The Oral History of Don Hultman

September 3, 2019

Interview conducted by Tom Worthington
Lake Winnibigoshish, Deer River MN

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Don Hultman
Date of Interview: September 3, 2019
Location of Interview: Lake Winnibigoshish
Interviewer: Tom Worthington

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 30 years

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Tamarac NWR: Outdoor Recreation Planner, 1979-84; Seney NWR: Asst. Refuge Mgr., 1984-85; Devils Lake WMD/Lake Alice NWR: Asst. Refuge Mgr., 1985-86; Valley City WMD: Refuge Manager, 1986-89; Benton Lake NWR and WMD: Refuge Manager, 1989-91; R3 Regional Office: Refuge Ops Spec/Project Manager, Realty -Ascertainment, 1991-92; R3 Regional Office: Assistant Refuge Supervisor, 1992-94; R3 Regional Office: Acting Refuge Supervisor; Chief, Refuge Operations, 1994-98; Washington HQ: Deputy Chief of Refuges, 1998-99; R3 Regional Office: Refuge Supervisor, 1999-2002; Upper Mississippi River NW&FR: Complex Manager/Refuge Supervisor, 2002-2009

Most Important Projects: Chase Lake Prairie Project; Crane Meadows NWR establishment; Refuge Compatibility Training: course development team and instructor; Refuge System Mission, Goals and Objectives Policy, main author; "Promises for a New Century" vision document for the Refuge System; Keystone Conference, "Fulfilling the Promise," Refuge System Centennial; Upper Miss Refuge CCP, EIS, Regulations; Refuge System Staffing Models (2), team leader

Colleagues and Mentors: Dick Toltzmann, Omer Swenson, Ed Crozier, Rick Schultz, Dale Henry, Rick Coleman, Tom Worthington, Nita Fuller, and Charlie Blair

Brief Summary of Interview:

Don was born and raised in Minnesota. After a two-year enlistment with the US Marine Corps, Don studied at the University of Minnesota, graduating with a degree in Technical Communications (Wildlife), and later, a M.A. in Environmental Education. He worked a year for the IRS before getting his first job in 1979 with the USFWS as an Outdoor Recreation Planner at Tamarac NWR (MN). He worked at Tamarac for approximately 4 years, then made the career switch to the refuge management series, working at Seney NWR (MI), Devils Lake WMD (ND), Valley City WMD (ND), and Benton Lake NWR and WMD (MT) from 1984-91. He moved to the Twin Cities Regional Office in 1991 where he worked as a refuge operations specialist in the Refuge Ascertainment Branch, working to establish Crane Meadows and Rydell national wildlife refuges in Minnesota. He became an assistant refuge supervisor, acting refuge supervisor, and

chief of refuge operations from 1992-98, then moved to the USFWS Headquarters in Washington DC where he worked as the Deputy Chief of the Refuge System. There he was the lead planner for the first ever refuge system project leader conference at Keystone, Colorado, and was the lead planner and editor of the Refuge System Vision Document: Fulfilling the Promise. Don returned to the Twin Cities Regional Office in 1999 as a Refuge Supervisor. In 2002 he became the Project Leader of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge where he became the first GS 15 graded refuge project leader. He led the development and completion of the Upper Miss Comprehensive Conservation Plan and its Environmental Impact Statement – an effort that faced extraordinary public input and controversy. He coordinated the completion of Federal Register rules that implemented significant elements of the CCP. Don received the Refuge Manager of the Year award and the Department's Meritorious Service Award in 2007. He retired in 2009.

Interview

TOM WORTHINGTON: All right. So this is recording now, and I am Tom Worthington: Today is September 3 2019, and I am interviewing Donald Hultman today and we are at the Bowen Lodge on the shores of Lake Winneboshish. in Deer River, Minnesota. Don, we are conducting an oral history today where I'll be asking a bunch of questions. We can stop at any time. And I'm going to look and see. It looks like it's recording, and I assume it is. So that's good news. So, we'll start with some really easy questions.

Where and when were you born?

DON HULTMAN: Oh, I was born in Willmar, Minnesota. Kandiyohi County, Indian for where the Buffalo Fish run. And May 7th, 1952.

TOM WORTHINGTON: 1952. Okay. Where did you spend most of your early, early years?

DON HULTMAN: I lived. I moved quickly from Willmar as a baby. Moved to Alabama for nine months. And then moved up to Saint Paul, where my parents were from originally and lived there through third grade in Saint Paul on the midway section near University Avenue. Then we moved to White Bear Lake, where I started fourth grade, and I spent the rest of my school years there and college years there.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What kinds of hobbies or interests did you have growing up in those years?

DON HULTMAN: I was always had this innate interest in animals and especially wildlife, usually wildlife that I could catch. So I had lots of wildlife animals. I started out with toads and I had toads as pets that I would catch them by the shores of White Bear Lake. Like I kept a diary on my toads, a toads, a journal. They all had names and I would record what I observed. And besides toads, I had pet frogs. I would set up terrariums, salamanders, snakes. And then as I got older, I, I did raise pigeons for a little while.

Then I had pet crows. I had like five different pet crows. And then from crows I moved on to falconry and had hawks starting with little kestrels and then working my way up over the years to capturing and training a goshawk.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So how old were you when you had your first hawk?

DON HULTMAN: Let's see. I think. I think I was a junior as probably 16 or 17.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you train under somebody to learn falconry?

DON HULTMAN: No. There was a neighbor boy and me, and we would just buy books and read them about how to do falconry. And then we just taught ourselves. And then there were some other young people that had some hawks, too. And we learned a little bit about them, sort of this little neighborhood group. But and it was very loose in those days. There was no license required. This was prior to the birds even being protected. Prior to 1972, a lot of the birds of prey weren't even protected. You could still shoot them. It was easy to get the birds pretty much if you knew the biology that I'd learned about the birds. So, finding the nests was a little tricky, climbing up to get the birds and that kind of thing.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And this was in your high school years. You did this?

DON HULTMAN: Yes, up through, through my early years in college.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What did your parents think?

DON HULTMAN: My parents were always tolerant. Also, at this time, in junior high and high school, I started doing taxidermy. So, I had lots of animal parts in the house and in the freezer and in the second fridge downstairs. But you know, in those days we were pretty much turned loose and came home for dinner, and we pretty much could do what we want as long as it was within reason. But they were very tolerant because I had to take over a part of the garage for my hawks, and I was allowed to build pens outside for some of the animals and things like that.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Well, after you graduated from high school, where did you go to college?

DON HULTMAN: I went to the University of Minnesota in St Paul [fall, 1970.] I originally planned to major in zoology until I got into college and realized I didn't know you had to take a year of foreign language at that time because zoology was in the College of Liberal Arts, and I didn't do well in German at all.

So I switched majors to wildlife management, which was over in the St Paul campus after my freshman year. But then after my sophomore year, I enlisted in the Marine Corps. I went to the Marine Corps for two years. And when I came back, I finished undergraduate degree.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What year did you. What year was this? The sophomore year in college.

DON HULTMAN: Would have been 1972.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And you enlisted in the Marine Corps, why did you enlist?

DON HULTMAN: I was out of money going to college. I didn't have enough money, and I wasn't doing as well as I thought I was going to do. I wasn't totally adjusted from high school. High school seems so easy. You know, I was pretty much an ace [A] student. And then I got into college and I my study habits weren't well-honed, so I wasn't doing very well. And I was just sort of wondering if this is what I should be doing. It was a struggle to have money to go to college. I thought the Marine Corps, it sound like an interesting thing to do. And then I knew when I got out, I could use the GI Bill to finish my college. So, I kind of always intended to go back to school.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Where did you serve your time with the Marine Corps?

DON HULTMAN: I was what they called a Hollywood Marine. I was in California the whole time.

TOM WORTHINGTON: That's what Charlie Blair calls you…is that a widely known term?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, it is sort of. We knew it when we were in. It was right after the Marines had been pulled out of Vietnam. When I went in, in 72 and the Army was still there. But the Marines, you know, they're not supposed to stay there as long as the Army. So, they were pulled out. When I went

inside [in], I mean, I was never offered a chance to go to Vietnam, which is fine. Closest we got to combat was we were on high alert during the oil embargo in 1973. But I was stationed in California, stationed in Twentynine Palms in the Mojave Desert, a fascinating place right near Joshua Tree National Monument was adjacent to it. It's kind of an interesting habitat. I got to see white necked ravens for the first time. I kept watching birds and writing in my journal while I was in the Marine Corps.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And what were your major duties in the Marine Corps?

DON HULTMAN: I was in the field for heavy artillery. I computed the data for the guns. So, for example, a forward observer would locate a target, send in the coordinates to us. We would plot it on a table using a computer even back then, and we'd tell the guns how to set their guns to hit that target.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So how many years were you in the Marine Corps?

DON HULTMAN: Two years. Two years. That was the year enlistment tours of duty there. Back then, you could enlist for just two years.

TOM WORTHINGTON: After you got out of the Marine Corps, what year that would have been 1974?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, 74. I went right back to school. Spring session of at the University of Minnesota. Spring session was up at Itasca State Park for that they had for wildlife majors and did that. But again, I became a little disillusioned. I wasn't sure I was going to finish school, but I came back that fall and I ended up changing my majors more in tune with what I learned by then were my talents and interests were, and that was communication. Communication was my bachelor's degree. And then I just blossomed in school once I matched up my interest in wildlife and interest in communications. I got a degree in technical communications. As I like to say I have a degree in wildlife and communications, because you had a specialty, and my specialty was wildlife. So, I took all the biology courses still and I needed and all that for wildlife, but I took all the communication courses with the intent I was training to work in, in communications in the wildlife field when I got done, which is what I did.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And when did it hit you that that would be your kind of career path?

DON HULTMAN: I think what I after I came out of the Marine Corps and spent another quarter, we were in the quarter system then going to school and I think it was biochemistry that kind of did it for me. You know, this didn't make sense. And the vertebrate anatomy, I mean, I loved wildlife, and I thought what does this have to do with anything, memorizing all this stuff. Then later, you know, when I changed, when I was in communications, I actually took the really fun courses of mammalogy and ornithology, all the ology courses that were field courses. And those I did well and then. Well enjoyed them too.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Who were some of your major professors that influenced you with that aptitude?

DON HULTMAN: David Parmalee He was Professor of Ornithology, a gentleman like many of the ornithology professors seem to be. Oh, Dr. Frenzel, he was sort of a mentor and advisor in the wildlife program and then also later and even when I was changing my majors to communications. So those two, I guess, come to mind.

TOM WORTHINGTON: After you graduated, did you work right away? Did you continue your schooling?

DON HULTMAN: No. I was one of the lucky ones. I. I got a job right out of college before I even graduated. I pretty much had the job, or at least that summer. And I went to work full time for Wyoming Game and Fish Department. And the way I got the job, I wrote a letter to every state DNR game and fish department in a state that I thought I'd like to work in. And I found out the name of the communications director for each of those state DNRs, and I wrote them personally. And with my resume and my interests and what I had done and out of those, I got rejected by all of them except [Wyoming]. Because they didn't have openings.

I got a few letters back saying they're impressed, but we don't have an opening. But Wyoming Game and Fish said we have an opening, and can you come out for an interview? I drove up for an interview and got the job right then and there. And then I went home, got married that fall and started work.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And your job was in Laramie or where?

DON HULTMAN: I was in Cheyenne, Wyoming, at the headquarters. And my job was I was a public information officer. We did weekly news releases every week, get a packet, go out. We did two radio programs every week, worked on hunting regulations, and then any of the things with public relations both in-house and external.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you envision that being your career then?

DON HULTMAN: Well, I thought at first, but then when I was doing it, I don't know if I was just too immature. I got homesick for Minnesota, but it didn't quite seem to be the right fit either. And, you know, as kids, even though here I was handed this job that no one else got out of college. After like ten months, I resigned and went back to graduate school at the University of Minnesota. And at that time, that's when I got a real interest in the Fish and Wildlife Service, because at the time they were hiring outdoor recreation planners, which were the public use specialists on national wildlife refuges. I had known about refuges, I had hunted on refuges for years, and specifically I hunted a lot on Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge. So, I geared my graduate degree to those positions as an outdoor recreation planner. I continued, and I got a degree, a master's degree in education. But basically, it was environmental education, took more biology courses at that time and. And then at the same, I'm trying to think now.

So I finished all the coursework, and we did the work for the paper, but life got in the way of writing the paper. At that time, I also started work I knew that to get into the Fish and Wildlife Service, you had to have federal status to apply what we call the green sheets. Then the weekly listing of openings that were only open to federal employees. So I, I took a typing test for the federal government out of Fort Snelling, I think. And, and I got a job offer right away with the Internal Revenue Service. I took it, I was a files clerk GS 3. Little did I know it would turn into a year working as a files clerk GS 3, although I did get promoted to a purchasing agent as a GS 5 before the year was over. But then as soon as I did that, I was working in St Paul and as it happened, there was an area office right upstairs.

TOM WORTHINGTON: The US Fish and Wildlife Service Area Office?

DON HULTMAN: Yes, the Fish and Wildlife Service. There was a Service guy named Dick Toltzmann, he was the deputy and then another German feller I forget his name was the area manager. They had the area manager system at that time was his name.

TOM WORTHINGTON: He became the realty chief, Bekaris?

DON HULTMAN: George Bekaris, George was the area manager. Dick Toltzmann was the assistant.

I went up there every week to check their sheets and then, you know, they got to know me and see me. And then I sat down with Dick, and he asked me what my interests were and why was I up here all the time. And so I told them what I was interested in, outdoor recreation planning. And he said, well, bring in your resume. And so I did. And he was impressed enough, and he started setting me up with managers that were in town: Ed Crozier. Omer Swenson, Joe Kotok, who all had clerk jobs open. The old clerk was the secretary. So, I'd meet with these guys and, you know, but, you know, they knew what I was up to, and they really [did not] want to hire me for a clerk job for the Refuge [since they knew I wouldn't stay]

And low and behold there was a guy working at Tamarac as an outdoor recreation planner. They had hired one there, very recently, as they did at a lot of places. But he resigned after a while. And all of a sudden there was an opening at Tamarac. And now I had status. And they were looking for applicants.

TOM WORTHINGTON: There was an opening due to a resignation?

DON HULTMAN: Yes, there was this Ralph Webb, I think, was his name. He came from the Park Service. It wasn't a good fit. He really didn't know anything about wildlife. He knew about public use and stuff. But he just, you know, he was a not a very good fit. So he resigned. So they had this opening and I had status. So I applied. And lo and behold, I got the job. It was a GS 5/7/9. GS 023, outdoor recreation planner position at Tamarac, which was - I thought I died and gone to heaven. If I had a refuge to pick in the whole world, it would have been Tamarac, where I had duck hunted for years. And that's where I started my career. That was I was hired in December of 79 and started right up to [after] the New Year. On a 50-week appointment. Back then, there were a lot of 50-week appointments because at the end of the fiscal year they would drop us off the rolls and then we wouldn't count on the federal list. I think Reagan was.

Reagan was elected in 1980. So the Republicans were cutting back government. So, it was a trick. They lay us off for two weeks a year and then we wouldn't show up as an employee. It kept them under a personnel ceiling count.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Who was the manager?

DON HULTMAN: Omer Swenson was the manager.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember any of the other staff that.

DON HULTMAN: Tom Atkins was the assistant manager? Cy Brock was the forester. I can't remember the clerk's name. Back then most of the clerks on refuges were men. And of course, they did a whole bunch of other duties too, besides the paperwork. Vivian Sunram was the name of the next clerk, I think.

And Tamarac had a big YCC and YACC camp. Youth Conservation Corps, and Young Adult Conservation Corps.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What were the major duties you had as an outdoor recreation planner?

DON HULTMAN: Pretty much anything to do with the public. All the brochures, the signing. Doing a sign plan and make sure the signs were erected on the refuge. Laying out trails, developing an auto tour route. We were in the process of starting a new visitor center office, so I worked on all the exhibits. Design and writing of the exhibits. Public education programs, I worked with schools a lot.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was there someone in your job before you got there as an outdoor recreation place?

DON HULTMAN: Yes, this Ralph Webb.

TOM WORTHINGTON: You were working in the exhibit design. Was this the new visitor center that was constructed? Under the BLHP (Bicentennial Land Heritage Program) program. Were these the first exhibits to get installed?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, the very first exhibits. And I while I was there, I think it was pretty soon, I don't know, it was 1981 I went to law enforcement training, so I was became a collateral duty officer.

TOM WORTHINGTON: How many weeks of training was that?

DON HULTMAN: I thought it was like nine weeks. It was nine weeks at Glynco, Georgia.

TOM WORTHINGTON: You had public use duties and then law enforcement, right?

DON HULTMAN: It was really nice. I, I got to help with all, all the rest of the management, you know, Tom Atkins, the assistant, just taught me so much about land management, you know. Fire management. I did help with prescribed burning, wildlife surveys, pretty much the whole gamut of whatever happens on a refuge, which was good because, you know, I'm the one that's interpreting it for the public So it was good to be involved in all that.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you get any particular training in public use interpretation?

DON HULTMAN: You know, I went to one environmental education training for a week and [at] this Washington [state] environmental camp, I don't remember too much about it other than it was in a beautiful part of the country with other federal employees. I think it was mostly federal. There might have been state people there, too. I don't remember any other training besides that.

And at that time, early in my time at Tamarac, I did lock myself in the basement and finished my master's. degree paper. So, I got that done and then got officially got my masters.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What was the topic of your paper?

DON HULTMAN: Boy, it was measuring the differences on achievement between using instruction with controversy or without controversy and then working individually or working alone. How did it affect that achievement? And we picked the topic was we had to pick a controversial topic. So, at the time our topic was the gray wolf in Minnesota and its management. Which in the late seventies, early eighties was a very controversial topic. And so the kids would learn both sides of the topic basically and then be tested. And then they would learn both sides in different ways and be tested. And it turned out basically that the groups that debated both sides of the issue had higher achievement about the subject, and which sort of common sense. Mostly we helped the professors get published.

TOM WORTHINGTON: But you got yourself situated well enough to finish the paper and get the degree.

DON HULTMAN: Right. And even though there was not much incentive at the time, you know. And I had a new family. I was married, I had a baby. When I started at Tamarac. We were lucky enough to move. And this was a milestone. I mean it was just a watershed moment for me. We were lucky. There was an opening in refuge housing. So we lived off refuge for a few months. But then someone retired. And we moved into this little house, and it was like a one-bedroom house. But the attic had been converted into a couple bedrooms and so two more of my children were born in Detroit Lakes. I thought I was going to be there for 30 years. But I didn't quite make that. But it was a great experience because I was totally immersed in the refuge. And I tell you, I would walk to work because it was that close. In those early years, I could not wait to get up and get to work. And I never wanted to leave the job. I just I couldn't believe they're paying me for this. I was I was really in my niche.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Were there any new policies that were initiated from the region over in Washington about public use at that time? Any big changes that happened?

DON HULTMAN: You know, the big there was a big push on planning for public use, planning on refuges, and it was really elaborate. They had hired some consultants. It was very confusing the process. You did a public use plan. And so I spent those first couple of years working a lot on the public use plans. You know, you had a theme, and it was kind of corny, but it was, I mean, a good planning exercise to lay everything out. So that part was good. And then it was a nice resource when you were done. Because you learned all this stuff about the refuge.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you have to do any other planning, fishing plans, hunting plans?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, I worked on a hunting plan, although the assistant refuge manager, you know, they usually ran the hunting program in those days. But I would help with the plan, the public use plan which covered most everything.

That plan would lay out what brochures you'd have. And then a lot of my planning was just on the ground. You know, I laid out some of the trail loops that are probably still in existence today. I mean, bushwhacking through the terrain, using a topo map to find the best hiking route. And the auto tour is brand new. The brochure and the stops. And there's a lot of hands-on stuff.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Tamarac Refuge Borders the White Earth Indian Reservation Road. What were the relationships like with the Native Americans at that time?

DON HULTMAN: It was pretty good. The fun part. I'm glad you mention that because every year we'd have they had rights on the refuge for trapping and for harvesting wild rice. And so every year we'd have this wild rice drawing. We'd go up to White Earth to the school gymnasium, and, you know. There'd be hundreds of people in the gym, people from the reservation. Here we come in, these mostly white guys with uniforms on. Conducting this drawing. And it was a kind of a festive party atmosphere. And of course, they wanted to get the best lakes because some lakes had more rice than others. So that's why they were all there. They'd get their names would be drawn for these lakes. And so then that would be over.

And then the ricing season, when it was ripe, the tribal members and with the refuge would say, okay, the rice is ready to harvest, usually around Labor Day. And then we would be assigned to a lake. And as they go out to rice and when they come back in, we'd have scales in the little huts at each landing and we'd

weigh the rice that came in and track it. I have no idea why. I don't know what we did with the data other than to say we harvested this much rice.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What would be a typical harvest?

DON HULTMAN: You know, on good years they'd come in after a few hours with their canoes just full of rice. So it could be hundreds of pounds. And it was. It's big money, wild rice. So it was a great cash crop for the tribal members. So they harvested a lot.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you have any controversial interactions at that time with any parts of the public or other staff?

DON HULTMAN: No, I was pretty. Pretty calm. I can't think of anything that was really controversial. It was pretty well set up with the Native Americans. They weren't pushing for any big changes at that time. They seemed happy with the way things were run. It was pretty quiet. We had great public support. You know, the refuge is open. A third of it was open to hunting. So that was a popular activity. I remember one deer season. I mean, the deer season in northern Minnesota can be kind of crazy. In particular the opening morning, before daylight, everybody's trying to get to their spots. Driving around the refuge, three deer were killed by cars on one opening morning.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And you had a law enforcement commission for a couple of those years then what types of law enforcement did you do?

DON HULTMAN: You know, it's almost all during the hunting seasons. Not too much with fishing. I think the state wardens [handled that]. What I did was mostly hunting and mostly waterfowl hunting. Since I was a waterfall hunter, the manager let me work undercover. So I'd go out as a hunter and set up in my canoe and then hunt amongst the hunters and observe them and then go approach them.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was the steal shot implementation during those years or did that come later?

DON HULTMAN: Steel shot was being implemented. Tamarac did have a steel shot requirement when I first got there, so checking for steel shot was a big thing. There were still violations at that time. So you'd have your magnet with you to check the shot shells.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Sounds like a blissful time. As a refuge employee.

DON HULTMAN: It was. You know, and, you know. And being able to live on refuge, I still to this day and as my career went on, I got to live on refuges again and I just loved it. To be immersed in that habitat and to learn its rhythms by living there. I think it's unfortunate we don't do it that much these days.

TOM WORTHINGTON: You become a GS 9 Outdoor Recreation Planner; what happens that makes you want to move?

DON HULTMAN: Oh well, because I was doing a good job then the Regional Office, Dick Toltzmann said you should be in refuge management. Right before that though, there was an opening in Minnesota Valley Refuge. They wanted to move me there and I still remember I wrote out this letter to Dick Toltzmann telling him why I couldn't move, there were big financial reasons. I was living in refuge housing for 90 some dollars a month. I had two kids, two babies and another one probably on the way.

And it was like Twin Cities is pretty expensive. I thought, I just started, why do I want to go back there? That's where I'm from.

So but they bought it, and they didn't move me. Then they hired somebody else named Tom Worthington for that job. Imagine that!

TOM WORTHINGTON: Yes, imagine that!

DON HULTMAN: It all worked out for everybody involved. But they were still pestering me. So after four years at Tamarac, they pretty much said, I'm moving. And I don't know. I can't remember if they gave me a couple choices, but I ended up going to Seney Refuge, which was my choice out of the ones that I think they offered me.

But that's because I was changing into the management series, which I qualified for based on my education. I had to take a downgrade.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So you went from a GS 023 series to the GS 485 series. And even though you were a GS 9, you had to take a downgrade to GS 7 because it was a different job series.

DON HULTMAN: So I went to Seney. And in Region 3 at the time they had a Refuge Manager trainee program. It was designed that I was going to be there for one year and then they moved me again at a place of their choice. And well, I'm an independent minded person, I thought, I don't like it when people control my career.

So as soon as I got to Seney I started looking around. And I got hired almost as soon as my year was up, I got hired in North Dakota. But at the Devils Lake, the job I would be in charge. At Seney I didn't get to live in refuge housing, but at Devils Lake (ND) I would be in charge of waterfowl production areas in two counties, plus Lake Alice National Wildlife Refuge, which was a 10,000-acre waterfowl refuge, and there was a refuge house there. I got to move into refuge housing there. My supervisor was Rick Schultz who was working at Devils Lake as the Assistant manager. And another great mentor. He showed me how to do easement enforcement.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Who was the Wetland district manager at Devils Lake?

DON HULTMAN: Dave Janes, who eventually went in the planning or something in region six later in his career.

So that was a whole new phase in my career, but I was working waterfowl. I love it. You know, waterfowl was one of my real main interests. And that was my start in understanding Waterfowl Production Areas.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So the duties there considerably different than you got to agree with the planner duties or that, right?

DON HULTMAN: I mean, I was in charge of the refuge, all phases. I was the only staff person on the refuge. At Devils Lakes we had these satellite refuges like Lake Alice where I lived, but we also had Sully's Hill, and someone living on that refuge. I think it might have been a maintenance guy.

But then we had three district managers. We each had, you know, I had 100 and some waterfowl production areas, I guess under under my care, several thousand acres plus the refuge. So in North Dakota were no special public use staff, you just did it all. Easement enforcement was a big part of our duties. We spent probably a third of our time enforcing wetland easements.

And that was that was interesting work, tough work. Lot of confrontations with the landowners that were there.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Can you briefly describe what the easement work is like?

DON HULTMAN: These easements, there are wetlands that we just buy an easement to protect them from drainage filling and burning. Although we give permits to burn the vegetation around, it basically protects them from draining or filling them. And these are small potholes, we protect we might take an easement on a whole section and every wetland in there that's either there now or developed in the future is protected from draining.

Which was fine back in the sixties and seventies because farming methods. The landowners thought they're going to pay me for a wet spot. But as the generations changed and farming got more modern, these wet spots became nuisances and these landowners, who didn't take the original easement but now had the land didn't want the easement.

We had hundreds of violations of violations. The first thing we would do is work in a small plane. We'd fly grids over the whole landscape with the easement maps in front of us, and vomit bags on the left. And I hated it. It's the toughest work I ever did, I think, because I got sick on some of those days. You're not flying very high, you know. Needed to see. You're like at thousand feet, and you're making a lot of turns. And if it's warm, bumpy weather in a small, small plane, it could be pretty brutal that you do that day after day for till you fly all of them.

So you'd mark what you think is a drainage or a violation on the map. And then when the flying was done, you'd take those maps you marked with crayon because they were kind of plastic. Then you'd drive out to each individual farm and truth it.

And some you'd say, no, this was an existing ditch. Or you look at the easement contract and see that was allowed, as some of them excluded certain wetlands. Or when you were there in the ground, it wasn't what you thought it was from the air. So then you come up with another list of the violations and then after that, you take those to the landowner, you take photos of everything, document the evidence, then go meet with the landowners and try to convince them to comply.

And most of them did. And you'd have to follow up, you know, you'd give them a deadline and send them letters. Everything had to be documented, just like any law enforcement case.

And you sought voluntary compliance until maybe their third time that they weren't doing it. Then you'd write a ticket and bring them into court. The court was simple. We met before a magistrate, which I think was in the basement of some little room in Devils Lake or something. The Federal District Magistrate would hear the case and it was decided just like that.

That was interesting. And it was somewhat rewarding because you felt like you were saving habitat and, you know, the small wetlands would all be gone now if we hadn't had those easements. All across the country of Minnesota, Dakotas, Montana.

So that was a good part of the job, at least seasonally part of the job. And it would carry over, you know, with the letter writing a back and forth with landowners, it would sort of go all year round and start the cycle. You'd hopefully clean up all the cases.

By the time the next spring came when you started flying again.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you have help with the, the special agents or was it mostly refuge?

DON HULTMAN: It was mostly refuge people. And we often, not always, but sometimes go out in teams to make landowner contacts, for safety. We wore concealed weapons, at that time shoulder holsters. And the reason we did that, we didn't we didn't want our guns showing that might set these guys off and yet going to someone's home confronting them in their house is one of the most dangerous things, because they you know, they want to protect what's theirs. And some of these people they really get irate. So so we often went in pairs. Sometimes with known people that were really sort of agitated and dangerous. We asked a special agent would come with us. And it's a little different now. We have, you know, full time officers doing the enforcement. And I think at Devils Lake, over the years, they had the landowners start coming into the office to talk to them instead of going to their farm. That sort of disarmed them. You know, once they get in the office, that's. They're not in their environment. So, it's probably a little safer.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Were you doing any acquisition at that time?

DON HULTMAN: It was pretty slow, but there was there was some. We had a realtor stationed at Devils Lake, but the heyday of the small wetlands program sort of stopped and part of that because the landowners really didn't want it as much. But there is still some acquisition going on, but not a whole lot. Maybe it picked up later if a few years.

They had done so much in the sixties. I mean, it was amazing what they saved both in fee title and easements.

TOM WORTHINGTON: After Devils Lake and Lake Alice, you were there for how many years?

DON HULTMAN: I was there a year and a half, or thereabouts [1985-86]. And there was an opening at Valley City. The manager, Lloyd Jones had left there after many years and went to Bismarck, and so I applied for that job and got that job as the manager of Valley City (WMD).

And that was a great experience. It was a wonderful community to live in. It was one of the smaller wetland districts in North Dakota.

It was a GS 9 and they said, if I taught this hunter education class at the college that Lloyd Jones used to do maybe they would make it a GS 11, like he had.

So it seemed like every job I had to work hard to get promoted.

I'll tell you the next story to it because that's pretty much the way it was. I taught the college course in hunter education. So after a year proving myself, I was promoted to a GS 11.

I was there for three years [1986-89]. And my wife finished her degree at Valley City State University. The kids liked Valley City, so that was a nice duty station, nice community. But then we get the itch to

move again. And I looked and saw there was an opening at Benton Lake Refuge in Montana. This was a Wetland Management District and Refuge, and it was a GS 11, with a chance that it might go to a 12. So I applied for that and got that.

Oh, I had also worked, when I was at Valley City, I was asked to work on the Chase Lake Prairie Project, which was a joint venture project [North American Waterfowl Management Plan]. North Dakota did not have a joint venture project and the race was on to have these showcase projects in each state. And I was tasked to start one up and do the planning, working with this private citizen who was a millionaire, who ran all these radio stations throughout the Dakotas. His name was Bob, but I can't remember his last name, he's dead now [Bob Insgstad]. He lived in Valley City, and he just had an interest in waterfowl conservation. He was like a Howard Hughes kind of guy. He never left his house. And sometimes I'd go over there and he's always in his underwear. He was a big guy was an athlete at one time, smooth talker, and he'd buy radio stations and turn them around and make them profitable, they [then] go by another. And so, he had this whole network, and he was quite wealthy, and owned lots of land.

And he owned land up by Chase Lake, maybe a couple sections. And Chase Lake is a national wildlife refuge, mainly for pelicans. There's a really large white pelican colony there.

He had an idea about a project out there. So, I always I met with him and went out on the landscape. And then I started doing the planning and it just took off. And with my interest and skills and communications and his connections, you know, he would just get things done. Like I wanted to make a video. We were going to do a promotional video for the project. And I mean, it was done in a week. I did the script. He had one of his radio station guys do the narration, and on the first take, it was flawless. I worked with a guy in Jamestown, North Dakota, that had a video editing machine that did that kind of stuff. We sat down together and put the whole thing together using stock videos and some photography that we had hired to be taken.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did the regional office will oversee or provide any guidance.

DON HULTMAN: No, no, never. Just encouragement go there. I mean, they would just hear good things. So they stayed out of the way. No, we never had no review.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What was the nature of what you were communicating about that the Joint venture project was it acquisition and restoration.

DON HULTMAN: It was mostly partnership with farmers. And that was the novel idea. I mean, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan was starting to stress this whole idea. It was evident that we (FWS) couldn't it alone that we had to have landowners cooperate. The federal government couldn't do it right or the state government. That we had to stop this sort of confrontational method of, you know, buying land and then enforcing it. So that was the whole notion. It was sort of a partnership, and it was new back then.

And you know, the farm bills were changing to give incentives for farmers and stuff. So, all that was coming together and. But it was like this I was given this total free hand to develop these wild ideas that with this millionaire radio guy. And then it just worked. I mean, that was I worked on that almost full time, mostly on nights and weekends, because I still had my manager job to do, but this was another job on top. But I met with lots of landowners.

I put together a plan, we were going to have a visitor center in Medina off the freeway. It was going to be the North American Waterfowl Wildlife Hall of Fame. It was like an Ed Crozier plan.

And some of it came to pass and some of it was acquisition. And so we got these landowners to be spokesmen, and we had public meetings with these landowners at grain elevators and stuff and because we had other farmers sort of working with us they were willing to listen to the government, but we never wore uniforms at that. It was really one of the very beginnings of the private lands program.

And at the same time, you know, I think we started the sodbuster and swamp-buster programs. We started offering CRP easements. We'd pay farmers to restore their wetlands. And that was kind of fun because we hardly had any rules back then. I would go to a farmer and say, I'll give you a $50 for this one and $75 for this one, and they had equipment, so they plug the ditches, and then the wetland was restored for the years of the CRP contract.

And I don't know what they signed, maybe a little piece of paper to get their little bit of money.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was the funding coming from one of the early farm bills?

DON HULTMAN: I don't know if it came from Farm Bill or if the service had some money for the small restorations. They were getting money for CRP. We were just paying them small amounts of money for restoring. I don't know where the money came from. I think it was the services money. Really private lands might have. This would have been from 1988-89. This opportunity work on the Chase Lake Prairie Project, which to this day was one of the really most rewarding and creative things I got to do. And I still have the, you know, the video program, which still kind of gives me goosebumps because we had the governor, the governor of North Dakota, standing up there at a press conference saying this is like the greatest thing that's ever happened while [with] the government and the farmers working together. And so that was that was nice. And it was kind of groundbreaking.

From there then I went to Benton Lake [1989]

And I thought I was going to be there for a while. But I was only there a year and a half.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Who was your supervisor in the regional office?

DON HULTMAN: Refuge Supervisor. Yeah, there were refuge supervisors at the time. So when I was at the Valley City and even at Devils Lake, I answered to a manager, but at Valley City. Valley City, I answered to a complex manager out of Arrowwood Refuge.

But I worked with, you know, Dale Henry was the refuge supervisor back then, very creative manager in Denver. And these guys were really supporting innovative stuff at that time. And so that was good.

And then I was hired [for Benton Lake], by Barney Schrank was the refuge supervisor in Denver for Montana for Benton Lake.

TOM WORTHINGTON: How big a staff was that? Well.

DON HULTMAN: I think there were five [six] permanents, pretty small. And, you know, there was a biotech, and an assistant manager, [a WMD asst.manager], a clerk and just one maintenance worker. My wife got a job offer back in Minnesota, but because she had finished college in Valley City. She was

applying for jobs, and she wanted to work for the IRS of all things. She was a business accounting major. She got a job offer from the Internal Revenue Service, who I had worked for years ago, and she got a job offer in the same building I had worked in all those years age [ago]. So it's kind of like I said, well, you can't pass this up. It's there for her that was her dream job. And so she took the job and left. And I stayed on working with three kids for a little while. But then the girls got really homesick and so I packed them all in the car and then drove them home after a couple of months. And they lived with their mother. But my son stayed with me for a while till I could line something up.

The Regional Office helped me a great deal. Dale Henry wrote John Eadie, the Region 3 ARD, he wrote a letter of recommendation for me. They had an opening and John Eadie wrote on it "Hire Him" and sent it to Bill Swanson who was the head of Realty. And the idea was they could use me and my experience in refuge ascertainment. By this time, I'd, you know, had a track record and planning work and with landowners and was a refuge manager.

So, they had an opening in ascertainment. That's where I went because that's what they offered me. And that was a tough time because I was leaving project leader status in the field to a regional office to sort of a job where I was doing staff work.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Describe what ascertainment work is?

DON HULTMAN: Ascertainment got its name because originally, they would go out and ascertain if a piece of property was worthy of inclusion as a national wildlife refuge. It wasn't so much that anymore because the field people were doing that, but we weren't. We would still ascertain whether it was worthy to go forward in the planning if there were any obstacles. And then we'd do the environmental compliance planning, either an environmental assessment with public involvement or an environmental impact statement, depending on the level of controversy or complexity. We would do all the planning, documentation, public involvement to get a new refuge stablished. Set the groundwork for the first piece of land coming in. As soon as you acquire the first piece of land, it became a refuge. That's how it was established.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So, do you remember what level the new refuge establishment could be approved?

DON HULTMAN: I'm trying to think, you know. I thought it was at the regional director's level at that time. Yes, it was. A regional director could establish a new National Wildlife refuge after completing the environmental compliance.

So that was pretty nice. You could do it quickly if you had your stuff together.

But I tell you know, before I got into my first planning project, it was I, I almost left the service. I was looking at private sector jobs because I was really having a hard time adjusting from the field. And, you know, as a Project leader and on a refuge, you've got so much autonomy. I mean, you can really do what you want creatively. And when I became a manager, like at Benton Lake or even Valley City, I was in charge of the public use program, too. Which is how I started, so I could dictate how everything was run on a refuge. And you're managing people, which is really kind of fun. But to go from that to a staff job in a regional office was kind of hard. Commuting through traffic. Not exactly my dream.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Who else was in that ascertainment branch with you at that time? Do you remember their names.

DON HULTMAN: Jeff Donahoe was the chief. Jean Holler was one of the biologist planners. And then there was another woman who was kind of an artist. I can't remember her name. She did the cover drawings for our plans and some other work. Those are the ones I remember. There was another there was a guy, blond haired guy (Doug Damberg). Because I'm always looking. You know, when I stayed there, it was about a year.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What were maybe some two or three the big projects that you worked on?

DON HULTMAN: Well, I worked on two big ones that year, Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota. It's now a national wildlife refuge, its near Little Falls, Minnesota. That was a big marsh project. I did the planning for that and got that over the finish line. And then I did Rydell National Wildlife Refuge, which was a donation to the service. That was a pretty simple one because we had already, you know, the land had sort of been given to us, but we had to do the planning to bring it into the refuge system. And I think those are the only two. But, you know, getting two in a year isn't too bad. I must work. I must have putzed around with something else.

Oh, yeah. I killed one! This is an accomplishment because that was a project that needed to be killed. But was that called?

TOM WORTHINGTON: Pickaway Plains?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah. Pickaway Plains in Ohio. That might have been my first one. Might have been my first assignment. And really controversial.

And, you know. I was told by the Chief of Ascertainment that he had been down there and had the skids all greased for me. I go down there and be with some people and find out there's lots of opposition to this refuge. Lots of opposition. They don't want it. It's all farmland. They don't want it. So then we did some true ascertainment. We with another guy that can't remember his name, Jerry? He was an assistant manager somewhere. The two of us teamed up and we started pouring over soil maps and stuff.

But we started looking at soil maps. You know, that's sort of you start on these things and wetland soils. And it turned out this is a refuge that can't hold water based on the soils maps. We had we had an open house, you know, we met with landowners, they could come in and talk to us and stuff. But as we're doing this, it's kind of like. We came to the realization this should not be a national wildlife refuge. So I went to brief my superiors. I said, here's the evidence that thing is it's not a very good candidate based on the soil types and all that and the opposition and stuff and too many hurdles. And my bosses agree. And then we briefed Jim Gritman, the regional director at the time and I recommended that we should kill the refuge. Jim Gritman said, okay, go down there and handle the public announcement.

So, I went down there and did a press conference. And this is where I goofed up. We did it on a farm. On one of the farms that was in the planning area. So we got all the farm neighbors there instead of doing it up in a town or anything. And I was talking to someone beforehand. I didn't know it was a reporter. He never identified himself. And so I just kind of joking around and this person asked me, why is it not becoming a refuge. I said, well, basically because of incompetence. Because it never should have gotten as far as did.

TOM WORTHINGTON: You're implying Service incompetence?

DON HULTMAN: Well, I think I was implying the state or at least that it was taken as that because the state was behind this idea to begin with, I think. Ohio. They were kind of pushing it as my understanding. This guy who turned out to be a reporter. He published a story. Used my quote about incompetence. The state was all upset. They called the regional director Jim Gritman. Of course, Jim was a tough old Marine officer. And you he didn't care if he took any shit. But the next thing I knew, I was called into John Eadie's office, and he took his bit of skin off me. Then I had to go see the regional director and then he yelled at me. But he knew I was a marine. So, you know, there's this bond between Marines.

So he was, you know, with both these guys whenever I got yelled at, I just kept looking them in the eye and taking it because, you know, I made a mistake, but I didn't really mean to. And I still remember Jim Gritman. And he said after he yelled at me and I got up to leave, he said. Go get me another refuge.

Then I worked on Crane Meadows, and I got Crane Meadows established.
That's a lot to happen in a year. But it was only a year then [there].

And Ed Crozier had an opening for an assistant refuge supervisor in the regional office in Minneapolis. And so that would have been, that was a promotion to a 13. I was a 12 manager when I came from Montana because I had started as 11, but did a good job, got a grade 12 in Montana. And stayed at 12 when I came to region three. I had a hard time deciding whether I was going to leave ascertainment because, you know, starting new national wildlife refuges was pretty rewarding. Creating these things from nothing. And so I wasn't so sure. But as I thought about it more and I decided to change, which was the right decision. So I worked for Ed for, I don't know, three years or something as his assistant. And that was fun. Ed was a creative guy and gave you lots of freedom. It was interesting work, supervising refuges.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Which states?

DON HULTMAN: We had Minnesota and Wisconsin. I think at that time. I don't think we had Iowa. They were called wildlife associate managers or WAMS.

Matt Kirschbaum was one. Ed was one. Maybe there were only two:

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was Rolland Siegfried one?

DON HULTMAN: Oh, yeah, we had three, Rollie supervised the wetland districts. So we maybe we had Iowa too.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Or you might have had Michigan.

DON HULTMAN: Oh, yeah. Michigan. Michigan. Yeah, maybe. Yeah, because we had, we had Seney Refuge. I remember going to Seney. It was extremely high paced work. I can't believe the stuff that pops up every day. Like one of the assistant refuge supervisors at the time used to say, JC Bryant used to describe the job. It's like trying to drink from a fire hose. But it was really I mean, good training. But you had to be, you know, quick on your feet because, you get constant requests for information, things pop up, you got to answer up, down, sideways.

TOM WORTHINGTON: The area supervisor directly supervised refuge managers? Maybe a dozen or more. And then the area supervisor reported to the assistant regional director. Did you handle budget issues? Personnel issues?

DON HULTMAN: Hiring of managers was probably the most important thing. Hiring the best you could to manage a field station, which made all the difference. Request briefings for Washington on issues, congressional liaison as needed, and budgets for each refuge Every year. We make it all the decisions on what's going to be staffed and funded at a refuge.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Different kind of issues popping up all the time.

DON HULTMAN: Yeah. You never knew. You know, from a given week things would happen, then there were natural disasters. When I was working with Crozier the big flood of 93 happened and Ed was called off to be the river czar to do the river planning. Both the Mississippi and the Missouri had historic floods. And there was a time when they were trying to decide, okay, we have these huge floods now. What's the government going to do, how are they going to respond to protecting the floodplain from this happening?

So, Ed worked on that like full time for over a year. I basically was the refuge supervisor during that time. So that's one of the things, you know, you had to be quick, had to have good writing skills because you were writing talking points for regional directors or even directors briefing statements. And so my communication skills throughout my career, it's the best major for wildlife. It really is. It really is good because it's all about writing and communication.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What year would that have been then? Assistant supervisor?

DON HULTMAN: Uh, let's see, I think 92 to 94. Maybe around there is something like three years. And then we were reorganizing really heavily. Nationwide. They eliminated the Refuge supervisor jobs I was acting in [Crozier retired in 1994]. I remember acting in it for a year during this transition, so they didn't fill it. I don't think I had an assistant at that time either.

And then and then I sort of was in limbo. They created these operations chief job, Bill Hutchinson, had it for a year because we were both assistant supervisors without a job after they were sort of eliminated and I was just all pissed off anyways. So I just said Bill, you can do it for a while. And he did it for a while. Then I took it over and did it for three years. This refuge operations position which they shouldn't have done because that's where I started the revolution.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And this is part of the ecosystem reorganization?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, we had program areas and geographic areas. GARDs and PARD (geographic assistant regional directors, and program assistant regional directors). And the geographic area, we had a whole area, all the programs (ES, Fisheries, Refuges) within a given area. But then within that you still had the program ARD, which had the expertise. For example, the old Refuge Regional Chiefs became the program ARDs. They kind of controlled the money and the policy but didn't supervise the managers. Who thought of that great system?

And then the geographic areas they might like, the one I worked for, came from Ecological Services. And was John Blankenship. They are supervising people that are in refuges, but they have no real experience with refuges.

But it was a bizarre time. And so at this time, you know, I was pretty mad about the whole thing so that I'm organizing refuge managers around the country. We're sending in a campfire letter about getting rid

of refuge supervisors, what a bad idea it is. And we thought the refuge system was being really downgraded with this whole geographic business, you know, being lumped together and losing the line supervision that we had always had. And so we started complaining a little bit.

TOM WORTHINGTON: The campfire letter, did you draft that the so-called campfire letter?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, I wrote that. I wrote the campfire letter. And this is, you know, during the transition I was still I guess I was the operations chief. Well, we didn't have supervisors, so this would have been under the GARD. But right at the beginning, sort of, yeah. I drafted the letter and then I contacted the refuge managers to sign the letter. So, I got over 100 managers to sign the letter. And it was kind of hairy because, you know, I think people knew I was kind of doing this, but I don't like [regret] it to this day.

I don't know why they didn't really confront me.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Can you talk about, you know, how communication was done with project leaders at this time?

DON HULTMAN: Well, we're using electronic mail email. I was emailing. And then they'd have to email back to say whether they're in or not. And so, then I would just type their letter so I could verify that they actually were signing the letter. I didn't have their signature. But I had an email trail that said I agree, I will sign so then I would put their name on the list.

So, I listed the 100 and some managers. That all sent me an email saying I'm on board. Some wrote back and said, I can't sign this. You know, I believe in it, but I don't think we should do it this way, you know? So, there are differences of opinion. So anyways, it was pretty powerful to have that many managers in this. This was a letter going to the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the campfire letter was something that Bruce Babbitt, secretary of Interior, was sort of his thing. About, [he would say] you know, in the old days we'd sit around the campfire, and you'd give your opinion about stuff. So, I want to hear from people and, you know, send me a campfire letter.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So it was sent to Jamie Clark?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, Jamie Clark became the Director after Molly Beaty

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember the repercussions of this letter when it was received?

DON HULTMAN: It shook them up a little bit, there's no doubt. I mean, you get that many from the field disagreeing. And it leads to some angst with the higher ups.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you get contacted or do you remember what happened?

DON HULTMAN: There was a response. Because I had signed the letter. I mean, my name was sort of they knew I was the leader of it. We got a response. They said why they couldn't do anything or why they're still studying it or something. But, you know, it's still I can't remember all the sequence, but it kept building, you know, and eventually they gave in. We got the refuge supervisors back in the service and we tried this ecosystem approach administratively, at least or organizationally for a while, and it just fizzled. It wasn't working very well.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember a meeting with the Directorate?

DON HULTMAN: You know, there were some at those, you know, they were pretty open and there were managers that went and met at the directorate meeting and made our case. I remember like Roger Hollevoet from Devils Lake was one of the managers and maybe Mike Boylan. He may have been in Washington at the time. I don't know if Mike was one of them. But we had a few managers that made our case and why we needed refuge supervisors and the old-line authority.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So you were the operations chief, the sort of new position that was created after they just wrote off the Refuge Supervisor?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, it'd be more like what a deputy regional chief does. I would guess. Supervise the budget staff and the staff work for the program ARD.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And then where did your career go?

DON HULTMAN: Well, as often happens when you complain about something, you know, eventually they want you to step up, you know, be part of the solution. So, I was I was asked about, Nita Fuller talked to me about the opening for the deputy chief position in Washington, of refuges. And so, after much deliberation, I did. I applied and I'm not, you know, I applied mostly because at that time you had to have Washington experience to reach a certain point in the service, and to become an assistant regional director.

And I wasn't sure what I wanted to be, but I, you know, it's kind of like, well, if it's a requirement, I don't want to be held back. Someday in the future. I had shown I was really interested in the national organization and the refuge system as a whole, so I applied for that job and got it.

But my kids were teenagers or junior high, entering high school so we didn't move the family. And I took the job and I, I knew I'd be there at least a year. And it turned out to be about a year. But it was a great time. We were doing then planning for the first Keystone conference at that time and doing this vision document that came out of that, “Fulfilling the Promise”, which was the first [formal] vision document for the Refuge System. I really loved the job as the deputy. I worked with Rick Coleman, another creative guy that just lets you run.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Rick Coleman was the Chief of Refuges in Washington.

DON HULTMAN: Yes, and you know I just I learned a lot and, but it was good to go in there after I had been a project leader and had all this experience before me. So, I had the experience and confidence to really make the most of my time in Washington. And plus, I was in a position high enough that I was often meeting with the director and got to know Jamie really well, the director who I used to badger with campfire letters. But we developed a good relationship and I think that was helpful. And I became an advocate for the small wetland program. All this while I was in there it really helped elevate their stature within the refuge system, so they weren't forgotten in the prairies. And so, then we planned Keystone.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And the Refuge Centennial was just around the corner.

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, this would be 1998 or 99. And the centennial in 2003. And we had other things that happened, you know, in 1996 we had the Executive Order from Clinton and then 97 the, the Refuge

Improvement Act, the first organic act for the refuge system. And so that set in motion all sorts of stuff with planning and really elevated the refuge system nationally.

And so all this was happening at the same time. And I was in Washington. And all this was going on and it was just a great time to be in Washington. And had a chance to, you know, be involved in hiring some really good people. Guy named Greg Siekaniec who came into Washington and became the chief of refuges eventually.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And he was where was he when he came in? Was he in Alaska or?

DON HULTMAN: He might have been in Alaska at that time. He had worked in North Dakota. That's where I first knew him well. He followed me at Chase Lake, after Chase Lake was sort of established. And they hired a person to be the Chase Lake manager. And Greg Siekaniec was the first.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Who are some of the other people brought in?

DON HULTMAN: Do you remember Doug Staller, a creative guy in visitor services and then went back in the field years later. Ken Granneman was in there, he was budget. He had been in there a long time. There was another branch chief that was the wildlife branch that we hired. There was you know, there's a lot of field guys in the field of talent that came in at that time.

You know, there's a high turnover back then that, you know, people didn't stay long. It was sort of a year or two. Year or two and try and go back out to the field. Which is a good. I think.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Was Jon Andrew in there?

DON HULTMAN: That's right. Jon Andrew was one of the ones we hired.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Can you talk about the "Fulfilling the Promises" book? Do you remember how that got started?

DON HULTMAN: And I do. You know, it was before I went to Washington, I think. But the idea started, and Mike Boylan was in Washington, and he sort of talked about what the Park Service had done to make a vision statement.

TOM WORTHINGTON: The "Vail Agenda".

DON HULTMAN: Right, the Vail Agenda. They had a conference, and they wrote this book and I read it. I got it from Mike Boylan, and I was just blown away how beautifully it was written. And it became in my mind, this is what we need to do. Not only that needs to be the book needs to be the same size, which it eventually did. But I thought the system needs something like that and it's got to be beautifully written and tell our story.

And all the passion and then lay out a vision for the future. And then we needed something like that because Keystone, we never had a conference of all refuge managers, but you can't just have a "get together". What's the purpose? Well, the purpose had to be the vision. And so those two fit together. And I was deputy in Washington laying this stuff out, establishing the teams and writing the instructions and giving the marching orders to the teams and what they had to do and how it should be written. We handpicked people for the teams. They were nominated by the regions, but then Washington sort of

approved them. So, we looked for people that had a proven track record of working with others and experience and were good writers. And then I think we pretty much got those. There were four teams: wildlife, habitat, people, and leadership. And to get ready for Keystone the teams were working.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Didn't they prepare a draft ?

DON HULTMAN: That's right in advance. And I don't know if it was before the conference or after, but I remember looking at it; I think I was in the habitat group and the wildlife team was mostly focused on biology, but we were overlapping so much. I made the case to Rick Coleman and others that we should combine wildlife and habitat. There's too much overlap.

So, I had to sell that to the teams and let's see the regional, we had regional directors in charge of each team that was planned to. We wanted higher ups vested in this, which I thought really worked well because they took ownership of their teams as regional directors, which was very important. So, I called up the regional director I would communicate as deputy with because I was in charge of sort of making sure the vision statement happened and was written.

I'd get on the phone with the regional directors and say, sell them first. Here's what we're going to do and why we should do it. And they said, Yeah, makes sense, let's combine them.

So we had to combine those. The teams were a little upset, especially biologists, but they got over it.

And then people section remained separate and then leadership was remained separate.

So, they all did their drafts. You know, Keystone had workshops and people got input from the rank and file at the meeting and inspirational talks from Bruce Babbitt. And Jane Fonda was there with Ted Turner and others. So that was really quite a conference.

I didn't enjoy it as much as I would have because I was, I was on the steering committee for the whole thing and we were meeting, you know, as the conference was going on to make planning each day. And so, I missed so much of the conference. And then Rick Coleman, his wife was having a baby. And so, I had to step up and do his work as the chief and give a speech that I had to write while I was there. And it was it was a busy time, and I'd like to do it again so that I can just sit and listen. But it was it was fun. And then, you know, then then putting it all together. I became the main editor of the paper and that and some of it I ripped to shreds and hurt some feelings. But I, you know, I could smooth them over. They were just guys and women just like me, managers from the field.

The leadership guys, they had great ideas, but it just needed to be tweaked a little bit and editing.

And then I enlisted writers like Tom Worthington, I'd call and say this section in People doesn't read well, can you redo this. And then you redo it. And it got done and I was I mean it's a wonderful document. I think to this day when I go back and read it, it's inspiring, you know, and fun things happen. I remember, we'd make these decisions like I wrote one section of the intro and we thought, let's see, let's have Jamie sign this. And if she signs it, then she's got complete buy in. So, she signed this really nice, flowery introduction about the refuge system. And then we wanted Bruce Babbitt, the Secretary of Interior, so I wrote the Bruce Babbitt statement when I was in Washington, and had to you know, that's kind of hard to get something through all the way to the Secretary. Dan Ashe had to take it up to this communications director for Babbitt.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So Dan was probably the AD (assistant director) for external affairs?

DON HULTMAN: I think so, yeah. So I wrote this thing for Babbitt the preface. I think it's the preface for Fulfilling the Promise. Anyway, Babbitt's communication people came back and said we love it, we wouldn't change a word and they never did. So that's the only time in my career that I think I wrote for higher ups that wasn't changed to some degree.

And so that's where it started. But it's signed by Bruce Babbitt, but I got to write it, so that's kind of fun. So anyway, so it was it was useful, we use Fulfilling the Promise for a number of years. I mean. That was sort of our marching orders. We had a list of action items. Everything was planned in advance, you know, we didn't want the document to be the end in itself. So, we had implementation teams established for the different sections. They would meet, the regions and the regional chiefs would have agenda items. Everybody would keep picking away at the actions.

We got some things done. Some things became outdated, but things moved along on many fronts.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And I think you could look back at the list of 20 recommendations, or maybe there weren't that many or maybe they were 23. I know there were ten public use recommendations and seven out of eight or eight were done and the others maybe not as valid and slipped away.

DON HULTMAN: So, you know, and I remember two of the teams, you know, you give people a chance to make recommendations. They come up with a big list. And we learned as we went along. We'd say you can only have ten and people said why, But, you know, if you only have ten, they become pretty good and interesting and it's easier to show progress on. People can get their heads around it at least.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So that book was published then, was it 1999 or 2000 maybe?

DON HULTMAN: And I think it was 2000 that it actually physically came out printed. Yeah.

TOM WORTHINGTON: There's maybe 50 copies in the Twin Cities Regional office in one of the file cabinets somewhere.

DON HULTMAN: Yeah. And I still have a copy at home and I once in a while I'll take it out again, just to read the beginning. You know, the beginning is just good about nice about our history. And that's what it was and that's what the Vale agenda did. So, you know, we, we took what the Park Service did and tried to make it our own. Which I think in the end we did. Yeah. But they were the sort of the model.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So that year as the deputy chief in refuges, lots of different tasks but the main thing probably was getting the promises document. Would you say that was maybe the number.

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, that was probably the number one. We were all pretty focused on that and implementing the Improvement Act and we started training for compatibility. We had done that before through some lawsuit settlements, but you know compatibility became law of the land and so we had to mandate it. So, there were people working on training sessions for that, and I was helping that because I had always been involved in refuge compatibility.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you write the compatibility policy?

DON HULTMAN: I didn't, I didn't write, I reviewed it and stuff, but I didn't write that policy. The compatibility policy was done by the planning folks. And working with the Solicitors. So I reviewed it and then sometimes I got involved in some thorny issues that I had to resolve. Especially with like wetland districts or something that was unique, and we had to work through some of those issues and I'd suggest language for certain parts, but there were good staff that were basically hammering that out.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So, you came back to the Twin Cities after the deputy chief job?

Yeah. Turned out there was an opening for a refuge supervisor back in region three. Just as a year was up. And so I expressed my interest and they basically just moved me back there. Jamie Clark got involved to the director at that time said, let him go back to his family. So.

So I went back after a year, but continued to work on fulfilling the promise, getting that to the finish line and that I was a refuge supervisor. I know at one time I had 21 project leaders under me. We were set up kind of weird, I don't know if we were still under the geographic area or were we completely out of the geographic area.

TOM WORTHINGTON: I think we hadn't completely gotten out of the Geographic Areas, but we eliminated the wetland supervisor?

DON HULTMAN: That's right. That's what I picked up. All the wetland districts, and maybe the river was part of my area, I know is it was too many project leaders to supervise. All because when you did performance reviews, this took, like, two weeks. So, there was a pretty big span. If you remember.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember who the other refuge supervisor was at that time? Was it Matt Kerschbaum? Or maybe there was an actor.

DON HULTMAN: No, I think Matt was still there. I think Matt was there. But I don't know if we had assistants. We've only just had one assistant between us. So, the workload was a little different than what I remembered from earlier years. I did that for a few years. 1999-2002. My next job was at the Upper Miss in 2002.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So the Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge job, was the Refuge Manager job. Had it become a GS 15 when you took that job or was that something that wasn't yet done?

DON HULTMAN: No, it became a year 15 when I applied. But it took it seemed like a year to get approved because it was the first refuge to go to a GS 15.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember how that happened?

DON HULTMAN: You know, there was there was talk about it, but part of it with all the talk was how come we're not on par with the National Park Service, you know, the National Park Service and Fifteen's. But they also had senior executive service at some of their big iconic parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite.

Which why wouldn't they? Those are huge operations. Compared to whatever refuge we want to compare it to. But it had been talked about. If we want the stature of refuges to be higher nationally. So that was sort of the thought behind it then. Bill Hartwig was Regional Director at the time, I think in region three.

And he got behind it. Otherwise, I think if you're still in the. As a regional director, which, you know, they have quite a bit of clout. So he kept the idea alive. And then, you know, they told classification personnel, we want this done. And but it took about a year at that time I was interested because it was vacant, and I remember writing Nita Fuller (Refuge ARD) a letter that I would be very happy to take this as a 14. I want you know; this would be a great job for me. I'd like to go back to the field. It's complex. They're doing a CCP. The grade doesn't matter.

But you know, she really wanted it to be a 15. So eventually it came out as a GS 15, and I applied and was fortunate to get the job.

TOM WORTHINGTON: I think it was the first GS 485 15 in the refuge system?

DON HULTMAN: Well, it wasn't the 485 series at that time. It was a fish and wildlife administrator position, GS 480. It was the first refuge to get GS 15, but the personnel couldn't get that grade in the 485 series. That would, that would happen later while I was on the job. Because I worked on that to get it into the 485 series. I wrote the PD to get it to the 485.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Okay. So, in 2002, you moved to Upper Miss.

DON HULTMAN: In the fall of 2002. I started on the Upper Miss, as the refuge manager, supervising the four Districts and the HQ staff, and the Trempealeau Refuge manager. And I supervised the Mark Twain Complex manager Dick Steinback, who was the manager of Mark Twain, that was a GS 14. Mark Twain Complex included refuges on the lower part of the Mississippi River and the Missouri River.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Okay. So the position supervised both the Upper Miss Refuge and what we called the Mark Twain complex.

DON HULTMAN: So basically, we had one manager overseeing the big river refuges in the region. Which made sense because we all we dealt with the Corps of Engineers and the States on similar issues, even though the refuges are quite different. And you know, the Upper Miss was just, it was a perfect job for me at that time of my career.

They were going into a planning phase, doing the CCP, which was sort of floundering when I got there. They had done it for a year.

TOM WORTHINGTON: The CCP is the Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

DON HULTMAN: Mandated by the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, each refuge had to have a plan that laid out the future next 15 years, how they're going to manage the resource, public use, land acquisition, everything that a refuge does. And it had to be done with public involvement. And you had to comply with NEPA. Either an environmental assessment or in the Upper Miss case because of the complexity and controversy an Environmental Impact Statement.

And so, I came in, I knew that that was the effort. Which that's fine. I embrace that. I always loved planning so that was fine. So, I grabbed hold of that and well, the first things I did. I remember the staff had a staff meeting of all the district managers and staff and they had put together a vision statement, this was before I got there, and they had a consultant hired, they were doing some preliminary public involvement workshops. Noncontroversial. What do you think? Well, I threw the written statement away it was way too long. I made a shorter one. And of course, I took charge of the process and never let it go.

And with the district managers just ran the process.

And it was a lot of fun because it's a marketing dream and so that's where we missed the boat for years on Upper Miss. Think of all the attributes of Upper Miss Refuge. It's like, holy cow, you can sell this thing anywhere. And so that's what we did. I mean, that's the first thing. I started marketing this place differently, and I was on public radio a couple of times. This is even before we really got into the planning. And then we started you know; we laid out the plan for plan. We knew we had to have lots of public involvement, and we wanted to make major changes that hadn't been changed in 50 years.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Did you do go through a scoping effort first to see what the issues the public were interested in?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, there was. I think they might have done the scoping before I got there. And we had a list of issues and in truth, we pretty knew what they were.

The public has their issues, but it's sort of often selfish issues about public use. And then we have issues that are more resource oriented, habitat damage that's being done that needed to be addressed.

For example, in scoping some people may have mentioned we had a thousand permanent hunting blinds down in the Savannah district. A thousand wooden structures on the National Wildlife Refuge, been there for decades. We thought they should go. The blind system wasn't fair. They led to confrontations with other people. There were basically people using public land for private good. And of course, in scoping, you're not going to hear, you're not going to hear that, you'll hear a little bit of that. But mostly it's they want to keep their lives that they've had for generations. So anyways, early on it was obvious we're going to have some controversy here. And big time.

And so anyways, we started the process then. I think there are there were probably 30 some public meetings up and down the river, it was an exhausting schedule. We'd be in one town one night and the next night, we'd be in another town. And we had more workshops, I guess they're called scoping. We call them Manager for a day workshops, which is kind of a clever way to market them where people would come in on a Saturday and we'd say, you're the manager, what would you do with these issues? But then we had many of the issues identified. So, we'd get more input and develop rapport with people. And then after that we wrote a draft which took a lot of work and it was complex issues, legal issues that hadn't been resolved before. And we pushed and pushed and pushed and got a draft ready.

And then you know, that went out to the public for more public meetings and that's when the shit hit the fan, so to speak, because we were really radically changing some of the way things were done.

TOM WORTHINGTON: What were some of the big changes that attracted the attention?

DON HULTMAN: Changing the closed areas. These are, you know, the Upper Miss is about 240,000 acres or so. And within that you have areas that are closed to hunting within the refuge. These are closed areas. So that waterfowl has a place to rest because it's a major migration corridor. I mean 90% of the canvasback ducks in the world stop here in this refuge.

So those closed areas were last changed in 1957 and needed to be adjusted as river habitats had changed. We needed more steppingstones in case something happened. If the habitat crashes here, where are the birds going to go? So based on biology and what the district managers everybody thought, we revamped the whole system, made some radical changes to some of these closed areas. And of course, all of a

sudden people that had hunted for decades since 1957 now it's going to be a closed area. They're going to be unhappy. And so that was controversial.

Motorboats and jet skis, you know, could go anywhere on the refuge because it's navigable waters. But we wanted some quiet areas. What about the people that like to enjoy paddling or fishing in a quiet environment. So we proposed to establish slow and no wake areas which effectively took care of our jet skis without going after them and electric motor only areas. There was like one of them on the whole refuge. We established them up and down the river.

So, what we're trying to do is manage for everyone's need on the river, meet everyone. My saying was however you'd like to use the river. We have a place for you. Whether that's if you like to just paddle. We have a place for you. You won't be disturbed by others. And camping had to be revamped. The regulations, the permanent blinds we wanted to get rid of totally. Which was a huge thing further south where they were allowed. So, it was sort of one thing after another. All these major changes. I remember Nita Fuller saying, there's a lot of "No" in this plan. And I think she was a little apprehensive.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Nita was the Assistant Regional Director of Refuges.

DON HULTMAN: Refuge Chief, that's what they were called at that time. You know, I and by this time I had Washington experience, so I had contacts in Washington. I knew people in Washington, the Solicitors office, especially when I dealt with legal issues and stuff. So that's why I was so I always said, you know, being at Upper Miss, that Washington experience was so valid because I had all these contacts when things got bad. That they trusted me. I felt that rapport and trust. People like Alan Palisoul [DOI Solicitor] and Dan Ashe I'd worked with in there, and so I had their trust, and I think and given more latitude to let, let me run a little further. And I knew I could do it. So, I mean, I was totally confident.

And I was willing to compromise. I knew we're not going to get everything we want.

The public didn't believe that the when the draft came out, we'd be willing to change, and we made major changes then after they had their input. But that's when it got loud. When they saw the draft and what was being taken away, they took it out in force. Hundreds of people, sometimes with a lot of alcohol in their system. Weren't you at some of them?

TOM WORTHINGTON: Yes, I was. Then didn't we actually revise, and come up with a new additional alternative?

DON HULTMAN: We did we called yeah. A new alternative. We had sort of started blending stuff or made so many changes that what was needed was another alternative to describe them. So we came up with another alternative.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So you did much of the writing yourself for you and your staff. By then there was a planning staff in the regional office, did they provide some support as well?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, they provided mostly, like they would do all the printing. But, you know, I was a firm believer that I'm on the ground and we're in charge of the planning. We're going to take this as our responsibility, so we're going to take it all the way. And so we did, I and the staff did the writing on virtually all of it. The RO did some review and some help.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Layout and map production was done by the RO?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, well that was done at first in the RO, but the maps we ended up doing ourselves. The communication wasn't good enough. We had to be able to walk into the mapmaker's office and make a change. And so, we had a person that sort of learned those skills and had some experience, and so we produced the maps in house, but then we would send them, you know, they'd have to produce all this stuff up in the regional office. And we had an editor up there, so they were great that way. It was a great partnership that way, yeah, but there was no doubt we were in charge of the plan. Yeah, it's our plan.

It's the only way it could have worked. I think it should work on all refuges. I mean, if you hire a manager, they know what's going on the field level.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do you remember what year that was completed?

DON HULTMAN: The record of decision was signed in 2006, 2006. It was started in 2002 or maybe a little bit before, but in earnest when I got there in 2002. It took four years to get to the record of decision. Which is it's not bad. That's pretty fast for Upper Miss.

TOM WORTHINGTON: That's pretty fast for an EIS.

DON HULTMAN: I'm really proud of that effort because my I wanted everything. I wanted people to be able to pick that up, someone on the street and understand it. And it was an opportunity to lay down our history and jurisdictions and all that stuff in clear language for those that follow us.

And I know in talking to staff ten years later, they still they use that every day as a reference to go back to, the objectives. A lot of things have been accomplished. Some will never be accomplished. but here's the thing even though when the plan was done, we still had to get everything through the Federal Register. We had to revamp all the regulations and go through Federal Register, get comments.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Do public use regulations.

DON HULTMAN: Yeah, so our Law Enforcement Officers could enforce the plan. And that was a whole other experience. Working through Washington, push, push, push to get that through. And that's where my contacts were invaluable.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So that was before 2008 that the regulations was that when did the regs finally get passed?

DON HULTMAN: I think the 2008 and so those are, you know, codified it's hard to change that stuff, although I hear there's a streamlined process for changing stuff maybe now. But I know, if it gets challenged in court, See, we always assumed from the time I started that we're going to get sued. So, everything we did in keeping records of everything and how we did things and it's catalogued. And the justifications for everything. We have a good administrative record of our decisions.

I always thought we would be sued by the states. Because we had states against us. We had to compromise on some things with this, with the four states involved.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Which states were there more controversy with?

DON HULTMAN: Wisconsin. When the refuge was established in 1924 each state had to give permission for the refuge, and some had conditions on it. Like Wisconsin. And some of the states said, well, we want jurisdiction over the fisheries all the time. Wisconsin also said you can't interfere with navigation. Wisconsin was always very protective of their rights. They weren't really all supportive. Some of their staff was, and overall their higher ups were.

But a lot of them weren't very supportive. We had to nurture and get them to come along to eventually give their blessing to it, which they did. We had compromised on a lot of things.

TOM WORTHINGTON: So getting that CCP completed and the regulations and the Federal Register finalized, did that bring you pretty much to the end of your management there?

DON HULTMAN: Yeah. Did you know I at that point I was close to that was eligible to retire by the time. I looked around, I thought, what do I want to do now? And frankly, I was just tired of moving. And I didn't see any other job that, you know, one of my shortcomings is that I never wanted to leave refuges. I had an opportunity to go higher up in the service, but I couldn't leave refuges, and I was, and I didn't after being a GS15 in the field, what do I want to be a regional chief for.

It didn't look that appealing. It was the right time. I had finished this big thing and set it on a course. I had a wonderful, fun career. It was just time for me to.

TOM WORTHINGTON: And you were remarried and had family reasons, maybe to make a geographic change.

DON HULTMAN: Yeah. In 2002, I went to Upper Miss. I also got married that year and so changed jobs, physically moved, did all the big things, things you're not supposed to do in one year. But then we, my wife Lauri and I decided to adopt a girl from China, and we started that process while I was still working, and we didn't think it would take so long and it took four years. The year I retired in 2009 we went to China in August to pick up our little Sarah. A one-year-old baby in China. I became a father again.

I was never bored in retirement. I had a little hobby farm and then eventually we moved to Massachusetts to be with Lauri's family. Her sister had cancer and she wanted to spend the last years with her, which worked out well. She got to spend three years with her sister before she died and be there to help her. So that was good. We've become accustomed to New England.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Quite an extraordinary career. Would you, looking back, if you could pick maybe two or three of the highlight activities, what would you say they were, if that's possible.

DON HULTMAN: You know, after now that I've been retired for ten years, you know, one way to look at that is what stands out in my mind when I think back. And, you know, to this day, I always think of Tamarac and my first job and walking to work and how much I loved it and how enthusiastic I was. My first day of work, there was a snowstorm. And I still tried to get in and I got stuck.

The first day I was driving this pickup truck that the accelerator stuck, this old junker truck. As I was rounding a corner the accelerator stuck and it was in the winter and I just spun out, I ended up in a ditch and I ended up running to work. I come in kind of sweaty from running out and then the maintenance guys pulled my truck out. Well, it was just like a day or two later we had a snowstorm and then I got my Volkswagen. I took the Volkswagen bug because it had better traction. It got stuck in the snow. And the

manager Omer Swenson was on his way out to get the maintenance guy to come in and plow, going to pick him up. And he said did you think you can make it to work?

So yeah, I was enthusiastic and yeah, I loved it.

But I think you know, the most those projects that gave me the freedom to use my gifts and my creativity. Chase Lake was fun, the prairie, managing any of the refuges was fun, ascertainment work was fun. Up to this day I look back, you know, I can say Crane Meadows was established because I got to do the ascertainment work. Rydell too. So those are you know anytime you can save habitat. And that's the only thing that really lasts. You know I put together plans and policies, but they can be overturned, but the land stays there. Even at Upper Miss we acquired lots and lots, several thousand acres that will always be there. So that's very rewarding.

And then, you know, working on Fulfilling the Promise, because any time you write something down in that form, that's going to last in the archives at least. And people a long time from now will pick it up, that was kind of interesting back then. They'll learn about what refuges used to be like.

And the people, lots of great people I worked with.

TOM WORTHINGTON: One of the questions they say you should conclude with is: what did I not ask that you would like to tell other people about your career? Is there anything more that you want to mention?

DON HULTMAN: You know, it's just that I always I just always consider myself one of the lucky ones. Because even at a young age, I knew what I wanted to do, and I became it. That's kind of rare. And it's, I've instilled that in my kids. They haven't followed it. But I always tell them. Follow your heart. I don't care what you do. Follow your heart if you can and I just feel so blessed that I was able to do that.

And all these memories and living on refuges. I wish everyone had a chance. I got to do it three times.

And the things I saw on a daily basis stick with me forever. So I'm one of the lucky ones.

TOM WORTHINGTON: Very good. Thank you Don.