant to do that because there were really [numerous] examples of how it was just a great program.

And in my opinion, instead of the State fighting it, and wanting to roll back time, they should adapt that program for the rest of the state, or at least in urban areas. And I think the trappers in general would benefit; there would be less conflicts with people who are real opponents of trapping. It would actually be good for the longevity of trapping. Anyway, that's one of the Kenai success stories - the trapping permit and Kenai NWR Furbearer Management Plan.

ROBIN: Thanks. Well, Rick, with 34 years at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, you've provided an outline here that's got all kinds of issues and things you worked on and stories, and maybe you could just share a few that you'd like to have on the record of things that you think are important for people to remember, out of your list here, and tell me what you'd like to.

RICK: Well, when you work at the refuge area, you're all the time kind of meeting people from the local community and over the years, not only was I an officer, I hired a lot of officers. And we started using the seasonal refuge law enforcement program here at Kenai, and it was available to other refuges throughout the United States. The National Park Service had come up with a program where you could have seasonal rangers be commissioned to enforce national park regulations with a kind of mini law enforcement commission, where they could do investigations and write citations for the basic 50 CFR kinds of things and so on and so forth, that occur on federal conservation areas.

The Refuge System adopted a program like the National Park Service to commission seasonal officers and even assimilated the select colleges and training centers that were approved by the National Park Service. So, we were able to get a program going [at Kenai]. I can't remember if we initiated it or it was collaborative, but the Service approved the policy where we could use the National Park Service's training centers and seasonals; [rangers who had been through the seasonal training program]. They had junior colleges, like Santa Clara Community College, the Alaska State Troopers Academy - that were approved for seasonal law enforcement certification. So, if you had prospective refuge seasonal employees that went to these smaller academies, lesser academies - shorter academies than the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, -you could get certified summer seasonal employees as law enforcement officers.

So, we got our first seasonal officer in 1987, David Kenagy. [I recruited and hired Dave and he was also the first seasonal LE officer in the entire Refuge System to the best of my knowledge]. And then in the years subsequent to that, some years we had three, four, or five seasonal officers almost every summer season. A lot of times they worked with one of the permanent officers, but they could make most of the compliance cases, and write regular notices of violation for different things and stuff. And so, managing those seasonal folks was a real asset to the refuge, but you had to be kind of careful.

Every now and then you'd get, maybe someone that wasn't quite suited. But it also worked as a good program. Some of our long-term officers, one, Rob Barto, who will be retiring this next summer here at the Kenai Wildlife Refuge, in July, and recently retired, Chris Johnson, who retired after a 20 some year career here ... and then actually, he's still a state trooper, and oldest person to go through the state academy - were both brought in as seasonal officers.

So, I just kind of wanted to mention that. The use of that program lasted probably about 15 years. And after 09/11, when the Association of Chiefs of Police report came out, kind of providing some guidance and so on and so forth, it kind of made it harder to do the seasonal program. And actually, my stepson, Clay McDermott was as far as I know, the last person in Refuges in the United States that was one of the seasonal officers. And he evolved into a full-time officer, then went off to Desert National Wildlife Refuge.

That seasonal program was really interesting. But sometimes it had its challenges too, because you might get an officer that was just a little bit overzealous. One year I was trying to kind of beef up the law enforcement program; it's the same year I hired Chris Johnson. We hired a seasonal officer who had been at the Statue of Liberty, as an officer with the Park Service. And I brought him up for the summer, and he worked with us for a few years. The transition from city policing at the Statue of Liberty and the change to a rural refuge was challenging, so you really had to be kind of be careful, as far as having the refuge seasonal officers working with the local community and other state and local police officers. So, yeah, I just wanted to mention that seasonal officer program.

Over the years, there were all kinds of cases. One of the things - it's not really a story - but when I first came to the refuge, I looked back through the records and stuff, and it was very common for officers at the refuge to work with, say, a road-killed moose or a poached moose or so on and so forth, particularly in the territorial days before statehood.

But then after statehood, when the State took over, a lot more of the law enforcement operations involved the State - it was common practice to have state officers take the lead on resident game cases. When I first came to the Kenai Refuge ... if you had, say... any kind of a state game animal, like a moose, maybe not migratory birds so much, like ... say, an over limit of ducks or something like that, but if you had any kind of a game animal, we would call a state officer to come and take the lead. We would take the information or wait there until the state officer came. And so, the refuge was really kind of farming out a lot of those cases.

Mike Hedrick, who we've talked about before, was a proponent of a new State regulation requiring a spike-fork or a certain sized antler for legal take of [a bull moose] in order to balance out bull/cow ratios and reduce bull harvest. The State regulations finally adopted the bull moose antler restrictions. And so, the first few years of that, it was kind of a slow learning curve for people. A lot of the cases we would go out on involved violations of the new antler restrictions. Someone would take a moose they thought

was 50-inches (which was legal) and it was only 47, or a spike-fork that wasn't quite a spike-fork. If it was a real close call, warnings were really appropriate.

It was that era where we were still kind of referring a lot of our state cases to the State. But what would happen is we would come upon a situation where a hunter had clearly taken a moose, four or five inches below the standard of 50-inches. And then we would wait there, and the state officers would show up, and then we would get there, and the state person would say, "Oh, well, I'm just gonna give you a warning. And yeah, you can go ahead and keep the meat and/or the antlers and stuff." And so, there were a lot of situations like that that didn't quite fit into our sight picture [of what was appropriate charging Judgement or the appropriateness of letting a hunter keep a sub-legal set of antlers or reward the hunter's lack of compliance with getting to keep the meat].

So, we started writing more of the state cases ourselves. And then not too long after that time, the refuge officers, instead of taking a state wildlife case to [federal] court, or having to go through a state officer for state court, got state commissions. And so, when officers here at the refuge, and actually throughout Alaska, were able to get their state commissions, they really had more tools and the appropriate court system to take resident game cases, either through the state court system, or federal court.

And in some ways that extra work with the state paid off ... and our law enforcement efforts became more cooperative. In fact, Refuge Officer Chris Johnson, for many years was on like the local AST SWAT team, not just for game things, but for years and years and years, for all types of emergency law enforcement responses. And it really, kind of elevated the State's perspective of our stature as officers when Chris was on the first response team here on the Kenai Peninsula. Not just for the ability to actually go through the state court system or take on more investigative approaches to federal cases, but having the case completely handled by the refuge federal officer. I thought that was a real step forward in the program.

There was one case, when I first got back from the law enforcement training center ... when I came back, USFWS Agent Wally Soroka was assigned here to the Kenai Peninsula, and usually agents were stationed at more cardinal cities like Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks. Wally was the exception and was assigned to the Kenai Peninsula.

Wally ... he had actually been in an undercover operation with illegal walrus ivory trafficking - "The Brothers" motorcycle gang out of Anchorage. And for almost six months, his family and wife lived here on the Kenai Peninsula while Wally was undercover in Anchorage, but nobody [from the refuge] had met them. Wally was flying up from here pretending to be somebody else buying and selling illegal ivory. Because he was in a deep cover situation with "The Brothers" motorcycle gang for this wildlife [operation] nobody from the refuge was aware or had even met Wally. It was a very big, commercial and illegal wildlife contraband network he was [investigating]. [The case was] very successful in court and when he kind of came out of the closet, so to speak, he remained stationed on the Kenai. He still

worked regionally in terms of commercial and various federal wildlife cases, but he also was able to work here on the refuge. So, when I first got back from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center and later had my commission, he was kind of my partner and worked on a lot of stuff. And he worked with me a lot on the refuge, and I worked with him [on several of his cases]. And so, when the officers had various cases, like maybe they were making a pre-dawn illegal ivory case [I might be asked to assist].

There's one case that we were involved with where Denny Strom, who was [a refuge officer] from Yukon Delta, and me, had been asked to work with [FWS Special] Agent Jerry Cegelske, who was up from Juneau. And we were just kind of backup waiting in the car, but Jerry was making a [plain clothes] pre-dawn purchase of illegal walrus ivory. Denny Strom and I were along for support and officer safety.

Anyway, Jerry made the case. We were watching from a distance in the parking lot. He made the case and went off with the guy because he had arrested him. So, Denny and I do an inventory of the car that [the detainee] had been driving, and that was seized associated with the arrest. So, in the trunk of the car there were 36 to 40 jars of cocaine, and about \$35,000 or \$40,000 in rubber-banded bundles of \$1,000 apiece. And so, we realized that this was a little bit bigger case than just the walrus ivory.

And based on what we [discovered] there, we notified Agent Cegelske, and we were able to get search warrants for the guy's home and post office box based on what we had found in the car. We ended up with about a half million dollars of cocaine seized that day [including a large amount of cocaine from the residence]. And, at that time, it was one of the largest drug busts in the State. And it's interesting that just about a month before that, there was one time when I actually applied to get another job off the refuge. I had applied for an agent/pilot job, potentially making the switch from uniformed refuge officer to the agents. It was kind of out of my culture, but I made an attempt. And I still had a pretty good flock of hair and a red beard, and I didn't quite look like maybe what Dave Purinton had in mind. Dave was the Regional Chief Agent, at the time. Anyway, he didn't hire me. He hired Stan Pruszenski, who had transferred up from the lower 48 states. And he wasn't a pilot yet like I was, but he was a good choice; I just didn't get the selection and Dave is the one that made that decision. So, when we had this large ... cocaine [seizure], we brought it back to his office and spread it out on his desk, and I guess they called the press in. So, there was Denny Strom and I, and this fellow Dave Purinton, sitting behind the desk - the guy who didn't hire me for the agent job, and with about a half million dollars of cocaine ... I mean, it was a lot of cocaine spread out in front of the cameras. And there was a couple of reporters there, and then Dave Purinton kind of got between us and kind of put his arm around us, and maybe kind of wished that he had hired me [laughter].

There was one thing I remember about that day too - we had just stumbled on to this kind of middleman, big drug operation. And I think kind of in the background, at the press and news photo shoot there, was someone they said was from the DEA. He had kind of a frown on his face, and he was looking over the reporter's shoulder when they were having the press conference after this large drug seizure there in Anchorage. And I kind of sensed that DEA maybe had surveillance on this thing, hopeful to follow cocaine trafficking up the ladder to a larger, more regional drug dealer, and here these US Fish

and Wildlife country boys just kind of stumbled onto the situation - for us it was quite an expansion of what we usually dealt with. That was kind of an interesting day, I thought.

ROBIN: Yeah.

RICK: There was a period of time when the Kenai regulations were kind of suspended [on hold] based on an [aircraft landing court case and charging] interpretation of what valid regulations were in place or not in place [following] ANILCA. And during that period of time [when the US attorney in Anchorage would not take our cases], there got to be a real large illegal landing scenario or situation up on the lower reaches of the salt chuck of the Chickaloon River. Some nights you'd fly over ... and we were in this period where we couldn't make a case on it [and word traveled fast to the pilot community}. And Chickaloon Flats, [historically] and to this day, had only certain areas open to aircraft landings and this particular place wasn't one of them - [it being a sensitive brown bear area, due to an abundant silver salmon run].

So, it wasn't uncommon to see a helicopter or 20 or 30 airplanes [who were exploiting our enforcement suspension]. It was just a short flight ... over from Anchorage. And so, when we finally got our regulations back in place, we decided to go up there and put some signs on the airstrip and put a large white X on the airstrip with some lime, so it would look like a closed airstrip and maybe we would make some contacts with pilots still landing at what was once again a closed area, and sending some people [illegal aircraft] away from there.

So, we went up Mystery Creek Road, seasonal ranger Ron Levy and me. We had signs. We had to put up two big signs on the airstrip, and we had a bag of lime to put the X on the airstrip. And so, it was kind of like our first day of beginning to reestablish the closed-to-aircraft area situation. Actually, there was an inholding right near there with a small road that went off of the Mystery Creek utility corridor there, which was how we gained access to the remote area.

And when we got there, there were already 15 or 20 planes there. So here Ron and I were out, canoeing down the river. Our canoe was kind of loaded with these signs and all this gear. So here we were putting up the closed area signs, but if we put the sign up in the middle of the airstrip, the guys who were already there couldn't take off. So, we gave warnings before [obstructing the illegal strip] and we kind of told the folks to kind of be gone and not come back, in a nice way.

Because this is the beginning of our re-establishment of our control of that aircraft situation and so, we encountered a lot of people out of there ... and one of the people who was very aggressive and come to find out, was the "advocate general" for the State of Alaska - I didn't know what exactly he did, but I thought perhaps he was associated with a lot of state enforcement of stuff associated with senior issues, but he was kind of a pretty high "muckety muck" in state legal circles.

He was an attorney, and his name was McGee, and I said, "... well, I know a McGee." There was a guy that was a friend of a friend, and he loaned me aircraft skis that I had used on my Aeronca Champ for two or three years when I first came to the Kenai. And he was the head land manager for Cook Inlet Region [Native] Corporation. And then the guy just stared at me and said, "Yeah, he's my brother, and he's already taken a load of people back to Anchorage and he's coming back down here again." And we had just erected or were erecting the sign. [We had not; erected the signs yet but the sign and post were just off the de facto runway.]

And so here came this 180 flying, on a long, low landing trajectory there at Chickaloon and he just wasn't stopping. And Ron and I had to drop the sign so he wouldn't hit the sign and dove off of the makeshift landing area just avoiding being hit by the landing aircraft. And this fellow landed, and I was not happy, and I was doing 10-foot strides over to talk to this guy that just about hit us with the airplane. It was a pretty close call because he was landing and there was only a certain place he could land, but we were already putting a sign up there.

We had no idea he was coming back to pick up other people that soon. So, I ended up writing him a citation for landing there and I wasn't happy. He paid his ticket and so on and so forth. So ... somehow the FAA got a hold of the case, and they suspended his commercial pilot license for his flying practice. So, here I was with this former friend who had loaned me skis who was gonna lose his pilot license because of this kind of incident. So that was one interesting case.

ROBIN: Well, Rick, you did a lot of flying yourself, maybe you have a story or two about unique incidents in an airplane while flying down here.

RICK: Yeah. I forget whether it was maybe in the early '90s or about that time, but every year, we would have pilot training and safety sessions, and I'd get to meet up with a couple of my old buddies from FLETC who had become National Park Service pilots. The great part about it was we also had a lot of mentors, like my check pilot, when I first started flying with Fish and Wildlife, Tom Ballou, and he had been a Reeve [Aleutian Airways] pilot and kind of was a pilot's pilot.

And it's just kind of amazing, a lot of the efforts and training that they [provided] was to make us safe as pilots, but in Alaska, there's always incidents. Not so much that it happened [frequently] with any of our [pilots], but pilots [in general] would stall their [aircraft] while being distracted [by something] outside the airplane, looking at moose, or local animals. It was called a "moose looking stall" where the pilot may be busy ... occupied looking at something on the ground and then would inadvertently stall the airplane, and because there wasn't enough altitude to recover, a lot of times it was fatal or a very serious injury.

And so, there was one fellow who had been a national level aerobatic pilot, kind of an aficionado. His name was Rich Stowell, and he started a program of using the fundamentals of aerobatic maneuvers and unusual attitude performance flying to teach just general aviation pilots, or in our case ranger/pilots or

whatever, to be comfortable with emergency situations ... [like being upside down or at very steep angle].

So, they came up with a policy where all of the Department of Interior pilots in the State: National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and so on ... would go to a weeklong course for unusual attitude [flying] and stall prevention. There were a couple emergency maneuver schools in the country, but the Rich Stowell's Emergency Maneuver Training course in Palo Alto, California, I liked because our family could go down there and maybe get a little vacation time while I was going to training every day; Rich Stowell had a very highly regarded school.

So, I had just come back and participated in this training thing for a week and then would in the future go every three years - sometimes they'd flex a little bit if you had conflicts, but every three years you were required to go back for a couple day refresher.

And so, I got back to Alaska, and it was winter. It was a real still chill winter air type day. And there's a [situation] that they teach private pilots about called "wake turbulence". And it's where a large jet or aircraft like a C-130 prop plane creates a wing tip vortex on takeoff. Some aircraft are worse than others, having what they call a "dirty wing" which really puts out a lot of turbulence on the lee of the wing when it takes off, especially when it isn't windy - it [the invisible horizontal vortices] turbulence can actually hang on over the runway for several minutes.

And they teach you ... when you're taking off as a pilot, like when the tower clears you for takeoff, to never let yourself be rushed to [depart] and be cleared for takeoff behind a large plane that's taken off like that. So, I found myself out at Kenai [Airport] on a winter morning in a Super Cub. The reason I was flying that day is that there were two lynx that somehow had been injured and the biologists on the refuge had rehabilitated them, and they had asked me if I would relocate these lynx someplace far away from the road, part of the refuge. The [lynx] were a sub-adult and an adult lynx.

And it took me probably an hour to get the seats in the Super Cub taken out and take these small to medium-sized crates into the Super Cub. Biologist, Ted Bailey sedated the lynx and got them in the crates and so on and so forth. By the time I [completed a preflight check] and was ready for takeoff, they were kind of waking up. Anyway, I had these two kennels sandwiched into the airplane. I was rolling out for takeoff at the airport, and many times the military planes or the Coast Guard planes were doing training. They would come down to [the airfield] and do multiple stop-and-go landings at the Kenai Airport.

So, there was a C-130 that was landing just as I came up to be cleared for takeoff; the C-130 was immediately departing and had gone by. I radioed the tower that I needed to wait for wake turbulence avoidance. And so, after about 30-seconds, he kind of came back and impatiently said, " ... cleared for takeoff, 784," the plane I was in. I said, "... negative ... waiting for wake turbulence." Behind me on the

taxiway, there was a small commuter plane, maybe a five or six passenger commuter plane that came up behind me.

That Commuter plane pilot said, [over the radio] "... when will I be able to take off?", to the tower. So, here I am with my little Super Cub stuffed full of lynx and kennels in the back, so I allowed myself to be rushed a little bit. Maybe it was a minute, minute and a half, and I should have waited even up to five minutes. Because what happens is you have like this invisible horizontal tornado of turbulent air, and it can tip a plane over. It can be very dangerous on takeoff. So anyway, I allowed myself to be rushed, and I put the "whip to it"! [meaning ... adding full power on takeoff] and I was climbing out probably at three or four - not quite 500-feet.

And it was just like the hand of God took that plane and tipped it over. Think of when you can see a tornado. It just tipped me up completely knife edge and a little bit inverted. And that can be a pretty fatal situation. And the lynx were squalling like you stepped on a house cat's tail. And later, as soon as the situation happened, I learned that they were so stressed that they had peed or urinated inside the kennels and that fluid was everywhere inside of the airplane. And I was practically upside down.

I was able to call up my skills that I had just gotten from this unusual attitude aerobatic clinic, and I was able to lower the nose [to maintain flying speed] and somehow level it. And I probably came to level flight maybe 25- to 30-feet above the extension of the runway and then gained altitude and was off to drop off the lynx. [There was a lot of noise and commotion in the crates, and no small amount of reflection in the pilot seat]. So, I dropped them off. They were way fully awake after getting dumped upside down in the Super Cub. The kennels were strapped in, but the lynx inside the kennels were just pummeled upside down when the plane was up on its edge.

So anyway, I released the lynx and took the kennels to the Speedy Car Wash, and it took probably close to three weeks [after a thorough cleaning] to kind of have the Super Cub back to normal after that.

ROBIN: Well Rick, I'm sure you've seen a lot of changes in the Kenai Peninsula and on the refuge over the years. What comes to mind when you think about change?

RICK: One thing is just a real simple thing is when I first started, they were using Selectric typewriters, and by the end, everybody learned to use a computer. And that's just kind of a little simple thing, but I was looking at an oral history, discussion of ANILCA by former ANCSA and ANILCA planner, Bill Reffalt. He kind of brought that up regarding just doing all the kind of work, drafting and redrafting reports during the lead up to ANILCA with manual typewriters compared to what we do today. None of us could imagine going back to typewriters to draft and redraft.

There were some people at first who were reluctant to learn how to use computers, me being one of them, but it was interesting that Bob Richey, one of the longest time people on the staff, actually led the charge and kind of got everybody automated and using computers. And the other thing, on a

completely different note that comes to mind, is when I first came to the Kenai, there had been [big wildland fire] burns in the past, like the 1947 very large burn; there had been the 1969 burn ... also quite large.

And as a result of those, there were (at least in the Swanson River) some of the best moose densities in North America. In general, a lot of the fires were man-caused fires. Lightning fires just seemed unusual. You just never saw lightning here. And I remember with former Assistant Refuge Biologist, Ed Bangs, when we were coming back on a boat across Tustumena Lake, and he was just saying, "... boy, this is really hungry country down to the south here. It's all mature black spruce and spruce forest."

He said, there really isn't much habitat there for moose to eat and so on and so forth. And there was really no burn mosaic on the two bigger lakes - Skilak or Tustumena Lake. And then over the years, it's amazing how the burn mosaic changed and how many man-caused and lightning-caused fires [occurred.] We started to get more and more dry lightning, just like you see in the Pacific Northwest or the Cascades - lower Cascades, northern California Sierras, and also in the Rockies ... having dry lightning storms associated with warm weather and turbulent weather conditions.

That was very uncommon here. And most of the fires were man-caused, but that really changed. We were getting lightning strikes ... more on a regular basis. We were getting more human-caused fires because of the dry conditions. [We were getting thousands of acres of spruce bark beetle outbreaks and related tree die-off], probably because of double beetle incubation periods, and warmer weather - we were getting at first, maybe 100,000 or 200,000-acre spruce bark beetle infestation starting in the 1980s.

And I think now, in 2024, we're on our third or fourth beetle outbreak with just a tremendous number of dead trees associated with that, making for dead and drier fuels and more likelihood of lightning causing bigger fires. Not unlike the [200,000 plus acre] Swan Lake fire that they had in 2019 here on the refuge, and forest fuels that lead up to that fire. But anyway, that's a really big change. Like if we were all on a boat on Skilak Lake or Tustumena Lake, and we would just be glancing around the shoreline of Skilak - the 28,000-acre lake, or Tustumena, the almost 73,000-acre lake, there's just a whole "Rubik's Cube" of burn mosaics from the different burns that have happened during my tenure here. So, you know you've been around for a long time when you have a lot of whole-forest-changes and climate change occur [on your watch]. I mean, climate change has been coming, but it's slow. And so that is definitely something both in terms of the spruce bark beetle epidemic and the drier conditions.

And one interesting note in 2005, we had had a pretty big fire burst. And I think the King County fire was [the big fire that year], that they believed was a lightning strike and it was a pretty large fire at the western end of Skilak Lake; so that kind of set the stage for this [next] little story.

One of the outfitter-guides that I administered a permit for, and who also had a recreational use permit and associated lodge inholding within Kenai Wilderness on the backside of Skilak Lake (at Cottonwood Creek). It's one of the most well-known, ecotourism operations in the State if not the whole Alaska and

Canada, Pacific Northwest area. The business was Alaska Wildland Adventures [and they were long-time refuge permit holders.]

They had a nice lodge there and were very compatible with how they set it up adjacent to Wilderness. And Kirk [Hoessle] the lodge owner calls me up and he says, " ... hey, we've got a visitor coming that you might want to drop in and see when you're out on patrol in our area." And I said, "Well, who is that?" And he said, "Well, Jimmy Carter and his wife Roslyn are gonna be here for their wedding anniversary and they're going to spend time on the refuge ... they're up here in Alaska for the 25th anniversary of ANILCA and he and Edgar Wayburn, (a long-time conservation advocate) are going to give the keynote talk in Anchorage. But afterwards, they've got some personal recreation time on the Kenai." And I said, "Hmm, that's interesting." And so, I kind of put that in the back of my mind. And so, later that week and it was the day that I was planning to go out and see if I could stop in and meet former President Jimmy Carter ... he'd been kind of a hero to me because of his hard work on ANILCA and signing that legislation, the Alaska lands bill.

And it was just kind of the serendipity of the situation that that morning, I had State Forestry call and [notify me that] a [Forestry] helicopter had lost a helicopter bucket. The lost water bucket, like they use underneath the helicopter to help put out spot fires, got accidentally touched off – released - for some reason, and it was in Skilak Lake. They had heard that it had washed up on the shore of Skilak Lake ... and could I get in the airplane and go spot [the lost bucket], then send some [boat] crews in [to secure it]. And so, I [thought], *hmm, that'll be my good reason for a timely flight, then stop in and maybe meet Jimmy Carter.*

About an hour or two before I was to depart, I ran into my former Park Service supervisor and mentor who had since [retired] and had been a 10-year chief ranger at the Denali National Park. He was with his wife and granddaughter going through the Kenai Visitor Center. I remembered Tom had been quite a fan of Jimmy Carter; I don't know why, but probably the same reason that I was excited to meet former President Carter, but I just had like a little flicker that [Tom would be just as thrilled]. I said, "Tom, how would you like to meet Jimmy Carter today?" And his eyes got big as saucers. And I said, "Can you ditch your wife and grandchild for a couple of hours?" And so, Tom had just recently retired from the Park Service, so I knew he had all the aviation safety training and so on and so forth and was probably still within the time frame there.

And it was easier to get forgiveness than permission, so, I just signed him up on a volunteer agreement, found a refuge-looking Nomex green [flight] suit so he'd look pretty official, and had him meet me at the floatplane base at Headquarters Lake as soon as he could get there. So, we took off ...

We found the helicopter bucket on the shore of Skilak Lake, called in the coordinates to State Forestry, and then proceeded to land there at Cottonwood Creek, where the lodge was. Kirk Hoessle, the owner and person who'd told us about their special visitor, came out to greet us. When we pulled the 185 floatplane, N56581, up to shore there, Kirk Hoessle greeted us and says, "Well, the Carters just did a fly

fishing [trip] down the Kenai River Canyon and they're going to do a little bird watching after their nap. He suggested we come back a little later ... So, we took back off again and patrolled the shore of Skilak Lake and returned about 20-minutes later, landing there at Cottonwood Creek.

And just then, the Carters came down. So, we were able to say hello and talk to them a little bit about the refuge. And Tom said he was a retired National Park Service chief ranger and really appreciated his service, and so on and so forth. So, it was a nice evening.

And just then, getting back as I digress to the fires, earlier that year had been the King County fire and a lot of times after a big fire like that, the project team stays in the area for a time until they get assigned [elsewhere].

And so, there was a helicopter, H3, commonly known as a Huey, that was stationed somewhere near where the fire camps were near Sterling, Alaska. Almost simultaneously, we were talking - Jimmy Carter, and I had been talking about the King County fire earlier that summer, and all of a sudden there was smoke coming up from a completely different high area in the mountains just by Upper Skilak Campground - Hideout Mountain, I think. And just then, we saw the helicopter, whooshing across Skilak Lake at about 1,000-feet. And they had a helicopter bucket. And so, they lowered it in the lake. And so, President Carter and I were looking at this across the lake and I said, "... there's an example right up there in that area of a likely lightning-caused wildfire ... probably wasn't a human-caused fire; it was probably a lightning strike from a dry lightning storm, and just a short time after this other larger fire we'd had earlier this summer.

And I mentioned it was probably because of climate change and so on and so forth. I kind of nodded and I said, "Well, I'll give you another example of climate change." And I invited him to come over to the [Cessna] 185 on the shore there. When Tom and I were flying, we had gotten the windshield of the 185 just completely slimed by bugs. And that had never happened for the two decades I had been at Kenai until just several times in a recent year, and a lot that summer.

There was a bigger hatch of aphids or whatever those bugs were - when conditions are warmer. People who are familiar with the Midwest are familiar with like a mayfly infestation as they're crossing a bridge, like on the Mississippi or Missouri River - [one can experience] just totally opaque bug spatters on the window of the car. So just before Tom and I had landed, I almost had to [land] blind because the windshield was so slimed with aphids flying over Skilak Lake in Alaska. And I just told Carter that in my opinion, those kinds of events were very unusual and indicative of the warming seasons we've been having, even in Alaska.

And he kind of wryly grinned and he said, "I'm gonna use that in my next speech on climate change." And just before that he had said, when we were talking about climate change, and Carter, had said, "Your big boss in Washington" - and I think he was referring to the younger President Bush -, he said, "Your big boss in Washington doesn't really go for this climate change stuff." Actually, I kind of gotten

ahead of myself. That's when I told him, "Well, there's something that even someone from Texas can understand and that's "bugs on the windshield." So that's when I took him over to the plane and showed him. I had started keeping a window washing squeegee with me. And so, President Carter watched me squeegee the plane off. And before I took off again, anyway, we said, have a good day. And I think we took a picture with the former president and his wife. But ... I don't know if Jimmy Carter used my "bugs on the windshield" example of climate change, but it certainly was something I experienced.

ROBIN: Well, Rick, it's been a pleasure. You've had a unique career, and you contributed a great deal to conservation in Alaska, particularly the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. And again, a pleasure talking to you today. Is there anything you'd like to share as we wrap up?

RICK: Well, when I originally came to the Kenai, I had no idea that I would end up staying here for 34 years as a career. And I think to date, I'm the longest person that's been here. During that time, when I first came here, I tried to get to know all the living people that had been [here]. I met with Dave Spencer, the first refuge manager and later refuge supervisor, and former Assistant Refuge Manager, Bob Seemel; Will Troyer, who I think I mentioned, and talked about earlier, and who was one of my mentors who had been the refuge manager here in the 1960s and later became a wilderness biologist with the National Park Service.

And he always stopped in to see me throughout my career. I really sought out a lot of those earlier folks, and then I had access to all the annual narratives and could really look at the evolution from the day the first refuge manager, Dave Spencer, arrived in, I think it was 1947, several years after the refuge was established. And I really tried to be a student of those early folks. Some of them were pilots; some of them were biologists. Others were assistant managers and did a little bit of everything.

And I really tried to kind of immerse myself in that culture of the Refuge System, and as much as I could I tried to pass [on] that sense [of history] and interest in that, and tried to understand how they did things; when and where and why, and kind of make that part of our daily management stuff. And I always talked a little bit about the history and the legacy that was here at Kenai Wildlife Refuge with the seasonal employees that I trained or was involved in cooperative training.

And I think over the years, between Youth Conservation Corps, seasonal rangers, interns - I think I either was involved in or hired over 300 people there. And I tried to, as much as I could, share the knowledge that I had acquired from those early managers and that I had the sense that it was really important to meet with and understand how they had come upon their Alaska journey, and their contribution to the Kenai National Moose Range, and later the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. And that kind of sense that Kenai was a special place. It was never lost on me, and I tried to share that with the different seasonal folks.

My greatest legacy here, I would just say, is having a long-term perspective, trying to roll with the punches, trying to work with the various five or six refuge managers, trying to work with five or six

presidential administrations with different philosophies of conservation management and so on and so forth. I really had a sense of this as a pretty special place with a pretty special history and had lots of places to go and things to do.

Just when I stopped in today to do this oral interview, we met a young woman, I guess seasonal. She said she'd been a winter ranger this year... whose name was Candace ... I think she said she was from New Mexico, if you remember Robin. Meeting Candace caused me to reflect on my first winter on the Kenai [and where she may be in in the future] ... and I think that it was real special coming in to talk about 34 years of history and more years living here on the Peninsula since retiring - recreating on the wildlife refuge almost on a weekly basis.

It was kind of fun to reflect on that and to meet one of the new [staff] ... and that maybe they'll be working here at the refuge 20 years from now.

ROBIN: Very good. Thanks, Rick.

End of Interview

Key words: aircraft, aviation, biologists, climate change, conservation, employees, fires, law enforcement, parks, planning, recreation, training,