



The Oral History of Jim Ringelman

December 13, 2013

Interview conducted by John Cornely

Rio Serrano, Chile

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Jim Ringelman

Date of Interview: December 13, 2013

Location of Interview: Rio Serrano, Chile

Interviewer: John Cornely

Approximate years in Conservation: 32 (non-FWS)

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Spent 15 years with Colorado Division of Wildlife as a waterfowl researcher at Fort Collins Research Center. In 1996, he joined the Great Plains office of Bismarck, North Dakota, Ducks Unlimited ultimately serving as director of conservation programs.

Most Important Projects: Development of the Colorado Duck Stamp and the Colorado Wetlands Initiative, diversification of the work undertaken by the Ducks Unlimited (DU) Great Plains Office, creation of DU's Grasslands for Tomorrow initiative, revision of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and development of the NAWMP Action Plan.

Colleagues and Mentors: Ray "Bucky" Owen (University of Maine at Orono), FWS and/ or USGS: Carol Lively, David Anderson, Dick Hopper, Fred Johnston, Gary White, Jack Grieb, Jerry Longcore, Jim Nichols, John Cornely, Ken Burnham, Ken Williams, Matt Perry, Mike Anderson, Mike Runge, Paul Schmidt

Brief Summary of Interview: Jim talks about his childhood and education, including how Jerry Longcore mentored him with his work on black duck ecology which led to Jim's Ph.D. After getting his Ph.D., Jim went to work with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, where he began working with the flyway programs, participating in the Central Flyway Waterfowl Technical Committee and the Continental Evaluation Team for the NAWMP. He also joined the Adaptive Harvest Management Working Group as a state representative. After 15 years with Colorado, Jim transfers to DU's Great Plains office. He describes the work he did there including the protection of grassland habitat and his continued involvement with the Fish and Wildlife Service on efforts related to the NAWMP.

The Interview:

JOHN CORNELLY: This is John Cornely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service Heritage Committee and as a continuing part of our oral history project and more specifically a part of this interview will relate to our special North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) history project. I'm at Rio Serrano in Chile watching it rain. We've had a beautiful time here in Chile looking at wetlands and birds and talking about conservation.

I have the pleasure today of being with Jim Ringelman, who I've known and worked with for quite a few years. He's recently retired from Ducks Unlimited. I worked with him first when he worked for the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Jim is going to share with us some of his life and conservation work and specifically he's going to tell us about some of his specific involvement with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

With that, Jim, you can just start. We'd like to know where you grew up and went to school and that sort of thing. This is your story. I'll just let you start with that.

JIM RINGELMAN: Well, thanks, John. It's a pleasure to do this. Gosh, I grew up in a typical suburbia setting. I was born in 1953. I grew up in a city called Redwood City, California, which is on the San Francisco Peninsula between San Francisco and San Jose. It wasn't an environment like a rural environment where you could get outdoors and do that kind of thing. I was into sports quite a bit. I got my love for the outdoors from my dad who was an avid fisherman. He'd go on various fishing trips.

The highlight of my year when I got older was going on a weeklong backpacking trip into the Sierras. It was actually a horse-packing trip. We'd go up and he taught me to fly fish and we'd go catch trout in high mountain streams. I just thought that was the greatest thing ever to do that kind of outdoor activity. When I got a chance, I spent more time outdoors. I went to high school in that part of the world, San Carlos High School and graduated in '71. During my high school years, I used to spend a lot of time with my buddies backpacking in the Sierras and kind of loved that. Pretty outdoors oriented.

After graduating from high school, my buddy and I went to Europe for three months and toured around. There I got to see a lot of the kind of European environment. It was great for a high school kid because all of sudden you think you know what the world is like until you're exposed to a place like Europe. Then all of a sudden, your eyes are open that there's a different way of thinking about things, a different way of doing things. That was a great experience.

I didn't get to South America, but we did spend a lot of time in Switzerland and Austria and those kinds of places.

I was always interested in biology partly because of that background. I started my undergrad at a place called Humboldt State University in Northern California as a biology major, just general biology. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to be up in the redwood country 'cause it afforded me a chance to do more camping and fishing - my only reason for going up there. It was a pretty good school for a state college. I did that for 2 years.

JOHN: It turned out a lot of wildlife students.

JIM: It turned out a lot of wildlife students as well. Although I was not in the wildlife program at that point. I was in biology. My girlfriend who later became my wife could not get into Humboldt State. Jennie was going to Fresno State. After two years, I transferred down there to continue my biology studies. That was a different kind of school. It's in the San Joaquin Valley. It wasn't a great environment.

I started to get interested in ecology classes down there though. More and more there, I started to talk to people who were actually considering a career in wildlife biology. At that time, I thought it was pretty unlikely that I could have a career in wildlife biology. I became interested in that. Towards my senior year I really became interested in wildlife ecology and decided I wanted to go to graduate school. There was an opening at South Dakota State University for a graduate assistantship. I needed some kind of assistantship to be able to afford graduate school. I applied and was fortunate enough to get into that school which again turned out a lot of wildlife people, working in South Dakota.

It was a huge cultural change for me 'cause I went from California to the middle of the country. Climate totally different, society entirely different. I got involved right away with a group of kids, graduate students who had grown up on the farm and they grew up hunting. It didn't take me long, they were like, *we're going to go hunting. We're going to stop at the corner gun store, you can buy yourself a used shotgun. You'll need these shotgun shells and just shoot a couple feet ahead of the ducks, so you'll make sure you hit it.* That was my indoctrination to hunting and the outdoors. It really opened my eyes as to kind of a whole 'nother field really the discipline of wildlife biology.

Lester Flake was my advisor back then and Les was a waterfowl professor there. He taught waterfowl classes, and we went on various field trips. I ended up doing a research project on duck broods. I was interested in survey techniques, and it was obvious at that time people didn't have a very good survey methodology for duck broods. I did some work on what times of day and in what habitats they're most visible as a way to kind of expedite the survey. That was in 1975.

JOHN: That's when you're finished there?

JIM: Yeah. Well actually it was '76 I finished there. Immediately after that I thought, *well, this is pretty cool, I like this waterfowl stuff. I like wildlife biology.* And again, an opportunity came up to go to the University of Maine in Orono and study under "Bucky" Owen, Ray B. Owen who was, again, a waterfowl person there. It was a study on black ducks - one of the first studies on the ecology of black ducks in the inland breeding habitat. A lot of beaver ponds. Of course, there again it was a huge change 'cause I moved from a landscape that barely had any trees to one that was 95% plus forested in northeast U.S. and a whole different culture. Again, very interesting.

Bucky Owen was a big mentor, but the other person was Jerry Longcore. Jerry was a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee who staffed a small field station called the Maine Field Station. It was actually a field station of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

Jerry had a real keen eye and a really good field sense, took impeccable field notes and everything. I learned an awful lot about field observation in general. He worked rain or shine and of course, there the sun gets up in the summer, it's light at four in the morning. We were out early and out late and black flies and mosquitoes, but lots of field time with black ducks. It was one of the first studies where black ducks were captured and radiomarked. That was kind of the advent of radiotelemetry at that time. We followed

them and looked at home ranges and habitat use. That was eventually my Ph.D. dissertation on the ecology of the black duck. It was very interesting. That was like '77 through about '80.

JOHN: I'm a little older, but you got your master's and Ph.D. almost exactly the same time I did 'cause I spent four plus years in the Air Force in between.

JIM: Jerry was really good. After I graduated with my degree, he arranged for a years' period of time in which I could actually write up publications and build a publication resumé, which helped a lot. In the meantime, he took me on several kind of field trips and visits down to Patuxent Wildlife Research Center where I was introduced to folks like Matt Perry and Jim Nichols and folks like that who were really doing exciting stuff. It turns out that those kinds of contacts as you well know in this profession help when you go to look for other employment. You get people that kind of know you. There's name recognition and stuff. The contacts and kind of the exposure that Jerry gave to me to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were really, really invaluable in terms of that kind of networking.

JOHN: Was Jerry working on pesticide-related stuff or something different?

JIM: He had finished doing that. He was involved in pesticide work and then he was involved actually in some of the initial steel shot and lead shot toxicity work as well. By that time, he was kind of out of it and he was in Maine and doing his more general ecology work. He actually tried to get me to stay on in Maine and I would've liked to do that. That was the time I think hiring was not going very well for the Service. I was kind of on the hunt. I was pretty much on a track to be a waterfowl biologist at that point in time after a master's and Ph.D. both in waterfowl.

I noticed an ad for an opening in Colorado for a waterfowl researcher about 1981 or so. Of course, I jumped at that chance, flew into Denver, cold. They had a real formal kind of interview process, downtown Denver, a series of questions they asked about. I don't know who developed the questions. There were things like what was a three-bird flight. Was it...I mean they were very much detailed biology questions. I remember sitting in that hotel room and I got a call that said I had nailed it. I'd gotten all the questions right. I thought *well, that's a pretty good sign*. Shortly after I was offered a job with Colorado Division of Wildlife as a waterfowl researcher in their Fort Collins Research Center. We moved out there. Great place. I'd always loved the mountains, so I had a chance to be there. What I didn't expect and was such a pleasant surprise was what a strong group of researchers were there. It turns out that because Colorado State University is in that same town, there's a very close connection between the research folks there and the Division of Wildlife and Colorado State University.

That was an opportunity for me to continue my professional growth way beyond my formal education. It was a chance to rub shoulders with David Anderson, Ken Burnham and Gary White. I was offered a chance to be an affiliate faculty member at CSU, which I did and so I advised graduate students. It was just a huge continuing growth experience, to be at a place like that. It was really interesting.

Now, the way that I came to this job is kind of interesting because it is the first nexus with NAWMP actually. It turns out that the person that used to be the waterfowl biologist advanced to the research chief and that person's name was Jack Grieb. Then Jack Grieb later advanced to become the director of the Division of Wildlife. Dick Hopper, who had taken Jack's place as the waterfowl researcher, became research chief and that opened an opportunity for me to come in there. Well, it wouldn't be but a couple of years later Jack Grieb retired and took on the chore of being the US lead and actually writing the North

American Waterfowl Management Plan. As I'll come around at the end of this discussion, it's an interesting nexus in terms of how his career kind of ended and the opening it gave to me and then my career after the same kind of thing.

JOHN: That's very interesting. I didn't know about that nexus. When we started this special project on the North American Plan, Jack was no longer with us. It would have been wonderful to be able to have sat down with him and have him participate in these interviews. Dick Hopper had taken over a lot of that stuff. Dick was in our first video interviewing process and panel discussions. He gave as good of a view as we could get of what Jack had done and then what Dick picked up.

JIM: As a researcher, I was getting pretty much a free hand to work on any topic I thought was interesting and relevant. The first several years we worked on ecology of ducks and montane habitats in the big inner mountain valleys like North Park and San Luis Valley. We did a lot of banding, a lot of physiological work which was very big at that time, quite a bit of radiotelemetry work. We were doing a lot of interesting things.

I remember Jack Grieb pulling me aside shortly after retirement and said, "This is all interesting stuff you're doing but make sure you work on stuff that's important." I think the implication was some of the stuff I was working on he didn't think was so important. I've always thought of that because of course, Jack wasn't with us too much longer. As I went through my career, I kept thinking back, *okay let's do a reality check. Am I working on things that are really important and meaningful?* It was just a brief comment, it wasn't that long even, but it stuck with me for that amount of time.

I guess after a while I wanted to continue research, but I wasn't entirely content to just do that. I started to, I guess you'd say, apply my technical skills to the flyway group. I was invited to be part of it - the Central Flyway Waterfowl Technical Committee - probably a few years after I joined the Division of Wildlife. I gradually became more and more involved with that group on things like the High Plains Mallard Management Unit and those kinds of things. Eventually I became very much in the mode that you get as a flyway biologist which is very technical and regulations oriented, while at the same time I continued to keep one foot in research and acted that way. It was interesting.

I found the flyway regulations stuff interesting, but it's its own culture you can say in terms of history and tradition. I was a little reluctant to buy into all the traditional things and this is the way we do it, it's just the way it's been. It's like, *well, I don't know. What's the scientific basis, what's the biological basis?* [That] kind of stuff. I was kind of questioning that.

JOHN: I think you and I had, in some ways, come from a different background and a different [way of thinking.] Neither of us really had been involved in the regulations setting process that much. We found that we looked at things a little differently than those guys and a lot of those guys seemed to be carrying on the traditions with very little change in how they looked at things.

JIM: Later on, we had an opportunity to expand the habitat work. My first kind of real solid connection with the habitat end of things came when they decided that they would institute a Colorado Duck Stamp, a state duck stamp program. I was basically in charge of getting that up and running. The legislation had already been passed, but I needed to get it off the ground. Again, some commonalities that you and I have about art, selecting art and rules for artwork and stamp production and collectors and all this other stuff. It

came into being [at that time.] I'd always been interested in wildlife art, and we were fortunate to get some good artwork to begin with.

Then it's like, *okay, we've got this duck stamp money, what are we going to do with it?* I helped develop a structure around a Colorado Wetlands Initiative which initially used some of the duck stamp money. It's almost like a mini joint venture and again this is a bit of a connection with NAWMP.

JOHN: I hadn't thought of that. I was on the first committee to help review those and score those projects. It was kind of like a mini version of having NAWCA (North American Wetlands Conservation Act) money and allocating it to priority habitat stuff.

JIM: We had what's akin now to what you call the joint venture board; we had in small regions of the state and San Luis Valley and various other places. It was an interesting process to get that up and going. It made me appreciate the dynamics of working with people and sometimes the complexity working to the conservation endpoint. Then something really interesting happened. The Great Outdoors Colorado [Fund] came about, which was of course, as you know, proceeds from the lottery fund dedicated to conservation - a large chunk of which could be spent [in the] state.

Initially we got some money to match with the duck stamp money. Then later on they [Great Outdoors Colorado] decided *we needed to move the needle. We need some projects that really make a difference.* They started these legacy projects. I remember the first time they had that. There was a call for proposals. On the very last day those things were due, there was an opportunity to put in [apply for] - these were like \$3 million proposals which were absolutely unheard of at that time. Add another zero or two to what we've been thinking about. I put in one for Colorado Wetlands Initiative at that point. The thing was accepted and that really, really launched things. The Colorado Wetlands Initiative really gave some pretty substantial backing to the State Wetlands Initiative, but it also provided a match for NAWCA because it was nonfederal and that brought a lot of NAWCA dollars into the state as well. I started really enjoying the habitat stuff at that point. Right now, my career is doing research and doing flyway stuff and I'm more and more into the habitat things as well, more and more along the NAWCA lines. That kept going and was pretty interesting.

I was asked because of my involvement in the state stuff to get more into national level stuff. About that time, they started the Continental Evaluation Team (CET) for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The Plan had been in place long enough, people are starting to ask, *well, you're spending a lot of money. Does it make any difference?* A group of us became involved as kind of a science group to go around and talk to the joint ventures and find out what they're doing and try to get them to think critically about evaluating performance if they hadn't already done that.

The CET was an interesting exercise in thinking about performance criteria for a big project like NAWCA. That was interesting. That effort started out. Then, it was early 1990s, there was a lot of acrimony between the states and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on regulations. Again, I was asked to join a national group called Adaptive Harvest Management Working Group where there would be a whole kind of different paradigm to how flyway regulations were set, especially with regards to ducks where most of the acrimony was. This is the era where Carl Walter's had just published a book on adaptive management that was kind of all the rage. Very smart people like Jim Nichols and Ken Williams and Fred Johnson were thinking about all this and very highly motivated administrators like Paul Schmidt were looking for a way out of the acrimony and said, *look why don't you guys get people together and really try*

to think about objective decision-making processes for federal regulations? I was fortunate enough to be one of two Central Flyway technical people appointed to that committee.

We all went back to Patuxent for that first meeting; threw us all together in a room and now we're looking at our counterparts in other flyways. We'd never seen these guys before. We'd had no contact. We had no idea what they're thinking. It was just a weird concept to think that all these other flyways and flyway biologists who really didn't communicate with each other.

JOHN: They're sharing resources.

JIM: They're sharing resources. This was the states versus the feds. In some ways it was the flyways versus the flyways, if you had a common resource.

JOHN: Especially between the Central and Mississippi [Flyways.]

JIM: Central and Mississippi Flyway. Yeah, now we're in a closed room with these guys. It was a masterful job by the Fish and Wildlife Service in particular Fred Johnson who really organized all these meetings. It was all based on the principle of self-discovery. We didn't rush things. We were presented with things and led to discover it ourselves, which it turns out is something that Carl Walters, the guru of adaptive management, says is really important. You're buying the thing if you discover it yourselves. Fred and others led us through this process.

JOHN: You need all those people to buy in or it's not going to really go anywhere.

JIM: I ended up sticking with that AHM group for many years, really until I left the flyway system. It developed and flourished. I think right now is held up along with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan as a real progressive model for managing populations. I guess you'd say it's the counterpart to NAWMP in terms of a model of how to manage harvested populations. I feel very fortunate to have been able to do that.

The other thing I became interested in is, in setting these regulations, you would be at these flyway meetings, you would always hear, we need another split or we need an additional bird in the bag for this and this and the reason always was, *well hunters wanted it. Hunters wanted it.* I started questioning, *Where are these hunters? Where's the information?* Well, it turns out that the model back then was for the flyway biologists. I want to try to be fair about this, but I think in general the model was for the flyway biologists to project their own personal biases and preferences for hunting and assume that was what the hunters wanted. That was at a time the science of human dimensions research was coming along. I became interested in knowing, *well can you inform decisions better using human dimensions research science and do a better job than what we're doing kind of just anticipating what these guys want?* Maybe even worse than that is projecting their own desires and assuming that's right. Because it turns out flyway biologists are not normal, average hunters. They are very talented.

I became very interested in this subject and I asked, "Well, where's the national coordinated survey asking about these things?" And there wasn't one. No one had ever conducted a survey to actually ask about desires and tradeoffs, would you rather have this or that? No one had asked about their motivations for hunting either. Now it's becoming a really interesting area of research. Jody Enck and others at Cornell had discovered that there are multiple motivations for hunting. Whether you just like to affiliate with

people, whether you appreciate the outdoors, whether you want to achieve certain goals like full bags. It's like, *well what are hunters made of? What are they thinking?*

So, I organized, I guess you'd say the first ever National Hunter Survey. I got the flyway guys together. By now, I'd known them because of adaptive harvest management. They kind of knew me and I guess trusted me enough. I said, "Let's do this. I'll work with you guys. We'll get a set of survey questions and all we need you guys to do is send these out to your hunters and send me the raw data and I'll analyze it." We pulled that off. That was back in 1994, I think; something like that. I think I got 31 states to participate out of 50 which I thought was pretty good. Got the results back and one of the things that I decided to do at the last minute was I asked each of the flyway biologists to answer the questions as they thought their hunters would respond, 'cause I was very interested in if it differed.

JOHN: Kind of parallel what they had been doing all along.

JIM: Exactly. Exactly. That turned out to be just key, because when the results came back, the hunters on average - of course, there was a range of responses - but if you took the average response and desires of the hunters, they differed radically from what their own flyway biologists in their states thought. It was a bit of an embarrassment to the biologists but at the same time it was an eye-opener *that hey we do not have a good handle on what these clients of ours really want.*

JOHN: And yet I know some of the arguments - me being on the Fish and Wildlife Service side of these discussions and arguments - they were arguing for these - what they thought represented the hunters. That was weighing heavily into how they would vote and how they would bargain during the regulations process.

JIM: Oh yeah, yeah, it was huge. By this time in my career, I was realizing, *okay, I've been in this adaptive harvest management group, I've seen the models.* I've realized that this minor tinkering that we do with regulations, which take an enormous amount of time and process were really not impacting populations hardly at all. I also realized that what we were doing to address the desires of hunters really wasn't addressing the desires of hunters.

JOHN: Because we didn't know what the desires of hunters really was.

JIM: Right. I harken back to Jack Grieb who said *am I doing important stuff here?* I concluded that maybe it was time for a change. I really enjoyed the habitat work I'd been doing.

In 1996, there was an opportunity to go to DU. There was a job opportunity in the Great Plains office of Bismarck, North Dakota - Ducks Unlimited. I think if you're a waterfowl biologist, you ultimately want to spend some time in the prairie and there was the chance. It turned out that the director of that office was changing. Jeff Nelson, a friend of mine, was going to go in from Memphis, the national headquarters of DU to be the director and he was looking for a deputy. He invited me to apply for that. I did and I got it. In fact, I had multiple opportunities within DU when I said I was interested, but then I moved - one was in Memphis, and I didn't want to be a Memphis guy. I went to Bismarck and that shifted my whole career focus into one of looking at habitat trying to deliver habitat conservation in a meaningful way. It really was the second half of my career. I had spent 15 years by then at the Division of Wildlife. I was ready for a change, and it all came together. Then I realized that I could probably be spending my time better than I was) doing some of these other things.

It was an exciting time with Ducks Unlimited. That regional office administered eight states in the Upper Midwest, including the Dakotas and Montana, which are the heart of the prairie pothole region, but it was very – for the importance of the region, it was a very small program. It wasn't diverse; it had an engineering component that just did wetland restorations, but it hadn't contemplated any type of land protection or easements or acquisitions. It had no science program. It had a minimal program really outside of the Dakotas and nothing going on in Colorado or other places. It had no GIS section. It had no agronomy work going on. Over time, I had the opportunity to work pretty closely to build all those programs to where the office grew from probably about a dozen people to more than 50 in the decade or so that followed.

It was really fun because it added a lot of diversification. One of the first things that we had done was to emphasize the importance of uplands as well as the wetlands, because prior to that time, it had been all wetlands. We didn't yet realize that uplands were really important for nesting birds because, as you recall, the work from Northern Prairie, Lew Cowardin and others had done had just come off of a big mallard study [and discovered that] recruitment was just absolutely miserable. Their studies suggested 5, 6, 7% nest success was not enough to maintain mallard populations. I remember thinking *oh, that's not good. We've got to do something to reverse that.* Of course, that's part of the genesis of the North American Plan, too. So, we started Grasslands for Tomorrow which is the name of the program that eventually would run for 15 years and focus on all the components of our conservation work there, but in particular the idea we ought to preserve habitat and to try to protect what we can.

Let me circle back just a minute because it's interesting. I want to put it into the perspective of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. I remember when all this was going about in the '80s, I was a researcher with the Division of Wildlife, but I was very much aware of the recruitment studies that Lew Cowardin was doing and the miserable recruitment. I was thinking - of course, we're in a drought period - and I was thinking *this North American Plan could be the last chance for waterfowl.* I mean, everybody was...you had to have been back there feeling that. It was like the data was there suggesting populations weren't sustainable, we were losing habitat, populations were crashing. I thought, *man, this was kind of it. This was make it or break it.* Even though I wasn't involved with NAWMP at that time, that thought carried with me a long time.

When we started Grasslands for Tomorrow, things had turned around a bit. I think in some ways we'd underestimated the resiliency of North American waterfowl to respond to drought and to survive even that pretty massive habitat destruction.

JOHN: When I got to Denver in 1988, we were in the throes of a long-term drought. I know that people like Ron Reynolds and Dave Sharp and myself - who we both worked with for many, many years - none of us were sure. We knew that water would come back, but we weren't sure that ducks would recover. We talked about it a lot. When the water did come back, boy, the response - even though we knew we had lost a lot of habitat wetlands and uplands - the response was remarkable. We thought *well it's not that they still don't need help and protection but they're a lot more resilient than we gave them credit for.*

JIM: Exactly. I mean there was a high level of uncertainty and anxiety, I think, about what would happen.

So, we started Grasslands for Tomorrow and that went along pretty good. Eventually built it quite high, but about 2000 on, the moisture returned to the prairies with a vengeance. It got very wet and populations

just exploded. Went way past the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV) goal. It was at that time, it was very interesting, Carol Lively, who was the joint venture coordinator - I was on the PPJV Technical Committee then - Carol asked if I would help lead the revision of the Strategic Plan for the PPJV and I said I would. We sat down with a group of biologists and looked at the data and realized that ducks have now demonstrated their capacity to respond and build to levels in a way that exceeded our goal when moisture conditions exist. Maybe we need to change the paradigm. Instead of a paradigm of restoration, we needed a paradigm of keeping all the parts in place that we had right now, because we already had massive loss. Maybe the best thing we could do now is stop the bleeding if we can, because we know that we can build populations when moisture comes back.

That ended up to be the central theme of the revision of the Strategic Plan for the PPJV. It was pretty much a paradigm buster for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan 'cause they're like, *wait a minute, you guys are supposed to talk about how you're going to build populations back up to what your goals are.* Then the PPJV was saying, *we've already way surpassed our goals. We're losing a lot of habitat. What we need to do is keep the habitat that's there. Keep the basins intact. When Mother Nature provides water, the birds can come back. Keep the nesting habitat there, because we still have native prairie and CRP (Conservation Reserve Program), but that should be our top priority.*

That didn't fit very well. That was like a square peg in a round hole when it came to NAWMP. We got some raised eyebrows about our new strategic plan but it's like, *look guys, doesn't this make sense?* Everybody had to admit that it made good sense to adopt that model. That's where you saw a huge growth and push for wetland and grasslands, especially grassland easements. Grasslands for Tomorrow, the program that I led, really tried to lead the way in building capacity, both financial and staffing capacity to ramp up the easement program working with the Service who already had a great program going.

We're just like, *what can we do to add capacity to what you guys are doing?* That was the focus, along with some other things. That was the main focus for 15 years of Grasslands for Tomorrow was doing that. Over time we got a million acres in the 15 years. "We" being the big "We" - the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and DU and other partners. It was really quite rewarding that way.

As my career moved along, I continued to see loss of habitat and I continued to see I guess you'd say, a bit of confused thinking at the national level over this tension between restoring habitat and saving habitat and thinking about the nature of what's secure. I became worried about the continuing loss of waterfowl hunters and the implications for conservation. I became distressed at public policies that were really not progressive. They were kind of anti-conservation and wondering how we could get the public engaged in valuing these resources because it became apparent, we weren't going to do it on the backs of waterfowl hunters. It had to be progressive policies and funding and programs that the public at large supported.

So, The North American Waterfowl Management Plan seemed like a natural vehicle to do that. As it turned out, there was a desire to once again update the Plan. It had been updated three times I believe since the '86 Plan. It was kind of due for another update. They knew they wanted to think about populations. They knew that they wanted [to] obviously, 'cause that's key to the North American Plan. Habitat is obviously key as well, but they wanted to think more about people.

I thought *well maybe this is something I can contribute to* because as I've rambled on here, I've had work in human relations between flyways and populations harvest and habitat. I mentioned to Paul Schmidt, who was still the assistant regional director for migratory birds with Fish and Wildlife Service, I'd be

willing to help with this update. He jumped all over that. Before I knew it, I was half-time to lead the update which had morphed from an update to a full-scale revision by that time.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan committee, I think, wisely decided that if the community at large is going to totally reconsider the key elements of the Plan, it's deserving of widespread consultations with the community and it's deserving of kind of a full-fledged revision and not just another update.

We embarked upon that late 2008. It ended up we had 13 consultation workshops in the US and Canada in two waves. We had an initial wave to kind of scope the document. It was really interesting to get the input. By that time, we were into a process called structured decision making which was a very logical approach to thinking about not only what your means objectives are, how you wanted to get things done, but what your ultimate objective is - your "fundamental objective", they called it. That objective is when you can no longer say *you want to do this just because you want to do this, just because it's important*. That's your fundamental objective.

We had these sessions where we'd ask about *what do you think is the fundamental objective of waterfowl management? What are the means objectives you would use to get to that fundamental objective? What are some of the tactics you would use?* Then there were broader questions about concerns.

Dave Case from DG Case and Associates was a consultant who had software where you could actually query people, make it anonymous and put the results in. It would tally you. It was really fascinating. We had this series of meetings and consultations that helped form the foundation of the Plan. At the same time, there was interest in the community of bringing together in a more explicit way the objectives of harvest management and habitat management. There's a group called the Joint Task Group that was kind of assigned to do that. I was a member of that. Mike Runge was the USGS biologist to help coordinate that. It really was the idea that look, *the habitat joint ventures should really have their goals grounded in what the population managers felt was important and vice versa. The population managers should be able to take advantage of gains that are made in habitat and realize the opportunity for additional harvest*, for example. They needed to be more coherent.

That desire kind of underlaid a lot of the thinking of the North American Plan Revision. The Plan emerged as a document that considered this idea of greater coherence between harvest and habitat management and, at the same time, greater recognition of *how are we going to carry forward this conservation mission when we had declining hunter numbers and fewer people are joining the ranks of hunters?*

We developed a draft. We sent it out for review in the community. It came back pretty loud and clear that we had underplayed the importance of sustaining the conservation programs by getting larger public support. So, we went back and thought about, *well how would we do that?* It became this idea that the Plan is really a three-legged stool. It's about habitat and populations and people. You need all three legs of that stool in order for the North American Plan to stand and for waterfowl populations to thrive and support the need.

It was fascinating to think about that three-legged stool. There was a lot of resistance to including people as a fundamental objective. That's eventually what happened. Look, people and the desires of people can no longer just be a byproduct. There has to be explicitness, and this is what you want in terms of support

and/or hunter participation and things like that. That was key. That was as important as explicit objectives for population and for habitat because it's all connected. Without all three of those, the stool doesn't stand.

We beefed up that portion of the Plan. It became clear that this was getting to be too big a document for North American Plan. There was a desire to have an action plan developed that had a few more details, that was a bit more like a roadmap for the next steps. We want to get a bigger, a larger public engagement. *How do we do that in terms of what are the messages and what are the objectives?* And so, there's a whole Action Plan that's now a companion document to the North American Plan.

The initial thing that I thought I would help was for two years turned into me leading and being the main writer on not only the North American Plan, but an Action Plan as well. It was tremendously rewarding. Basically, I got to interact with everyone in the waterfowl community across both the joint ventures and the harvest management and even some of the human dimensions communities and get input from all of those folks and think about how to weave it together. In a way, I really think what I'd done in my career up to that point finally [led] me to do that, to weave it all together. Hopefully I did a good job. I guess time will tell. I had a lot of great brilliant people helping me. Mike Anderson was clearly my wingman. I know you've talked to Mike. He's an incredible scientist and thinker. Other people - from John Eadie to Bob Clark - we just had a tremendous group of folks.

JOHN: Obviously you couldn't have spent all that time on this assignment without the support of Ducks Unlimited, both your immediate supervisor and all the way, probably to the top in Memphis. I know personally how much time you had to spend on all this stuff.

JIM: That's true. Well, so as it comes to pass, Paul Schmidt, who got me into this in the first place when he was with the Fish and Wildlife Service, decided to retire from the Service. He became the chief conservation officer for Ducks Unlimited right about the time that this is really getting going. In terms of line supervision with DU, he was my boss' supervisor. Paul thought this was a great idea to continue to have Jim work on this. So, I continued.

JOHN: Did your boss have any issues with that?

JIM: No, not really, because it intersected so closely with what we're doing in the prairie pothole region. The prairie pothole region is such an important part of that Plan. As I was thinking about my programs and program delivery within Ducks Unlimited, it really translated over nicely to some of the stuff that's going on at NAWMP too. Ducks Unlimited is of course an independent nonprofit, but the concerns and the questions and the programs that are designed so closely parallel, especially the Fish and Wildlife Service, that you'd be working on a lot of these topics anyhow.

Now, I was supposed to spend about half time on this thing. I don't know how much time I spent on it. It ended up kind of almost like two jobs in a way because the essence for the model is still going strong. I don't regret a minute of it. It was great. It's nice to wrap it up and put a bow on it after five years. I have backed out of it a little bit. Dale Humburg is taking the lead and kind of moving it forward now. I'm interested but there gets to be a point and I think you need to kind of cleanly step away and let others carry it on.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, it has such a history of kind of inventing new ways of doing things. It's just remarkable. It's almost got a life of its own and it evolves on its own. I think it has

such a passionate group of people who are part of that institution. I mean they're part of their institutions as well as flyway affiliations, joint ventures, but they're part of the whole too, and they realize that. An interesting outcome is explicitness about people is the creation of the Human Dimensions Working Group. We hope eventually it will become kind of akin to either the flyway community or the joint venture community where you have a group of people thinking about *what are the desires of the public and about hunters and how can we really add strength to that whole decision-making process.*

JOHN: One of my observations is that the initiation and implementation of the North American Plan had a lot of impact that I don't think anybody really thought about or anticipated on the way Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, states, other partners do business in general because you have described this meeting where for the first time people from all these flyways got together and started to have an opportunity to compare notes and work together. You talked about your experience with the Colorado Division of Wildlife in the Central Flyway. I remember a couple of different things related to my growing up and my background and what I was seeing in the flyway process and in refuges where I spent my first ten years as a refuge biologist. I just said *this is not right.*

One was from a refuge standpoint; all our neighbors were farmers and ranchers. I grew up working on my granddad's farm and going to school with farmers and small-town people. We were fighting tooth and nail with these people as refuge people, all the time. I said, "This doesn't make any sense. I don't think these people in eastern Oregon are that different than the farmers I grew up with in north central Kansas and in South Dakota. There's a lot of good people here but we're not getting along too well."

On the same token, when I first started going to flyway meetings because I was the Region 1 Dusky Canada Goose biologist -that's how I started going to flyway meetings [for] the first time - I had no idea all this stuff was going on. It wasn't quite as bad out in the Pacific coast as it was in the Central Flyway when I came to the Central Flyway but still. Most of the relationship between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the states was arguing about setting hunting regulations.

Then all a sudden I'm on four of the first technical committees of the North American Plan with all these same people. We've got mostly the same objectives and we're getting along and working together. This transcended all the stuff that had happened in the past and even though we still had our arguments over regulations, we became better working partners. It helped that process, in addition to the habitat process. At the same time the Partners for Wildlife then later became Partners for Fish and Wildlife, we started working with private landowners and said *if you're interested in wildlife we can help. We have some money, and we can find other money.* To me, this is much more the way life should be. That was kind of good unintended consequences of the North American Plan and this new Partners program.

You don't think of these things but a lot of this happened when I started working on this project. We started talking about the history of the Plan and talking to all the people that played important roles in this and say *this really changed the way all of us did business together.*

JIM: It did. It was much more collegial and much more cooperative and that's something. Yeah, I guess it's easy to underappreciate that, but it really did bring the community closer.

JOHN: Yeah, I didn't appreciate. I mean, I just didn't even realize it until we started getting these people together and talking about it. The other thing is that you already knew about black ducks. I didn't know anything about black ducks until you get all these people together and you start learning about all these

different habitats and all these different issues. Conversely, a lot of people knew about prairie potholes, but nobody had ever heard of rainwater basins except I happened to go to college adjacent to rain basins and I happened to go to graduate school in the middle of playas. I happened to go to elementary school in the middle of prairie potholes and I didn't even know that. You started thinking about *these are the same birds. They're nesting here. They're migrating through here. They're wintering down there. We've got to be talking.*

JIM: We've got to be talking. I think the whole community - because of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, because of adaptive harvest management - it's just come closer together. That's a good thing, because we have a lot of challenges out there. It's working together.

John: You got to. I mean, we've really amplified and there's still, as you know, we have a lot of work to do; even us retirees. We're in a better place and it's good that we're in a better place because the challenges are growing at the same time. We need to be in a better place, or we don't have a chance.

JIM: That's very true. Very true.

JOHN: We've achieved my expectations for this visit but certainly we have more electrons here available if there's any other thoughts that you'd like to share or advice you'd like to give to the future. One of the things we're trying to do here is, you're now retired, you've had a wonderful career. You've learned a lot. We would not like it if the next generation had to learn that all over again. We're trying to capture some of this experience and stuff and make it available to the current and future waterfowl and habitat biologists. It's fun to do but the more I've done it, the more important I think it is to capture this stuff. We need to figure out ways for people to actually listen and apply it. At least we've captured it...some of it.

JIM: Right. I think it's incredibly important. It's a great effort. I do worry you hear that there are no new problems, just new biologists or something like that. You lose that institutional knowledge, and you don't want to go back and start at square one. We can't afford to do that.

JOHN: No, we can't. We don't have enough time.

JIM: Well, you can start pretty much where the other folks, the other generation left off. I worry that that doesn't happen, so these oral histories hopefully will be a way to avoid that. I mean when we look at the science that drove our conservation programs, we stood on the shoulders of giants.

I think about the "Lew Cowardins" and all those other colleagues he had at Northern Prairie Wildlife Research. The great work that was done there and the great work at Patuxent. Then before that, there's Belrose and all these other folks. We can't afford to go back and start over again. We've got to build on that. I worry sometimes that it's not done in an organized way. I'm afraid our universities aren't necessarily teaching that.

JOHN: Well, our universities, as much as we'd like them to be, aren't organized systematically to do that. I don't know that much about university systems in Europe or other parts of the country, but just the way it's difficult for an organization, I would guess, like DU because you're not just given a checkbook and say, as Jack Grieb says, *do the most important thing*. You have to go after the money and sometimes the money is not there for the most important things to work on. I always am concerned about that as it's in some ways kind of a helter-skelter prioritization process of chasing the dollars.

There are good examples of professors and programs where they've just kept bringing in students and building on themes and so on. Hopefully there will always be people, big thinkers that are saying *well right now, I have an opportunity to do this piece of the puzzle, but I've got to keep the big puzzle in mind and keep plugging in the pieces so there's some coherence to the whole thing.* That's not easy.

JIM: No. Working with DU too, I became aware of the growing importance of donors, private donations from individuals, some of whom are very well off and have a passion for waterfowl conservation. I've learned that if you can spend the time with them - these are bright people, they wouldn't have made their fortune otherwise - if you can spend time with them and really educate them as to what's going on, then you get a nice match between what they want to give to and what's important. That's the key. If you're too late in the communications and relationship building, then you do risk a mismatch where you want it. They want to give money, but it's to the wrong thing. The most important communications, well there are lots of important communications. Obviously, peer reviewed publications are important as a foundation of science. Web-based communications are important because that's just the way our program works now. But personal communication is a way that boils things down. It doesn't mislead, it simplifies but gets to the point. It is really a fine art. You need to do that in a way that you can get to these people who really care and have great wealth. I've had the pleasure of working with several of them and they've done miraculous things. I mean in the tens of millions of dollars for things like easements, which is exactly what we wanted to have happen. It's just a matter of bringing the two together. I think increasingly that's going to be important to conservation. I'm afraid that governments are going to probably lose their spending power in terms of conservation investments and that sportsmen probably are not going to increase in large numbers. The question is, *who funds all this work, because it's increasingly expensive.*

JOHN: It's a changing landscape. I spend a lot of time defending sportsmen and rightfully so because who knows if we'd even have a conservation movement. Here in Chile, we've talked about things going on in Argentina in particular and in Chile where we didn't have that long-time passionate people and sportsmen that said, *hey, populations are going down the tubes. We need to do something for populations and habitat* - which in the US started the whole thing. Society is very different than it was back [then]. The conservation movement started before the Civil War. So, we need to change with the times and bring those kinds of people along. They have to trust you or they're not - that money, some people may not look at it that way, but it was pretty hard earned on their part. Even if it wasn't, they think it was. They have to trust you that you're right; that these are important things. If they want to continue to enjoy the things they enjoy, we need their help.

JIM: Right, right. I have nothing else to add. It's been a wonderful project. Thanks for the chance to visit about it.

JOHN: Well, I greatly appreciate your time and I've appreciated working with you over the many years. This is a good contribution to try and pass this information on to folks. As you know, I hope to take this a step farther and condense some of this into some articles that will actually be in print and available. That will hopefully help make it, as you say, simplify the concepts for some of the younger people. Not that they need things to be simple, but just because to tie things together and look at the bigger picture. Again, thanks very much for your time.

JIM: My pleasure.

Key words: adaptive harvest management, conservation, habitat management, migratory birds, North American Waterfowl Management Act, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, partnerships, structured decision making, waterfowl