



The Oral History of Tom Melius

December 23, 2019

Interview conducted by Tom Worthington

Twin Cities Regional Office

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Tom Melius

Date of Interview: December 23, 2019

Location of Interview: Twin Cities Regional Office, Bloomington, Minnesota

Interviewer: Tom Worthington

Education: B.S. Fisheries and Wildlife South Dakota State University. 1973; MS Fish and Wildlife Sciences, South Dakota State University, 1975

Preserve manager: Nemaquin Hunting Preserve (PA) 1975

Hunter Education Coordinator: National Rifle Association (DC) 1978

Staff: House of Representatives Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee (DC) 1984

Staff: Senate Commerce Committee, Oceans and Fisheries Subcommittee Committee (DC) 1994

Program Coordinator: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (DC) 1997

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 20 Years

Assistant Director External Affairs; Assistant Director Migratory Birds and State Programs 1998-2006

Regional Director R7 (Anchorage AK): 2006-2008

Regional Director R3 (Twin Cities, MN) 2008-2018

Colleagues and Mentors: John Rogers, Marshall Jones, Dan Ashe, Don Barry, Jamie Clark, Dale Hall, Sam Hamilton, Charlie Wooley, Gary Edwards, Paul Schmidt, Dr. Ray Linder

INTERVIEW:

Worthington: Tom. I've started the recording now. This is Tom Worthington. Today is December 23rd, 2019. I'm with Tom Melius. Tom and I are in the Twin Cities regional office, sitting in Tom's old office this cold December morning. We're doing an oral history interview with Tom Melius this morning.

Tom, this will take at least an hour. It could be close to two hours, but it gets pretty exhausting after two hours. And if we have to continue on another day, we can do that. Where and when were you born?

Melius: Well, I was born March 1st, 1951, in West Bend, Wisconsin.

Worthington: Did your parents live there for a long time?

Melius: Yeah, that was kind of funny. My father is originally from South Dakota. Grew up on a farm where he was one of 16 children in the family. And because there were so many, some of the Melius boys went back to Wisconsin and helped other uncles and other family members during the summer farming. And while he was back there, he met my mother and that's where they resided.

And at five years of age, we moved from West Bend, Wisconsin to the home farm in South Dakota that my grandparents had homesteaded on. So that's why I have strong Midwest roots, growing up in both Wisconsin as well as most of my adult years in South Dakota.

Worthington: Which town in South Dakota was the farm?

Melius: It's a small community called Faulkton, it had maybe a thousand people at that time. And a lot of Melius's in that community, again, with my father being one of 16, eight boys, eight girls, all the boys married and farmed in that community. So I have a lot of cousins. There are actually seven of us that were in the same grade all through school, we all lined up alphabetically.

I have about 70 first cousins. And that's why I like to go back to the South Dakota area a lot, having all that relationship.

Worthington: Do you go to grade school and high school there?

Melius: Grade school and high school, I graduated in 1969. And then decided I had an interest in wildlife and went to South Dakota State University in Brookings, South Dakota, where they did offer a program in fish and wildlife sciences. So that was kind of my early beginning.

Worthington: What got you interested in the outdoors?

Melius: I think it was growing up on the farm. If you know anything about farming, you're outdoors a lot and you grow up with a pretty strong work ethic. To get things done when they needed to be done. You don't work 9 to 5 on a farm, and I was outdoors a lot. An example was during haying, if we'd run over a pheasant nest, I'd collect the pheasant eggs and put them under some chickens and hatch out the little pheasants. I had always an interest in wildlife in the outdoors, and that really has always continued throughout my life, my career.

Worthington: Did you hunt and fish back then?

Melius: Quite a bit. Growing up, yes.

Not so much fishing, but hunting. During pheasant hunting season, I would be walking beside my dad, you know, carrying the pheasants that he would shoot. And then when I was old enough to shoot a shotgun. I was given a single shot .410, that was my first gun.

Worthington: How old were you?

Melius: I probably was seven. I mean, I was young, but I was pretty deadly with that .410! I remember walking along and shooting a pheasant right next to my dad with my little .410.

And he was pretty proud of that. So that is a great memory.

Worthington: Were you the first of the children to go to college?

Melius: I had an older brother, uh, five years older, who has passed, and he had gone to one year of college. When I was ten and eleven, both my parents passed, an illness for both of them. And at that stage, I moved off the farm. My brother stayed on the farm and started farming.

And I moved into the community of Faulkton and became part of the family of Jarvis and Ione Brown. He was an attorney in town and knew many of the Melius's. He had a son the same age as me and a younger son and daughter. So I moved in with the Brown family. And I don't know if you remember at the retirement party, but my cousin Conrad mentioned that... how I kind of grew up in that family as well as still with all Melius's.

So I have a pretty large background, both with my biological family as well as the Brown family that I moved in and grew up with.

Worthington: That is so interesting. So you went to South Dakota State University. Did you look at any other schools, or was that the place you knew you wanted to attend?

That was the place that really in South Dakota offered any type of a fish and wildlife program. And I was again interested in that. And while I was at South Dakota State University for a summertime position, I applied with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks and became a park ranger two summers - while I was a junior and a senior in college. So I got started working in the state parks in South Dakota.

And during that time is when I met my lovely wife Marylee, who was also working at the state park, at Roy Lake State Park, up around Lake City, South Dakota. That was the first year they were selling park stickers. You had to buy a sticker to come into the park for a dollar. And so she was one of the people who would sell those stickers. And I was the park ranger. I would basically enforce park rules and regulations and deliver firewood and talk to all the people who were camping there.

So that summer we met and got engaged. The next year she went to South Dakota State University also. And, and we ended up getting married. And I got to remember this - May 19th, 1973. 46 years ago.

Worthington: 46 years. Congratulations. That's great.

Melius: I am very fortunate.

Worthington: Do you remember any particular professors or classes that you took at South Dakota State?

Melius: Yeah, at South Dakota State, because of my interest in fish and wildlife, I had Dr. Ray Linder. Dr. Linder was one of the leaders at the SDSU co-op unit. And at that point, some of the graduate students needed undergrads to help with whatever they're doing – counting duck broods on the James River or catching pheasants at night and putting radio transmitters on them.

So that continued my interest and even perked it a little bit more, because when I graduated in 1973, Dr. Ray Linder provided me an opportunity to continue on as a grad student, and I worked through the co-op unit there, and raised pheasants, I raised about a thousand pheasants divided them into groups and fed them different doses of a herbicide called atrazine, which is still used today.

And the purpose of the study was to basically see if, higher levels of atrazine than what farmers were legally able to put onto their crops would cause behavioral problems, weight loss, eggshell thinning, whatever to the pheasants, because a lot of times after farmers applied the atrazine to the soil, the pheasants would just go down row and pick the seeds out of the ground and get a lot of the atrazine in them. So, my study found that even the high doses of atrazine that I was feeding these birds it really didn't have that much of an impact on them.

But it allowed us to have, 100 pheasants as a control group. And so we had a great feed, pheasant feed. When the study was done. That's the benefits of working with wildlife. I was pretty popular because I had 100 pheasants for free, and we had a really grand banquet one night and everybody ate a lot of pheasant!

Worthington: That must have been great fun. So you went straight on from undergrad to graduate school?

Melius: Yep, six years straight at South Dakota State University.

Worthington: So, you got a Bachelor of Science, I presume, in wildlife, and then a master's in wildlife.

Melius: I had an opportunity to go on for a doctorate, but I was married then, and I just felt it was time to get out and start doing something.

Worthington: What was Marylee doing while you were in grad school?

Melius: She helped put me through grad school. She worked- she did one year at South Dakota State University. She was going to go on for a physical therapy degree. But then with our marriage, she decided to basically help support me. I feel so honored that she was able to do that. And it really helped as we move through grad school.

Worthington: As you approach the end of your graduate program, did you think about what job you're going to get or what you were going to do next?

Melius: I was very fortunate, and throughout my career I've been very fortunate. It must have been 3 or 4 weeks before I was finishing up, and I had no permanent career or job ahead of me after I was graduating in 1975. Then I saw on the bulletin board in the old SDSU fish and wildlife building, there was an announcement about a hunting preserve in Pennsylvania, that was looking for someone with a background from the Midwest that could help raise pheasants and help with their hunting program.

I thought that was kind of interesting. So I sent out a resume to him, and about four days later, I thought, I wondered if they got it. So I called them up and it just so happened I talked to the manager, who was just opening his mail and basically was looking over my resume as I was talking to him on the phone, and at the end of the conversation, he said, I'd like you to fly out to Pennsylvania and we'd like to see if you'd want this position.

I thought, well, that's pretty decent. The hunting preserve was owned, at that time, Willard Rockwell, Rockwell Tools, Rockwell International. He had 8000 acres of his own private hunting area, and he had hunted in South Dakota at one time and liked the people from South Dakota. And so that's what pushed them to put the bulletin or the announcement out on the bulletin board. So anyway, I flew out there, to talk to the manager.

Mr. Rockwell came down that afternoon from Pittsburgh. We drove around and chatted, and they offered me the job on the spot, and I flew back to Brookings and took my orals and passed those. And basically on graduation, like three days later, we loaded up a U-Haul and moved to Pennsylvania.

Worthington: Wow. That was fast.

Melius: Yes, it was for something that I didn't have - in about three weeks it all came together.

The hunting preserve was in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, in the southwestern part of the state, about an hour south and west of Pittsburgh.

Worthington: That must have been a full day of travel.

Melius: Yes. And it's one of those things where I was driving the U-Haul. Marylee was driving our car, and at that time, we didn't have cell phones or GPS. I mean, she was just following this U-Haul, not really knowing where we were going. She had never been there, and she was following along. But yeah, it was a couple of days travel. We stopped in West Bend and visited some relatives there. But that's how we began our career of moving east.

Worthington: How long did you work at the reserve?

Melius: I worked there for just about three years. And the interesting thing is, one of the people who knew Willard Rockwell was Dr. Jim Lindsay. Dr. Jim Lindsay was at Penn State and was running their wildlife department up there, and he had several graduate students who had come down to this hunting preserve to do some research. They had a bunch of captive deer, and they would have their students do some research work.

Well, Jim Lindsay was a good friend of Ray Linder. And so I got - because of my work with Ray Linder back at SDSU, I now became somewhat known by Jim Lindsay. So after three years of working there, which was really a good job, I got a call from Jim Lindsay saying, there's going to be an opening in Washington, D.C., at the National Rifle Association to run their Hunter Program, and he thought I would be a good candidate for that.

And I thought, hmm, I wasn't planning to move, but I'm always open to more challenges. And so I drove to Washington, DC and met one of the vice presidents at the National Rifle Association and was offered the job at the end of the interview and came back to Pennsylvania loaded up a U-Haul and drove to Washington, DC and found a place to live.

And about that time, our oldest daughter Vanessa came onto the scene, and we had a chance to kind of have her as well as her sister Micheel, who arrived a little bit later, grow up in the Washington, DC area and Northern Virginia.

So it was another step going east and which was both really good. But yet it had a little bit of its negatives that we moved farther and farther away from grandparents and cousins and, yeah, the support system as well as on my side and Marylee's, because of families were still in the South Dakota area.

But we sure became good tour guides of the DC area, because a lot of Melius's and a lot of Marylee's cousins and family would come out to visit us, as you know, going into Washington, DC on your own, can be a little tricky getting around, but we lived there for 28 years. And during that time we came pretty familiar with how to maneuver people to see things. So that was both a good thing as well as, somewhat of a negative, but we worked it all through.

Worthington: So, you worked with the NRA developing hunter safety programs? What were those responsibilities?

Melius: Yeah. Hunter safety. That responsibility at that time was working with all the states. Hunter safety at that time was basically managed by the National Rifle Association in conjunction with the states who got their PR (Pittman/Robertson) dollars from Fish and Wildlife Service. So I would go out and teach all the state coordinators instructor training, how to set up these programs, what material to use, because at that time some of the states didn't have any type of hunter safety training requirement for new hunters.

And so, I did a lot of traveling. I got to know a lot of the state people, and Fish and Wildlife Service people from the Federal Aid area, who worked with all those state people. So it was a great seven years. I think it helped develop my understanding of working cooperatively, working

collegially with other professionals, with the state people and with Fish and Wildlife Service people. And the only little negative was when you work with 50 states, you're traveling a lot.

And with two young children growing up, it was quite a burden on Marylee to raise our daughters. But again, it allowed us to have what we have.

Worthington: Where in DC did you live?

Melius: We lived out in a little community in Northern Virginia called Sterling. It's out by the Dulles Airport. And at that time, when we moved there, it was basically rural, cornfields behind our development and woods. I mean, it was really nice. Now it's pretty much wall to wall people as well as concrete and traffic. But it was a great area to have kids grow up. I could go hiking and skiing and play tennis and golf and all those things and get the kids out in the outdoors.

Worthington: And the NRA office was downtown?

Melius: The NRA Office was downtown, about 5 blocks north of the White House at that time. And so I rode a commuter bus to work but then I started driving in a carpool. It was kind of funny because when we were first there, and my commute was 28 miles, and it took me about 35 minutes. When I left in 2008, I was still living in that same area, 28 miles out. But it became almost two hours of commuting.

And it just twisted my gut. It's just hard to put up with that much time sitting in traffic. It's time to leave.

Worthington: Did the NRA provide you any training on how to do the job?

Melius: A little bit, but again, at that time, with my background growing up hunting, and my experience at the hunting preserve. Well, one of the things is that at the hunting preserve we had a lot of contacts with members of Congress, and different governors. I mean, Nemocolin catered to a lot of that type of clientele. So they would come out and I would guide them. I would talk with them; I'd set stuff up for them. I'd take them out, teach them how to shoot shotguns, trap and skeet shooting.

And so I had a little bit of that ability to work with a variety of personalities and teach them things by example, showing them as well as instructing them. And so when I got to the NRA, that was a pretty easy transition, going out to the state and working with 40, 50 people I'd never met before and, you know, kind of win them over and, and work with them and, and treat them respectfully, and got a lot of stuff done.

Worthington: Were there other opportunities at the NRA for position changes or advancement?

Melius: I just advanced internally, but again my career has been always in the right spot at the right time. An example I had a friend by the name of Dan Smith. I don't know if he's still an employee at the Department of Interior, but he worked at the NRA at that time as a lobbyist the same time that I was there. Dan called me up one day and said, Tom, there's going to be an opening coming up, in Congress in the House of Representatives, Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, on the Republican side.

And the main person that's leading that is Don Young from Alaska who Danny Smith knew and said, why don't you call up the staff director - I think you'd be good at that job. I'm thinking, oh, man, you know, I just moved to Pennsylvania, then into Northern Virginia working with the NRA. And now all of a sudden I have a job working with Congress. I didn't really know what it was, but I went up and talked to the staff director and talked with the congressman, and they offered me the job!

And I think a lot of that, again, goes back to the other positions I had been in where I'd worked with members of Congress and governors, and I felt comfortable with that. And so next thing I knew, I started my job on Marine Fisheries Committee for the House of Representatives and, was there for ten years.

Worthington: So, you worked for the committee although a congressman was your boss?

Melius: Yeah. The chairman and the top minority member of the committee controls the staff that works on the committee. And there were probably 60 people that worked on that committee. You had five different subcommittees. And so the staff director basically oversaw that work; the committee staff was usually divided like 40 for the party in control and about 20 were the minority party staff.

And at that time the Democrats were in control. So, I worked for the minority. Again, the Republican side was led by Don Young. At that time, it was a very bipartisan group. You worked fish and wildlife issues based on - the split was whether or not you were more aligned with consumptive users or you were more with non-consumptive users. It wasn't split on the committee because you were a Republican or a Democrat.

And so, it was interesting how you could form these coalitions of Republican staff, Democratic staff working together to write legislation, do amendments, oversee the budget of the Fish and Wildlife Service, write a bunch of the refuge and migratory bird legislation that came out in the 90s, and it was a lot of fun. It's not as much fun now, from what I understand.

Worthington: Who were some of the other committee staff that you can recall working with?

Melius: Oh. Dan Ashe and Don Berry, they were both on the Democratic side. Uh, Jeff Curtis – these were guys that would really work well together on an idea. I think that was another good thing, because knowing Don Berry and Dan Ashe, when they left there, they went into the administration. And that was very helpful for me to get into the Fish and Wildlife Service.

But I also took a little detour. I worked in 1990 for the Republicans, when Newt Gingrich took over the House of Representatives and the Republicans were in the majority. At that time, I was at a conference, the CITES conference. I was a part of the US delegation, and the election had just come out and everybody was saying, oh, man, Tom's going to be in a good position because he's now going to be working for the chairman, set the agenda, do all these things.

Well, about a week later, at that time, Congress, with the new administration of Republicans, eliminated three committees. And the Merchant Marine Fisheries Committee was one of those committees. So, again, luck had it. I had a friend who was working for, Senator Larry Pressler from South Dakota, who was Republican over in the Senate. And the Republicans were in control of the Senate, and Senator Pressler was taking over the Chairmanship of the Commerce Committee, and one of the subcommittees was the Oceans and Fisheries subcommittee run by Ted Stevens of Alaska.

And I got a call from a friend who said, I know that your committee in the House is being eliminated, but how about you coming over and working in the Senate? So in 1994, I went over to the US Senate and became the lead staffer for the Oceans and Fisheries Committee. I think it was called at that time and worked very closely with Ted Stevens, again from Alaska. So my Alaska connection in the House now was very helpful.

My South Dakota connection was also very helpful, and I was able to have a great time for three years working in the Senate, which was a little bit different environment than the House of Representatives. In the House, if you had the votes, okay, you kind of push stuff through, but the Senate you tried to find unanimous consent. And every senator tried to work a deal, work through so that they wouldn't get hung up with an objection.

As a staffer in the Senate, you had a lot of power to make agreements on behalf of your senator or the group of senators that you were working for. It was just amazing because I oversaw then, the National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, Coast Guard. The Fish and Wildlife Service was done by another committee. But I always kind of kept up with FWS.

So I got to again see another administration agency in its operation its budget and personnel and legislation.

Worthington: So, between the House work and the Senate work, how many years did you work for the Congress?

Melius: About 12.5, which was really nice because that affected my retirement. I was a FERS employee under the new federal retirement program that came through, and it actually increased my years of service.

I ended up working for Fish and Wildlife for 20 years. And when you add the years that I worked in Congress it almost gave me about another five years of service. So when I decided to retire, it was pretty nice to have those extra years in service.

Worthington: What were some of the maybe the most contentious issues that you dealt with, either in the House or maybe the Senate?

Melius: In the House, it was probably one of the last times they actually brought the Endangered Species Act up for reauthorization. Today they just kind of pushed it along and don't really do a whole lot with it. The thing I remember is I worked again with Don Young and all the Republicans, and there was another Republicans on the Committee like Claudine Schneider who was from Rhode Island [Rep. Rhode Island 1981-1991].

She was more of the non-consumptive group. And I had to write statements for them to go down to the floor of the House when they were debating, and I had to write a statement for chairman Don Young, questioning some of these things in the Endangered Species Act, and then write a statement just almost 180 degrees different for Claudine Schneider, a very strong ESA supporter. And I, had to write these statements, and then I had to go down onto the floor of the House during the debate and sit next to Congressman Young.

And I remember, he yielded time to Claudine Schneider, and I was going to move over and sit next to her to help her. He put his arm on my shoulder, said, no, you're working for me. So I just handed her the paper. So it was interesting to see that whole operation of debating things on the floor of the House of Representatives. And that's funny.

Worthington: Did this experience last up in through the 90s then?

Melius: Yeah. Let's see, I think I came with the Fish and Wildlife Service after I left the Senate. I did spend one year, with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Amos Eno at that time was running Fish and Wildlife for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and he again knew me and, offered me a job that was pretty nice. And it kind of got me my goal – ever since I was with the NRA I always looked to maybe be a Fish and Wildlife Service employee.

With my college background, working with the co-op unit, working with the States, I thought Fish and Wildlife seemed pretty good. So working then in the House of Representatives and working in the Senate, then working with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation it all just got me a little bit closer and closer with the leadership of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Also knowing Dan Ashe, knowing Don Berry, who were then in the administration, that was helpful to come into the administration, back in 1998.

And it was through Jamie Clark. If I remember correctly, Dan Ashe left the Hill and came on board with the Fish and Wildlife Service. His first job was the AD for External Affairs. He then moved from there into the refuge position - Chief of the Refuge Program, giving them an opening in External Affairs. Dan recommended to Jamie that he thought I might be a good candidate. So I took a couple of interviews with Jamie and, next thing I knew, I was hired, came in at the SES level and started a great 20-year career with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Worthington: So that was in the back of your mind, perhaps for quite a few years, looking for a position with Fish and Wildlife Service?

Melius: Yes, and I always thought FWS regional directors have wonderful positions. I always thought that Midwest Region 3 in Minneapolis would be a nice spot with my Midwest background families. And so when I got on board, I worked a couple of years with External Affairs, and then I moved over when the Service reconfigured its Migratory Birds and State Programs at that time.

And then Steve Williams came on board, and I think we did another reconfiguration. I went back to External Affairs for a couple of years, and then Dale Hall came on board. And at that time he did some switching of regional directors and, asked if I wanted to go to Alaska - again with my Alaska connections from Congress and background and understanding. My wife and I talked it over. And so in 2006 we moved up to Anchorage and I was the Regional Director in Alaska for all most 3 years. We came back in the fall of 2008.

Worthington: And if I can back you up just a little bit.... the dates, the years that you were in headquarters, the Assistant Director for External Affairs and then the State partnership program. With Jamie Clark - was the this was the era of the ecosystem approach to management and reorganization? Did you get involved in those types of decisions at all, about how she was going to restructure the agency?

Melius: Yeah, because that was Jamie's style. I really liked that she worked with the Directorate's input and formed teams to figure out the best way to go. But the GARD/ PARD program didn't quite shake out, I think, like the whole leadership wanted. And so we kind of dismantled that - though the ecosystem approach, I think was still a very positive way to go.

And it just took us as a leadership group, took us a little bit longer to kind of get there, figuring out how much time was being spent on certain things, the way our, our leadership structures were set up. And maybe that's what drove the recent reorganization going on in the Department to look at a better way of managing things in an ecosystem. But I think it was a good time in my career to, to look at things more as a leader instead of doing stuff, looking more as a leadership setting things in motion. Which I enjoyed.

Worthington: What would be some of the biggest successes or issues you faced during your time in those positions there in headquarters?

Melius: Well, I was there when the whole Federal Aid review came up because that was a program underneath my administrative area. I was there with Jamie Clark, to kind of help peel things back and look really close at how things were being handled. And it did bring about improvements and it did bring about – though- some tarnished relationships between, I think, leadership in the Fish and Wildlife Service and leadership within the AFWA group at that time.

Worthington: So, were there questions about how some of the administrative funding for federal aid was being used by the Service?

Melius: Yes, there were some concerns about how some funds were being used by the Fish and Wildlife Service – it could be looked at that the funds should all be going to the states for their wildlife work, for their hunter education, for their shooting range programs – but the Fish and Wildlife Service had an ability using ‘administrative needs’ to spend some of that money outside of the flow going to the states. Now, a lot of it was done for fish and wildlife benefits.

It wasn't, in my opinion, wasted away. It was just being used, which the law allowed, by the leadership of the Fish and Wildlife Service. And I think that was a little bit of an irritant to some of the leadership within the states who felt that all that money should be coming out to the states. And that led, I think, to some tough relationships with the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service at that time and, maybe brought around the thinking of getting more state involvement.

Steve Williams came in as a Director from Kansas. And I think that was something that the states were very supportive of. I worked well with Steve. Because my state background of working with all the states, helped in doing things that were very positive.

Worthington: Did the service provide you or the department provide you any particular training that helped you?

Melius: I'm not certain that there was a lot of that training available at the senior executive level.

Worthington: You never went through the SES training program per se, because you already met the criteria?

Melius: Yeah, I came in at SES level. Yeah, so I'm not one that has gone through all the various steps of the upper level and advanced training that we encourage service employees to do. I'm a little bit unique in that respect that I, with my background of where I worked and that the level I worked at got me in when they looked at my background and filled out the form, they said, yeah, you're SES.

Worthington: Very remarkable. So, you said when Dale Hall became the Director, he made some leadership changes with people around. Not unusual for a Service Director to do.

Melius: No, not unusual. And it was a real benefit for me because I wanted to, you know, I wanted to, get some Regional experience. And Alaska was an opportunity to work at that Regional Director level. I knew a lot of the people. The thing about Alaska was its ...you either go up and you love it, and you stay there.... or you go up and in a couple of years it's tough on you.

And I had been there a lot - before with Senator Stevens and with Congressman Young. And so I'd been to Alaska a dozen times going out and seen what Fish and Wildlife Service does in the state. I kind of knew a lot about it. But after about three years, Dale had an opportunity to make a couple of more changes. And, he said he was going to move Robyn Thorson, who was the Regional Director in Minneapolis, out to Portland. And would I be interested in coming down from Alaska to Region 3?

At that time, my wife was ready to come back. Winters were getting a little long and dark. So I said, sure. So we packed up in 2008 and drove down just before the snows started and have spent ten wonderful years here in the Minneapolis area, which ended up my career.

Worthington: When you were in Alaska, there were a couple of big issues there. Certainly some refuge issues, as there always are with refuges in Alaska, it just goes with the territory, maybe not the Arctic drilling at that point, but there were some other issues. What were some of the big issues you dealt with?

Melius: I would say the biggest issue was, again, back to Alaska being unique as it is, was the polar bears. At that time, there was a petition to list polar bears, and not a whole lot was understood about the effects of climate change at that time impacting on the wildlife. The USGS. Biologists were really good at modeling the effects of climate change on the polar bear's main

food source, which is ringed seals that only live on the ice.... that the change in the ice in Arctic Ocean was going to cause a crash and a continual decline of ringed seals.

And since polar bears were not able to forage as well on grass or other food sources, they were starting to notice that polar bears were losing weight, not having cubs as healthy as they normally do. And so the polar bear numbers were declining. And in projecting that out 20, 50 years and the ice diminishing, ringed seals disappearing, polar bears were going to be disappearing. Therefore a petition was submitted to list the polar bears as a potential threatened or endangered species.

I had never, in my other positions ever managed a rather large issue like that. And so Bryan Arroyo at that time was the head of the Endangered Species office. We got to know each other well, to make sure we understood all the science and the modeling, because at that time, we had President George Bush in the White House and the Endangered Species Act was probably not one of the biggest issues for the White House.

And Dale Hall had to basically move forward the idea that climate change was going to have an impact on this wildlife species, and they should be listed as threatened. And so that was – well it took a lot of finesse to get the White House to agree.

Secretary Dick Kempthorne, I remember him coming up to Alaska and flying around with him and talking to him as this whole issue started to percolate up to his level. And I remember going into the Secretary's office with the ES biologists and USGS biologists, there were about 20 of us up in his meeting room, and he wanted to understand this issue. And so they put together this, visual that looked at the ice pack in the Arctic and talked about the ringed seals and how they were the main food source for the polar bears.

And the polar bears are, you know, all over the Arctic up there eating ringed seals. And then they put the visual on for what's going to happen to the ice. And the ice was just diminishing, diminishing, diminishing. And they projected the polar bear numbers would also go down. And when they stopped the presentation, there was just kind of a silence in the room like, oh my God, visually, you can see what's going to happen if you believe the modeling and everything.

And, it was, I think, the one meeting that turned Kempthorne to say, yeah, we have to list it. And so they brought the President over like the next day. And I was not in that meeting, but they showed a little bit of that presentation video and everything. And they agreed to the listing.

Worthington: That was a time when the science of climate change was accepted by both parties.

Melius: Well, just starting to be accepted. And at that level, now there's still questions on some of it, but.

Worthington: So, the listing went forward for the polar bear and had the approval of the administration to go forward.

Melius: So that was a pretty interesting and challenging thing up in Alaska. And then one of the interesting, not quite at the same level, was moving down here as the Regional Director and working through our issue with monarch butterflies. I mean, another great example of impact of habitat loss and how you try to understand it all and then figure a way forward and build your coalition of state people and conservation groups and work it through.

And with my retirement I don't know what they were going to do. I don't know if they've made a final decision. I think they got an extension on it. But that was another really good opportunity to show leadership, to show a way to help employees come along. And I think that was that's another area in my career that I really enjoyed, and that is to mentor and coach and bring along younger employees, just like you have done to challenge them, because you can see that they will be the leadership and try to push them a little bit to take on some more responsibilities.

Worthington: Did you see a change in being a member of the Directorate from your time in headquarters, to Alaska, then in Minneapolis, the workings of the Directorate, did you notice any changes or how would you characterize how they worked together early on compared to when maybe a year and a half ago when you left?

Melius: Yeah, it was interesting. 20 years on the Directorate, I got to see a lot of different personalities and styles and how in my early years, there were several individuals I will not name, but they were pretty vocal. And their behavior in Directorate meetings was to basically drown out any other views or any other voices.

And it was interesting because I think after a while the Directors became a little bit more stronger, and said "no", everybody should have a voice. Just because you're loud doesn't mean you should persuade everyone else. So at one point, we went to a lot of final decision making, voting electronically on our computers just to make sure everybody had an opportunity to participate.

And then I think the last couple of years it became more cooperative. The Directorate worked more collegiately and worked together as a group. And I think the Director, Dan Ashe did quite a bit of this, he would listen to what the Directorate wants to do. Not what do I want to do - I work along with you 20 people. You guys and gals make your advice and recommendations, and we

work as a Board of Directors, not as I'm the, you know, the one voice. And you guys just carry it out.

So I thought over the 20 years, that was a little bit of a change in the style of how the Directorate worked and the Fish and Wildlife Service, from my view, I'm sure every year, every way was okay in that time. But I'm more of a person who enjoys working collectively and working things together. And so, I enjoyed the last ten years on the Directorate as better than the first ten years.

Worthington: When you were up in Anchorage as the Regional Director, I remember one refuge issue, and I don't remember the specifics of it. It was a compatibility issue. I think it may be hunting from a helicopter? And it got fairly political. And I think you had to make a decision.

Melius: Yeah. One of the things in Alaska, and it deals with the difference on how wildlife is managed between the Fish and Wildlife Service in the state of Alaska. The state of Alaska has in their constitution, language that talks about managing predators, wolves. And that if you keep the wolve population down, you have more moose, and moose is really a mainstay up there for a lot of subsistence users.

So gunning from airplanes to drive down those predators, whether they were on state land or federal land they were in Alaska. And so Fish and Wildlife Service pretty much said, well, no, we have to have a little bit more of a management for diversity. And we don't support helicopters coming in and gunning wolves when they're on Fish and Wildlife Service lands.

That was a pretty hard position to take since it had been allowed before or maybe not allowed. It was never really challenged. And so not only were the state people a little upset with us, but the public wasn't all that favorable of our position either, because they wanted to be able to have food, you know, in those communities. Moose and salmon provide subsistence food for many of them throughout the year.

And if we don't have good moose or caribou populations because the wolves are driving them down, where do we get our alternative food? So it was kind of a tough sell. I think the Fish and Wildlife people understood it, but it was hard for others to understand that. Why when that wolf crosses this river and now is on federal lands that we still can't harvest or shoot? It's interesting.

Worthington: Did that put a strain on your relationship with Don young and or his staff?

Melius: It did. Yeah.

And at that time, Senator Murkowski, Senator Lisa Murkowski's father, who was also a Senator when I worked in the Senate. I remember briefing him a couple of times. He was then the

Governor of Alaska. And so I was called down to Juneau twice to visit with the Governor. Explain our position. Which didn't go over very well.

Worthington: It must have been hard.

Melius: It was, but you had to deliver it. And do it respectfully. And they didn't agree with it, but they knew that's what our position was.

Worthington: You got to see some incredible places up in Alaska throughout your career. Do you remember any particular trips or experiences?

Melius: Oh, yeah.

Again, it goes back with the polar bears going up to Barrow with the USGS scientists. We went out in a helicopter darting polar bears out on the ice of the Arctic, and we're up probably 70 miles out, and temperature was maybe 30 below zero. We had darted the bear and, set the helicopter down as the bear fell down and started doing our work and shut the helicopter off. And we worked with the bear for about an hour. And then I'm just thinking, you know, my gosh once we put the tranquilizer antidote into the bear - I'm just hoping that helicopter will start!

And then the second thing, just how quiet it is out in the Arctic. Out on the ice. You hear the ice cracking, but there's just no noise anywhere. And it just made an impression on me from a South Dakota farm kid out there in the middle of the Arctic Ocean in the wintertime, 30 below, with a big old polar bear lying next to you.

Worthington: You have come a long way. And the helicopter started.

Melius: Yeah. The helicopter started. I wanted to make sure if it didn't, I was going to get in it once that bear woke up!

Worthington: Marvelous, marvelous. And were you hoping to get an appointment to Minneapolis?

Melius: Yeah, I again, with my Midwest background, I had always, I can say it now, probably thought the Midwest region was probably the best region in the Fish Wildlife Service. And so it took me a while as my background went from South Dakota to Pennsylvania to Virginia, all the way to Alaska to come back to Minneapolis, it took me 30 years.

But I always wanted to kind of get back to the Midwest. Very pleased that the last ten years here was so enjoyable.

Worthington: So, you came to Minneapolis. You followed Robin Thorsen, a very well-liked regional director here. Very pleasant person. Did you have any trouble getting adjusted to the staff here at all to begin with?

Melius: No. And one of the things we were talking earlier, I was very fortunate, when I was on Merchant Marine Fisheries committee, in the House of Representatives, one of the things that we offered to the Fish and Wildlife Service is details for Fish and Wildlife Service people to come on up and spend probably three months learning about how the legislative process works. I think that was a part of their advanced leadership program at that time.

Anyway, the first person I had up, that worked directly with me was Rick Lemon. And that came off very well and the second person that came up was Charlie Wooley. And so Charlie and I got to know each other, you know, 30 years ago. And so when I got appointed as the Regional Director here in Minneapolis, knowing that Charlie Wooley was going to be my Deputy, who was the deputy under Robyn, I just said, man, that's going to be a great Team, because he's got such a great personality, and we worked well together.

And so, the ten years that I was the Regional Director here in Region 3, I thought I was so fortunate to have a strong, strong regional leadership group, and a strong administrative assistant, both with Pat Jelinek and Connie Conner, to help in keeping stuff moving, because regional directors and deputy regional directors are traveling a lot and on the road a lot. And you need to have somebody who has that continuity to keep the office working.

And so we've been, I've been very fortunate in both the administrative help as well as the deputy positions to have strong people to, to make my job so much easier.

Worthington: You came here in 2008 an election year, and we had a change of administration.

Melius: Yes, we did have a new Democratic administration from the Republican administration. New Secretary with new initiatives. Secretaries come with initiatives and ask the agencies to implement and, and Sam Hamilton was our first Director under Secretary Ken Salazar.

Worthington: And you were certainly good friends with Sam.

Melius: Yes, I knew Sam. He came up through the ranks of the Fish Wildlife Service and was somewhat of a newcomer onto the Directorate. And so we hit it off. Well, we had similar dry senses of humor and enjoyed each other's company a lot.

Worthington: You were with him that weekend that he passed.

Melius: Yes. It was after a Directorate meeting that was held out in Denver. Sam and I, Cindy Donner and Dan Ashe decided to stay another couple of days and ski.

So we did, and we stayed at a place and had a great first day of skiing. And I had skied that area before and I said, well, let's go to this other area and ski these slopes. So we started out in the morning, and I would say after about our second, third run of the morning and all four of us are there, five of us were skiing together and Sam just stopped and we kind of waited for him and he said, I just can't catch my breath, my chest is hurting. And so we said, well, let's just stop. And next thing we knew, he just fell over and in the middle of the, you know, ski slope. So Dan and Cindy stayed with Sam. I skied probably the fastest I had ever skied, down the slope to get to the bottom to the call box and call the ski patrol. And then I had to ride the lift back up.

And by the time I got back down there, they had four guys with snow machines down there, and they are working on him giving him CPR. And then we all went down to the bottom to the hospital and passed soon thereafter.. Yeah, that was tough, tough way to be there. You never know when your time is coming.

And we just had the night before, just a great evening dinner and reminiscing of things that we had all done on the Directorate and. But you move on.

Worthington: Yeah, absolutely. Sorry to bring that memory up. I just recall that was something that happened. Everyone loved Sam.

Melius: And I have a picture up there on my wall that had Dan, Cindy, Sam and myself, all lined up skiing the day before.

Worthington: So, Ken Salazar was the secretary. He had one of his initiatives. I'm trying to remember it had a couple of different names, but, it was to establish new refuges, I think to create a new conservation legacy. And. That each region was asked to come up with a couple of ideas for some new refuge plans. Do you remember how that was implemented or how that came to be?

Melius: I just think there was an effort to try to identify some of the best wildlife lands that needed protection where we had good relationships with the local communities and landowners and conservation groups that would support the creation of new refuges. And you had to kind of, in this region and in some other regions, go slow. As you know that sometimes if you go too hard, you come off too heavy handed and then that sets you back a long way.

I think a good example here in this Midwest region is through our private lands program and working through easements, how our wetland districts continue to grow, as another way of growing the refuge system without the large sign going in the ground that this is, you know, a National Wildlife Refuge. I think our WPA programs are strong, I see those wetland signs that I think they really provide a lot of great conservation.

Worthington: The days of establishing a refuge quickly and without a lot of public input or long gone, and in this region there's a lot of public interest in what the federal government does.

Melius: Right. And so we moved slow, compared to maybe some other regions. Did we ever get the money from the Butts Estate?

Worthington: Yes. Actually, I should send you a photo of the check.

Melius: Yes. Oh, I remember kidding you quite a bit about that project.

Worthington: Oh, yeah. No, it took a long time, but we did get it done! The Service now has close to \$4 million in the bank, the Treasury account dedicated for fish and wildlife conservation in the Kankakee area.

Melius: Hopefully the next leadership will spend it well, but that's another way to kind of slowly chip away and complete some of these areas.

Worthington: Yeah. So, let's talk about the monarch butterfly a little bit. How did you first think about the monarch butterfly as a species of interest, and something that the Service should focus its attention on. Do you remember how that happened?

Melius: It was probably just from the early petition that we received. And then kind of trying to understand it. You know, I never thought monarchs were in trouble. Growing up as a kid, everybody, you know, knew about them and you could see them, but then you kind of wondering about the way we're managing a lot of our lands, that we are applying a lot of herbicides and insecticides, and you kind of wonder what impact is it really having? And then some conservation groups were able to really document that the population was just continually going down. And it's unique in that this species migrates a great distance and they all congregate in a certain area down in Mexico, but yet they come up and they spread throughout the United States and the southern part of Canada. And you kind of wonder, wow, that's quite a story.

And, it's a way to really unite not only a lot of the public, but conservation groups, state groups, because I think they figured out right away that any benefit for habitat for the monarch butterfly

or any pollinator really would be good habitat for other species that they maybe had an interest in, whether it was upland birds or any type of animal that likes that type of grassy forb habitat.

So it was a pretty easy sell. And then it was more or less just kind of coordinating, these various interests together. And then they had the monarch joint venture, which was something started here in the Midwest area to kind of help focus conservation groups and personal interest groups to do good things for monarchs. So it was just more or less putting pieces together, building a coalition and then having Senator Klobuchar interest, and other members to understand it.

And it kind of just grew in that support.

Worthington: So, it was my impression that early on we had this ‘surrogate species’ kind of approach for a year or two. The Service focused on a handful of species that could represent conditions of many, many other species. And certainly the monarch was one of those, but that didn't seem like it was an initiative that was really finding footing in the agency. But then I can recall distinctly you invited over from the University of Minnesota entomologist Karen Oberhauser.

She gave a presentation about the status of the monarch butterfly and the factors affecting it. And that seemed to be a real pivot point in the way staff viewed monarch butterflies here in the regional office. And maybe in your eyes as well.

Melius: We'd never really worked with just butterflies. Hunting and fishing and bigger land. Yeah, that was kind of the vision people had in their minds. And now all of a sudden we're pushing butterflies? So it took a while for, people to really understand that. Okay, so we're working for butterflies, but all the additional benefits that that habitat effort brings and we're not saying it, but it's doing that. And people started understanding.

And that whole monarch initiative I thought was really good to help other individuals, other biologists, other employees get a foothold in kind of what they want to be doing, because I think they picked up on it. We had Ryan Drum, who was, you know, an up and coming biological person in his understanding of modeling and data. And Anne Marie Krmpotich was a person who was coming along early in her career to understand how to work with coalitions, how to work with people.

And so I think it was another good way of having an opportunity where employees could start being challenged and developed in their own careers. And as you know, there'll be maybe 20 different species or initiatives that come along, and some of those provide some great opportunities for people to be challenged and help in developing their careers.

Worthington: It seemed to me, Tom, you recognize the public attraction to the monarch and how it was going to resonate way beyond a traditional conservation constituency. And that certainly came true.

Melius: Right. Everyone loves monarchs. And there was very little downside.

Worthington: And it seemed to us that you were kind of the lead voice in the agency for getting the Fish and Wildlife Service serious about doing conservation work for the monarch. And we had the endangered species consequence out there. The listing would be a consequence if nothing was done. How did you convince the rest of the Directorate and Dan Ash that this was something to really focus on?

Melius: I think it took a little bit of an effort – first we were just talking about it internally here in this regional office, some people were a little hesitant to drink the water, so to speak, for monarch conservation. The Director was thinking, well, is this really something that the public throughout the United States is going to want to support? But as soon as we got some other state agencies to start recognizing it, putting on seminars at annual meetings, having a budget push towards it, the idea became a little bit more acceptable and understandable.

And then when the science kept showing a continual downward trend, Dan Ash asked me to be that point person. And I was able to explain it and get everybody's support.

So I don't know, once those numbers – if they do- come back up, whether or not there's going to be continued support, I think as an agency we will go on to other issues, other emergencies, whatever it is. But this, I hope, is going to be a good success story, like, wood ducks and everything else that the agency has been able to point out as being very helpful for because they protected habitat.

Worthington: Yeah. A real success story, it seems, in the making.

Melius: I hope they can keep it that way. But as our habitat continues to be degraded and lost, and you wonder whether or not a population such as monarchs can continue in that unique migration of everybody, you know, sitting on a hillside in Mexico, what's going to happen if that gets all burnt down or diseased and, you know, whatever?

Worthington: As the Region 3 Regional Director for ten years, you've had many different assistant directors - ARDs come and go. And we certainly saw budget challenges in the region. And a couple of shutdowns. Can you talk about how you manage through the shutdowns that we experienced, what your approach was to that.

Melius: The biggest thing - both Charlie and I talked about - was show unity, show our understanding, project a lot of empathy and keep the morale up because it's tough. Working as all the employees do in the Fish and Wildlife Service doing their job, and all of a sudden they're told we're not going to pay you anymore. You know, shut the doors and you kind of feel unnecessary.

But why would they do that to us? And having worked in Washington, worked in Congress, knowing how all of that is more political than really a slap or a reflection of poor quality. If you've never worked in that environment, it's just hard to understand why they're doing it. So Charlie and I, having that experience of working in Washington, working with the leadership, we kind of knew that that was our biggest challenge was just to keep morale up, to keep the doors open and lights on and, and show as much empathy and as we could to the employees who really couldn't understand it.

And hopefully they won't have to go through that anymore. They just got another budget that was signed, so that should take them for a while.

Worthington: Speaking of morale challenges, you also managed an office move from the Fort Snelling Federal Building to this location in Bloomington, maybe five miles to the west. A more difficult drive for many people. And you were one that has probably the worst impact. Can you talk about this? I mean, it seemed like a small thing, but there are 100, 120 people affected, and no one likes to change their office.

Melius: No, they don't. Office space is a tough thing. We were outgrowing it - outgrowing that office. And then when the issue came up that GSA wanted to renovate the whole building and that we were not going to be their number one Federal client coming back. Homeland Security needed more space, and ICE needed space. And there just wasn't enough space left in that building for FWS.

And so once that sunk in, we had to think about where we can go with the least disruption of the 120, 150 employees, whatever it was at that time. And so then we looked at where people lived, I had basically all the zip codes and addresses plotted on a map, and we could see that about 75% of our workforce was living in the South metro area, as opposed to north or out west farther.

And so that's where we said, okay, let's put out a bid within this type of a circle to keep the most of our people unchanging in their commutes. And so I think it was a good move for the majority of people. Some people probably had a tough time changing their driving and their commuting, but then just changing to a new office because this was an office set up a little bit different than a lot of other regional offices.

It tried to bring in a lot of the natural lighting. It tried to, as a lot of offices are doing, to make offices a little bit more uniform as opposed to everybody having their own little individual styles. And another thing, it was basically regarded as a forced move. So we were able to financially, receive several million dollars from GSA to help in the move. Otherwise, it would have been a very expensive move for the agency and probably more for this region.

So we were able to benefit, I think, from that move and hopefully, well, I don't know if this new regional configuration now is going to make a shift of offices or not, but I'm hoping people will be able to stay here and work out of this office. People buy their homes now. And you know where this regional office is located.

Worthington: Two other areas I want to talk about. Can you discuss your interest in youth and the out of doors? It seemed apparent when you first got here that you were very interested in making sure all of our offices involved youth in some way or another. Had programs, and you made personal visits and encouraged that.

And then at the end of your regional directorship, we are doing this, three Rs: recruitment retention and reactivation for hunting and fishing.

Your career has come full circle a little bit from hunter education, back to hunter education. So talk about your interest in youth and getting people involved in the outdoors.

Melius: Well, I just think it's probably an area that we should have been emphasizing all along. Again, going back with my background growing up on a farm, having those opportunities, I think some people now aren't provided those opportunities as we just had available to us all the time. And so I think we have to work out a little bit more of providing those opportunities. And with the lands we have and the people we have.

I just think it's a real easy sell to try to get kids out in the outdoors. I mean, what a great example the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center is up at Fergus Falls - seeing all those school kids out every day, tromping around in the wetlands, collecting stuff and learning about the outdoors as well as their education. One of the things I enjoyed the ten years working here was, as you mentioned, going out to our field offices and there is such dedication by those employees, and sometimes it just takes a little bit of a nudge to, you know, why don't you invite this group in and show them what you have and maybe set up some sort of a program where you have a youth hunting program or, or a disabled hunting program, but try to get more of the public aware of what you have, because some people don't fully understand what goes on behind those blue goose signs.

And so just a little encouragement, brought about, I think, more acceptance both by the community as well as maybe starting some people out into a career of fish and wildlife. And so I

always enjoyed that. Another thing, just a little bit off subject, but it's going out to those field offices. I always try to stop and spend some time talking to the maintenance people, the people who never really get thanked enough, but they're out there working hard every day, keeping the equipment running, roads open, the water control functioning and the administrative people.

I always tried to make sure I stopped and just listen, talk to them, because a lot of times you go out and, you know, they get you in the pickup and they want to show you the habitat and the critters. And I'm thinking, yeah, but we have, you know, a handful of people that are back there. Kind of behind the scenes, and I always tried to stop and look at the shop, talk to the people, tried to always show that I had, you know, my background of growing up on a farm where I can drive tractors and weld and do things, and they always, I think, enjoyed that.

A Regional Director should spend some time talking to them or listening to the admin people complain about stuff going on in the regional office, right?

Charlie, the new acting Regional Director here, Charlie Wooley continues on with that because I think he sees also the importance of having the visibility. You can't just successfully run a region by sitting in an office here, as you well know, with all the field offices that this region has.

Worthington: A that leads to employee attitudes towards work – could you maybe talk a little bit about the employee attitude surveys that OPM collects every year?

Melius: I was pleased again; there's always a little bit of a competition between the regions. And when you're at a directorate meeting and the Director is talking about the results of these surveys, I always wanted to have Region 3 be high in the list and not last on the list. And I think when I left, we had Region 3 up there as the number one region with the attitudes that came from the employees. And I think that was instilled both by the Regional Director, the Deputy and all the Assistant Regional Directors to get out and really work well, respectfully and professionally with our people.

And that came back in a strong survey of employee work satisfaction.

Worthington: Is there anything, Tom, we haven't talked about that you have on your list that you'd like to discuss?

Melius: One thing, I was just looking at some notes here. One of the things I mentioned about people in my career.

The last ten years, I was very pleased to have Charlie Wooley as my deputy. When I was in Washington, I had a number of deputies, Paul Schmidt was a pretty strong Deputy in our

Migratory Birds and State programs. Gary Edwards, a strong deputy when I was up in Alaska. And two people that I probably looked at as more mentors to me when I was early on in my career were two deputies of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The first was John Rogers. John was the type who would come into the office and just ask how are you doing? You know, very socially. And I really respected that he would spend time - with all the issues going on with the director's office and the secretary's office - that he would spend time with all the various ADs and just making sure everything's going along well. And he helped me immensely in my career within the administration the first couple of years, because I came in from the outside, so he wanted to make sure that I was doing the right things. Understanding personnel issues, things like that.

And the other one was Marshall Jones. I knew Marshall when I was working up on the Hill and then working at the Fish Wildlife Foundation and then working with him when he was head of International Affairs. But then as he became the Deputy, the relationship developed very strongly because he, again, was a very diplomatic person.

His parents were diplomats, and he knew how to handle issues. And since he had worked on that world stage, and I had worked in Congress, we had a sharing of how to work in committees and how to move ideas forward and establishing coalitions. And so John Rogers and Marshall Jones were two people that I would say really benefited my early development. I really enjoyed just to be able to bounce things off them and listen to them; they were well known; I think personalities within the Fish and Wildlife Service. I wanted to be sure to mention how important they were to me.

Worthington: Absolutely. Yeah. Two great characters, for sure, gentlemen and well respected. Anything else?

Melius: Not really. My career has been one where I've been very fortunate. I have strong family support, a beautiful, lovely supporting wife, two great kids. And now a couple of grandkids. And I've been blessed to be in the right spot at the right time in my career, as I've mentioned, to have opportunities, doors open, and I've always been one to, you know, I don't like to be just too comfortable.

I always like to have a little bit of a challenge or something new, something pushing me a little bit. And throughout my career I've had those opportunities and the ten years working here, I've tried to provide those opportunities to other individuals. Also, I always try to push people to go into leadership development, just to get a different exposure, so that when I leave and as you know, when you've left there are very capable people that take over and keep the agency running.

And it brought enjoyment into my career.

Worthington: So right now, you spend your time with family, you get to ski, you get to be outside, you get to spend time with your grandchildren.

Melius: Outdoor skiing yesterday and we still have about ten inches of snow up in the Fergus Falls area. And I just love that outdoors.

Worthington: Thank you very much for doing this interview.