



The Oral History of Jim Ruwaldt
October 12, 2021

Interview conducted by Tom Worthington
Lodi, Wisconsin (by telephone)

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Jim Ruwaldt

Date of Interview: October 12, 2021

Location of Interview: Lodi, Wisconsin

Interviewer: Tom Worthington

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:

32 years with FWS, 12 years NRCS

Offices and Field Stations Worked

Pierre Ecological Services Field Station (SD)

Bloomington Ecological Services Field Station (IN)

Wisconsin State Private Lands Office, Madison (WI)

Most Important Projects:

State Coordinator, Wisconsin Private Lands Program

CRP wetlands restoration, Indiana

Duffey Marsh Restoration

Colleagues and Mentors:

Dave Hudak, Greg Brown, Dan Stinnet, Nita Fuller, Art Kitchen

Brief Summary of Interview:

Jim worked in the Pierre Ecological Services Field Station in the late 1980s, and began to work implementing the 1985 Farm Bill, coordinating with the Soil Conservation Service on CRP and wetland restoration projects. He transferred to the Bloomington, Indiana ESFO and was given broad latitude from his supervisor, Dave Hudak, to work with private landowners and conservation groups to accelerate wetland restorations on private lands. He worked extensively in Indiana to help landowners take advantage of wetland restoration opportunities. In 1996 he became the State Coordinator for the Partners program in Madison, Wisconsin where he expanded the Partners program support to landowners throughout Wisconsin. He helped coordinate large wetland restoration and protection projects, such as Duffy's Marsh, and worked with landowners to enhance grassland habitats for the endangered Karner Blue Butterfly. Jim retired from the FWS in 2009.

The Interview:

WORTHINGTON: Okay, I've started the recording and today is October 12th, 2021. I am Tom Worthington and with me today is Jim Ruwaldt. Good morning, Jim. I'm in Saint Louis Park, Minnesota. Jim, where are you right now?

RUWALDT: I'm in Lodi, Wisconsin. Lodi, Wisconsin.

WORTHINGTON: And Jim, you know that this interview is being recorded and a transcript will be made available to you at some point in the future, probably in the next six months, I would guess.

RUWALDT: Yes. Yes, I know that.

WORTHINGTON: Starting off, I have a set of questions about the Partners for Wildlife Program. Jim, what was your first job with the partners program? Where was it and what year was it?

RUWALDT: Well, it's a little hard to actually pinpoint that, I guess. You know, I started doing work that turned out to be partners work prior to the partners program being started. So if you want to go with that date, that would have been about 1986 when I was working in the Pierre Ecological Services Field office in South Dakota.

And our supervisor at that time, he was looking at things, and the Conservation Reserve program was being talked about. I'm not even quite sure when it actually passed. It may have passed; I think it was the 85 farm bill. So whenever it was implemented, it was in that time period. And so the field supervisor told me, he says, you know, we need to take advantage of this, the opportunities here with this farm bill. And, you know, I want you to start working on some things. And so I didn't do any wetland restoration work or anything like that, but started coordinating with the Soil Conservation Service, which is what they were then.

And, you know, that kind of was my first exposure to partners type work. Then I transferred to the Bloomington, Indiana field office, Ecological Services Field Office, and I believe that was late 1987.

And Tom, you maybe can tell me... I know we celebrated our 20th anniversary of the partners program, and that was probably about 2008. So I'm thinking 88 was the official start. And so in 88, yeah, that summer of 88, when I was in Bloomington, I was a staff biologist there at the field office. Dave Hudak was the field supervisor. And so he wanted us to jump into this with both feet. And so we started in probably the winter of 88, or late fall of 87 maybe.

And there was a big conservation reserve sign-up [CRP] that had taken place already.

And the northern part of Indiana, particularly the northeastern counties. they had a big CRP sign-up. That was an area that was very much like prairie pothole country. And so we decided, well, let's make some contacts, you know, we'll send some letters out to these CRP landowners and see if they'd be interested in having wetlands restored on their property. And so I think we sent out, I don't know, 1000 or 2000 letters.

We sent out a lot and we got roughly 200 responses back from those mailings, just those blind mailings. And so we started making contacts. I had one other fellow in the office that would work with me, and he and I started making landowner contacts. And sure enough, a lot of them had really nice, drained wetland basins that they were willing to restore through the partners program. And so we got a crew of refuge folks with heavy equipment operators and so on over there. That summer of 88, I remember it well because that was a deadly hot summer, and we worked all summer long. We did about 200 wetland restorations that that summer. And so that's how it started with me.

WORTHINGTON: So Dave Hudak seemed kind of an unusual field supervisor in that regard, that he was interested in getting involved with private lands work right away. Is that true?

RUWALDT: Oh yeah. Yeah, he really was. I mean, he was a real hands-on guy. And yeah, it just was a perfect fit for him and me and, you know, the other fellow that I worked with. But yeah, he really supported the program.

WORTHINGTON: Did the refuge staff from Muscatatuck Refuge help you on these projects?

RUWALDT: I think it was mostly the Minnesota people and maybe Illinois. I know it was not Muscatatuck. Yeah. And I didn't know any of them. But they were detailed over for a month or two, you know, and I think we had a couple of shifts of them. But we did all that work that year with refuge staff. We didn't have any contractors, you know, which we did in later years, we used private contractors.

WORTHINGTON: Did you do your own engineering on those projects, that setting elevations?

RUWALDT: Yes. We did all that ourselves.

WORTHINGTON: And the funding I presume to pay for that must have come out of refuges or did they set aside some of ES budget for that?

RUWALDT: Yeah, that was probably a combination of things. You know, I wasn't really into the funding part of it at that time. And because we were using refuge people, you know, we weren't paying contractors, of course we had to buy materials and so on. So we had to use, you know, there were purchases and so on involved. But paying the refuge staff, I think that probably just came right out of those refuges' budgets for their time, you know, and equipment.

WORTHINGTON: What was the response like from the landowners when you finished a job?

RUWALDT: They were all real happy.

For the most part. I mean, actually I can't think of anybody that was disappointed. Yeah, they were really supportive of it. And, you know this is land that had been farmed up until the CRP program. So it wasn't idle land. Some of the sites may have had some water issues, for sure, but once they got into CRP, they were all real happy to get to restore the wetlands.

WORTHINGTON: So what was this the main focus of your work at the Bloomington office that year or did you have other more typical ES duties?

RUWALDT: No, I didn't really have any other duties though. I had, you know, a little bit of report writing for a few things, but not much. I was pretty much 100% partners program, you know, the first few years it

was all wetland restoration and then we kind of branched out into some other, you know, stream corridor work and some prairie restoration and things like that.

WORTHINGTON: Was there a state coordinator at that time for the partners program?

RUWALDT: Well, I think Dave might have been considered the state coordinator. I'm not sure if that was official. You know, it was just probably a part of his job duties.

WORTHINGTON: And were you aware of, you know, the Regional office leadership in partners?

RUWALDT: Yeah, you bet. Yeah. You know, Dick Tolzman [Regional Office Refuge Supervisor] came out. Actually, I think he was a little bit concerned about what we were doing and that we weren't really prairie pothole country per se. And he had a little bit of a narrow concern on his part, I think. And this was probably in the second year or so because we had a lot of wetlands on the ground at that time. And I kept hearing these rumblings from the regional office, primarily from Dick, that like, I don't know if these guys are really doing what they should be doing or that kind of thing. So anyway, he said, 'Hey, Jim, send me a map with a bunch of wetlands on it where you guys restored ... I'm going to be driving through there'.

And so he did, and he just came on his own. I think he was on a vacation or something, and that was the end of that. I think Dick was really happy after he saw the restored wetlands. We had a lot of good communication with the with the regional office folks from then on.

WORTHINGTON: So. Okay, that's great. What other private lands work evolved at the Bloomington office in Indiana?

RUWALDT: Well, we did a lot of coordination with the Farmers Home Administration under debt restructuring properties you know, their inventory properties. I don't know how many of those we looked at and quite a few easements, you know, are established on those properties. Swamp Buster was not a big deal for us as I know it was in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and the Dakotas, but for us it wasn't so much. We responded, of course, whenever there were reviews needed and all that kind of thing. So we did quite a few of those with SCS [Soil Conservation Service], but we didn't do much proactive work with Swamp Buster.

The CRP work was pretty much handled, of course, by SCS. And then we followed that up with contacts for wetland restoration. So that was the primary, you know, focus of our work.

WORTHINGTON: How many years were you in Bloomington?

RUWALDT: So I left there in 1996, yeah. Okay. So about 10 years I worked in Indiana.

WORTHINGTON: You were there for the Garfield [comic strip] business?

RUWALDT: Yeah. The Garfield PSA.

WORTHINGTON: Can you describe that whole program? Or maybe it's been written up somewhere, but whose idea? How were the contacts made?

RUWALDT: Well, I don't know. I mean, there's been little articles written about it. I don't know if there's ever been anything, you know, in any kind of detail.

Jim Davis [the comic strip creator of Garfield the cat comic had contacted us about doing some work on his land, wetland restoration work, and I'm sure he probably had it in CRP, but I don't remember for sure. And so, we did that, and we got, of course, got to know him. And then Dave Hudak, you know, said we got to take advantage of this opportunity here with, you know, Jim Davis and Garfield and so on. And so he made some overtures to them like, hey, would you be interested in doing something through the comic strip or through Garfield to support wetland restoration? And sure enough, he says, yes! So then we did the video [30 second television PSA video] and that was a lot of fun.

WORTHINGTON: Who wrote the video or the script for it, do you remember?

RUWALDT: I don't recall. I think it was probably a kind of a mutual effort among everybody, you know? We probably gave ideas. They probably came back with their, you know, artistic creativity kind of slant to. It was that kind of thing.

WORTHINGTON: Did you have to get External Affairs involved or did you guys just do it?

RUWALDT: Well, I think we just probably did it and let them know, you know, I don't recall them being actively involved. Dave would be the one to know more about this. I think as far as the background of that, how that all came together.

WORTHINGTON: So during your time there in the Bloomington office, did your role evolve in the Partners program? You started as a staff biologist taking on partner duties, right? What was it like for you at the end of your time in Bloomington?

RUWALDT: Well, I talked Dave into promoting me and, you know, I essentially was the state coordinator. I don't know if that was ever officially decided or not, but that's essentially how I ended up. I was the official supervisor of the staff that worked on the partners program. We had one permanent person and a few temporaries, you know, every year usually. And so I was the official supervisor of them. So that changed from when I first was working there when Dave supervised me and so on.

WORTHINGTON: Were you a GS 11 biologist there?

RUWALDT: Yes, I was GS 11, and I was promoted to a 12.

WORTHINGTON: And who was working with you on partners project, in 1996?

RUWALDT: Forrest Clark was the primary assistant and we did most of the work. Then we had, like I said, just a whole host of temporaries and things like that over the years.

WORTHINGTON: But you reported to Dave Hudak. You didn't report to the regional office separately at that point, correct?

RUWALDT: Yeah, yeah.

WORTHINGTON: What prompted you to look for another job and leave that wonderful place of Bloomington, Indiana?

RUWALDT: Well, I had always liked Wisconsin. That was I guess one of the main reasons why I wanted to, you know, leave Bloomington. And so when Eldon McClaurry [Wisconsin Partners Coordinator]

retired, that opened up the state coordinator job there, which would have been, you know, that was a promotion, that was a GS 13 position and so on. So that's why I applied for that for the job then. And, you know, I didn't get it right away, but then a few months later I did get it.

I just, you know, I really wanted to work in this state. I knew we had a really good Service group up here with more staff and more opportunities to do partners kinds of work.

WORTHINGTON: So that would have been 1996?

RUWALDT: Yeah.

WORTHINGTON: And did you report to the Twin Cities Regional Office, to the Refuge supervisor or to the Partners Coordinator?

RUWALDT: I'm kind of foggy on that, Tom, because I'll tell you, I think I had five supervisors here in Wisconsin, and they varied from people like, oh, gosh, Nita Fuller was my supervisor for a while. Um, you know, and Dan Stinnett, of course. Then he was the partners coordinator. And then Greg Brown was the partner of the regional coordinator and. Yeah. Oh jeez, maybe Jim Leach was my supervisor for a while.

WORTHINGTON: So where was your office? In Madison.

RUWALDT: Well, we started out kind of on the west side of Madison, just in a private office building. And then shortly after I got here, our lease was up and we changed our location over to the east side, and we're able to get some more fieldwork friendly property where we had, where we could keep our equipment and things like that before we were just in a small office building.

WORTHINGTON: And how many staff did you have?

RUWALDT: We had six, I believe, in total. You know, we count the temporaries and that kind of thing, and a secretary.

WORTHINGTON: So do you remember any of the names of the initial staff when you when you were the supervisor there?

RUWALDT: Well, Art Kitchen was one of the primary ones. Kurt Waterstradt who is now the state coordinator. Also, Vicky Ford was our admin person. Well, then there was also a couple of law enforcement people that are associated with us, so I guess I threw those six in with them. They weren't actually partners. Staff. And then Mike Engel. I hired Mike. He's still there.

Those are the primary people.

WORTHINGTON: And how many years did you work in Madison before you retired?

RUWALDT: I retired in 2009.

WORTHINGTON: So another ten years?

RUWALDT: Yeah, Another ten. Yeah. Okay. I think it was 1996 when I left Bloomington, so it was more like probably 13 years in Madison.

WORTHINGTON: How would you describe maybe the top 2 or 3 projects or programs that you administered there in Partners?

RUWALDT: Well, it was you know, of course, we were coordinating the program statewide at that time. We did it in Bloomington also, but it was mainly because we were the only, really the only field office in Indiana. But here we had, you know, a number of different offices that we coordinated work through. So we coordinated that, and the primary focus was on wetland restoration. And really it continued that way throughout the time I was the state coordinator.

Later we did more, a lot more grassland work and we hired when we hired Mike Engle, he was primarily hired to do endangered species work. So he worked with the field stations to do endangered species work also. We did a lot of that. We did a lot of that debt restructuring too, with the inventory farms. That was, that was a pretty big part of our workload for a while.

WORTHINGTON: How did you prioritize the wetland restoration projects? Do you remember? Was it just a first come, first serve, or did you have to make selections on where you'd spend your time?

RUWALDT: Yeah, we didn't have any formal way of doing that. We like I left that up to the biologist to do it. They were given a budget and, you know, had to work within that budget. So I think would prioritize sites based on the funding available. So they would go at the highest quality sites. And you know, and the and the best cost benefit kind of a thing also.

But we didn't have a system. We didn't have any kind of formula or anything like that. I didn't review their projects, although in the projects coming out of Madison, I mean, I was involved with a lot of those directly, but the other ones were up to the field biologist to, to decide which ones to do and which ones to pass on.

WORTHINGTON: You've talked about some of the endangered species cooperative programs. Were those the Karner Blue Butterfly projects or?

RUWALDT:: Right. It was Karner Blue Butterfly.

WORTHINGTON: The oversight that you got from the regional office. How did it change over time? Maybe from the Bloomington office experience to Madison? Were you getting more and more direction from the regional office or did you feel like you were you could operate independently and just touch base? What was your experience?

RUWALDT: Well, you know, the day to day work kind of thing. I don't think that really changed at all from Bloomington. We always worked independently there, and I felt like we did here, you know as well where we got into more coordination with the regional office, I think was with personnel and planning, regional planning and things like that, that which we really didn't do much of that in Bloomington. Of course, Dave would have handled the personnel the first few years and then I handled it after that for a few years.

But you know, that was one of the really nice things about the job. I thought the regional staff and whether it was, you know, when I was being supervised by people like Nita Fuller and later on when it was, you know, a regional coordinator like Greg Brown or Dan Stinnett, they really let us do our thing. And that was nice because I think they recognized that we, you know, we had a better feel for what was going out on out here at the field level.

WORTHINGTON: Do you remember having discussions or competing for budgets with the other state coordinators?

RUWALDT: I would say no. I was not involved with any kind of competition for funding. You know, but there were a lot of times where when we needed money, where we had projects that, we needed funding, we would go directly to Greg Brown or Dan or whoever, Jim Leach, you know, and tell them we're getting short of money here. We got some really good stuff coming up. We got a good partnership developing with DU or with Wisconsin Waterfowl Association or something like that. They were always there, you know, we generally were able to get some help. So I always kept that in the back of my mind, you know, like, okay, here's the initial budget, but if we get some stuff going here, I think will some support from the regional office and we usually did.

WORTHINGTON: Did you have support from the State, your state partners, the DNR or the state agriculture people? How would you describe the state coordination?

RUWALDT: The DNR and I don't know if you talk to Eldon or if you have talked to Eldon, they had a really a rough go of it early on with the partners program here with the state. The state really wanted the program and there was a lot of animosity from the state. But by the time I got here things had settled down. And, I wouldn't say they weren't supportive. There's no doubt about that. But we didn't do a lot of things together in the field. You know, initially, we did later on. So it was sort of that transition period early on where they were sort of not pushing a lot of support, but eventually we did get on just fine.

WORTHINGTON: I remember that at one point Wisconsin DNR managed the Waterfowl Production Areas in Wisconsin, at least the few that we had in Wisconsin, and then that shifted back to us, and I and I wasn't really involved in those decisions at the time, but I gathered there was there was a bit of a rub somewhere.

RUWALDT: I think that's probably right. And I know Eldon, you know, that's what he was doing there, I believe, prior to being the partners coordinator. And so, yeah that may have filtered over into the partners program.

WORTHINGTON: But the relationship you had with, say, the NRCS or the Soil Conservation Service was it mostly positive?

RUWALDT: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. The State conservationist, Pat, Leavenworth was real, real supportive. And even with things like Swamp Buster, where there could have been some controversy, we didn't have much with that at all. Once WRP came around, then, you know, they were doing their own wetland restoration and that's where we started getting in a little more of the engineering kind of kinds of things and got help from them when we needed it, for the most part on engineering kinds of things.

WORTHINGTON: Could you talk about maybe 1 or 2 of the largest projects that you were involved in? Do you remember any large wetland restorations or complex of wetlands?

RUWALDT: Well, probably. You know, some of the bigger ones were WRP projects that we were a partner on. You know, the Duffy's March project was one of those great big WRP projects that we helped out on.

There was one at Quincy Bluffs that was a Nature Conservancy project, that one that was a Partner's project. The Nature Conservancy was a big partner for its engineering. I think on that we probably did

have NRCS help with engineering on that one. I don't think the region probably had engineering staff to help Partners at that time. Those are a couple of the bigger ones.

WORTHINGTON: So for example, on the Duffy's March marsh, which I think I recall, that's not too far from Horicon Is that that right?

RUWALDT: Yeah, it's kind of northwest of Horicon yeah.

WORTHINGTON: Can you just talk about that project a little bit, who the partners were and what was involved?

RUWALDT: Yeah, well, it was a WRP project, so that was a big part of it. The Leopold WMD folks were the primary field staff that worked with NRCS on that.

And that was kind of similar to the one there at the Baraboo River, WPA. And that also was a project that ended up in a WPA also, you know, whereas Duffy's Marsh was always in private ownership/

WORTHINGTON: So the Baraboo River started as a wetland reserve program restoration?

RUWALDT: Well, it would have been Service land at the time, I think we got a 30 year easement or something like that through WRP. I think that's how we were able to enable the assistance out of that.

And then WRP did a lot of the engineering along with Sheldon Myerchen, you know, he was the assistant there at Leopold and he and he did a lot of the engineering work on that, and the biological layout and all that kind of stuff. Sheldon was, was very involved with Duffy's marsh also.

WORTHINGTON: Was that like a mint farm?

RUWALDT: They probably grew mint there at one time. You know, they grew carrots, sometimes potatoes on those muck farms in rotation

WORTHINGTON: So were you there when the Leopold Refuge project proposal was made near Baraboo?

RUWALDT: Yeah, I worked on that a lot. Yeah. That went on for quite a few years.

WORTHINGTON: So that I guess that's a whole different subject. But that for the, for the transcript, there was a, a refuge proposal being put forward by the, I guess the conservation planning staff in the regional office to establish a large refuge, well, not maybe large 10,000 acre refuge I think proposed to be the Leopold National Wildlife Refuge right near Baraboo. And it was a large muck farm that there was quite a bit of local resistance, I would say.

I think ultimately you might have had to broker a conservation deal. I think, to describe how we would move forward in that area?

RUWALDT: Well, I was kind of a you know, Steve Lenz was the refuge person, the local refuge person involved with that. I was a private land side of the equation, you know, because it was all private land, of course. And yeah, there was a lot of planning meetings involved and a lot of local opposition. We never got to any kind of a stage where we made plans to actually restore this site.

We never got to the point of actually doing wetland restoration there. It just got to be so controversial. I think the Kankakee Marsh project was kind of in the works at the same time, which basically had the same outcome, you know.

WORTHINGTON: Sometimes you try these projects, and if the time is not right, you change course.

In the partners program at that point, were you having to do environmental assessments or the historic preservation reviews of the sites? Do you remember how that was done?

RUWALDT: Yeah, that came out a little later, too. We never really did any environmental assessments. We did the SHPO reviews or, you know, at times we had to do get involved with that. Um, that came later and those were, you know, just another kind of step. I never felt like they were very limiting as to what we could do. Occasionally we had to change plans. You know, the project plans a little bit, but for the most part it was just another kind of step in the process that that we went through.

WORTHINGTON: What were the main challenges working in Wisconsin in the Partners program?

RUWALDT: You know, getting landowners involved. It was always our primary conversation issue: how do we promote the program? How do we contact new landowners? How do we get landowners to contact us? You know, we did things like farm progress days and booths and Ducks Unlimited outdoor show and state fair and all those kinds of things. Those were directed at making contacts for landowners because they were the limiting factor.

I mean, without the landowners, you didn't have a program. Word of mouth was the best way. Of course, when you did a project in an area, you know, oftentimes another 1 or 2 would pop up just because of word of mouth. But that was the biggest limiting factor was landowner getting landowners involved and interested.

WORTHINGTON: Did you always have more projects than you had time and staff to work on?

RUWALDT: Yeah, pretty much. We were always looking for funding and partnering with other conservation groups and, you know, NAWCA funding was always a big part of what we did and.

We never, I don't think we ever finished a year where we were looking for projects where we didn't have money to do them. But it seemed like at the start of the year that's always where we were at. It's like, okay, we got to get projects, you know, we got to make sure we have them all lined up, you know, who's got what going on out there, who's developing projects, who's not and that kind of thing. But by the time we got through the season, and we were always, you know, looking for more money.

WORTHINGTON: Were you thinking of trying to focus your work more in the, in the prairie pothole part of the state or along the larger rivers? What was your thinking?

RUWALDT: Yeah, you know, and that kind of evolved to with priority areas and things like that and regional, you know, some of the regional planning things that we got involved. The northwestern part of the State, the pothole area up there on the Saint Croix wetland management district, that was always a very good area for us to work in and not that we necessarily prioritized it that way, it's just that there was a lot of opportunity there and kind of the same thing up there and in the northeast around Green Bay and some of those counties where they had a lot of depressional wetlands and so on, it was always a good area for us.

In the central part of the state, it's more like those muck farms and things like that. But that was more WRP oriented kind of sites. So as far as prioritizing things, we prioritize based on where we saw the demand and the demand kind of followed the opportunity. And so it all worked out well because we were able to do the work where the work was and where it was probably the most beneficial to for the resource.

WORTHINGTON: Did you have to report on your yearly accomplishments and what type of report did you have to provide?

RUWALDT: Yeah, we had, yeah. Um, gosh, it's my mind has drawn a blank on it because I hated it so much. It got to be a little bit onerous for us to do, but that was all part of the national, you know, record keeping, which had to be done.

WORTHINGTON: Was the name of that program HABITS?

RUWALDT: Habits, Yeah, habits. There you go.

WORTHINGTON: That was a computer database that you had to enter?

RUWALDT: Yeah. Yeah. And of course, when stuff like that comes down your first reaction is, oh, no, I don't want to do this. You know, I got field work I want to do. And nobody liked doing it, of course. But then, after a while it's like, okay, this next two weeks is habits weeks and we'll get this, you know, taken care of.

WORTHINGTON: What about tribal involvement in Wisconsin? Did you work with tribes to any degree?

RUWALDT: No, not really. You know, we did some work with the Ho-Chunk. I think we might have done a project or two, and they're down here in the Wisconsin Dells area. And the Oneida is, I know, up by Green Bay. Gary Van Vreede might have done some work with them. And then you get up into the far northern part, we really didn't do much work in the far north. Just wasn't that much opportunity. Um, the Bad River tribe, I think we did a lot of coordination with them.

We probably did some field, you know, trips and things like that, wild rice related things, but not a lot in the way of projects. I know. You know, that would have been off reservation up Ted Koehler in Ashland. He was pretty involved with a lot of the streams up there, the tributaries to Chequamegon Bay and doing water quality kinds of work up there. But that was not, that was not tribal land.

WORTHINGTON: So any of the dam removal or clearing river work that would have not been done by your office or?

RUWALDT: We did quite a bit of stream work, small streams and some in-stream habitat and some related to some not thoroughly listed species, but some state listed species that we did some work on cold water streams. We did the La Valle dam removal on the Baraboo River. We were a big partner with Sand County Foundation on that. So that was our major dam removal project I think really that we did. There would have been some small ones here and there, I'm sure. But you know, I'm not I'm not familiar with all of them.

WORTHINGTON: Did you do any fencing projects to keep cattle out of streams?

RUWALDT: We didn't do much of that. No.

WORTHINGTON: What about working with the NGOs? Either Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever. Describe some of your experiences with them.

RUWALDT: You know, Ducks Unlimited really came on a little later, probably mostly after I left. The Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, we were a good partner with them. They had a staff person and we worked with them on projects and cost shared on projects quite a bit. Sand County Foundation was a nice partner, and they were mainly interested in stream work and things like the La Valle Dam. But they were, they were a big supportive partner to give us, if not direct assistance on projects, but a lot of publicity, you know, positive publicity from them. Nature Conservancy where we had their properties, we some work with them. We had the NRCS with their technical state tech committee, with all the partners around the table there. That was everybody you know that you can imagine Pheasants Forever and Wisconsin Wetland Association, Waterfowl Association, and others.

But all those groups were involved. The land conservation departments and we all coordinated activities, you know, from what they were doing to what we were doing or where we can help them, where they can help us, where we could provide some funding or they could provide funding to us for the NAWCA grants where we, you know, a lot of partners involved with those.

And then part of that funding, you know, went to us part, went to refuges from the districts. Um, so it was really a very large group of partners one way or another working on.

WORTHINGTON: Did you work with the Leopold Foundation? Very much at all?

RUWALDT: Not directly on their lands too much, but, you know, with articles that they would write that would mention us and we would, you know, that kind of thing, more than more than an actual physical, you know, on the ground work.

WORTHINGTON: Did you have meetings at their facilities? I imagine you had to host tours on occasion there in Madison?

RUWALDT: You know, they built the new facility. I don't remember when it was, but it was within the last 15 years, I guess. And there were some meetings after that. Prior to that, they really didn't have much of a facility there for things. So we didn't really meet there very often. But tours, of course, the Leopold Shack tour and all that's always been, you know, we had the one coordinator meeting there. I don't know if you were there, Tom. We took a big picture out in front of the shack, one of the, you know, the regional coordinator meetings and stuff.

WORTHINGTON: The use of prescribed fire in the partnership program, it seems to my recollection Wisconsin was one of the places where we tried to do some of that. Were you involved in prescribed burning as a landowner assistance tool?

RUWALDT: Yeah. When the fire program got, you know, really got going. And of course then they had fire staff at Leopold and then, you know, other refuges around the state. But yeah, then we started burning and we did a lot of burning on private land. It got to be more and more complicated. Of course, as time went by and more and more restricted. I don't know if there's much going on now at all, but we did a lot of burning with refuge staff and a few of the other partners.

And it got to be where, you know, the qualifications got to be pretty, pretty strict, which kind of limited what we could do. Like, for example, the DNR, for the most part, they couldn't burn with us because they

didn't have the qualifications. So that kind of limited things a little bit. But we did a lot of burning mainly on Karner projects for the most part.

Yeah, I think I remember the Partners program actually funded a fire specialist position for a few years anyway to help coordinate and manage the prescribed burning projects. But I believe you're right. The I think once the funding started to get a little bit tighter in the fire world of and the complexities and the requirements to do the burn plans and get these fire reviews done.

And the fact that the state of Wisconsin didn't necessarily comply with the red, red book standards for their fire qualifications kind of made it more difficult over time.

RUWALDT: I know Kurt is still involved with it and I know Mike Engle is too, but I don't really know how much they're burning. They are probably doing some.

WORTHINGTON: The long-term benefits for the restoration projects. What? How did we evaluate the success or the lack of success for the restoration projects? Do you recall what we did?

RUWALDT: Well, we really didn't have a monitoring program. It was mainly through the field staff, you know, and there, you know, they would look at these projects and I would look at projects that I was involved with as we are driving them past them and so on. And you kind of just give it the, you know, an eyeball look, and we felt like that was probably good enough. We didn't really need to do any, you know, more scientific monitoring. But as time went by, you know, there was more and more pressure for monitoring. And so what we did here in Wisconsin was one year I asked Art Kitchen (Partners biologist), just take a year off of what you've been doing and you're going to monitor across the state.

We're going to do a random sample of projects everywhere. And your job is going to be to monitor those. And that's what he did. And so he did a real nice report on that. And that gave us a lot of good background information that we used a lot for, you know, when comments would come up like, well, is this what you guys are doing any good? Is it really, you know, doing what it's supposed to do? And so we had Art's report and so that's when I left. That's all we had done at that point.

But it was a good one year of solid one staff person effort statewide to monitor projects.

WORTHINGTON: I remember that report and I remember the significance of, of that. To have that documentation, that was good. Looking back at your career then in Indiana and in Wisconsin and partners work, what are the two or the three things that you're probably most proud of?

RUWALDT: Well, I've always been a hands-on guy, too. And when I was working in ES, that's where I, you know, and I started with ES in Pierre. That was got to be a kind of a frustrating thing for me because we worked on these big irrigation projects like Cendak, you know, and Garrison Diversion in North Dakota was a lot like it. And we did some hydropower pump storage kind of reviews, and he spent an awful lot of time working on this stuff.

And, you know, for the most part, fortunately, they never developed. But it was also frustrating to do this kind of work and have nothing really come of what you, you know, what you were doing. And when the Partners Program came around, which gave us the opportunity as a, you know, we weren't refuge staff, so we weren't out doing that land management. But it gave us the opportunity to start doing things hands-on and physically things that you could actually take a picture of that looked like great wildlife habitat when you got done.

You know, that's what was the most rewarding part of it for me. And then I think secondly, it was working with these landowners, because it was, it was so much fun to go out and, one on one meet with these people from all walks of life. You know, some of them were farmers down and dirty and, you know, big time farmers, a lot of them were just recreational kinds of people. Some of them were businessmen that owned private land that they were having somebody else farm. And the variety of, you know, people that you got to meet, and their interests and they were all interested in wildlife. That was the nice thing to that because they wanted to do this. They weren't being paid to do it, you know, like they would be with CRP or one of those kinds of programs. They just wanted to do it; you know? And so it was great talking to them and meeting with them and going over what they had on their land and, you know, and then following that up later, seeing what we did, what they are doing. A lot of them took, you know, did management on their own. And they wanted to check in with us and like, hey, I want to do this is it going to be a good thing or not? Should I or shouldn't I? Or we've got this thing going on with the muskrats, you know, now what do we do? And so all that was a lot of fun.

And then just from, I guess maybe more of a professional thing working with the other staff people. And when I was the state coordinator here in Wisconsin, being the supervisor of the program in the state and bringing these new people up and hiring people, hiring temporaries, seeing them develop, you know, and then maybe getting them on permanent. There are a number of people that I hired that just turned out to be great people that are still working in Wisconsin. You know, some left the service. They're working for NRCS now. Others are still with the Service. Maybe some of have gone to other places.

But, you know, that's really rewarding.

WORTHINGTON: Wonderful. Yeah. Well, you had a had a great career and should be really proud of the work that you've done. Well, this is, this really concludes the questions that were given to me. Is there something that you want to mention about the partners program that you haven't had a chance to talk about?

RUWALDT: I wish it were going better now than it is. We kind of were in the hayday of it, I think, you know, but the whole funding thing has changed so much, in the last 30 years.

I was fortunate to work with a lot of great people. You mentioned Carl Madsen, and I didn't ever work physically or directly with Carl, but I was at a lot of meetings with Carl and the enthusiasm he had that rubs off on a lot of people, that was great.

And the Washington office staff back then was very supportive too. People like Bob Misso, he was the kind of guy you needed in that job because he was, he was like a Dave Hudak in Washington. We just want to get good things done out here and let's figure out how to do it, you know? And that was a real good attitude to work with. It was a great yeah, you're right, Tom. I have had a great career. I occasionally talk to folks who have retired, and they were all grumbly about, you know, not necessarily Service people, but other, you know, resource agency people.

And they had problems ... that I think, boy, I'm just so glad I didn't have. I don't have that to think back on. You know, what I have to think back on is very positive and I wouldn't want to do it any differently.

WORTHINGTON: And you're enjoying a good retirement. Well, I am going to stop the recording now, thank you Jim for your time!