



# Special Topic: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Rick Schultz  
(in Farmington, Minnesota)

December 4, 2020

Phone interview conducted by Tom Worthington  
(in St. Louis Park, Minnesota)

# Oral History Cover Sheet

**Approximate years worked for in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife**

**Program:** 1988 - 1994

**Offices and Field Stations Worked, PFW Positions Held:** Wildlife Biologist, Regional Office (Region 3, upper mid-west); Regional Private Lands Coordinator, Region 3

**Most Important Projects:** Developing guidance for fledgling private lands program; overseeing implementation of Partners for Wildlife program in Region 3; developing Stewardship 2000 which led to broader based restoration activities; development of more comprehensive conservation easements than “no drain, burn, or fill” easement; development of concept for Wetlands Reserve Program

**Colleagues and Mentors:** Bob Lange, Dick Toltzman, John Eadie, David Smith, Jim Gritman, Bob Misso, Dave Hudak, Laurie Nordstrom, Jim Leach, Lisa Mandel, Greg Brown, Dan Stinnett, Joe Artman, Mary McCorkle, Steve Kufirin, Gene Whitaker, Martha Naley, Doug Helmers, Jim Ruwaldt

**Brief Summary of Interview:** Rick describes beginning days of the Farm Bill (implementing the 1985 Food Security Act) and its’ three major components: restoring wetlands on Conservation Reserve Program lands, protecting wetlands through Swampbuster and conserving natural resources on Farmers Home Administration lands. He connects early private land restoration work with the Mid-Continent Waterfowl Project. He discusses why the program was managed by Refuges in some regions and Ecological Services in other regions. He describes working with private lands staff in Washington, D.C. to get funding to support the private lands program and to develop a Wetland Reserve Program in the U.S. Department of Agriculture that has protected millions of acres of wetlands at no expense to the Fish and Wildlife Service. Rick describes the change in names from Farm Bill/private lands to Partners for Wildlife to Partners for Fish and Wildlife.

## The Interview

TOM: Okay, I've started recording. Today is December 4, 2020. I am Tom Worthington and on the phone with me this morning is Rick Schultz. Rick is going to be doing an oral history with me on the history of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. Rick, you understand this is being recorded.

RICK: I do, yes.

TOM: Okay, and you are calling from Farmington, Minnesota, and I'm in St. Louis Park, Minnesota. So, we are doing this by phone.

RICK: Yes.

TOM: Okay, Rick. I've got a list of questions and I've shared them with you, so we will just start at the top.

RICK: Okay.

TOM: What years did you work in the Partners program, and where did you work and what was your job title?

RICK: I began working actually it's the late 80's after the Food Security Act of 1985 was passed. I was an assistant manager down at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge. I went to a project leaders' meeting in 1987 and Bob Lange, who was a biologist for Region 3, came out and spoke to the project leaders about the Farm Bill and what the Fish and Wildlife Service was doing with the Farm Bill. So that would have been like the summer of 1987 when I heard, when I learned of the regional efforts relative to the Farm Bill. Then, I was interested, at the time, and I mentioned to Bob Lange, casually, I said, "If you want any assistance, let me know. I've got quite a bit of experience with habitat restoration", after having spent nearly 10 years, or 8 or 9 years on a wetland management district. So, one thing led to another and eventually they brought me in for a detail. I think it was in October of 1987 in the Regional Office [in Minnesota]. My job there was to inventory what the Fish and Wildlife Service had – mostly refuges had – in terms of equipment and heavy equipment operators that could begin the process of restoring wetlands on CRP, Conservation Reserve Program, lands. So that was October 1987. By May of '88, I relocated to the Regional Office as a wildlife biologist working with Bob Lange and Dick Toltzman and John Eadie to continue the effort to provide administrative support and later on some financial support to field crews that were restoring wetlands on CRP lands. So, I worked in that capacity, first as a wildlife biologist and then I became the Regional Private Lands Coordinator. I worked there for about 7 years, and I ended

up working until October 1994, at which time I transferred to the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge as the project leader.

TOM: When you say the Regional Office, you're talking about the Ft. Snelling Regional Office in Bloomington, Minnesota.

RICK: That's correct. It's actually in Ft. Snelling, Minnesota but it's the regional office there, the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal building. That was our regional office at the time.

TOM: Right. The inventory that you did of heavy equipment and heavy equipment operators. This was probably in the early days of any kind of regional database. How did the data get collected, and was it a computer format, or how was it?

RICK: You know I think I may have had access to some property records, some personal property – I don't know what we called that.

TOM: Real property?

RICK: Real property records back in those days. Then I went from whatever I had, and I actually contacted the project leaders and their deputies in each and every field station to see what they had in terms of their bulldozers and front-end loaders, equipment, trailers, tractor trailers, etc. that we could move equipment around. I also, I don't recall a list of people that were certified, I don't even know if we certified people back in those days, to operate heavy equipment, but there were a number of individuals that had experience. Mostly the maintenance guys stationed at national wildlife refuges. I surveyed to see what we had there.

TOM: Did you work on Farm Bill implementation or private land habitat restoration?

RICK: I worked on Farm Bill implementation which - we called it the Farm Bill for the first couple of years but eventually that evolved into a broader Partners program. I never did work at the local level, at the field level. I never did contact a single landowner in requesting or assessing their interest in restoring wetlands on CRP lands, but I provided a great amount of support to project leaders, field biologists. Both Refuges and Ecological Services at the time. Providing them some guidance and some training when it came to mostly wetland restoration during that first summer.

TOM: Can you, if you know, can you describe the very beginning of the Partners program and its connection to the 1985 Farm Bill.

RICK: Yeah. I think the origin of working on private lands, I guess it had some history back in the '60's and '70's. Oh, there's a gentleman, his first name was Jerry – a biologist in the field. He

told me once we were restoring wetlands on private lands back in those days. The true beginning, I think began, or it started with the work that Harvey Nelson and Carl Madsen did on the Mid-Continent Waterfowl Management Project out of Fergus Falls, Minnesota. They fired up that effort I think in the late 1970's into the early 1980's. They were demonstrating – they did a number of different things – from nesting platforms to restoring wetlands to contacting landowners, etc. etc. That kind of served as the model, at least the beginning model, of what Fish and Wildlife Service might do under the Farm Bill, the 1985 Farm Bill. The '85 Farm Bill was called the Food Security Act and it had more, of 1985, I think it had a longer title than that. But the Farm Bill, the '85 Farm Bill, was unique in that it had three major conservation provisions. One was the Conservation Reserve Program upwards of, eventually upwards of about 40 million acres nationwide retired under 10-year contracts and most of them were retired with a semi-permanent grass species, etc. etc. The second part of the '85 Farm Bill was what they called the Swampbuster provision. Basically, the Swampbuster provision said, of the Farm Bill, said that no landowner can receive government payments or can be in the government program, agricultural program, if they are actively draining wetlands. So, it was really a carrot and a stick, really a carrot approach to keeping farmers from draining wetlands if they wanted to receive some, if they wanted to be part of the agricultural program and receive some payments in exchange for retiring land, and so on and so forth. The third provision of the '85 Farm Bill was lands that eventually became Farmers Home Administration properties. The mid-80's, I should say the early to mid-80's was a terrible time for agriculture across the United States. Many farmers went out of business and many of them had loans through the Farmers Home Administration. Many of those farms were foreclosed upon by the Farmers Home Administration. What the '85 Farm Bill did was provide an avenue for the Fish and Wildlife Service to consult with Farmers Home Administration to make sure that anything that they did with that property would not impact the existing natural resources on that property. In other words, the Farmers Home Administration before they re-sold the property or made the loan good or whatever way they disposed of the property, they had to make sure that the wetlands of that property were properly secured for future generations. They did that through the use of, the development and use of what we called FmHA [Farmers Home Administration] conservation easements. So those were the, I guess, the three pillars, if you will, of the '85 Farm Bill. This is before my time working on the Farm Bill, there was some movement in the Washington Office and that movement, I think there was some interaction between John Turner and both the Natural Resources, I should say the Soil Conservation Service at the time, and also the administrator of FmHA. John Turner, our Director back in those days had a good relationship with those two entities, and we were able to begin some work with them cooperatively. In other words, we provided some advice and consultation to the Soil Conservation Service when it came to the Swampbuster provisions. We also provided advice and consultation to the Farmers Home Administration at all levels, including at the Washington level, at their regional levels, and also at their state levels and local levels for the preservation of wetlands on these FmHA properties. Then we saw the opportunity – “we”, meaning some folks in D.C. at the time, very few folks in D.C. time, but a few of them – and that opportunity of

course was to restore wetlands on conservation reserve lands that were going to be retired for ten years. Bob Lange was working in D.C. at the time when the Farm Bill was being – you know what, this is actually – a lot of this occurred before John Turner, okay? This occurred under [FWS Director] Frank Dunkle because '88 is when [FWS Director] John Turner came on board, and a lot of this Farm Bill happened in '85, so it was the staffing under Frank Dunkle. But when John Turner came in, he maintained those relationships that were initially established with these entities. There were some folks in there on the refuge side of things under Dave Olsen who was an assistant ...

TOM: Assistant Director?

RICK: Assistant Director for Refuges and Wildlife at the time. There were some folks in Refuges that didn't want anything to do with the FmHA easements unless they were large tracts that could become part of the refuge system. And there were others on the Ecological Services side, and this is where Bob Misso and a gentleman by the name of David Smith, they began to work with FmHA and all these other agencies to see what we could do with, see who would be responsible for easements that were eventually generated on these FmHA lands. Bob Misso [correction, Bob Lange] eventually relocated to Region 3 and he found, and he actually worked on this issue when he was in D.C., he found a receptive audience in Jim Gritman, our Regional Director and in John Eadie, the regional [refuge] chief at the time, to take advantage if you will or work to enhance habitats on CRP lands and FmHA lands and also provide expertise towards Soil Conservation Service when it came to Swampbuster. So, essentially that was the origin of the Farm Bill program. There were a few – we'll get into this later – but there were a few regions that really got on board. Region 3 was one of them of course. Region 4 was another, where I think you had Jim Pulliam and refuge chief Harold Benson down in Region 4. Region 6 has Galen Butterbaugh – I think Skip Ladd if I'm not mistaken was the refuge chief at the time in Region 6, but Region 6 was fully supportive of it too. The other regions across the country weren't that supportive of it. It depended upon the personalities, if you will, or the priorities of the regional director as well as the priorities or attitude of the refuge chiefs. So, essentially these three regions – and Region 3 with the support of John Eadie and Jim Gritman - really kind of forged ahead of the other regions. Took a leadership role in taking advantage, that's not the right word, but making, I should say exploring and capitalizing on the opportunity to protect habitats, restore and protect habitats, on private lands.

TOM: How did the funding go for that in the early days? I presume there was no special funding through the Service budget to work on private lands. How was it financed?

RICK: Initially, and I think - I came on board, as I mentioned, in 1988, and during 1988 we didn't have any special funding that I know of, that I remember. There could have been some towards the end of the year. There could have been some reprogrammed funds towards the end of the year that was allocated from Washington to the regions. But essentially, there was no funding.

In Region 3, Jim Gritman - his priority was to expend as much as he possibly could of existing funds which included operational funds from refuges as well as I believe Ecological Services offices. The amount that he said that we're going to spend is 10 percent of our existing budgets will be diverted and applied towards the private lands program. I think a lot of the initial salaries for folks like myself and Bob Lange came out of the Migratory Bird program that we had. But after that, Bob Misso and David Smith in D.C., they eventually built some relationships with some Congressional staff and I think in Fiscal Year '89 was the first full year, if I remember right, that the Fish and Wildlife Service had an itemized element in their budget for the private lands program. They called it the Farm Bill back in those days, and it was a simple program, according to Bob Misso, just to restore wetlands on CRP lands and then some of these other efforts as far as the FmHA and Swampbuster.

TOM: What was the working relationship like between the Fish and Wildlife Service and say the Department of Agriculture agencies at that time? Do you recall?

RICK: It was really quite good. I recall attending several meetings with Bob Lange, and the issue was either Swampbuster or FmHA or CRP wetland restoration and collectively, they were working on policy and guidance for their field stations. The Fish and Wildlife Service was working on guidance for its field stations relative to their role in the implementation of the conservation provisions of the '85 Farm Bill. Then Soil Conservation Service and FmHA were working on guidance with their, working on field guidance for their folks to implement those same provisions, those same conservation provisions. So, there was an awful lot of interaction and exchange. I think it even got better after - in '88, a new president - George Herbert Walker Bush - replaced Ronald Reagan, and then John Turner became the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. There was a fellow by the name of Paul somebody or another [Paul Johnson, Director of the NRCS 1994-1997] that became the chief of the Soil Conservation Service and he renamed, he renamed that agency as the Natural Resources Conservation Service because he felt it was more than soils that they were preserving, and the fact that the Soil Conservation Service had an array of tools, if you will, to work with landowners on important natural resources. He felt that should be renamed as the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

TOM: Okay, thanks.

RICK: Paul - I forget his last name - I'll think of it before - well, when we have a chance to edit this, Tom, I'll have that name. [Paul Johnson is the name of the NRCS Director Rick is referencing]

TOM: Yeah, absolutely, that's great. So, you talked a little bit about how some regions incorporated the Partners program within the refuge program. Others did not. Do you know specifically why that became to be? Some regions ending up running it through Ecological Services.

RICK: I think, based on my window on the world back in those days, and what didn't – it's not a perfect window in the world - but it seemed to me that if there was a refuge chief that really wanted to work on private lands, in other words, think beyond the boundaries – and this is a concept that we were advocating and came to realize back in those days – we needed to think beyond the boundaries when it came to refuges and we needed to think beyond the boundaries when it came to migratory birds because refuges by themselves are not much more than postage stamps. Important postage stamps but nothing more than postage stamps on this large environment. If we really wanted to have a long-term impact upon migratory bird species as well as resident wildlife species, we needed to think beyond the refuge boundaries and work with private landowners. The traditionalists, I'm going to refer to them as traditionalists, on the Refuge chiefs' side of things, didn't grab on to that concept very fast or at all. So, those Refuge chiefs that didn't want anything to do with it, the money – I should say the responsibility for the private lands program in those regions – went to Ecological Services, because, in the budget structure, it was in Ecological Services budget package. It wasn't a Refuges budget package. But this region - Region 3, 6 and 4 – they essentially said even though it's in Ecological Services, Refuges are going to have the lead for it in their respective regions.

TOM: I would probably guess that Region 3 and 6, with the familiarity with the Small Wetlands Program, already we were, staff were used to working on broader landscapes and outside of traditional refuge boundaries. That may have had something to do with it.

RICK: It did and of course, Harold Benson cut his teeth, for the most part, on the prairies, when he was a younger biologist. So, Harold Benson also had that perspective, and he was a Refuge Chief in Region 4. He more than anybody else in Region 4 had that kind of perspective. So, Region 4 – I think in Region 4 it was more of a fifty-fifty partnership between Ecological Services and Refuges, while in Regions 6 and 3 it was led by Refuges for the most part with a supporting role by Ecological Services.

TOM: Rick, do you think the implementation the new North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Joint Venture concept may have also influenced [this]?

RICK: I think what happened in that same time period - the Mid-Continent Waterfowl Management Project based out of Fergus Falls - I think the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Act for that, was passed at about the same time. All the employees, basically all the employees that were, most of them that were employed under the Mid-Continent Project, transferred over to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan where Harvey [Nelson] became I guess the executive director of the plan. I don't exactly know what his – he was the Fish and Wildlife Service administrator responsible for the plan. He hired a deputy - Bob Streeter - and that relocated to Minneapolis. The headquarters for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan was in Minneapolis in our Regional Office. Carl Madsen,

who was more or less the field biologist for the Mid-Continent, he relocated to the Twin Cities as well. They, the Mid-Continent was another good reason to think beyond the boundaries, just the refuge boundaries. The other thing that happened at the same time, I think - the North American Waterfowl Management Plan kind of crystallized partnerships and, as did the Partners program, it crystallized partnerships between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, conservation organizations, and state agencies, perhaps at a level that wasn't seen before.

TOM: So, what was the program like when you worked for it? You've already described this. Did you have more opportunities than you could handle, or did you have to work to find projects to reach restoration goals?

RICK: Let's see here. During my tenure as the Regional Private Lands Chief, I guess, we seemed to have an awful lot of opportunities in the prairie pothole regions. The prairie pothole portions, I would say, of Region 3, which included Minnesota, parts of Iowa of course, into Wisconsin, a little bit of Michigan, southwest Michigan for sure. Indiana – perhaps the historical transition area between prairie and forestlands, they had some opportunities. Illinois had a few. A lot of this was driven of course by personalities of the field managers as well. There were some refuge managers that didn't want anything to do with the Partners program but then there were also some Ecological Services field offices that really wanted something to do with the Partners program. One of those individuals was Dave Hudak out of Indiana. Dave Hudak made his presence be known and really brought the Partners program up to a very healthy level in Indiana. I think that early on, like the first four or five years, there were plenty of opportunities for wetland restoration. Then we began to see needs and I should say, biological needs, and interest by some of these same landowners in retiring uplands as well. In other words, converting poor quality agricultural land into permanent or semi-permanent upland habitat, mostly grasslands. So those were the – it went from just a wetland restoration program into a wetland and upland restoration program. Then, down the road of course, we modified our easement program in Region 3 to also offer easements to those landowners who had participated initially. That created some more opportunities for the Partners program. So at least the first several years, from my perspective, there was good demand for our efforts. The other thing that happened, and I'll maybe get to this later, we kind of transformed the I guess the work and the approach that Fish and Wildlife Service biologists had. What really was occurring in the first year or so, we were advocating habitat restoration, wetland restoration and then later on a little bit of grassland restoration, through the Fish and Wildlife Service. But what these private lands biologists became was advocates for our, I should say the Fish and Wildlife Services' program as well as advocates for all these other programs that were already out there, whether they were being administered or promoted by a private conservation organization like Ducks Unlimited or Pheasants Forever or even USDA programs. There are a lot of USDA programs that were already on the books that were not being promoted or advocated for and so our people, as Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, became brokers not only for our program but brokers for other entities' programs as well.

TOM: Do you recall when the program changed its name to be called Partners for Fish and Wildlife?

RICK: I don't recall exactly when it became the, was converted from the Farm Bill program to I would say a broad-based private lands program, and then the name. I can tell you in 1990, in early 1990, which is shortly like two years after I was on board and we were deep into wetland restoration on private lands – we attended a meeting that we were part of - the joint Region 3/Region 6 meeting, and invited all the other regions to Bismarck, North Dakota. Our objective in 1990, early 1990, was to expand what we were doing from a simple Farm Bill wetland restoration program to a broad-based, I guess, fully integrated and fully accepted program within the Fish and Wildlife Service - a program that would offer many different opportunities whether it was wetland restoration or grassland restoration or conservation easements or brokering conservation easements or even some forest restoration or some forest management. The product of that meeting eventually turned into a brochure – I have it in front of me – we called it “Stewardship 2000: Partners for Fish and Wildlife on Private Lands”. So that was before, that was before the name had changed. I think our first name change probably occurred shortly after that, shortly after June of 1990, and we called it the Partners for Wildlife Program. That stayed around for a while. I then, I think, when I went to Washington in, no I didn't, I went to Minnesota Valley, and I think that Hannibal Bolton went into Washington D.C. sometime around that time, and he was always interested in working in the watershed of important fisheries areas, when I was in the region. He'd stop by and we'd talk about “what's good for the watershed is good for the wetland” or “good for the fisheries habitat”. So, when he went into Washington D.C. – he worked as chief fisheries person there – I'm not sure what his exact title was – but he came across I think a million or a million and a half dollars – I would say 1996, 1997 – in those days, then we changed the name from Partners for Wildlife to Partners for Fish and Wildlife.

TOM: You know, it's interesting. I think I remember working on that Stewardship 2000 brochure with Tom Kelly. I believe I supervised Tom Kelly, the graphic artist.

RICK: Yeah. I have one copy here and I think this should be part of the history of the – I don't imagine they have any copies in the Regional Office. What I'll do – I'll photocopy it and I'll just keep the photocopy and I'll send in this – I'll get you a copy of the original.

TOM: That'd be great. Even a scan or something would be interesting, I think.

RICK: Yeah, I can scan it. Okay. I could scan it to you. The other thing that I didn't talk about. Region 3 would do regional highlights for its Partners program. I think we did monthly highlights to begin with, if I'm not mistaken. I did have one example here from 2002 and that was after I left the private lands program, but we tried to keep everybody. Yeah, this is 2002 and it says

Partners for Fish and Wildlife on it, so obviously it transferred to the new name then. I have that too. I'll scan that and give you a copy of that.

TOM: Sure. What was the influence organizationally of doing NEPA compliance or archaeological preservation or even endangered species consultation? Did it have much of an influence on the work we were doing on private lands?

RICK: Initially, we didn't do, I didn't do anything from a NEPA standpoint at the Regional Office level. I think technically speaking that we were all doing categorical exclusions for the work we were doing on private lands. That's what I recall. But so that's really, that's all that I recall, if that's even true. I think that's true. So that tells you the level of concern relative to compliance with these various aspects. And I know that, as time marched on, even the contracting with private landowners got much more complicated than it should have, and it got to be a real challenge, I guess, for people at the field level, which I'm not, I'm not the right person to talk to about how bureaucracy, if you will, slowed things down. You know, Laurie Nordstrom would have a better feeling for that than I would. But it did change, and I don't know how they handle it today.

TOM: I'm sure whatever NEPA was done, would have been done at the field station level. That would have been the place for it. The other bureaucratic or administrative bumps that we encountered later with the FmHA easements as lands were protected through easements, they were not often described on the ground legally, so these legal descriptions of these easements and location of the paperwork was a challenge for our Realty Office, and it still is today, I believe.

RICK: Yeah. I guess if I, looking, if I had to do some things over again, what was happening is we were trying to, our field biologists were doing their best to try to both identify and map these things. I recall an FmHA easement up in Chisago County in Minnesota where it was a very irregular boundary – zig zag and so on and so forth. Just to, we -the idea with that FmHA up there, they wanted only to protect the wetlands and none of the uplands. So, we went through in a zig zag fashion to carve out the wetlands. As it turned out, the legal description wasn't even close. So, we made some mistakes back in those days with the FmHA program. They may have to be, we'll just have to live with some of those and eventually administratively declare that some of these are just unmanageable anymore, or they never were. But on the other hand, there are an awful lot of other good stuff that we have out there too. So, we have to take the good with the bad on some of those.

TOM: Yeah, that's a whole other topic. These easements became part of the refuge system and administratively can't divest them, but anyway. That's a whole other topic.

RICK: It is, and I recognize it at this point in time that some of those boundaries were almost unenforceable, is what they were. The legal descriptions didn't adequately cover what they were supposed to. But that's what you have when you have essentially maybe a hundred people in the region trying to implement a program that they're only vaguely familiar with.

TOM: And this really was a debt restructuring for farmers. They were able to, the value of these easements would be discounted against their loans on the property, so they were able to maintain their farms.

RICK: That's right. That's right.

TOM: In that way, we were being good partners, I think.

RICK: Right.

TOM: Trying to be.

RICK: Now there's some regions that want to and you probably know this, they want nothing to do with these easements as we speak. There were some easements that were poorly described, and so on and so forth. It is another big issue onto itself.

TOM: Rick, administering these new programs as they are being developed – I remember there was a series of memoranda or guidances called Farm Bill updates.

RICK: Yeah.

TOM: Was that something that you were involved in and developed or how did they work?

RICK: I think the first ones were produced by Bob Lange when he was serving in that capacity. What do we call them, I guess – yeah, they were Farm Bill updates. They were guidance and they were not policy for the most part. (unintelligible) that I can remember there were like 50 or 60 of them, I guess, in the end. We were trying to provide guidance to field folks on a number of different issues.

TOM: So, these were written guidances that came out from the Assistant Regional Director to all field stations, trying to answer developing questions and policy issues.

RICK: They were. We called them "Private Lands Guidances" I guess is what we called them. Initially they were Farm Bill guidance's, but they were called private lands guidances down the road. We had, it was our role as staff, whether it was myself or people who were working for me at the time, to draft these things. Then we had to take them to John Eadie for his signature

and then we had to take them over to the Ecological Services folks for their signature in the region.

TOM: You talked about staff a little bit. So, when you first came in, Bob Lange was working by himself, and then you came in on the Refuge side and helped implement that. What other staff ultimately became part of the Partners program while you were there?

RICK: Okay. After the first year, I think in the fall of '88, Bob Lange took a different job. He ended up being the Federal Aid chief, the regional Federal Aid coordinator or whatever they called him. So, the leadership if you will at the staff level for the Partners program ended up on my desk. Before Bob Lange left, I believe Jim Leach came over from the Ecological Services office and he served in that capacity for a while. We had Lisa Mandel. She was there for a while. Then Greg Brown, we hired Greg Brown from, Greg used to be a soil conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service. I think he was, he resigned from that post, and he went into real estate work over by Stillwater which is where he lived. He was put on board indirectly if you will. He was put on board to serve as a liaison, I believe, with Soil Conservation Service in southwestern Minnesota, if I'm not mistaken and eventually, he transferred up to the Regional Office and worked out of the Regional Office. Down the road, Dan Stinnett came in. He was kind of my deputy, if you will. Dan was an Ecological Services biologist in, I think, either Tulsa or Oklahoma City. I think it was Tulsa, Oklahoma. He relocated his family up and he worked on the Partners program for quite a while. Joe Artman was there for a while. I guess that kind of concludes it. Mary McCorkle was our administrative person for the most part.

TOM: Did you hire Steve Kufrin, or did he come later?

RICK: Oh yes. Actually, I didn't hire him. I forgot about Steve Kufrin. Dick Toltzman was the one that advocated for Steve Kufrin because he knew Steve Kufrin. Steve Kufrin was a writer/reporter for Swift County Times out in Benson, Minnesota, always an ardent conservationist. Dick thought that Steve would do a nice job with outreach and advancing partnerships for the Fish and Wildlife Service at the Regional Office level.

TOM: Okay. Very good.

RICK: I can't think of anybody else, but I did forget about Steve Kufrin.

TOM: Yeah, bless his soul. Describe some of the challenges you had in getting work done. (laughter)

RICK: Well, I think that I was fortunate in a very large way that both the Regional Director and our Refuge Chief were highly supportive of what we were doing as staff people, and they were very supportive of innovation and creativity. Some of the challenges we faced were project

leaders at the field level that had not grasped the concept of beyond the boundaries yet and they didn't want to be bothered. They just wanted to do their own thing within the boundaries. Some folks call it the "white sign disease". They could only see the white, the sign in their activities. We had a refuge supervisor or two, probably one for sure, that wasn't really gung-ho about the Partners program. He thought it was just a thing that was going to pass down the road.

TOM: If you could, did you have any particular conservation projects that you are especially proud of, important restoration or landscape focus areas?

RICK: Yeah. Let me go back to the previous question first then I'll come back and answer this. The other challenge that we had is, and it wasn't only my challenge, but I think the crowd support if you will. Stewardship 2000 was pretty much rejected or not thought of very highly by the administrators in Washington. They thought that all they wanted to do was to keep this a simple wetland restoration program and nothing more than that. But collectively with Regional Director support and other support, David Smith eventually in D.C., they acknowledged the importance of a broad-based private lands program. You know, one thing led to another. I don't know what their budget levels are now, but. The other thing about a broad-based Partners program is that it tried to transcend, if you will, administrations. It's a program that helps private landowners in both Republican and Democratic administrations where they like that, as compared to something like land acquisition that maybe limited under some administrations and promoted under others. So, the Partners program kind of has a universal appeal, if you will, politically, which works to its advantage. That was one of the other challenges that we faced.

Projects. I guess, as I mentioned - innovation and creativity – I think that there are a few things that we were able to do with the support of the Regional Director and the Refuge Chief. One of the first things that we did is, we took our simple "no drain, burn or fill" easement and said, "This isn't adequate enough," particularly when we have FmHA easements that covered a variety of resources. No wetlands and uplands and forest lands and then we felt, thought that our simple 'no drain, burn or fill' easement wasn't adequate. So, when Greg Brown came in, I asked him to develop an array, if you will, working with Realty, an array of easements that would be more applicable to the current situation. In other words, restore wetlands, protect that habitat. In some cases, protect a forestland or whatever it happened to be. Greg came up with four different conservation easements that were used and really adopted and advocated big time by our folks. I don't think we, I'm not sure about this, but I don't believe we, or if we do, we seldom take just a simple "no drain, burn, or fill" easement anymore. It's always one of these comprehensive easements. So, we kind of moved it from really a narrow program to a broad-based program which is much more beneficial to the resources. The other thing that was a matter of significance is that, as we were restoring wetlands on the CRP lands, not only in Minnesota and in the prairie pothole region, and we were doing it with colleagues and others in other regions across the United States, it became apparent that we needed something, if we

could, to offer to these landowners to keep at least some of these easements, I should say some of these habitats, in wildlife habitat for a longer period of time, perhaps perpetuity. So, we also knew that the Fish and Wildlife Service's acquisition program was limited and a lot of that was identified to be spent on fee lands, especially in other parts of the region, in the pothole region we could use it for easements as well as fee, but we didn't have a large amount of extra land acquisition funds. So, we looked towards USDA and all the programs that they had. One evening, and I don't remember the night that I did it, but I went home, and I put together this little concept paper called "Wetland Reserve Program". The Wetland Reserve Program just basically said, "We're restoring wetlands across the nation. It should be a USDA conservation easement that is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service." The source of funds I think it was the Commodity Credit Association which was a large source of money for USDA agricultural programs. We kicked it around the region a little bit and we had good support from Jim Gritman and good support from John Eadie. We started talking to some of our State counterparts like the biologists in Ohio and Missouri and some of those places, and some of the feedback we got wasn't positive. They said that farmers would never, ever take a permanent easement on these wetlands, and so on and so forth. Then, what we did was, sent the concept paper into Washington D.C. The fellow I sent it to, his name was Gene Whitaker. Between Gene Whitaker, Bob Misso, and Martha Naley, they worked with USDA and NRCS and they did a pilot program for the Wetlands Reserve Program. I don't know which fiscal year it was, but they did a pilot program, and it was accepted overwhelmingly nationwide. So, a little idea that we had here in Region 3 evolved and developed into a nationwide program that's probably resulted now in over 3 million acres of permanent conservation easements on wetlands and grasslands where we, the Fish and Wildlife Service, didn't spend a dime on the acquisition costs. That's one little project that I have in the back of my mind that made a difference. When I was a young employee actually in Region 6 – I was the deputy project leader at Devil's Lake – I went to a project leaders' meeting and this regional refuge chief, and I don't know who he was – I know his name, but I don't know who he was, and I don't know where he went – his name was Nels Caverno. Nels Caverno his presentation that day was all about the power of the pen, and back in those days, we didn't have a computer of course. But he said, "You can do a lot with the power of the pen if you know how to do it." In that case, I felt that little concept paper for the Wetland Reserve Program had quite a bit of power and it resulted in a brand-new program within the USDA that uses their money to restore and protect habitat.

TOM: Great story, Rick, and not such a little program.

RICK: Yeah. I don't even, I should check on the status of that Wetland Reserve Program – see how many acres there are nationwide. I bet you, I know it's, it was a couple million a few years ago or several years ago, and I imagine it's more than that now. There's a fellow that Dave Hudak worked with – a farmer down in Indiana – I remember his name. His name was Ray McCormack. Ray McCormack was a real progressive farmer if you will. He also knew the economics of farming poor quality land as well as good quality land, so he was the first on

board I believe with Dave Hudak and the restoration of wetlands on his property. I believe he was one of the earliest farmers to sign up for the Wetland Reserve Program.

TOM: It's interesting, the relationship with private landowners then. Rather than being an adversary, the Fish and Wildlife Service through the Partners program became an ally and a partner. Maybe talk about that a little bit. Were they initially – private landowners – apprehensive about working with the Service, or how did that evolve?

RICK: I didn't have, like I said, I never talked with the landowner personally about this stuff other than just to see how it's going, that type of thing. But I think the fact that, I think most landowners were surprised that they'd get a knock on the door and this individual with a uniform on, a patch, and he'd say, "Hey, you have CRP. We're willing to restore that wetland on your property for free, and you need to maintain it for 10 years, then you can do what you want to - without, without anything. If you agree, you sign this one sheet of paper and then we'll have the bulldozers in on Tuesday, okay?" I think that went over big time with the private landowners. So, in my opinion, anyway, especially I saw that, after I went over to Minnesota Valley as project leader, that one of the most positive public relations programs that Fish and Wildlife Service could have ever done, at least in rural America, was the Partners program. We were, we showed up, in most cases we were very professional, and we provided them a little bit of "benefit", at least – that would be in quotes. We didn't threaten them in any way. We didn't threaten to cut off their... On the other hand, of course, we had the Swampbuster program, which is another story in, of itself that eventually was pretty much undermined for its effectiveness by another agency. But the restoration program was a great PR program. I'll also say this. Some of the, some of the land that we actually restored – many of those, at least in the prairie pothole region – became, at a minimum, permanent easements. We protected that land into perpetuity. In one case, our first interaction with landowners for which we wanted to buy the land eventually was through the restoration of a little wetland along the Minnesota River called – it was called – man, what was it called? I want to say Rush Lake, but that's not right. Could be Rush Lake. This was – Rush Lake was on the Mittelsted property, so our first introduction if you will, our first conversation with the Mittelsted family was, can we restore your wetlands, restore this wetland on your property that is under CRP? And their answer was yes. And then Terry Shriner who worked at Minnesota Valley continued that dialogue. He was approached by the Mittelsted family to see if we would buy that property. And sure enough, we bought that 1,500 acres of some of the most valuable habitat in the Twin Cities area. That was catalyzed, if you will, by contact with a private lands biologist.

TOM: Wow. And the partnerships not just with private landowners but with other federal agencies, state agencies, and NGOs certainly blossomed through the Partners program.

RICK: It did. I think that that's the other thing I guess, benefit of the Partners program. We didn't have – we maybe had some outside funding for some of our refuge projects and some of

our other projects of course – but after as part of the private lands program, a lot of the major organizations like Ducks Unlimited which I spoke to several times in advocating both easements and habitat restoration, and Pheasants Forever and Minnesota Waterfowl Association, etc., etc. - a lot of people. And then of course you had the North American Waterfowl Management Plan that added to it. Collectively, those two entities, those two processes if you will, or programs, really opened up a great deal of opportunity to work together. The other, the other thing that I should say that the Partners program has done is that it kind of transformed the Fish and Wildlife Service. We have the Migratory Bird program, but they were just pretty much doing the surveys and the censuses and things like that. They weren't actually working with habitat partners, if you will. The Partners program served to emphasize or evolve the Fish and Wildlife Service biologists as habitat restoration specialists within at least the prairie pothole regions as well as other parts of the United States. That has served us well, whether you're talking about an urban habitat situation where you want to restore some urban habitats or you're talking about rural areas or things like that. The other thing it's going to do, it's going to play and hopefully we'll see some of this coming down the road, our roles as habitat restoration specialists will play a significant or will have significant impact on carbon sequestration as we try to address climate change. So, we already have the people with the knowledge and the capability to help us sequester carbon. We just need some funding to begin massive carbon sequestration across the nation.

TOM: For sure. Leopold talked about the land ethic and the importance of connecting landowners with their natural heritage and the heritage of the ground, and the Partners program certainly fulfilled that role.

RICK: Yes, it did. Fortunately, things tend to go in waves, if you will. The pendulum shifts back and forth. The outlook right now on rural areas isn't so great anymore because there's very few programs that serve our conservation need and there's very few programs that compete with at least Farm Bill prices as they existed up until probably now. So, we're not seeing an awful lot of private lands being retired. I'm speaking from my perspective on this. I'm not speaking from a Fish and Wildlife Service private lands biologist so I may be wrong about this. But it doesn't seem like we're – the environment is right for significant advances in habitat on private lands these days. But that should change I think with carbon sequestration. What they often need to do with carbon sequestration is take permanent easements on those lands on which they sequester carbon.

TOM: Rick, so looking backwards, what were your overall thoughts about its long-term benefits of the Partners program for people and wildlife? We've already touched on that a little bit, but any other thoughts?

RICK: Yeah. What we saw is that a lot of the hires that we were making back in the, during the seven years or so that I served as the regional private lands' person, a lot of those hires existed

on field stations that were doing active private lands program. If I'm not mistaken, Steve Lenz was a private lands biologist for Charlie Blair at Ottawa for a while. I think Tom at Desoto – what's his last name?

TOM: Oh, Tom Cox. Tommy Cox.

RICK: Tom Cox was a private lands biologist for Charlie Blair out of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge back in those days. We're just seeing a lot of these folks – they come in and they're really, rather than just staying on the refuge and thinking inside the boundaries – they may do refuge work when they do private lands work as well, but they have much more broader base, a broader perspective if you will, to really make a difference on the landscape, if you have had some experience with the Partners program. The other thing I think it's a benefit for the long haul is that all of our project leaders, regardless of whether or not they served as biologists, private lands biologists, or not, they need to think beyond the boundaries and try to protect their refuges from outside threats. A lot of times these are agricultural threats. Sometimes they're urban threats. Sometimes they're who knows what? It could be population threats or invasive threats, etc. You need to think beyond the boundaries if you want to keep these areas as important wildlife areas for the long term. That's one of the benefits of the private lands program.

TOM: Yeah. Well, we've covered a lot of ground, Rick. Last question I have is, and I've written down several names of additional people that you think would be good interviewees for the history of the Partners program. I've written down Carl Madsen, and actually I'm in touch with Carl. I'll be doing an interview with him before too long. Greg Brown. Dan Stinnett. Of course, Jim Leach and Lisa Mandel, I think maybe.

RICK: Yeah. Lisa was with us on and off for a while. She just, but she's a good contact.

TOM: What are the other names that you think we should really key on?

RICK: I think at the Washington Office level, David Smith. If you can contact David. David P. Smith was the guy that shot the buffalo, wasn't it? David A. Smith, I think David A. Smith was the guy that served as a biologist for the Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, D.C.

TOM: Okay. I'm not familiar with them but I'm sure someone is.

RICK: You know Bob Misso, probably.

TOM: I've never met him, but I certainly know the name, and yes, I think.

RICK: I think Marvin Moriarty would have his name and number, but I'm not sure. Then Martha Naley – Martha Naley played a pretty big role in Washington, D.C. with the Wetland Reserve Program, and other issues.

TOM: Okay, okay.

RICK: Gene Whitaker. I don't know where Gene is, I have no idea. He left after a while. Went to another agency. I think he went with USDA after a while.

TOM: Is Bob Lange, do you know whatever became of him?

RICK: No, I was thinking, I've been thinking about Bob Lange the last couple of days. I don't know where he is. The last I heard of him, he was on a detail in Africa someplace, so I don't know, I have no idea where he is.

TOM: Interesting.

RICK: Marvin might know. Marvin Moriarty might know.

TOM: Yes, yes. You're right, you're right. Just as an aside, I saw Marvin at the - last fall - at the Annapolis Retirees Association meeting, which by the way are a lot of fun, if you haven't been to one.

RICK: Yeah, I have not, no.

TOM: The next one was scheduled for Spearfish this coming spring. I don't know if that will happen or not. Anyway, they are more fun than you might think.

RICK: Let's see. I can't think of many other folks. I don't know if Joe Artman would be important. I don't think he would be. He didn't do much. Who else?

TOM: Okay.

RICK: Well, it was a very positive experience for me and I, well I'll tell you, you should talk to a state coordinator would be a good idea. Doug Helmers might be one, in Iowa.

TOM: Oh yeah.

RICK: And then Jim, what was his last name in Wisconsin? Jim...

TOM: Jim, not Munson. Jim Ruwaldt.

RICK: Ruwaldt would be a good one. He would have a good state – he actually cut his teeth on the private lands program in Indiana and then had considerable experience with private lands in Wisconsin, obviously.

TOM: Yeah, for sure. Okay. Well, great! I'd love to see copies of that Stewardship 2000 and if you have any other documents if you felt like you wanted to scan, we could send them on to get them part of the archives as well.

RICK: I mentioned Minnesota Valley and the Partners program, but there's another, there's another refuge that kind of evolved out of the Partners program. That's the Tall Grass Prairie Challenge. The Northern Tall Grass Prairie Refuge. I remember putting together – I think you were a writer as well as I was – the "Tall Grass Prairie Challenge: Conserving Our Resources, Conserving Our Heritage."

TOM: Oh yeah, yes.

RICK: The prairie is my garden. I got a copy of this, I've got a copy of this, and I'm pretty proud of that.

TOM: It was a beautiful document, I think. We used some wonderful old illustrations.

RICK: Yes, they were that. Harvey Dunn, I guess, was the artist that illustrated the "Life in the Prairie" back in probably the late 1800's.

TOM: Yeah, I remember that, working with Tom Kelly was the visual graphics.

RICK: Yes, Tom did a nice job of putting it all together. Who's the artist now in the Fish and Wildlife Service?

TOM: Well, we have no more graphic artists in the regional office. After Tom retired, it was never filled, so just contract out for art work.

RICK: I know a guy who could do a good job for you. He's, my son. He lost his job. He's an artist, did art work for a religious publication company.

TOM: Well, I don't know what, I suspect at some point they'll start revamping the art program, but the money was getting tighter and tighter and tighter, so they were cutting positions left and right.

RICK: Hopefully that will change a little bit.

TOM: I hope so too. Very good. Well, Rick I'm going to end the recording right now.

END OF INTERVIEW

Key words:

Directors, equipment, farms and farming, forest conservation, grasslands, habitat conservation, habitat restoration, legislation, migratory birds, partnerships, wetland restoration