



The Oral History of Elliott Sutta

December 14, 2017

Interview conducted by Ralph Morgenweck

Littleton, Colorado

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Elliott Sutta

Date of Interview: December 14, 2017

Location of Interview: Littleton, Colorado

Interviewer: Ralph Morgenweck

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: Approx. 35 years 1979 - 2014
(approximate retirement date)

Offices and Field Stations Worked; Positions Held: National Archives Service and the Department of Labor Analyst before joining the FWS in 1979. Washington Office, Chief of the Endangered Species Budget Office; 1986 – retirement Region 6 (Denver) Assistant Regional Director (ARD) for Administration.

Most Important Projects: Elliott helped develop the Land Acquisition Priority System and represented Endangered Species on the National LAPS team. He consolidated programs within Administration in Region 6 including setting up the IT (information transfer) program and he provided financial support to the field stations in Region 6. He also developed emergency management programs and policies as a representative on the Denver Federal Executive Board.

Colleagues and Mentors: Galen Buterbaugh, Amos Eno, Bob Gilmore, Terry Grosz, Paul Henne, Ron Lambertson, Ralph Morgenweck, John Murphy, Dave Olson, Dan Raisovich, Keith Schreiner, John Spinks, Beth Stevens, Ralph Wallenstrum, Ed White

Brief Summary of Interview: Elliott Sutta talks briefly about his youth and interest in biology when he ultimately decided to complete a math degree. From there he became involved in Federal work as a Budget Analysis, he then moved to the Department of Labor before eventually becoming an Assistant Regional Director for Region 6. He goes on to talk about his good memories of working as an ARD.

THE INTERVIEW

RALPH MORGENWECK: Well, we're recording Elliott. So, Mr. Elliott Sutta, tell me a little bit about where you grew up and how in the world did you ever end up interested in the Fish and Wildlife Service?

ELLIOTT SUTTA: I was born in Miami Beach, and grew up in Coral Gables, another suburb in Miami. There were lots of empty lots around and I just got into critters; snakes and turtles and frogs and ants and snails and anything else I could play with, and I kept that interest in animals all the way. I graduated high school and got into Duke University; they gave me the biggest scholarship. I started off as a biology major, but by my second year I wasn't cutting it. I just couldn't memorize all the stuff in anatomy. So, I changed to a math major with a biology minor. In my senior year I went into education and got a teaching certificate for high school math.

After I graduated, I didn't have a job, so I went back to grad school at the University of Miami. After one semester I said, "I'm done with school, I'm done with living at home, I got to get away." They had interviews at the Miami Counseling Office and I hooked up with GSA (General Services Administration.) I had an interview in the Atlanta Regional Office in the morning, flew to Washington in the afternoon, both places offered me a job and I said, "What's the difference?" Atlanta was a GS-5, Washington was a GS-7. I said, "I'll go to Washington." I was a management intern for 3 years, 7-9-11, which was wonderful and I rotated throughout what was then called the Transportation and Communication Service. This was before computers of course, so I learned telephones and telegraphs and finances and I got into the Defense phone system and I would call all my buddies around the world. I had a great time.

After 3 years, I think, I had enough and I left. I went to go work with New York Life, selling life insurance for about 6 months till I realized I wasn't cut out for salesmen. I went back to the Feds and I was the Budget Analyst for the National Archives Service, which was fascinating, not the job, but what the Agency did. I got back-room tours in the basement of the National Archives building. I got to see Eva Braun's photo album. I got to listen to the President's recordings. It was wonderful.

I had a family friend who lived in Washington who said, "You got to get out of GSA, it's a crummy little agency." He got me a detail with OMB (Office of Management and Budget.) I was there for 6 months and I learned to round off in the millions; it was fascinating. We had direct access to the Agency budgets; they couldn't see what we were doing to them, I had HEW (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.) I forgot the other Agencies. Anyway, he got me into the Department of Labor where I became the analyst for the Worker's Comp. programs. So, I learned about worker's comp, long shore, black lung. It was a great learning experience. During budget season I would work till 12 to 4 o'clock in the morning in the office to meet the deadlines. You had blue-lined paper, you couldn't make mistakes, but I learned how to write and how to justify budgets.

One day, month after month, you'd read the little job referral service, the green sheets that'd come out, out of Vienna I think the company was, and there was a job advertised - Fish and Wildlife Service, Asheville, North Carolina, and it's like WOW, I never heard of Fish and Wildlife Service, what a neat thing to do. So, I started applying to Fish and Wildlife Service. I got the biology background bug, I had the budget bug, I made the final cut for an analyst with Refuges. Dave Olson interviewed me, I was ready to be hired, then President Nixon put on the federal hiring freeze and I was stuck with Labor. I kept applying. I interviewed with Hal O'Connor; Keith Schreiner picked Ed White over me, so I was still stuck in Labor. 1979, I finally was chosen to replace Bill Atchenson in the Office of Program and Budgets under Dan Sokolowski and it was marvelous. The first 6 months I got to learn the agency, all the people, all the players, all the offices. I was in charge of Executive Direction and that's because the program coordinator – and then above that was administration head ARSS under Ed White and Dan Raisovich.

RALPH: What grade were you about this time?

ELLIOTT: 13. I was dying for a 14 obviously, and I would go anywhere and do anything to get it. Didn't pan out, eventually I switched jobs with Steve Parry. He came into Executive Direction and I took his job with Endangered Species in the Blue Goose building in Arlington. John Murphy was my immediate Branch Chief; John Spinks was the Division Chief of Endangered Species. John Murphy never thought about promoting anybody; regardless, I said, "How about I get you a 15, and I could get a 14?" He said, "No." Eventually he moved on, moved out and I took over. I think I got my 14 at that time, and I was Chief of the Budget Office for Endangered Species.

I think it was the most rewarding job I ever had. I felt I was making a difference for the critters. I would work with the Congressional committees, with the OMB guys behind the scenes. My first roommate was Amos Eno. He would go out and hustle the funds and I made sure they got put in the right slots and got spent properly. And it was fabulous. We had a great crew in the Blue Goose building - Listing, Recovery, and Budget; it was just wonderful. I'm sitting at my desk one day – I did field trips, we went out to Delmarva to release the Fox Squirrels, marking them, pinching their toes and then radio transmitters, had a great conference at Yellowstone.

Then one day, I'm sitting at my desk - this is July of 1986 - and I get a call from Ed White, who by that time was the ARD (Assistant Regional Director) for Budget and Administration in Alaska and he said, "I'm taking a detail in Denver, you want to take my slot here?" and I said, "There's no way I'm going to Alaska unless the ARD asks me." Let me back up a second, the Assistant Directors at that time – the first one was after Keith Schreiner - came Ralph Wallenstrum, then came Ron Lambertson. He used me like crazy during the budget time. I would accompany him to the Congressional hearings, I would anticipate the questions, flip open the briefing book which I had prepared and it worked out great, we had a great time.

After Lambertson, Bob Gilmore came in. Gilmore was from Refuges; he – on the surface – hated endangered species, because it took away from his beloved refuges, but to give the man credit, when he became Assistant Director, he threw himself into the job. He learned every program up and down, in and out, read every recovery plan; took me on every exercise he had to go to for

budgets and whatever. One day I'm sitting at my desk with my feet up on the desk like I normally sit, he came over from Main Interior unannounced like he typically did and walked by the hallway and saw me sitting there sprawled out and just yelled out, "Sutta! Get to work!" and I, with my typical tact and diplomacy said, "F- you Bob!" and I yelled, "Oh my god, he's, my boss!" and he cracked up and laughed. Life goes on, I was on the LAPS team, Land Acquisition Priority System, 1 of 4. I represented the Endangered Species Program as we developed this whole system of prioritizing land to be acquired. Absolutely fascinating. I did such a wonderful job on that, Bob rewarded me by taking me to see the Assistant Secretary, C. Craig Arnett – no – who's the other guy?

RALPH: Ray Arnett?

ELLIOTT: No, under Ray Arnett, the Deputy. Short, squat.

RALPH: Craig Potter?

ELLIOTT: Bingo! Craig Potter. Craig Potter was having fits because there was one tract of land that the Service had been unable to acquire for years, for a variety of reasons, and Potter said, "Gilmore, what are you going to do to get that land?" and Gilmore turned his finger to me and said, "He's going to do it." And I looked around and realized he was pointing at me. I then proceeded to develop a socio-economic survey working with Governor Bruce Babbitt's office in Arizona and eventually succeeded in acquiring Buenos Aries Refuge for the Masked Bobwhite Quail. One of my singular successes.

Anyway, back to real-time, 1986, I'm sitting at my desk, Ed White calls, I said no unless the ARD calls me, 5 minutes later Gilmore's on the phone; "Sutta, I want you, and I want you here and I want you now!" and I said, "Okay, but this is a detail, I'm not moving to Alaska." He said "Okay, I'll take 120 days." Packed my bags, said goodbye to the family and left for Anchorage. I was there for 2 months or so - maybe a little longer; had 2 field trips to the best spot and the worst spot in the state. Kenai was gorgeous, Bethel was an armpit. I had to do an Administrative Survey of the Officer out at whatever refuge it was at Bethel and found her guilty of stealing equipment and not disposing of it properly and all that kind of good stuff.

But it was neat being an ARD. It was really very impressive, and I enjoyed it, but I wasn't anticipating anything else. I liked being Chief of Endangered Species Budget. Ed White calls and said, "I'm homesick, I want to go back to Alaska. You go back to take my place in Denver." Okay, I did. By that time, Frank Dunkle was the Director of the agency and one of the first things he did, because he was frustrated with the bureaucracy, was get rid of all the program development staffs. He just didn't believe in them and his direct words to me was, "Elliott, if you want a job with Fish and Wildlife, you're going to stay in Denver." I became a permanent resident of Denver, having seen my family twice in 6 months.

RALPH: And you have 2 boys at this time?

ELLIOTT: 2 boys, they were 9 and 6. And they were crushed to leave Virginia. They all had their friends in schools and all that stuff. My wife was a kindergarten teacher and she loved it and everything was going gangbusters but being without her husband for that long she said,

“Wherever you go, I’ll follow you. I’m not too sure about Alaska.” But we all moved to Denver on December 10th, 1986. The family joined me; we moved into the house where I still am. So, the kids grew up in Denver and obviously everything turned out to be very well.

I became the ARD for Administration, Galen Buterbaugh was the RD, John Spinks was the Deputy, and it’s primarily because of him that I became the ARD. Unfortunately, of the 6 divisions at the time, 4 of them had also applied for the job, so I made no friends from the day I walked in the door. And the first several years were very tough, different people, different personalities, lots of conflicts. We had an employee union and it wasn’t a lot of fun. Eventually as people move on and you have turn-over, you get to pick your own – you look for certain attributes in employees that you can groom, move on that will do the job with a minimum of hands-on babysitting.

When Galen Buterbaugh left, which was wonderful – I got along with Galen reasonably well, not great, he would chastise me periodically - Ralph Morgenweck, the man who is sitting here doing the interview - became the Regional Director. Almost instantly there was a change in attitude throughout the Regional Office. I had known Ralph from Washington meetings, Directorates, and budget preparations and I was enamored with him and his style, but I felt pressured to perform. I felt that if I could prove myself and keep any issues of administration off his desk and out of his office, he would leave me alone and I could run my program and I could support him better. And that’s pretty much the way it went for the next 10 years – give or take.

During the time I was ARD the most fun was field trips, not administrative conferences for contracting personnel, IRM (Information Resource Management), and engineering and water resources and safety and EEO, that’s all the areas that I supervised - anywhere from 6 to 8 divisions, numbering about 8 people. As time went on and I grew more and more experienced, I felt like I was doing a better and better job. I had my pitfalls; I had my run-ins with the programs; the toughest thing you had to deal with was financing. Administration initially never was a line item in the budget, we always lived off assessments to the resource programs, which galled them and galled me because you were tin cupping all the time. Eventually we prevailed and we got a line item and we were funded, strictly for the minimal work for the minimal staff, anything else you had to do you still had to go to the programs. There was an animal called CAM and it was Centralized Assessments - I don’t remember the exact acronym, but I was bound and determined that I was going to explain to each of my customer programs what we did with their money and why we needed and is there a better way of doing it. My predecessor, Marv Duncan, never told the programs anything, he just took all their money, charged them for computer hookups and just basically took them to the cleaners. When I came in, after I learned what I was doing, I didn’t do that. I laid everything out, I showed them what the basis was and why we did it. Grudging acceptance, but it worked.

The best times I had were field operations - either law enforcement or going out to visit the refuges and hatcheries. Those were our ultimate customers, and I would go out and I would talk to the project leaders, what are we doing right, what are we doing wrong, what do you need, how can I help, what are the problems you have? And it was just a fascinating study and the workings of the agency – to see the differences in each program. I kept all of my contacts in the

Washington Office, and I would go back regularly – probably more than any other ARD for Budget did and I would go around to every one of those Washington administrative offices; “Hello, how are you? What can we do better? How can I help you?” and I kept my contacts. I was able to really streamline my program. We were always ranked number 1 or 2 as the Regional Admin Program. And that really was a nice compliment that I was receiving. *I’ll pause, I have to collect my thoughts.*

RALPH: Does the U.S.S. Sutta mean anything to you?

ELLIOTT: [*Laughter.*] There was a time – Terry Grosz the ARD for Law Enforcement came to me and said, “Hey, we got a big problem, Bear Lake, The Great Salt Lake – all the poachers there have these fabulous air boats, and we had a rowboat. Can you find help?” He came back in and said, “There’s a boat for sale.” I bought the boat and I said, “As long as you name it after me and I can go waterskiing.” We bought the boat – the U.S.S. Sutta - and he caught the poachers and that was – Terry still laughs about how we could pull that off. I did a lot of – nothing illegal, but creative, creative financing, creative – Terry and Ralph used to have this annual habit of taking a road trip for a couple of weeks where they would visit different field stations in one or two states at a time, and they made it a point to go to the project leader and say, “What do you need? What do you want? What’s your problems?” After initial reticence they would start coming forth with all kinds of problems; my heater doesn’t work, my headquarters is falling down, I don’t have a tractor, whatever it was – I need a canopy over the raceways. And they would take unbelievable, sadistic joy in giving me a laundry list of items, I, of course, being a total masochist took as just as much joy in chalking off every one of those lists and getting them done, and it was fascinating because the programs never knew what I did or how I did it. But it worked and the field stations got what they needed.

RALPH: Why don’t you put it on pause while you take that? (*Phone was ringing.*)

ELLIOTT: I’m going to back track a little bit – when I first started my Federal career with GSA, I went to George Washington University. I got my master’s in administration Area Public Financial Budgeting – Public Financing and Budgeting. When I joined Fish and Wildlife Service I went back to school again, got all my credits for biology, because I thought it would make me better relating to the field staff for their budget needs for the critters. When I got out to Denver, I started exploring going back to school for a Ph.D. but being lazy, I couldn’t find a biology Ph.D. program convenient to the house. D.U. (Denver University) didn’t have one, C.U. (University of Colorado) was too far away, so I gave it up, and I’ve lived on my laurels ever since. Where was I before? We talked about Law Enforcement.

RALPH: Yeah.

ELLIOTT: For Law Enforcement I did – I covered their asses from all their assessments, they didn’t have enough money to do anything so I paid for their assessments. I bought them stuff like locked gun boxes mounted to their trucks because they couldn’t afford it. Terry Grosz said, “I have a program for Native American Law Enforcement training, I need help for it.” None of the Programs said a word. I said, “I’ll do it.” And I paid for all of that. I was on Law Enforcement roadblocks; I was on undercover operations. It was fascinating. My wife was paranoid, because I

was wearing a bullet proof vest; the kids thought it was so neat that I was doing this stuff, but I wasn't allowed to carry a weapon, that was a bummer. But it was really – I was living on adrenaline, seeing what it was like to be a Law Enforcement Officer involved in some of these operations. My biggest regret was not doing as much field visits as I could have or should have. I saw maybe half of the refuges and half of the hatcheries and just had a wonderful time learning and doing hands on spawning fish, nest surveys, releasing Black-footed Ferrets, going to watch the California Condor release.

RALPH: Looking for rattlesnakes.

ELLIOTT: I was on a rattlesnake trip. My next-door office mate was Lynn Haines. At that time, Research was part of Geological Survey. She said she had a doctorate student who was working on rattlesnakes, *would I be interested?* So, I went with him on his field trips where we trapped and marked rattlesnakes. The premise was Flaming Gorge divided the habitat for the Midget Faded Prairie Rattlesnake - was there any morphological differences between the two sides of the lake? The answer was no, because the lake hadn't been around long enough, but I was out in the woods catching snakes. It doesn't get any better than that. In my office in Administration in the Regional Office building, I had my own little zoo. I had a Ball Python, which I still have, he's 23 years old, and I had salamanders, so whenever it was "Bring your Child to Work Day" or whenever Ralph would bring his kids to the office, they made a beeline for my office, and they took the critters out. Cameron, his son would take the snake and walk around the halls and scare all the women and then come out and take salamanders and have a salamander race up and down the hall. It was fascinating, just fun stuff to do.

I still went to all the Admin conferences, I still dealt with the Washington office, when Jamie [Rappoport] Clark became the Director, I got involved with the PARD-GARD exercise. I was on every team that was assembled to try to make this thing work, to figure out what did and what didn't work. And it didn't work because it's tough to beat human nature. Everybody wants control; programs, people and money, and you can't have it both ways with the PARD-GARD. Give me another prompt, will you?

RALPH: Did you ever have an experience where, like, the Regional Office was on fire, or anything like that?

ELLIOTT: As part of my safety background, I was with the Denver Federal Executive Board and all the emergency contingency planning, what to do in case of dire emergencies and major calamities, which we had in the Regional Office. At that time there was a restaurant on the first floor and there was a major fire in the kitchen of the restaurant and the smoke permeated the building; the flames were confined to the restaurant. I, on my own, closed the building, sent everybody home making sure everybody was present and accounted for. I called my buddy in Washington DC, Paul Henne, explained the emergency, got funding, we had clean up done of the building within 3 days and we were back to operations. And we did it, we got the whole thing done. As far as I know, it was the only such disaster within the Fish and Wildlife Service, other than natural disasters like hurricanes. We had those too in other regions, and we sent staff and equipment to Hurricane Katrina and some of the other places. I never went personally on those trips but I sent my staff to do the safety inspections and the bookkeeping and the financing.

RALPH: Did you work at all on the big oil spill in the Gulf?

ELLIOTT: No.

RALPH: Did your people work on that?

ELLIOTT: I think Safety did, and I don't remember who else. We were – this was a paper pushing, bookkeeping branch that provided all the administrative support, expedited hiring, expedited contracting, again all legal, all audited, all passed but really stressful and my troops came through. One of my better successes – I think of it as success – was I dissolved the employee union, which was a real pain in the ass. They were – they had some nice people in there and they had a lot of the slackers. When they did not perform to their legal calling, I called the National Labors and Relations Board, and they were gone.

RALPH: Did that require another vote?

ELLIOTT: Yes. By the union members? No. There was not enough people to vote; they were gone. I'm off my train of thought.

RALPH: So, if you could point to the single most satisfying event of your career, what would it be? Would it be buying Buenos Aires [National Wildlife Refuge], would it be buying the air boat, would it be – what?

ELLIOTT: I think making the program a respected member of the Directorate and a full partner in all efforts and work and semi-well-funded so the programs did not complain. They knew what they were getting and why. Just making Admin on a par with the resource programs which had never occurred before. I had lots of successes, I mean that – all the LAPS system, the land acquisitions that I did, the critter releases that I was involved with – just being able to do stuff behind the scenes. I liked operating behind the scenes.

I did a lot of novel efforts. I consolidated all the IT staff, taking people and dollars from the programs, making one uniform office that supported everybody – I consolidated EEO and Human Resources into one-stop shopping. I split Water Resources, made it a separate division from Engineering, so they stood on their own because Region 6 lives and dies with Water Resources river systems and water rights. I think I'm happy because we did more with less. We were one of the smaller staffs, but the second largest Region with the most field stations and we did it, we succeeded.

When Ralph left the world changed, we had a couple of other RDs afterwards that just never were the same. The attitudes, the behaviors, the workings of the office were not nearly as fulfilling. I had a disaster under Ralph, and I made a really poor sense of judgement when I was in charge of Aviation Management - which was another division that I took on - because the programs were squabbling, "He's got the pilot, he's got the money, he's doing trips." So, I said, "I'll do it, I don't really care, it's impartial." So, they accepted that, but I made an error and I did not pay attention to a Solicitor's Opinion and I paid the price on that, but I still think Aviation was the right way to go. I had a great relationship with the Solicitor's Office. One of the other things I used to do was go to them towards the end of the year and say, "What do you guys need?" because they never had any money and I would finance their new computers, typewriters,

whatever they needed and in turn I think we got better more timely service out of the Solicitor's Office.

RALPH: What was the funniest thing that ever happened to you while you were working?

ELLIOTT: Other than being roasted by Matt Kales. Aagh! Okay, back in the days when Galen Buterbaugh was there, and this is politically incorrect, we would have all employee ice cream socials where the Regional Director would serve ice cream to the troops and then they would put on skits. The first year that we put on the skit, I was Hugh Hefner and I had my smoking robe and my pipe, and my female employees that worked for me dressed up as Playboy Bunnies. It was totally un-PC, but it was hysterical, everybody loved it, I had three women that were very nicely built and they come out in their skimpy outfits; everybody oohed and ahed, and my 4th Bunny was Rita Bezos, who was pregnant, so I prefaced this by saying, "Sometimes there are errors." And the place cracked up. After the skit, Galen had all the girls sit on his lap for a picture pose. The following year, I was Secretary Manuel Lujan and we were doing the endangered species – the different squirrels, the Grey and the Red-neck squirrels, whatever the hell it was.

RALPH: Mount Graham red squirrel.

ELLIOTT: That one. And I had more women that volunteered to be in my skit, because they saw how successful it was and at the end of this particular skit, two of the women grabbed my arms, the third one came in with a bolt cutter and a basket as if she was going to cut off my nuts, to put them in the basket for the squirrels. That was probably the funniest, most embarrassing episode; I remember turning red in the face. You can't do those things anymore; it was – it was just disturbed. You had to be there to appreciate it.

RALPH: What would be your advice to someone who is considering a career in Fish and Wildlife Service now?

ELLIOTT: Start slow, learn the people; learn the programs, how does the agency work? Not necessarily where the skeletons are but quickly learn, who are the power brokers, how do you deal with them, egos and personalities. The toughest thing in life is personality conflicts. I am unhappy to say I was the target of numerous EEO lawsuits. I'm ecstatic to say that I won every one of them. I was never found guilty of discrimination of age, sex, or anything else, even though that was the basis for most of them. I remember doing one testimony by television; I'm in Virginia, the judge is in Washington.

RALPH: Oh, a video conference kind of thing?

ELLIOTT: Video conference type of thing, and the judge asked me point blank, "Did you discriminate?" and I said, "Yes!" and he looked at me perplexed and I said, "I discriminate based on competence. Are you the best person to do the job because I don't care how old you are, what gender you are, can you do the job better than anybody else?" The judge smiled, the case was dismissed and was thrown out. It's tough, I had some very dear people who filed suit against me and my response is, when you advertise a vacancy and multiple people apply, there's only one winner, everybody else is a loser, but it's not my fault that you're a loser, it's that there's

somebody else better, in my estimation and that's the way I carried myself: very honest, very straightforward, not always the greatest tactic diplomacy.

I'm very impetuous, I'm very – I don't want to say – I'm abrasive. I can be. I always interrupt when people are talking, particularly at staff meetings, because I'm impatient, state your case, make your point, and get over with it, and the common line was, "He answered the question before you finished asking the question." And that's the way I operated. And for the most part I was successful, I think. The low point in my career was the lawsuit at the end because I lost my cool with 2 people that had mental handicap problems and I forgot about that and I just didn't deal well with it. Other than that, you got to be honest, you got to be straight forward - transparent gets used too much, but if you're direct, no nonsense, honest, that's the way you got to be.

RALPH: Would you change anything?

ELLIOTT: Oh yeah, I would change – obviously the episode I had with the Aircraft Management, leasing his plane. I would certainly not get embroiled with my mentally handicapped 2 employees that got me. One of my bigger disappointments was I never made it to SES (Senior Executive Service.) I got down to the finals but I didn't get selected and I think it's because my abrasive nature caught up with me. I'm just too straight forward. I don't sugar coat anything. You ask me a question; I give you the answer. Whether you like it or not is your thing, but I give you the best that I know and that's not the way to get ahead. But that's the way I live with myself. Give me another one.

RALPH: Do you have any suggestions that you would have for people who are in the midst of their career?

ELLIOTT: Take advantage of every opportunity you can for training and expanding your horizons and expanding your network of contacts. Go to FEI, go to NCTC, go to LDP. Do every one of those things you possibly can. It certainly is a sacrifice from your personal life and your family but if you want to advance your career there's nothing better than a world of contacts. People you can call for help, advice, insight, knowledge, that's how you move onwards and upwards. And I guess one of the other things that I take incredible pride in is grooming my staff. I don't want somebody who's going to stay with me forever, I want somebody who's good, who's active, who's willing to learn and move on and move ahead and how can I help them get there.

One of the ones that I did was a woman named Beth Stevens who was a very, very bright, politically well-connected young lady who advanced in Washington, came out to Denver before Galen left, but right before Ralph got here. She was very assertive and territorial and possessive and nobody could do anything that would please her, least of all me, because I confronted her directly. But when push came to shove and she was having an altercation with another ARD, I volunteered to take her on as my deputy and I groomed her and I trained her and I sent her to conferences and I took her with me. She moved onwards and upwards from there – one of my prouder achievements.

RALPH: Then she became Assistant Director at the Admin.

ELLIOTT: Yes, she did. So, I'd like to think I played a part in that.

RALPH: Well, good.

ELLIOTT: Actually, there was several people like that.

RALPH: Do you think that – what was the effect?

ELLIOTT: I mentioned way back when ...

RALPH: Speaking of interrupting.

ELLIOTT: Yes, I do. When I first started with Endangered Species, John Spinks was the head dude. Amos Eno was my roommate; he left and went to Audubon. He offered me a job working with him at Audubon and I turned him down because he couldn't meet my GS-14 salary. And I still work with him over the years, back and forth; how do we get this done, how much money do you need, this kind of business. It was a wonderful working relationship. I maintained the relationship with his successor who was Paul Henne, who had much more tact, diplomacy and decorum than I ever did. He stayed in Washington and moved onwards and upwards in Finance and became the Assistant Director for everything but Personnel and Budget. When they split that office, I wanted to be the Assistant Director for Planning and Budget and he said, "Don't even bother applying, it's a pre-select, Denice Sheehan got the job. I never got to Washington again, I never became the Assistant Director; I never got SES. That's probably my biggest disappointment.

RALPH: What was the affect – negative, positive on your family life, working for Fish and Wildlife Service? You traveled a fair amount.

ELLIOTT: None. I think – I think the family – my kids were fascinated by the fact that I was playing with critters. My older son went to college and got a biology degree at a result because I exposed him to everything. The younger son never got into animals; he was strictly computers. He now works for Fish and Wildlife Service; he's a GS-14 with the IT shop in Denver. The older son gave up biology and became a photographer. The wife never had a problem, because I was never working 12, 2, 4 o'clock in the morning with regularity like I used to. My goal was to travel one week a month, leave on Monday, come home on Friday, and the space really worked out a strong marriage. I missed her when I was gone. I enjoyed my absence, and she felt the same and it was really fine. She supported everything that I did, stuck with me through everything.

RALPH: Anything else you want to add?

ELLIOTT: I'm glad I had my career with Fish and Wildlife Service. Other than a few instances, I wouldn't trade it for the world. I'm ecstatic that I'm retired. I had a year's worth of work afterwards working for the National Guard just doing part-time budgeting for those guys and it was a great way to ease into full-time retirement. I'm sorry to hear what's happened with my Region 6 empire and the whole Admin situation but I'm gone, I'm done. I did my thing. I left on good terms. I left a good program solid and I have no regrets.

RALPH: Thank you, Mr. Sutta.

ELLIOTT: I appreciate it, thank you.

End of Interview

Key words: administration, budgets, endangered species, equipment, law enforcement, management, personnel, planning, supervision