The Oral History of Joe McCauley

November 28, 2023

Interview conducted by Libby Herland

Shepherdstown, WV

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Joseph F. (Joe) McCauley

Date of Interview: 11/28/2023

Location of Interview: Shepherdstown, WV

Interviewer: Libby Herland

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 32 years, 1984-2015

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:

- Northeast Regional Office, Region 5 (1984 to 1986) - Ascertainment Biologist
- Supawna Meadows NWR, Region 5 (1986 to 1989) – Assistant Refuge Manager
- Back Bay NWR, Region 5 (1990 to 1996) – Deputy Refuge Manager
- Northeast Regional Office, Region 5 (1996 to 2000) - Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Coordinator
- Rappahannock River Valley NWR, Region 5 (2000 to 2010) – Refuge Manager
- Northeast Regional Office, Region 5 (2010 to 2015) - Realty Division Chief

Most Important Projects:

- Writing the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the boundary expansion of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, resulting in the expansion of the refuge by 11,000 acres.
- Serving as the first staff ever at Supawna Meadows NWR, developing a habitat management program and opening up the refuge to deer hunting despite significant opposition from the Fund for Animals.
- Defending a compatibility determination that closed 3 miles of dikes at Back Bay NWR to all uses during winter and migration.
- Working with the Friends of Back Bay NWR to convince the City of Virginia Beach to locate a sanitary sewer line outside the refuge boundary.
- While serving as the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Coordinator, helping states and partners navigate and obtain NAWCA funding for land acquisition and other wetland projects.
- Helping establish the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.
- Evolving the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture into an “All Birds” partnership, and not one solely focused on waterfowl.
- Building up Rappahannock River Valley NWR and establishing a habitat management program which included ending the co-op farming program, writing a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP), establishing a public use program, and starting a refuge “friends” group.
- Establishment of the Great Thicket NWR, a multi-state, multi-focus area refuge for shrubland-dependent species including the New England Cottontail.

Colleagues and Mentors: Bill Gill, Jim Oland, Bailey White, Dane Whittingham, Curt Laffin, Bill Ashe, Walt Quist, Dick Nugent, Steve Atzert, Bill Leenhouts, Tony Léger, Molly Brown (Friends of Back Bay NWR), Dick Dyer, Kathy Owens, Frances Murphey, Bill Zinni, Nancy McGarigal, Bill Porter, Sue McMahon

Brief Summary of Interview: Joe was born in Washington, DC, and grew up just outside the District in Falls Church, Virginia. He describes an idyllic neighborhood, where he had many friends who he keeps in touch with to this day. He talks about his detour from academics into a career as a surveyor, before deciding to resume his education at West Virginia University in 1981. While there, he was hired as a co-op student, beginning his career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1983 at the Cortland, New York, Ecological Services Field Office. His second co-op appointment at Great Dismal Swamp NWR was the beginning of his love for the national wildlife refuge system.

Joe highlights his career path through the FWS including on several refuges, working on the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. He started his career in the Northeast Region's (Region 5) Division of Realty working as an ascertainment biologist where he was responsible preparing information for Land Acquisition Review Committee meetings and writing NEPA compliance documents, including the EA for the boundary expansion of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). He ended his career as the chief of the Region 5 Realty Division. Joe talks about his work at Supawna Meadows NWR in southern New Jersey as Assistant Refuge Manager. He recalls that not much in the way of management had ever been done at Supawna Meadows, so everything he did was new. He rejuvenated the land management program but noted that one of the major undertakings was the deer hunt. He goes on to describe the lengthy process involved in getting the deer hunt approved, including writing the EA for the hunt plan.

His next career move was to Back Bay NWR in Virginia Beach, where with Tony Léger as his mentor, he was involved with two very controversial projects- seasonal closure of the dikes to visitor access and the rerouting of a proposed sanitary sewer line - in which the Service prevailed, protecting refuge habitat and wildlife. Joe talks about the total rehab of the 900-acre impoundment system, building new dikes, putting in structures, actively buying land, and dealing with wild ponies. Joe then talks about his relocation back to the Region 5 Regional Office as the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, where he interacted with State fish and game/fish and wildlife directors and non-governmental organizations to achieve waterfowl conservation in a 17-state region. Joe ramped up the use of North American Waterfowl Conservation Act monies for waterfowl conservation, particularly land acquisition, and he laid the groundwork for this joint venture to expand its partnership to protect all birds, not just waterfowl.

Joe goes on to describe why he left a job he loved to move to Rappahannock River Valley NWR as the refuge manager there. He describes writing and implementing a CCP, expanding the refuge, working with a Friends group which he established, doing grassland management and developing wildlife-dependent public use programs. Joe wraps up the interview by talking about his work and accomplishments as the Region 5 Chief of Realty and his very successful post-retirement work with the Chesapeake Conservancy which resulted in more land acquisition for the Rappahannock River Valley NWR and more importantly returning native lands to the federally recognized Rappahannock tribe.

THE INTERVIEW:

LIBBY: Hi, this is Libby Herland. I'm the representative from the Northeast Region on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service History Committee, and I chair the oral history subcommittee. I'm here today with Joe McCauley, who I did have the very great pleasure of working with for several years in the Northeast Region. We are doing his oral history today, and Joe is going to tell us about his career in the Fish and Wildlife Service. He did start in 1983 and he retired in 2015. He had several really great jobs, and he made some really terrific contributions to wildlife conservation in his Fish and Wildlife Service career. So, we're going to learn more about that today. All right. Welcome, Joe. How are you?

JOE McCAULEY: I'm great, Libby.

LIBBY: All right. Great to see you.

JOE: Great to be here.

LIBBY: All right. Let's get started. Give us a little information about where you were born, your early childhood and especially any influences that had to do with wildlife - being outdoors, your parents, school, whatever it might have been.

JOE: Sure. Well, I was born in 1955, in Washington, D.C. I spent my youth, right up to age 18, in Falls Church, Virginia, which is just about eight miles from where I was born in the nation's capital. At the time, Falls Church was, and still is, an independent city. It's a two-square mile city surrounded by Fairfax and Arlington counties. At the time when I was growing up, it was kind of idyllic. It was a small town. It hadn't yet experienced the exponential growth that was to begin in my teen years.

I like to think that the first thing that really happened in the way of development in that part of the world was Tysons Mall. It was a huge indoor mall at Tysons Corner which, previous to that development, was just a blinking light. Literally, there was nothing at Tysons Corner. And that was about three miles from where I grew up in Falls Church. So, when that came in, it really dramatically changed that whole area, and subdivisions just began popping up right and left.

But when I was growing up, we had a big field and that was where we hung out. There was a creek behind my friend's house where we could catch tadpoles and minnows. Looking back, I credit all of our parents in that neighborhood for just giving us the freedom to roam, to go biking, and as long as we didn't get hurt or get into too much trouble, we were good to go. So, that was how I spent my youth. We had a great neighborhood, lots of friends. Friends that I keep in touch with to this day, 60 plus years later.

LIBBY: What did your parents do?

JOE: My dad was a federal employee. He joined the federal government, the Department of Labor, as a GS-1 clerk and rose to be Director of the Bureau of Employees Compensation for the Labor Department. He was an “SES er”. All of that occurred before I really became cognizant of much. He retired when I was nine. My dad was considerably older than me. My dad was 63 when I was born.

LIBBY: Whoa.

JOE: Yeah, go Dad. Appreciate you! And Mom, too. My mom was pretty old when I was born. She was 43 when I was born, so I'm kind of lucky to be here, from that perspective. I don't believe I was planned, so I've been lucky since before birth, (*laughter*) and that luck has carried with me through my entire life, including my Fish and Wildlife life.

So, I went to school there in Falls Church. My first year of college was at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia; a small private college. And I did well, but it seemed a little too small to me, a little too confining. I don't know what I didn't like about it, as I think back, but I transferred after that year to Virginia Tech and spent my sophomore year down in Blacksburg. And it was during that year that I realized I felt like I was wasting my parent's money. I just wasn't into it. I'd always been a good student. So, when my grades started slipping into the "C" range, I was like, *I'm not doing this right*. I felt like I needed to do something different.

LIBBY: Did you have a major that you are working towards or were you still taking all those required classes?

JOE: Well, you know, I'm glad you reminded me. I'll take a half step back because you were asking me about influences that caused me to have an interest in wildlife. The first influence I remember was watching *Wild Kingdom* with my Dad. We watched Wild Kingdom faithfully every Sunday, and I was always just so captivated by Jim Fowler and his exploits wrestling critters and catching critters. It seemed like just a fabulous thing to be doing. I ended up meeting Jim Fowler later in my career. I have a picture of Jim Fowler and I, which is a prized possession.

LIBBY: How did that happen? Why don't you talk about it now?

JOE: He came to an event at Patuxent [NWR.] And [then years later] from the way I'm dressed in the picture, I think it was an event that I was asked to come and, this is going to be weird, "perform."

LIBBY: Oh!

JOE: I think it was a reception. Mamie Parker was AD - Assistant Director for Habitat Conservation, I believe, at the time, and she knew that I had this song - one song - in my repertoire that I wrote.

LIBBY: It had something to do with being a fish. (laugher)

JOE: It's called *"I'm a Fish,"* and it was something I wrote just as a lark, for a project that one of my colleagues was doing in the Regional Office, which was to create a CD for the refuge system centennial. And all the performers were Fish and Wildlife employees or volunteers or they had a close affiliation with the Service. And he pulled it off. It was, I think, a leadership project for him, and he did it and collected songs from all around the country and produced this really cool CD.

LIBBY: I have a copy of that. *"Songs of the System".* That's the National Wildlife Refuge System, for anybody listening or reading this transcript.

JOE: That was a great project. So, I had a chance, over the years, to perform that song a few times with Greg Thompson and the band, including Bill Zinni and other musicians that worked for the Service. So, Mamie asked me to come to this event to sing that song, which was kind of weird, and I didn't have any accompaniment. So, I asked my brother Pat, who happened to be an outstanding musician and a great harmonica player, to come with me. I think it was in one of the Congressional office buildings, maybe the Rayburn Building, I think. It was a reception, and there was a little jazz combo that was playing in the background, just playing quiet music in the background. But that's where I met Jim Fowler. He was there. Someone took a picture and sent it to me.

LIBBY: Did you recognize him?

JOE: Oh, yeah. He looks the same. I'm not sure if he's still with us or not, because that was a few years ago, and he was getting up there. He had a cane, but he's a tall man, and he walked so erect and looked just like he came out of the swamp with a marlin.

LIBBY: So fascinating.

JOE: So yeah, that was pretty cool.

LIBBY: Were you able to talk to him?

JOE: Yeah, for just a minute. I think I did say that he was an inspiration for my career, and I thanked him for that.

LIBBY: Well, I hate to interrupt because this is about you, but you and I were born the same year. And I also watched *Wild Kingdom*, faithfully. And I never, until right now, thought that might have been an influence on me, also. Because, for me, a big influence was Earth Day, which I think was for you also.

JOE: It was for me, too.

LIBBY: Which you can talk about. But I think you're right. I think it started with Wild Kingdom. How about that?

JOE: You know, today there's so many nature shows and shows about wildlife on TV. All that is just so prevalent now. But back then it was *Wild Kingdom*. There wasn't really anything really like it. And then, like you said, I think we were both fourteen, when the first Earth Day happened. Fourteen or fifteen, anyway. We were at the early part of a giant movement that was just getting started, and it was exciting. And it just felt right to take care of Mother Earth. That was the mantra.

LIBBY: That's right.

JOE: And it still is and still should be. We haven't done, I would say, a really great job, in a large part, since that era, but at least there's a large segment of Americans who still are working toward that end. It's not just us in the Fish and Wildlife, but people are generally more aware of environmental issues. And, if we would just get a little more serious about climate change, it would be good.

So, I was at Virginia Tech, before I backtracked, and I quit. I quit school. I was in a Forestry curriculum at Virginia Tech, so I was pursuing a natural resource career, at that time. The competition, I knew, was

very tight for that market. Everybody in that era wanted to be in wildlife somehow or some kind of nature job. You know, we didn't know what they were. But some of us were like, *I want to do that. I don't know what it is, but I think I want to do that.*

LIBBY: I could be saying these words to you.

JOE: But I realized that it's tight, and I wasn't stupid, but I was kind of lazy, and I didn't like schoolwork that much. So, I said, "I need to learn how to do something, so if I do get a degree, and I can't get a job in the field, at least I'll know how to do something." It was important because all I had was summer jobs up to that point. So, I said, "I need a skill, I need to learn how to do something." My brother was a surveyor, and he helped me land a job with the company that he worked for. So, I became a land surveyor, and I learned that business from the ground up. I worked my way up from a rod and chainman to instrument man to party chief. That was the career ladder in the surveying field, at least if you wanted to stay in the field.

Looking back at that, it was a great job in one sense because I worked outside every day. Every single day that we worked, it was outside. Some days we couldn't, but when we were working, it was outside in all manner of weather, and because of that, I got to see cool things in nature. The engineering company I worked for cranked out a lot of subdivisions. That was the downside of that job. We cranked out subdivision after subdivision after subdivision. We carved up northern Virginia and suburban Maryland, and it'll never be the same. So, I regret that. But in that six-year period, I learned a skill that was marketable, which has completely changed today. (*laughter*) None of the stuff we did when I was a surveyor is done today.

LIBBY: Not that same way.

JOE: No. You don't use a chain or plum-bob or any of that anymore. The principles are obviously the same. They're all mathematics, but the techniques of doing that work have completely changed. If I'd stuck with it, I would have had to evolve like everyone else did. I was living in northern Virginia, in Fairfax, and I had a steady [girlfriend]. I guess we got engaged; my wife will debate you on that. But we were steady, and I said, "You know, I've got to do something different now." So, I took a couple of night classes at Northern Virginia Community College. They had two classes in wildlife management, so I took them both. During the second semester, I remember the instructor was Jerry Moore. He worked for EPA in DC, and he encouraged me. He said, "You could do this if you want to. You could do this job." I guess that I didn't need a lot of encouragement because he said, "I'll introduce you to Dave Samuel," Dr. Dave Samuel at West Virginia University. They were friends, colleagues of some sort, and I said, "Okay." I talked to Dr. Samuel, and I applied and got almost everything transferred to West Virginia; and I started there in January of '81. I'm pretty sure that's right. [Correction: It was January 1982.]

LIBBY: So, you had to move.

JOE: I moved to Morgantown.

LIBBY: And you had to give up your job.

JOE: Yeah, I gave up my job. Obviously, I talked to my folks because I didn't have any money. I asked my mom – my dad had passed away in 1978, so I asked my Mom if she was still willing to front my college career. And, you know, bless her heart, she did. So, she put me through those last couple of years. I

started in the winter because I was ready to do something. I was ready to make a move. So, I started in the winter semester, which was a little unusual. I was just going along, not really thinking about *was I going to get a job or not*. I just had this job in front of me – this school thing to get behind me, because it's a little tricky going back after being out of school for five or six years.

LIBBY: Did they have a work study thing or anything like that?

JOE: Well, funny you should say that, because I wonder how many people interviewed for this, remember the exact moment that they intersected with Fish and Wildlife Service? Because I remember the exact moment.

LIBBY: Tell us about that.

JOE: I was walking down the hall. I was in my junior year. I had one full semester left ahead of me, and my advisor, Dave Samuel, Dr. Dave, poked his head out of a classroom and said, "Hey, McCauley. You want to get in a co-op with Fish and Wildlife Service?" Didn't know what he was talking about or even referring to, but I said, "Yeah. Hell yeah, that sounds great." *(laughter)* He said, "Well, go to the Guidance Office, and they'll fill you in." So, what they were offering me was a co-op student position. I just couldn't believe my dumb luck. I wondered often, after that, did Dr. Samuel – was he waiting to see me walk down the hall or did he open the door, and I was the first person he saw? *(laughter)*

LIBBY: Do you know the answer to that?

JOE: I thought about it for many years, until I saw Dave Samuel. It might have been at NCTC (National Conservation Training Center), because we were in West Virginia. So, I asked him. I said, "Dr. Samuel, I've been wondering for a long time." His response was so disappointing. He said, "Man, I've done that so much, I don't have a clue. I have no memory of it at all." Hugely disappointing, but better than saying "Oh, yeah, you were just the first guy."

LIBBY: Dumb luck. *(laughter)*

JOE: Dumb luck. I don't care, at this point, I don't care. It was a very fortuitous day.

LIBBY: You know, he wouldn't have said that to you, if he didn't think you were a good candidate for the program. Maybe there were other students, also, who could have been, and you were the first of the good candidates; but you certainly were a good candidate for the program.

JOE: Well, I was lucky. I was lucky in a number of senses because he told me later, he said, "I did nominate two other people because they wanted two students. But turns out they were seniors." I was in the middle – I was almost a [senior.] They were graduating, those two that he first thought of. Then, he found out they didn't want graduates. They wanted undergrads.

LIBBY: They need time to get their hours in.

JOE: To get the 640 [hours]. So, he did pick two other people, as it turns out. But the criteria they were looking for was someone who had taken a Remote Sensing Course because the job that they were looking to fill for that summer was working at the Cortland, New York Ecological Services Field Office to

help with a project that was evaluating wetland changes, as a result of building the Saint Lawrence Seaway.

LIBBY: Oh, interesting.

JOE: So, I guess the seaway had been built and was there for some time. It was Dieter Busch who was the principal investigator on that project, and he was the one who was seeking the two students. So, that was his project, to do this assessment. And me and a female student at West Virginia, whose name I can't remember, went to Cortland, New York. We had to move ourselves there. We had no assistance from the Service whatsoever in terms of the move or anything; helping find a place. It was not easy to find a place for 13 weeks because that's the term, but I found a guy who owned an apartment building in Cortland, a three-story apartment building that he rented to students. He said he normally didn't rent in the summer, but he had one grad student or summer student. He said, “I guess I could let you stay on the third floor where that person lives.” So, I rented this three-bedroom apartment on the third floor of a small apartment building in Cortland. No A/C. I remember just laying there in the summer, just sweating. Three o’clock in the morning, just laying there, dying.

LIBBY: You should have been used to that.

JOE: If there was a fan, I would have been okay. I couldn't afford a fan. I had no money. I had zero money. I couldn't afford a fishing license. It killed me. I needed 50 bucks for an out-of-state license. So, anyway, I worked there for that summer.

LIBBY: You want to tell us a little bit about what you did?

JOE: Yeah. So, I interpreted aerial photographs, mapped the wetlands from stereo photos. We used a stereoscope and then lined up the two photos, so that we could see 3D, and we mapped the wetlands. Lord knows how accurate that project turned out to be, but me and this other student worked there, and mostly we did that. We would map them on mylars and then transfer them to base maps using a zoom transfer scope, this big device. It was kind of complicated to set up. We put them on base maps. Then the base maps were sent to Slidell, Louisiana, where they were digitized. Something that every refuge biologist now can do at their desk had to be sent hundreds of miles away to Slidell to be digitized. And then they could be used.

LIBBY: Was that the Fish and Wildlife Service doing the digitization or was it USGS or non-federal?

JOE: I think it was Fish and Wildlife, but it was a different program. They were in their own world. That's what they did. They digitized stuff and they had these huge things the size of a wall.

LIBBY: It wasn't National Wetland Inventory people?

JOE: It wasn't NWI, because I had to borrow a zoom transfer scope from NWI, Ralph Tiner. He was working out of UMass. That was way before Hadley was the regional office. He was working out of UMass and I had to drive from Cortland to UMass to pick up the zoom transfer scope because we had one and we needed two. There was two of us. Ralph Tiner was loathed to let that go because it was kind of delicate. It was this big, honking, complicated piece of machinery. So, I drove over. I put it in the back of the station wagon. I did not load it. One of his students loaded it and then, when I got to Cortland, it was broken.

LIBBY: Oh. (*laughter*)

JOE: One of the arms. There were two lights that were on these real thin metal arms, and they just put it in [the car.] They didn't do anything to it. They just put it in the back of the station wagon like it was. I guess bouncing up and down, one of those pot metal arms broke, so that rendered the thing worthless. So, I'm still not in the Fish and Wildlife Service. I'm in the civilian world in my head. So, now someone would have said, *well, let's fix it. Let's send it in and get it fixed right away*. And I didn't even think, I was like, *I've gotta fix this myself. I'm responsible for this, and I know how important it is. Everyone told me how freaking important it was to not have this happen, and it happened on my watch.* So, I took it apart and I called around, and I found someone who would weld pot metal because you had to have an arc welder – not an arc welder - a heliarc to weld this material. So, I took it there, and they fixed it. They welded it, and then I painted it and I put it back together. (*laughter*)

LIBBY: I want to know. Did you tell Ralph Tiner?

JOE: Someone did, I didn't. I'm just running around trying to do something. Yeah, he was not happy. But I'd say, within three days, I had it running again. I had it up and going, so that was kind of cool. Everyone in the office was like, "What? What are you doing? We don't do it that way." Oh man. That was fun.

LIBBY: You know, you're talking about a way of gathering this information that is – I'm sure they don't use stereoscopes anymore, any of this stuff. It's almost ancient history, even for us.

JOE: It really is. It is ancient history.

LIBBY: But I also learned how to use a stereoscope when I was in college. *(laughter)*

JOE: That got me the job. Taking that one course, in remote sensing at West Virginia, got me the job. So, I remember the Field Supervisor was Paul Hamilton, and the assistant was Bill Gill.

LIBBY: I remember Bill Gill.

JOE: Paul was not around. I don't know if he was on a detail or getting ready to retire, maybe. But I worked right outside Bill's office, and I'd be like, *I'm so tired of doing this*, you know? "Hey, Bill." And I'd get him telling me some story, like about trapping. He used to trap. He was a trapper. And I'd say, "What do you do? When you come up on it, and it's in your trap, what do you do? Do you kill it?" And he said, "Yeah, you just bop it on the head." He had his method.

I remember asking Jerry Moore, when I was taking that course at the community college, and he said he was going to do a deer study, and they had to "take" some deer. I think he used the word "take." We're going to "take" some deer. And I was not familiar. And I said, "What? Are you going to kill them?" I said, "You're going to shoot them.?" He goes, "Well, I'm not going to go up and hit him on the head with a ball peen hammer." (*laughter*)

LIBBY: Yeah, but that euphemism "take" is….

JOE: Yeah, that was a euphemism. So yeah, I was like, *wow, are you going to kill a deer to study him? Okay. That's different*. Anyway, I finished up, and I did my first travel because I had to fly down to Slidell

and correct something that they couldn't figure out. I got to have my first trip and was so amazed that they would buy your food and everything. *Wow! They don't just send you down, they like pay for everything! Wow, what a concept!* So, I finished that up and then went back to school for a semester and left myself an hour short because I didn't have my second stint in. I didn't have enough hours to qualify for conversion, which was the payoff. If you did 640 hours and didn't screw up, then you were eligible for conversion to permanent. I remember having a conversation with the other woman who I went to Cortland with, and I'm like, "Man, can you believe this? If we do this, we're going to have jobs." She goes, "Yeah, I'm thinking about going to grad school." And I thought to myself, *why do you go to grad school? To get a job, right? Be more competitive to get a job with Fish and Wildlife. I already got the job with Fish and Wildlife.* So, I was like, *man, okay, that's not what I'm doing.*

So, I went back to school, left myself an hour short, and then I worked at Great Dismal Swamp [NWR] the next winter. So, I worked the summer, went back in the fall, and then I worked the winter semester at Great Dismal Swamp. It was really great because I got to see two very different facets of the Service, office mainly, and they did some field stuff at Cortland. I didn't really get to do much. They had projects that got them out in the field and stuff, but man, refuges, that's where I want to be. I want to be in refuges.

What I did at Great Dismal – let me think who was there - Jim Oland was the Refuge Manager and I hardly ever saw Jim. Mike Tansey was the assistant, and he transferred as soon as I got there. So, I didn't have a lot of mentoring at Dismal, except for the maintenance guys. They were my mentors because I worked with them all the time. That's mainly what I did was maintenance. I remember Dane Whittingham was there and Bailey White was the equipment operator. I remember those two guys. They gave me a hard time, but I think they liked me. I learned some things there, and I learned a little bit more about the Service. I remember asking if it was okay if I worked on my truck, because they had all these great tools in the shop, and I needed to do some work on my truck. I could tell by the way they were hemming and hawing that it wasn't cool, but I think they let me do it anyway.

LIBBY: I hope they're long gone, so they don't get in trouble.

JOE: They won't get in trouble. But I learned that it wasn't okay, but it would have been better if someone would have spelled it out a little more clearly for me. Like, why and what's the thought behind it and all that. Not just that it's a rule, but here's why it's a rule. Anyway, I had a really good three months at Great Dismal, and they were in the process of moving from GSA rental space to space on the refuge. They acquired two trailers, probably excess property, I'm sure. So, the job for the time I was there was to get them ready to be offices. So, we did that. We moved from the warehouse to the new offices. I got to do a little bit of outreach and a little wildlife work. We banded a couple of ducks and stuff like that.

LIBBY: But the main thing is you got to be on a refuge, and you got to see what things happen on a refuge and what a refuge is all about.

JOE: Exactly, exactly. And I was definitely gravitating to that. I wanted to work on a refuge.

LIBBY: And this was 1984.

JOE: That was '84, yeah. In about April, I got a call from Curt Laffin, who was the Chief of Planning in the Regional Office in Newton Corner, Massachusetts. And he said, "How would you like to come and work

in Newton Corner as an Ascertainment Biologist?" Again, *what the hell is that?* I didn't know and didn't care. I was like, "Yep. When do you want me?" I still had that hour to make-up, my final hour. So, I wrote a paper. Curt told me that ascertainment biology was evaluating whether lands should become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System and, if so, to justify those acquisitions. I thought, *well, that's cool*. I wasn't that excited about going to the Regional Office in Newton Corner, which is basically Boston. But I didn't hesitate a second to take the job because it did sound interesting, and it was a permanent gig. How could you even think about not accepting that?

For my last hour I thought *well, I should learn something about this National Wildlife Refuge System*. So, my last hour credit in college was a paper I wrote on the *History of Land Acquisition for the National Wildlife Refuge System, 1903 to 1983*. So, that was pretty complete, and I learned a lot about the refuge system and the authorities for acquisition and times and eras when things were really percolating and when they weren't, and why. Why did that happen? I learned about J. Clark Salyer who should be a hero to every person who has worked for the refuge system. He was incredible. He was an Ascertainment Biologist in that sense, driving around the country looking at lands and evaluating them for inclusion. That's ascertainment. So, I felt like I was really following in the footsteps of a giant.

So, two years in Newton Corner, and it turned out that was not a bad move because that's where all the power people were. The Regional Director, the Assistant Regional Directors. Bill Ashe was the Deputy Regional Director at the time. Howard Larson was the Regional Director and Bill Ashe was deputy, and Bill ran the Land Acquisition Review Committee meetings, which I presented at many times, in a suit and tie. We got dressed up for those meetings, and Bill ran them. All the ARDs were on the Committee, the Land Acquisition Review Committee.

LIBBY: I remember those.

JOE: Rarely did any of them speak up. Rarely did they have an opinion, because it was Bill's show. It was Bill Ashe's show for sure. And you could not disagree with Bill.

LIBBY: If he thought some land should be part of the refuge system, it was going to be part of the refuge system.

JOE: That's right, and vice versa.

LIBBY: And vice versa. But he had a lot of experience because that's what he had been, a Realty Chief, in a previous life.

JOE: Exactly. I definitely count him as one of my more significant mentors. Not in the personal sense of taking me aside one on one but just watching him work and watch how he did his job was very instructive. Mentor-wise, Curt Laffin was an outstanding mentor. He was great about explaining things and protocols, and I credit him a lot for helping me that first year, and Walt Quist as well. A different type of mentor, for sure. Walt and I drank a lot of beer together on our trips. We both were very fond of beer and seafood, and we enjoyed both on many occasions. Walt is probably one of the better communicators I've ever worked with. He could really explain things in a way that allowed you to *get it*, and an excellent writer. He taught me the government style of writing, which is different. I credit both of them for helping me during those two years.

My desk was right around all the refuge people. I started in Planning, but within a year, Planning was dissolved, in a sense. I didn't know what was going on. I was just "the GS-5." I started in a GS-5-7-9 career ladder, but I didn't really know about the machinations at the high levels, you know. Reorganization. That meant nothing to me. *Do I still have a job? Cool, I'm good*. So, Planning got reorganized out, and I became part of Realty. So, I was now a Realty Ascertainment Biologist, which makes sense.

LIBBY: Do you remember some of the refuge projects you worked on, from that time?

JOE: Yeah, definitely, I remember. So, here's some of the highlights from that time. We visited Back Bay [NWR], I remember, and I wasn't part of that big expansion proposal, but it was at the very early stages of that which did turn out to be a big refuge expansion. I went on a reconnaissance field trip with Walt down to Back Bay. We went to New Jersey a couple of times on recon. I wrote the first - I think it's the first - Land Protection Plan in Region 5, which was for Cape Charles [NWR], now Eastern Shore of Virginia. Back then, it was Cape Charles, and they were brand new. The policy was just out that *you will do a Land Protection Plan* so, we were doing them. I wrote one, and it got approved. But my big project was an expansion of Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. I was put in charge of writing that NEPA document, and I did. I was a GS-5/7, and that was my project. I wrote the EA, and it involved many municipalities in South Jersey. I remember setting up meetings with town administrators and board - I forget what they call him in New Jersey - selectmen or supervisors.

LIBBY: Yeah. So, they're townships.

JOE: And counties, because we dealt with Ocean County, Burlington County and then Mannington [Correction: Manahawkin] Township and all these other entities. So, I arranged all of the briefings, and Walt came with me.

LIBBY: Freeholders? What did they call them? I thought I'd remember because I was in New Jersey, there was the Board of Chosen Freeholders or some crazy name.

JOE: Something like that, yeah. All states are different. That was a big project.

LIBBY: I'm thinking about this and like, wow, this is a major responsibility for somebody who's just out of college. But you were not a kid. And you have to kind of go back. You must have been mid-20s, 27 or so, maybe at this time, 28, 30 even, possibly.

JOE: I was 28 when I started the co-op program. Yeah, I was 28. Late bloomer. [31 when I wrote that EA.]

LIBBY: But that probably helped you with this level of responsibility. Talking to the town managers and everything and representing the Fish and Wildlife Service when you're doing it is a big deal.

JOE: It was kind of a big deal.

LIBBY: It was.

JOE: I was nervous about doing it, but I did it, and Walt helped me. I didn't do it alone for sure. Walt was monitoring everything, reviewing chapters and giving me pointers. He handed me an old one like, *here's the last one we did at Forsythe.* So, I realized then that there's very little original work in the Fish and

Wildlife Service. (*laughter*) If it's been done before, and it got through, why do you want to reinvent the wheel? So, I did a lot of cutting and pasting, literally cutting with scissors and pasting with scotch tape and then handwriting the rest. I handwrote it and gave it to the secretary who typed it, and then I would proof it. And I would say, "Oh, let's move this paragraph here." I mean, I felt bad doing it, but I kind of had to.

LIBBY: They had to retype the whole thing.

JOE: Retype the whole damned thing. Oh my god. That was a job. Job security.

LIBBY: On a typewriter.

JOE: On a typewriter. They did have these fangled new ones, you know. They had the automatic carriage return, and some of them even had automatic erasers.

LIBBY: The Selectric.

JOE: Yeah. What a world. So that was a big project for a G-7. And, you know, here's a funny thing. So, I go out in the field, and I'd meet with some field people, and I'm like, *they're not going to want me*, if I'm a GS-9 and they are a GS-7 or 9 and they've been in the field for four years. I just felt like I couldn't break into that as a nine. I did not want to get a nine, and I didn't. No one told me this was a lack of mentoring. Someone should have said, *Joe, get your nine. You can always downgrade to a seven and keep your nine money, dummy.*

LIBBY: Right. I did that.

JOE: Wouldn't that have been a sweet piece of advice? Because I was like, literally, days away from getting my nine. But before that, I was petitioning to get out. I was like, *I don't want to get my nine here. I'm afraid I won't be accepted in the field as a nine newbie.* Maybe it was an irrational fear, but I knew that there were people working in the field who had been there for years and were either sevens or nines. Walt told me Guy Willey at Blackwater had been a seven for like 30 years or something. I'm like, *holy shit*.

LIBBY: You didn't think you'd be able to compete with these people, that they'd get the promotions, and you wouldn't or was it…?

JOE: No. I was worried about being accepted.

LIBBY: Oh, right. Being accepted.

JOE: I was worried like, *oh, some office dude from the Regional Office gets sent down here. I've been down here for four years, and we're equal pay. Screw that*. You know? So, maybe it wasn't a rational fear, but it was embedded in my brain that I needed to get out of there. So, I talked to all the Refuge supes (supervisors), who were George Gavutis, Tom McAndrews, Ed Moses. Those were the three supes, and they all had assistants. Tony Léger was Ed Moses' assistant at the time, and Don Young was the ARD. I talked to all of them, and I explained my dilemma and my fear and none of them told me to get my nine and take a downgrade. No one ever said that or actually discouraged my thought. Which makes me think maybe it was a real thought.

So, Don Young said, “Well, apply and see how that goes. If you're not successful, come back and talk to me again.” So, I applied to Key Deer [NWR], which I reminded [Deborah] Holle of today. I think that was a straight 7 or maybe it was a GS-7/9. I didn't get that. I applied, I think, to Kern [NWR] in California. I didn't want to go to California. I didn’t want to go to Florida, but these were what was available, what came open during that short window that I was petitioning. I applied for both; didn't get either. I went back to Don Young and said, “Don, I applied to Key Deer, and I applied to Kern.” George Gavutis was like, “Well, we could use someone at Supawna Meadows. So, I lateraled to Supawna Meadows in South Jersey. And I was comfortable because I knew a little bit about South Jersey, at the time. So, they sent me there, and that refuge had never been staffed.

LIBBY: And that was 1986.

JOE: ‘86. So, that had never been staffed. There was a part-time caretaker, Earl Wood. He was a local guy, and he worked like four hours a week. And there was a house there, and there was a lighthouse there.

LIBBY: I remember that.

JOE: It was on the National Register. Supawna was a 2000-acre refuge, mostly tidal marsh, lots of a *Phragmites,* that historically had wintered tens of thousands of waterfowl. *Phrag* was starting to impact that and a nearby area called Killcohook, which was a coordination area. It was a Corps of Engineers property that they used for dredge spoil deposit and had been doing that since the 40’s. When they first built the dike to contain the dredge spoil, it was a huge waterfowl area. I saw the annual narrative reports, like literally 10,000 black ducks, 40,000 pintails. Numbers that I had never seen in my life. Then when they started depositing spoil, the *Phrag* came in immediately and it was just a huge pile of *Phrag*. I forget how big Killcohook was; about a thousand acres, I think. And they had filled in the Delaware River so about 400 or 500 acres of that was actually in Delaware, and Delaware claimed it. Kind of interesting.

So, I was assigned there and I was the only one there. Now, you have to think about this for a minute. *What were they thinking?* To send someone who had never been in the field, never worked except 13 weeks on a refuge, to go down by themselves and start figuring it out. It was crazy. I didn't know what I was doing. Looking back, I didn't have any equipment, so I made this mental equivocation. Well, I have to use my equipment to do my work. I had my own binoculars, camera, and I said, *so if I need to use a tool that belongs to the refuge, I'm just going to use it*. I figured that was equal trade, and there was no one there to discourage that or tell me it was wrong or right or anything. That's just one example. There were many examples of that.

LIBBY: It is crazy if you think about it. Completely.

JOE: Nutso.

LIBBY: You were Assistant Refuge Manager?

JOE: That's what I put on my business card.

LIBBY: Who was your direct supervisor? Not George Gavutis.

JOE: Well, it would have been Dick Nugent. So, they assigned Supawna to Tinicum [NWR]. Supawna was always getting traded around.

LIBBY: Yes and threatened with closure.

JOE: Yeah, well. It's closed now. And it had never been opened so it was a great thing for me. It was great. It was fraught with minefields, that I somehow skirted - most of them. Dick was a very unusual supervisor and a different kind of mentor, for sure. Ultimately, before I left Supawna, I ended up reporting to Steve Atzert, who joined Tinicum as the Deputy. Primary Assistant, we used to call them. So, I worked for Steve, and that was good. Steve was a little more of a mentoring type than Dick was. They were both mentors because, I think anybody you learn from is a mentor, good or bad.

LIBBY: Supawna existed, I mean, it was there. Do you remember when the refuge was established?

JOE: '76, I think.

LIBBY: Okay, so about ten years or so, whatever. And had it been under Dick Nugent's supervision then?

JOE: It was, at that time. They had already transferred responsibility from Bombay Hook [NWR], I think.

LIBBY: Okay. All right.

JOE: Bombay Hook had it for a while. But Tinicum had it. I don't know why that decision was made.

LIBBY: Well, sometimes people get people assigned to them and more responsibility, and they don't want it. I don't know. I guess what I'm trying to get at is, was Dick happy that you were there?

JOE: Yeah. Oh, yeah. He liked Supawna. It was the only place he could manage. Tinicum wasn't a real Management Area. You know, you can't do much at Tinicum. He liked dabbling in management. He didn't know shit, though. (*laughter*) Like drawdowns, he just didn't know how that was supposed to work. He never worked, I guess, in a place where they had impoundments. Supawna had a little impoundment, I think it was 50 acres and they never did anything. They never lowered it or raised it. It just was always full pool, all the time.

So, I get there and I'm like, maybe we should try manipulating, let something grow up and then flood it. So, we drained it. Man, it had about four feet of silt in the bottom of it. I remember I called the Regional Office. "Can we get surveyors down here? I would like to do a bathymetric survey of the surface and the bottom of this pond." So, we drained it, and it had been draining a little while, and the surveyors came down and I said, "Well, I'll go out and kind of test the waters." Oh my God, I walked out off the dike, and I went down to my hips in muck.

LIBBY: That's scary, actually.

JOE: If Mike (Hayden) wasn't there, I would have never got out of there. They had to throw me guard stakes, so I could push in the mud so I could get my knee up on them and then climb out of there. But I was literally climbing out of there. That was a little scary.

LIBBY: That's actually terrifying.

JOE: I'm glad they were there to help me. Anyway, we did some management there. The most interesting thing that happened there - and I did a lot of new things because nothing had been done. So, everything I did was new. I rejuvenated the land acquisition program because they had some in-holdings, and I got those rolling. We acquired the biggest in-holding shortly after I left, but I had it all set up. The biggest thing, however, was the deer hunt.

The browse line at Supawna was incredible. There was nothing, no understory under about four and a half, five feet. The woods were like a park. All the cedars were trimmed as high as the deer could reach them. You'd see 25, 30 deer together in an alfalfa field. So, farmers are just screaming. You'd see piebald deer pretty frequently. The herd was not in good shape. So, I was assigned to write the hunt plan and a furbearer trapping plan, at the same time. *Fund for Animals* was very active in New Jersey, at that time. Great Swamp [NWR] was the recipient of their onsite protests. I mean, not good, really militant kind of protests. That was New Jersey. So, I wrote the EA for the hunt plan. Then, I got sent to FLETC (Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.) I did a lot of training at Supawna. Dick was really good about getting me training. I went to Fire Training first, went to Personnel Management Training, they called it back then. I went to Basic Academy for four weeks in Blair, Nebraska, and, finally, I went to FLETC. We put the EA for the deer hunt out on the street, while I was at FLETC. Bill Leenhouts was the regional biologist at the time.

LIBBY: I remember him.

JOE: And while I was at FLETC for nine weeks, the comments came in. Bill addressed the comments and prepared the FONSI (Finding of No Significant Impact), and the FONSI was signed, when I got back. Well, I didn't know that at the time. I didn't know the FONSI was signed. So, I got back and my first workday back, I think I got back on Thursday, took Friday off, and Monday was a meeting with Dick Nugent and Congressman Hughes, who was our federal rep. So, he came to Pennsville, New Jersey, and we thought it was going to be a meeting with the town to talk about the deer hunt. Well, it turned out it was in the county's hearing room, and Congressman Hughes is up front, like a judge, kind of, and Dick and I are there. The first thing he asked was, "Where are the Regional Office, folks?" It's my first day back. So, Dick's like, "Ah, we didn't invite them. We figured we could handle it." That's Dick. That's pure Dick right there. *Regional Office folks? Who needs them?* I don't think that made Hughes too happy. Then, in the front row were the vice president and the senior ecologist for *Fund for Animals*. There were two or three refuge neighbors, who had been clued in. None of them were happy about the hunt. And that was it. That was the hearing and it was a total setup. We're getting bombarded. I'm coming off FLETC. I should have been in bed for a couple of weeks with heavy therapy after FLETC. Everybody should, because FLETC messes you up.

LIBBY: I know, yeah.

JOE: I was a mess at FLETC, literally I was. That was the most stressful situation I've ever been in with Fish and Wildlife Service, and I didn't like it. I probably could have got screened out as being a good cop, if they tried, but they didn't do that back then.

LIBBY: No.

JOE: Anyway, that was where my head was. And I did my best. I was trying to answer right, but we were ambushed. And Hughes said, "Well, it seems to me Fish and Wildlife has to go back to the drawing board

and address some of these deficiencies." The FONSI was signed. There was no going back. So, the regional office kind of freaked out, and the decision was made because it was a new opening that there had to be a Federal Register notice and a 30-day public comment period for that. So, we decided that we would take that 30-day comment period to do a better job of getting our supporters out. So, man, that was a big to-do that day; that hearing.

LIBBY: That was a big to-do.

JOE: The ARD was there and Inez Connor from External Affairs. We called it Public Affairs back then. Everybody came down for that. We had done our homework and we had the room packed with farmers.

LIBBY: Oh, that's good.

JOE: Oh, man. It was a slam dunk.

LIBBY: Also, how about the State of New Jersey? They must have been pressuring the Fish and Wildlife Service to have a deer hunt there. Bob McDowell.

JOE: Oh, yes. And we weren't kicking with him, you know, we were like, "Yeah, we're trying." There was no argument that we needed to hunt deer. The State was on our side. So, we packed the house, and Hughes was there, and he's like, "Well, I'm convinced that Fish and Wildlife did what I said, and went back, and I'm happy now." We didn't do anything. (*laughter*) I did meet with a couple of neighbors about safety zones. And I said, "Okay, we'll do that." It mainly was to protect their hunting, along the border, because they hunted their edge. They didn't want our hunters on the edge. That was a pretty easy concession to make.

So, we got through that, and then Fund for Animals sued us, took us to Federal court to stop it. And here is kind of the highlight of my time there is that the judge ruled that we had done such a good job presenting the facts; it wasn't even a trial. It was like the pre-trial to decide whether it should go to trial or not. And the judge said to the *Fund for Animals*, "You don't have a case. They've done a great job of proving their point." And that was because I had done a good job with the EA. I got a handwritten note from the Director congratulating me on that effort. Unfortunately…

LIBBY: Who was the Director at that time?

JOE: It was Dunkle.

LIBBY: Frank Dunkle. (*laughter)*

JOE: Frank Dunkle. Oh, well. That was still pretty cool. So, I did all that. I did finally get accreted to a nine at Supawna. They did a review and accreted me to a nine. So, I did get my nine there. But that was the highlight.

Lots of interesting stories from Supawna. I'll tell you just one. My brother had gone to Jamaica and met this Jamaican Reggae band. It turns out they came over and were playing in Sunrise, Maryland, which is about an hour away from Supawna, at the top of the Chesapeake Bay. And we decided, *let's get them over for a party*. So, I had a party on the Refuge, at my quarters. My office and my house were in the same building. I'll tell you another quick story. I said, "Let's have a party." So, I invited all my friends

from Falls Church, which is only 2.5 hours away, and a bunch of them came. Some of them ride motorcycles. (*laughter*) I invited all the staff, including Dick. Dick knew about it. But man, what a barnburner that was. Oh my God. We had a full reggae band into the wee hours of the morning. Oh my God. That was something. That was one of those things, I was just innocent. I was totally innocent. Then, I thought, *It's my house. I'm paying rent. Why shouldn't I have a party?* That's what I thought.

So, what was I going to say about the bad things that happened, as a result of that? Oh! The house, the freaking house. I was told "You will stay here, you will live here, and your office will be here." That was the way it was set up. Well, the house hadn't been lived in for a lot of years. It was moldy. My wife was eight months pregnant with our first child when we moved. So, she came down ahead of me. I was back in Mass trying to saddle up and do what I needed to do with the move. And she came down early because they were still working on the house. The maintenance guys were painting, and they came down with a rug shampooer, with wall-to-wall carpet in this old house. And my wife says, "What are you doing with that?" They said, "Well, we're going to clean your carpet." She said, "That carpeting ain't staying here." (*laughter*) And they're like, "But Dick sent us down to clean the carpet." She was like, "I don't care what Dick said. My baby is not crawling around on *that* carpet." And they had a stalemate. Then she goes, "I got a solution." She walks over to the corner and rips up the carpet. "There you go." (*laughter*) That's my wife. So, here I am. She tells me this over the phone and I'm like, "Oh, shit."

LIBBY: I know, you're in trouble now. (l*aughter*)

JOE: My boss, who I've never even met yet, has now been introduced to my crazy wife. She's not crazy. She was perfectly within her logical thinking to think *no, you can't keep a carpet that's been in a house that's sat unused for years.*

LIBBY: Was there mold on the floor underneath it?

JOE: There was mold everywhere.

LIBBY: Everywhere. Oh, man.

JOE: They painted over the mold on the walls. The basement flooded regularly, like with a foot of water. And finally, the septic failed, as I'm preparing to leave for FLETC.

LIBBY: Oh, and now you have a baby.

JOE: Oh, now we have two babies [Correction: one baby and one on the way.]

LIBBY: Two babies, okay.

JOE: Because our second son was born there. So, now we have two babies, toddler and a newborn, and the septic fails. And they're trying to find where the tank is. Turned out it was buried under the asphalt of the driveway. So, when was the last time that was emptied? Never. So, it totally failed, and we had to get emergency procurement. Which, if it's an emergency, it only takes 30 days, instead of months to get a contract. So, they were doing it as fast as they could. When they exposed the tank, it was an open sewer tank. The top rusted off. And I left for FLETC.

LIBBY: It's amazing you're still married. (*laughter*)

JOE: Oh, don't think there haven't been repercussions from all of that. It's built with my wife. She has accumulated these things. So, it's not without repercussion. But that should not have happened. When that failed, we should have been moved out immediately.

LIBBY: I really don't think something like that would happen now.

JOE: I don't think it would.

LIBBY: We've learned so much. We never thought about safety really, until…. remember, we had George Geis? Wasn't he a Safety Officer?

JOE: Pete Suich.

LIBBY: Pete Suich, yeah. You can see the value of having somebody like that.

JOE: The next one was better, after Pete. I think it was Ed Bajakian. And he was way better than Pete.

LIBBY: Yeah. Okay, so we need to move on because you have a lot more career.

JOE: Okay, let me speed it up. So, I think I'm through Supawna.

LIBBY: Right. And that's when I met you. You were at Supawna, and I was in the Regional Office in the Partners [for] Fish and Wildlife Program. Did you do any habitat restoration, wetland restoration type work down there?

JOE: No, I probably could've.

LIBBY: I just kind of knew who you were. I know at some point you started doing a lot of work with trying to get money to do *Phragmites* control, remember? Did that start while you were at Supawna Meadows?

JOE: Yeah, because it was so full of *Phrag* that I was like, *man*. So, we did a little spraying, but we didn't really do anything major.

LIBBY: My recollection, and I may be wrong, but is that you were the first person in the region in refuges to really start focusing on trying to control *Phragmites* in the refuge system in Region 5.

JOE: I spent a lot of effort on *Phrag*, and it was a valiant effort that all turned out to be just a wasted effort.

LIBBY: Well, didn't part of the funding of Bernd Blossey at Cornell to look at determining native *Phragmites* versus [invasive.]

JOE: I did get that.

LIBBY: Was that part of your next job then?

JOE: That was Joint Venture.

LIBBY: All right. So, yeah. Let's move into the Joint Venture and then you can…

JOE: Well, I got Back Bay yet, so I'll do Back Bay really quick.

LIBBY: Oh, okay.

JOE: It was time for me to get out of Supawna. I was dead ended at a 9. So, I was applying. I applied to a lot of places. I applied to Eastern Shore of Virginia. I applied to Long Island [NWR Complex.] I applied to Rachel Carson [NWR], after Andy [French] left. I applied to, well, the first one was Back Bay, and I knew Tony. Tony was the manager of Back Bay, and I'm like, *I'm going to get this job. This is my job*. And I told my wife, I said, "Honey, pack your bags. We're moving to Virginia Beach." And I didn't get it. I didn't get it.

LIBBY: I bet you were crushed.

JOE: I remember Tony called me, and I almost cried. I was very close to crying, when he told me. What are you going to do? So, like I said, I was applying everywhere, and then, I'd say within six months, another job at Back Bay came up, and this time it was the 9/11, Primary Assistant job. I had applied for a straight nine. Yeah, it was a straight nine. I would have lateraled. That's how bad I wanted to go. I really wanted to go to Back Bay. Anyway, I applied for the 9/11 and got that and ended up supervising the guy who was selected over me for the GS-9. So, go figure.

I learned so much at Back Bay with Tony as a mentor and an active ass-kicking project leader. So much was going on at Back Bay. We had a total rehab of the impoundment system, a 900-acre rehab, building new dikes and raising dikes and putting in structures and actively buying land. And we had the wild horses and, man, so much went on there. We had 19 wild horses, whatever they were. The ponies came into the maintenance yard one evening. And we had a standing rule. If any horses came into the maintenance area, which was fenced, we'd shut the gate and deal with it, somehow. Up until that time, we had maybe one or two at a time that would come. This was 19 horses in our corral. And we're like, "What are we going to do with these horses?" And Tony's like, "Oh, we're not putting them back. We're getting rid of them. They're leaving." So, man, was that a big PR nightmare. Terrible nightmare.

LIBBY: I don't remember anything about this.

JOEL: We looked up the regs, like, *what do you do with excess property animals?* So, we had to advertise. *Do these belong to anybody?* And no one could legitimately claim them; we knew that. So, the next step was to auction them. So, we had a public auction, and we got rid of two or three that way. We inspected their property, and we tried to do it right, all the while getting hammered by the wild horse lovers. They didn't want any of this to happen. And then one of them adopted all the rest. I forget how many were left so, maybe we did adopt out a bunch. But we ended up letting this woman, who was hounding us to have the rest of them, and she was going to take them to Leesburg, Virginia, to an equine rescue league, and they could spend their days in bliss. Well, first thing that happened - we hired someone to transport them and while they were loading them, one of the mares broke her leg, which we didn't know. They transported her all the way to Leesburg with a broken leg. And as soon as she got out, they saw it, and they put her down. That was the first bad thing. Headline in the paper, *"Horse with Broken Leg Transported Six Hours by Refuge."* Terrible.

LIBBY: Well, you're not horse people.

JOE: And then they all died.

LIBBY: Really?

JOE: Every one of them died because they're saltmarsh ponies. They're not piedmont ponies. Not one of them made it through the winter.

LIBBY: That's too bad.

JOE: Very sad.

LIBBY: I didn't realize that you had wild horses at Back Bay. I thought it was only Chincoteague.

JOE: No. They came up from Corolla [North Carolina.] They come. They just wander. There's no fence, and they go between the state park and the refuge. Mostly they stay down there, but if you had some fresh-cut grass, they can smell that a mile away. So anyway, that was one thing. But it was just such a great, great learning experience. We hired people, we fired people, and it had everything that you could want. Then, at the very end of my tenure, Tony left. He came up to be Realty Chief. Just before he left, he had made a pretty controversial compatibility determination that basically outlawed public use of the dike system, which is how people got down to the state park.

LIBBY: Right. Which was to the south?

JOE: It was to the south, and had no other access, except by water. No land access.

LIBBY: Did they drive on the dikes?

JOE: No, you couldn't drive; [only park staff could use vehicles.] You could bicycle. You could walk. Sometimes, they had groups, and the park could transport them. But individuals, the only way to get there was to hoof it in or bike in.

LIBBY: How many miles?

JOE: It's only three. I think it was three miles.

LIBBY: Three miles down, then you got to walk back. (*laughter*)

JOE: And that's just to get to the end of the park. To get to the campgrounds, they were spread-out down there.

LIBBY: Oh, they had campgrounds down there.

JOE: It was a day use park, a low impact park. The whole story behind that is, we did a year study because, if you remember, back then, every refuge had to do compatibility on every use to settle a lawsuit by Audubon that we're not enforcing our own policy. So, as part of the settlement, every refuge

had to do compatibility on every single use that they were allowing. And we were allowing use of the dikes. Then, Tony had to do a compatibility determination. But before he did it, he wanted to do a study to assess the impact of vehicles and pedestrians and bikes on the birds that were using the impoundment, mainly waterfowl in the winter, but wading birds and shorebirds too. So, we did a yearlong study designed by Hal Laskowski. We did it in-house, and the results were that, *hey, guess what? Birds are impacted by walkers and bikers and cars. They fly away.* And Hal calculated the caloric count, diet and all this stuff and said, "You know, this is not really good." They're expending, in the winter especially, this energy to fly away when they were right where they wanted to be. Right where the food was or whatever it was that was attracting them there. Now they're put off into suboptimal habitat. So, Tony said, "Use of the dikes for these things is incompatible for like nine months of the year."

Well, that really hit the fan. The state had a very conservative Republican governor, George Allen, who unleashed his administration on us in a very serious way. It was a big fight. They tried to get Congress on their side, and we tried to get Congress on our side, and Senator John Warner granted a hearing to listen to both sides. Just before that, we had made, I think, a good faith effort to like, *okay, let's sit down and see if we can hash this out somehow. We'll form a team and do it.* So, we'd already put that on the table. And the state was like, "No, we want unregulated access. We want a right-of-way." And so, they dug in, and we went before Warner, and he's like, "I think you all need to sit down together and figure this out." So, he went right in with our suggestion. They had no choice then, but to do it, and it did get resolved.

LIBBY: But Tony's gone. So, you're the one that's handling all of this?

JOE: Yeah. So, Tony made the call. So, I remember the day of his going-away party. The headline in *The Virginian Pilot*, which was the newspaper, in the metro section, was *"Refuge Closes Dikes to State Park."* And I'm like, *okay, the game's on. Let's go*. And I didn't even really totally agree with the compatibility determination, but I would be damned if I was going to not uphold it with everything I had. I talked to Tony about that recently. I brought that up and I said, "You know, you were right. I remember arguing with you and saying you're going to unleash the fury of the State of Virginia on us for a few hundred yellowlegs." Because I don't think anybody argued about waterfowl in the winter. Oh, they did, but the shoulder seasons was when the wading birds and the shorebirds were there - that was nice weather. That was good weather to go down there and so, that was the rub. There really were only a few hundred yellowlegs that we measured impact on. And I said, "You're going to do this for a few hundred yellowlegs?" And I don't remember his exact words, but it was kind of like, "Does it matter if it's a few hundred or if it's ten, or if it's a thousand? It's a freaking national wildlife refuge. We're here for them. Not walkers. I mean, we're not trying to penalize people, but we're here for a wildlife-first mission." And so, I was sold. There was no crack in my armor at that point. That was what I did for ten months. That's what I did.

Although concurrently there was another big thing going on where the City of Virginia Beach wanted to put sanitary sewer into the community of Sandbridge, just north of the refuge, which is on septic. And no one could argue that sanitary was a good thing for Back Bay, but they wanted to build it down this right-of-way. It was also a road right-of-way, and we were adamantly against that road. We said, "If you put the sewer down there and clear that right-of-way, which was vegetated, it's just going to open the door for the road." So, we fought the route of the sanitary sewer and we proposed, instead of running it down their right-of-way, which they own, *why don't you run it through the Navy Base and under Lake Tecumseh to the Hampton Roads Sanitation District plant? Why don't you just do that?* And they were like, *what are you crazy?* Tony even said, "You'll never win that. You'll never win." He told me that

before he left. So, you don't need to tell me anything more than that to get my juices going. I worked with Molly Brown, who was the "Friends of Back Bay" president and her husband, Bill Brown, and a few selected others, and we won. They took that sewer through the Navy Base with all the easements they had to get, tunneled under Lake Tecumseh to get to the plant. And we had the Council so boxed that they voted nine to nothing.

LIBBY: That's astonishing!

JOE: And they fought us all the way through to the very end. But we had a mole in the City Engineering Department who kept feeding us stuff.

LIBBY: Don't tell me the mole's name.

JOE: I never knew. Oh, it was our private *Deep Throat*, and I never knew who it was. We were cool. We were like, "You don't need to know."

LIBBY: How much of that success do you attribute to Molly Brown and the Friends of Back Bay?

JOE: We would have never done it without Molly. No way. She got us a meeting through her friend, Waller Whittemore, who was the past president of Friends of Back Bay, with this guy who headed up the Hampton Roads Sanitation District Commission, the top dog. So, we went to him and said, "We need your help, and we need a million dollars to equal, to make the math work on the cost." The city's route was cheaper by a million dollars. So, we said, "We need a million from you to balance it." And he's like, "Okay."

LIBBY: Wow.

JOE: Molly got us that meeting. It would have never happened without Molly. And then - I know I'm dragging on, but - the City came back and said, "Oh well that's great, but that's a million dollars towards future hookups. So, in today's money, that's going to only be worth like $600,000. So, our path is still cheaper." So then, Molly calls me. She goes, "Joe, we need a letter right away to this guy saying that we appreciate it, but we need a million in cash up front." She told me what to say, and I said it. I did it like that (snaps fingers). I handed it to him that day, and he said, "Okay." And the city had no more ammo.

LIBBY: That's amazing.

JOE: So anyway, that was awesome. And then, Tony had left and there was a new Project Leader. I had applied. I didn't get it; not sure I really wanted it.

LIBBY: Well, just for the record, that was par for the course. You hardly ever got promoted [in place], if you were a Deputy. Very rarely would you get promoted.

JOE: So, I didn't expect it and, again, I'm not really sure I wanted it. But I didn't get it, so the new Project Leader and I didn't get along that great. I don't really need to say any more than that, but sometimes that happens. It is partly because I was in charge. I was making all the decisions on really super important things, and then all of a sudden, I wasn't. So, that probably was a big part of it. So, I started looking, and you never underestimate the power of a phone call because I got a call from Tom Goettel and Sarah Bevilacqua and they said, "Hey, Dick Dyer is stepping down as Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

Coordinator, and we think you'd be great at that." I'd never thought about it because I didn't know anything about it. I knew zero about the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. Really, didn't know anything about it, but I applied for it, and I got it. I was like, *okay, now what*? I moved to Hadley. I hadn't worked there before.

LIBBY: No, you had been in the Regional Office in Newton Corner. So, you're back in the Regional Office.

JOE: Back in the Regional Office; moved to Orange, Massachusetts.

LIBBY: And this is what year?

JOE: 1996.

LIBBY: Okay.

JOE: That turned out to be a fabulous job. Way more cool than I would have ever guessed. And the Joint Ventures are kind of a little bit of a world unto themselves. They really don't fit anywhere else. I had to spend at least six months getting acclimated to this new role, because they worked a lot with states. So, the Joint Venture Management Board, which this position was coordinator for and secretary of, is comprised mostly of State Directors. Bob McDowell was on it, and Wayne McCallum from Massachusetts was on it. Josh Sandt from Maryland. Not every state sent their Director to be on the Management Board, but it was either a Director or Assistant Director. Then, other partners were DU (Ducks Unlimited), the Forest Service, TNC (The Nature Conservancy), I think TCF maybe (The Conservation Fund.) I don't know about TCF. But anyway, it was mostly the states, and I'd never been in that world before. I was dealing a lot with people that I'd never dealt with, and it just took me a little while to get the hang of it. NAWCA, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, was a big part of that job and helping partners navigate that grant process. So that, I think, is probably one of my biggest contributions in that job. I didn't know anything about how that worked. Tom Goettel was the Assistant, and he helped me get acclimated.

LIBBY: He was the Assistant Joint Venture Coordinator?

JOE: Assistant Joint Venture Coordinator.

LIBBY: I didn't realize that.

JOE: He worked for Dick, and he was one of the ones that encouraged me to apply and then he ends up applying. Anyway, he didn't get it. He didn't stick around that much longer, but he did help me. He definitely helped me get acclimated. He said, "Here's the way NAWCA works. The projects are submitted, they are reviewed by NAWCA staff, then the NAWCA Council. The staff meetings are where it really happens, and you can go to them, but you can't say anything." And I'm like, *huh, that's interesting.* So, I said, "Well, I think I should go to one." And I'm sitting there, and I'm listening to them discuss all the projects. I'm like, *this is gold*. *These meetings are gold.* I'm listening to them critique all the NAWCA grants. What a great way to inform our partners about what to do and what not to do. You know, it's like listening to them, *well, I don't like that, I don't like that, or I like that.* So, I'm like, *yeah, okay.* I'm just soaking all that up, and then after, we all go have beer. Well, I can talk there. So, I got to know them on that level, and I went to every meeting after that. I was the only Joint Venture Coordinator that went.

LIBBY: Where were these meetings held?

JOE: They were all up in DC, and I'm right there. I mean, not that far. So, yeah, I would go to all those meetings. Sometimes, if we had a project, I'd go on the site visit. We had a lot of NAWCA projects, so I felt like going to that allowed me to help our partners develop really solid projects. And then, by the end of my three and a half years there, they were letting me pipe up during meetings and explain things without getting too much in it. It's like, *yeah, I can explain.*

LIBBY: So, describe a couple of typical NAWCA projects.

JOE: NAWCA projects? Well, it's almost always acquisition. So, they wanted the grant to acquire something, and a competitive grant would have at least a 2 to1 match and have all these other things, like numbers of partners was important, the categories of partners and the amounts that each partner contributed. Ten percent or more got you more points. It was all about points.

LIBBY: It was all about buying wetlands.

JOE: It was all about buying wetlands and associated uplands. There's a lot of projects in coastal Maine; [that] was really big. Amos Eno was a huge NAWCA guy and had a lot of influence. He was a big Maine advocate, so a lot of Maine projects got funded.

LIBBY: All the projects had to be in line, obviously, with the Joint Venture priorities.

JOE: Yeah, but that was easy. That was pretty easy. Ironically, the NAWCA, the Act, says that all the lands protected with NAWCA money will become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

LIBBY: I didn't know that.

JOE: And, if the money is applied to lands that do not, there has to be a waiver from the Secretary. Now, those were very commonly signed because, honestly, most of the projects did not go to the Refuge System.

LIBBY: No, they went to the States.

JOE: But some did. And, if it did, you'd get some extra points in the scoring. So, the first tract at Rappahannock River Valley [NWR] was acquired via a NAWCA grant. It was a million plus dollar grant, and it bought the first property that became that Refuge. [The refuge was then established in 1996.]

LIBBY: That's cool.

JOE: So that's one example. That's a beautiful 1,200-acre property loaded with uplands but it had nine miles of frontage on a tidal creek and a lot of tidal wetlands and oxbows. I'd say, half - percentage wise - but there was also a lot of wooded swamp too in parts of it. It's 1,200 acres, and I would say at least half is uplands.

LIBBY: Oh, that's interesting. The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture is under the umbrella of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. So, your focus was waterfowl.

JOE: It was waterfowl. But that leads me to the second biggest thing I did at that job. It was a movement. Because the Joint Ventures were so successful, the other bird groups were like, *what are you guys doing? How are you getting all this money?* So, they wanted to have Joint Ventures or something like that, and that was the origin of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, NABCI. We were struggling with this because some people were very critical of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, because we were not habitat based. We were state based. So, when you look at our boundary, it includes all of the states from Maine down to now, Florida. Georgia and Florida were included, during my time. I got them in. Dick had started Georgia, but I did Florida by myself. So, we got them in.

The other Joint Ventures though were like Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley. So, we were like, "Yeah, you guys are just like trying to get points with NAWCA." And I'm not going to argue with that. Dick did it, but it was his strategy. He was all about NAWCA, and so was I. Some of the other Joint Venture coordinators were like, "I don't care about NAWCA." Charles Baxter in the Lower Mississippi could give a rat's ass about NAWCA. He was into the mapping and the landscape design. That was his contribution and Seth's [Mott]. I went out and met with them. Everybody's talking about the Lower Mississippi. I had to go out there and see what they're doing. So, I flew out there and talked to them. I found out, and I'm like, "Oh, that's great. It won't work in Region 5, but it's great for what you guys are doing."

So anyway, I went to the first NABCI Conference in Puebla, Mexico. I traveled with my red DOI passport and had headphones that were for translating. It was very cool, very cool. I ended up being on the mapping team, and I think I made some good suggestions there. I made the point that, *yeah, our Joint Venture boundaries are administrative. They're not biological. No one has made the claim that they are. So, why not embrace that?* I didn't have the idea of wall-to-wall Joint Ventures, but that's what came out of it. *We should fill the whole country up with Joint Ventures. Seamless*. So anyway, I went to that first NABCI conference in Mexico, and that was very cool.

Then, I became committed to making the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, the first "All Bird" joint venture. That was a goal that I had for myself, and we laid the groundwork, with help from David Smith, who was here [at NCTC] today. He was very helpful in talking to my Board, during the meeting, and when they voted, they voted to go "All Bird." I remember it was the North American Conference in Chicago, and I didn't come down off of that for days. Man, I was flying. People were coming up buying me drinks and slapping me on the back. All the Joint Venture guys, the Canada guys were all like, "Man, how did you do that?" Because we were pretty big. I mean, a 17-State partnership. All these State Directors were like, "Yeah, we're in." It was mind-boggling. So anyway, that was probably my biggest thing in the Joint Venture. The only thing that caused me to leave - I was very happy. I loved the travel; probably my wife, not so much. But I got to go to some amazing places and see some amazing things because we each hosted a meeting every year, maybe every six months, I don't know. Some of the sites were incredible. So, I'm almost to my last gig. No, my next to last gig.

LIBBY: So, you started at the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture in 1996, and you were there for…

JOE: Just 3 ½ years.

LIBBY: Only 3 ½ years? Wow, okay.

JOE: The reason was, from the minute - I was in Back Bay - when I heard they were establishing a new refuge on the Rappahannock. I'm like, *okay, that's my job*. *I have to have that job.* There were very few people who knew me then that didn't know how much I wanted Rappahannock. Everybody knew,

because I told everybody *I want that job*. And it was being managed as a satellite from Presquile [NWR], if you can believe that. Barry Brady was Project Leader, and I told Barry, "When you leave, I am on your footsteps." I said, "You need to understand, I'm not doing anything untoward. I'm waiting patiently." That was 1994. I was very patiently waiting, and Barry was still hanging in there. Then, as soon as he left and came up to the RO – no, he went to Prime Hook [NWR] first. They wanted him to go to Prime Hook, and it was a bad move for him. But anyway, he left Eastern Virginia Rivers. It wasn't called that at the time, but Rappahannock was the satellite. So, Tom Stewart was Refuge Supervisor for the South Zone, at the time. Like I said, I had already made my desires well known. So, he called me, and he said, "Hey, I know you've been eyeballing Rappahannock, and it's vacant now. My philosophy is, anyone who comes in from the field and does their time in the R.O. like you've done, deserves some consideration." So, he just put me there.

LIBBY: So, you were able to lateral into the position.

JOE: Yes, I was already a 13. Yeah, I lateraled in. I know that upset a lot of people, who also had their eye on Rappahannock. I remember hearing from Bob Adamcik, he was like, "How'd that happen? How did you just get slid in there?" And I told him. I said, "What do you want me to say? Oh, you got to advertise it?"

LIBBY: They knew you. You worked in the Region. Bob didn't work in Region 5.

JOE: Yeah. And, seriously, I mean, I did want it so bad, and I got it.

LIBBY: Why did you want it so bad?

JOE: I'm not sure. I've asked myself that.

LIBBY: How far is that from Washington [from where] you grew up. Four hours?

JOE: No, it's only 45 minutes.

LIBBY: Oh, it's pretty close. So, it was kind of like going home in a way.

JOE: Kind of. I guess I'd always been intrigued by the Rappahannock. I'd see it, drive over it. I never fished it or recreated on it, but there's something about it that just kind of grabbed me. I don't really know. It was new. I think the fact that it was new, and I could start something myself and put my brand on it and do it right. In my head; *right.*

LIBBY: Right. No, I get it.

JOE: That's what was mostly intriguing.

LIBBY: It is exciting building a refuge. It's very exciting.

JOE: Very exciting. Very gratifying.

LIBBY: Often more exciting than just running a refuge. (*laughter*)

JOE: Way, way, way more. And what I didn't realize at the time is, when I got to Rappahannock, there was no public use and no facilities. We started working on it right away. We wrote a deer plan because, again, you got to do something with deer. No controversy there. But what was amazing was that, with no visitors, how much you can actually get done. And no facilities to worry about upkeeping. Just think about that for a second. I mean, you probably actually had it at Wallkill [River NWR].

LIBBY: I did have it at Wallkill, basically.

JOE: No one coming in and complaining, knocking on your door or anything.

LIBBY: For a while, anyway.

JOE: It lasted probably a couple of years at Rappahannock, until we started getting on the map. Those few years were just golden.

LIBBY: Well, where was your office? So, it's 2000, right? Eastern Virginia Rivers [NWR Complex].

JOE: I coined that, by the way.

LIBBY: Oh, you coined that.

JOE: They were calling it the Rappahannock Complex.

LIBBY: Okay.

JOE: I'm like, wait a minute. You can't call it the Rappahannock Complex when two of the refuges are on another river - the James River. And Plum Tree, which they gave me, was on the Chesapeake Bay.

LIBBY: So, where was your office at Presquile or did you move it?

JOE: No, I had no intention [of managing the complex from the office they had in rental space in Prince George, VA.] The staff that was there - there was a staff - Kathy Owens was the Deputy, and I called her. So, they advertised for the Deputy – Barry did. I'm not even in the picture. Barry advertised for, you can call it a Deputy, but the Satellite Manager, and no one applied, or he didn't get enough [applicants] or something like that. They had to go back out. And I heard about that, and I'm like, *that's weird*. I called Kathy Owens. She was in Kansas at Quivera [NWR.] She was a co-op student at Back Bay when I was there, so I knew her. I said, "Kathy, you know, you've done your thing." She was at Eastern Neck, and she was at Quivira. I said, "You're ready. Why don't you apply for that Rappahannock job? You never know, we might end up working together." [I was still in the JV position at the time.] So, she did, and she got it. And her husband, Greg had been a temporary firefighter at Quivira, but he was temp, so it took us about a year, but we got him on permanent as our maintenance person. What a duo they were. They're divorced now, but at the time - great duo. I couldn't have asked for a better staff.

LIBBY: She's terrific.

JOE: I know what I had there. I ended up hiring Frances Murphey to be our Office Assistant. What a gem Frances Murphey is. Oh, my God.

LIBBY: Is she still there?

JOE: No, she went up to Alaska. She was so good and had such a good rep. I don't know how she got it but, they moved her to Alaska from Virginia and gave her – I think she was a GS-9/11 or something; really high for an office admin.

LIBBY: Now they have new zones and everything. A whole new admin structure, and there's quite a few 11 Admin Officers.

JOE: She was the glue that held us all together. Frances was. She'd call us together for lunch, for example, and we would always have lunch together, when we could.

LIBBY: We did that at Wallkill River, also. We had lunch together every day. It made a huge difference.

JOE: It does. It's almost like having a staff meeting every lunchtime, but better. More intimate. So yeah, those first years were the best, I think, in a lot of ways.

LIBBY: What were some of the highlights at Rappahannock? So many. Land acquisition, I would assume, would be a big part of.

JOE: I spent a lot of time on acquisition because we had so much room to grow, and there was a lot of activity. All that Fones Cliffs stuff happened back then; started in about 2002. I met
on the Cliffs for the first time with the landowner, and he wanted to do an easement, but he also wanted to build a family compound on the bluff, the best habitat. And I'm like, “I can’t. I appreciate your wanting to do this. I get it. But I can't be your partner because I can't be a part of something that compromises the best habitat.” I just couldn't do it. He seemed, you know, not happy necessarily. But there's other easement holders. He didn't need it to be the Refuge. So, he was proceeding. Then, the County changed their zoning ordinance, and whereas his easement was worth “X”, it now was worth much lower than “X”. He somehow thought that I had something to do with that. I had nothing to do with it. But that started us on a path of mistrust and poor relations with him. He accused me of some pretty bad stuff and he really hurt my reputation. The people that heard it are not real friendly to the government anyway, or to me, but it was disturbing to have my reputation impugned in public like he did. And I didn't get the worst of it. Refuge neighbors across the river from his property got the worst of it because they blocked him from getting a pier permit for his resort development, and he never forgave them for that. He came down on them with flyers; just horrible, horrible accusations.

LIBBY: The thing is that every once in a while, somewhere, you get a situation like that where you have a conflict with what the person wants out of their land, and people don't always just say “okay” and walk away. This guy was not happy, and he had the ability to speak up about it. He ended up not getting his project, right? Is this the property you were talking about in the session that we had this morning?

JOE: It was one of the two. He did get as far as getting his property fully platted into 47 lots. The County bought into his plan, hook, line and sinker, and he sold to TCF for 3.9 million dollars. I think the Service appraised it at least three times. So, that was my rule. Normally, we don't do that. The appraisal folks won't let you do it. They're like, “You're just fishing for a number that works. You can't do that.” So, my argument was, he keeps making progress on his development plan. He's changing the value, by every time he gets a new approval, he gets more value. We should do a new appraisal that's going to take another eight months, and he's going to have another approval by then. So, we were leapfrogging like

that for years. And he never liked our number. I think we had like a million and one was the first one, then two. We never got up to whatever number he had in his head, but finally TCF had an appraisal, and offered him $3.9 [million] and he took it. But that was no bargain sale, and he would not give them a nickel.

LIBBY: How many acres was that?

JOE: 252.

LIBBY: Well, by this time, the land values are really starting to increase just everywhere.

JOE: Mid-2000's things just took off. That's why the County changed their zoning, because they were afraid of all the speculation that was happening.

Looking back at Rappahannock, which I just absolutely loved, every second of, we did a lot of *Phrag* control. We had the *Phragmites* Action Committee. We got 200 landowners to sign up and let us spray *Phrag* on their property. We got a big sprayer, a 200-gallon sprayer. We had hired helicopters. I was still working with Bernd, but I did most of that Bernd Blossey work when I was Joint Venture Coordinator. I got him grants that he gave to Kristen Saltonstall. It was her genetic work that actually proved that there was a native *Phrag* and what its characteristics were. So, that was worth doing. And Bern found some insects. We went through the whole protocol, and you couldn't mass produce them. And they didn't do enough damage. It was a moth.

LIBBY: Yeah, I remember that moth.

JOE: So, we tried and now no one's trying to control *Phrag*. If they're doing it, it's to keep it out of an area where it still has a chance of being kept out. It's a lot of spinning wheels there.

LIBBY: So how long were you at Rappahannock?

JOE: For ten years. I'm pretty proud that I had three students that were later brought on, hired permanent out of the SCEP (Student Career Experience) program. One of them, Matthew McGruder, he did some time in Ohio River Islands and somewhere else. Then, he got engaged and needed to move to DC, and they would not give him a job in DC. Shocking, really. He was young, didn't know anything, but still.

LIBBY: So, he left.

JOE: He transferred to Bureau of Mines or something in headquarters. At least he's still working, last I heard. But my two stars are Rebekah Packet, Rebekah Martin now, she was Rebekah Packet when I hired her, and Megan Davis Reed. She was Megan Davis, now she's Megan Reed; both of whom are Project Leaders now. I hired them as SCEP students and did a fair amount of mentoring with both of them. Rebekah, I had through grad and undergrad SCEP, and Megan came to us when she was in high school as a volunteer. She was in the Governor's School, and they had to do community service as part of their curriculum. So, she came to volunteer at the Refuge as a high school senior. Then, I brought her on the next summer as a STEP.

LIBBY: Yes, STEP.

JOE: I think either the next summer or the summer after that, I got her converted to SCEP. And she ended up graduating from Penn State. She graduated in like three years and got picked up. I think she went to Parker River and maybe with Tom Roster, maybe?

LIBBY: At Iroquois [NWR]?

JOE: I think so. Then she went into headquarters where she was Dan's freaking assistant.

LIBBY: Dan Ashe's assistant?

JOE: And the next thing I know, she's delivering a speech to the CITES Conference in South Africa.

LIBBY: Wow.

JOE: I'm like, *what? Wow!*

LIBBY: That's great. There are people here - the Directorate is meeting while we are having our reunion here at NCTC, which I don't think I said at the beginning that we were at NCTC. So, I'm seeing people that I remember as biologists [who are] now Deputy Regional Director, and it's awesome, isn't it?

JOE: I'm talking to Will Meeks, and I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, I saw you just a couple of months ago at the Refuge NWRA Awards." Back when he was there, I was there, because Rebekah got Manager of the Year. So, we're chatting and I'm like, "What did you say you were doing?" He's like, "Well, actually I moved, and now I'm the Regional Director in Region 3." I'm like, "Whaaat?"

LIBBY: Yeah, it's great. All right, so we do need to move on. What was Rappahannock like when you left it? That ten years you opened it up for public use, built buildings and offices, acquired equipment.

JOE: They are still headquartered in an 18th century farmhouse, maybe 19th century. I can't remember, but a very old house and not a great headquarters, not accessible. Really, totally out of compliance with ADA (the Americans with Disabilities Act). So, they really need to get a new building. But we did a lot. I worked to get all the ag land. We were farming 800 acres when I got there because Barry was old school. Barry was co-op farming through and through. He told me last month, or whenever I saw him over the summer – "It's a shame." He said, "I had a good thing going there, but I guess they didn't think so or they changed it." I'm like, *that was me, man*. (*laughter*) But anyway, he was a co-op guy. They had made some pretty firm promises to the farmers. So, it was pretty tough to say, "Oh yeah, well policy changed, and that happens, and we're going to start taking this land out of production." But I said, "I'll tell you what. We won't do it all at once. We'll do it incrementally, but every year something's going to come out, and I'll let you pick first. But you tell me what your least productive fields are, and those will be the ones we do first."

LIBBY: That's fair.

JOE: So, we did that and there's no farming at Rappahannock. Almost all that land has been restored into either trees or grass. We did the CCP (comprehensive conservation plan) while I was there, and we made the decision to try to do grassland management, which is very difficult in the Mid-Atlantic. It doesn't want to be grass; it wants to be trees. So, you've got to fight it every year. I think, knowing that

now, I might have made some different calls, but I was very concerned about the plight of grassland birds because who else is managing for them?

LIBBY: Right. No one.

JOE: No one. So, if you don't make an effort to manage for them, they're not going to have habitat. We had a pretty robust quail population, and their population is totally in the tank long term, not migratory. I just came out of the NABCI world, so I didn't care if it could fly far or not. It could fly. We did a lot of habitat management for grassland birds. We established some great facilities for the public - fishing, all the big six, but limited to the big six. I was very strict about limiting it to wildlife-dependent recreation. I don't think I was overboard, but I made it a point. Like the Friends group sometimes would want to do something that I didn't think was real wildlife-oriented, and we would discourage that.

LIBBY: So, you had a Friends group also?

JOE: I started the Friends group. We got a mentor down from NCTC, and a refuge person came from somewhere. We assembled a bunch of people and ended up that, before they left, we had a Friends group and a board.

LIBBY: Great.

JOE: And they all remember it differently than I did. They said we locked the door, and we wouldn't let them leave, until we had a Board. (*laughter*)

LIBBY: That's probably what happened.

JOE: It's a good story. We had that meeting at the building that was just transferred from the Refuge to the tribe. That's where we had our Friends mentoring meetings - two consecutive nights. So, yeah, started the Friends group, got the CCP done, got public use going. We rehabbed a lot of buildings for our use. We built a couple of buildings for interns and people to stay in.

LIBBY: So, you really made it a refuge, and then you leave.

JOE: I didn't think I would leave, but I've always, since my very first job, loved land conservation and land acquisition. Again, when you're asked, it makes a difference. Left to my own, if no one was calling and saying, *yeah, we really want you*. But when someone says they really want you, I'm kind of a sucker.

LIBBY: All of a sudden, it's like you start wanting something that maybe you didn't even think or know you wanted, but you can see yourself doing it. You could see yourself being Chief of Realty.

JOE: I could. I could.

LIBBY: So could a lot of other people, obviously.

JOE: I thought I knew a lot about Realty. I didn't know as much as I thought I knew about some of the smaller details. A lot of details in Realty. It's all so legal. Bill Porter had been acting (chief) for a long time, and he probably should have got it, but he didn't.

LIBBY: Who had been the Realty Chief?

JOE: Walt Quist.

LIBBY: Walt had been the Realty Chief, and then he retired.

JOE: He retired, and Bill was his Deputy. In that world, it is more common to move up. They don't expect Realty Deputies to move to another region, for some reason, like they did us. Bill was a great Deputy. He never showed me one hint of recrimination or anything. He was great. So, when I get there, there are all these closing packages. Every closing package requires about 5 or 6 signatures from the Realty Chief, and I'm thinking, *damn, these seem really important*. Like deeds. I'm signing deeds, and I thought, Bill's been doing it for six months. He just surnamed all this shit. I'm signing it. So, I didn't worry about it.

LIBBY: For the sake of the transcript here, you have moved back to the Regional Office in Region 5. So, you're in Hadley again.

JOE: Back in Hadley.

LIBBY: You still have your house in Orange? You never sold it, when you moved.

JOE: Well, no, when we moved, we bought a different house on the same lake.

LIBBY: Same lake, different house, same city.

JOE: I love that little lake. Lake Mattawa, in Orange, Massachusetts. It's a 115-acre lake. When we moved there in '96, we were house hunting, and we got the realtor to give us her book. It had all this data in it and had everything in it. There was one house in Orange, and it didn't have a picture. We said, *well, let's go anyway.* And it was on a lake, a beautiful lake, and the house was just finished being rehabbed into a year-round place from a summer house. So, it was brand new, basically. $117,000. We were pinching ourselves. *We can afford this. This is heaven.* Crystal clear lake, I mean, this is a beautiful lake. They stock it with trout. So, I love that lake. And when we moved back in 2015, I immediately went to Lake Mattawa to see, and sure enough, there was a house that was just getting ready to go on the market, and I had to have it. So, I did.

LIBBY: Good. So, you moved to the Regional Office in 2010 to be the Realty Officer in Region 5.

JOE: Correct, 2010, that's right. So, again, a little bit of a learning curve there.

LIBBY: That is the case for almost everybody when they take a job. It's always a learning curve.

JOE: There's always a learning curve.

LIBBY: If there isn't, you kind of wonder why you're taking the job.

JOE: But if you're moving from refuge to refuge, you're just trying to get acclimated to the new refuge. Not all the rules and everything that comes with it.

LIBBY: That's true.

JOE: With Realty, there were a lot of rules that I had to pick up on pretty quick. But mainly that's managing your people That job is people management, as much as anything. And managing up, managing to the SLT (Senior Leadership Team) or Tony. I can't say enough about Tony Léger and the mentoring that he's given me over the years and continues to give me in life. Just a great friend and a great mentor. And Bill Zinni, too, not so much a mentor, just a great colleague in the land acquisition world. He and I worked to get that Great Thicket [NWR] project done before I left and before he left. So, he and I worked on that together.

LIBBY: You might want to describe Great Thicket a little bit because that was … I was involved with that as well. It's a very different concept, again, for a refuge. It seems like a lot of the refuges now – we've moved way more into a partnership. Or you can have an acquisition area, but it's not defined so much. The Great Thicket was, as I recall, really to help support the New England cottontail and other of those early successional scrub-shrub type habitats, but multiple areas over multiple states. And the management would be completely different. The process for getting to that point took years, didn't it? It took two or three years.

JOE: Yeah, it took two or three years. It started as the New England Cottontail is declining, and I think all the states were freaking out because they didn't want an endangered rabbit. How are their hunters going to understand what rabbit to shoot and what one not to shoot? So, they didn't want to have anything impact their hunting programs, at all. None of the states ever do. There was a big push to do something, and because the Service was in a position of considering listing these species, they were looking to the Service and asking, "How are you guys going to fix this?" So, there was this concept, an idea, to create a refuge for the cottontail. I don't know if I should name names or not, but it was kind of a funny thing, I guess. The Chief of the Refuge System, at that time, said something to the effect of, *we ain't gonna establish no refuge for them God damn bunnies.* (*laughter*) I'm paraphrasing, but maybe you can tell, from the accent, who I'm imitating.

Hey, he's right. I mean, it's not listed. So, what's our impetus for creating a refuge for a candidate species, that's a mammal> Where's our statutory framework or background for doing this?

LIBBY: We had all come out of the effort, though, when Dan Ashe was the Director. Remember, we were doing all that work. I don't remember what we called it, but we did a lot of work with the States and did a lot of habitat work on the ground. I remember Dan came up when he was still the Director. We were in New Hampshire, and we had a big ceremony where he indicates we are ***not*** going to list the New England Cottontail as an endangered species because we had shown that we, the Fish and Wildlife Service, could work together with the States and with towns and with landowners and all this to try to improve the population but keep it off the endangered species list. They didn't want things to go on the endangered species list.

JOE: No, no.

LIBBY: So, I think the impetus for the Great Thicket came out of that because people realized you still needed to have some [land protected.] How many things have we done in the Fish and Wildlife Service where it almost feels like it's a fad? Ecosystem teams, right? Don't you remember going to some of those early ecosystem team meetings, and I remember the old refuge managers saying, "How do we know this is going to be around [in ten years]? This is just another fad." They were right, in a way. Even

now, today, we learned that the North Atlantic Conservation Cooperative, you know what I'm talking about. The LCC, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives…

JOE: Are they still around?

LIBBY: Right. You know, all these things that we start. So, I understand completely. But once you have the land, and it's owned by the Fish and Wildlife Service, that becomes tangible. We may neglect it a little bit or not put the resources into it, but we own it.

JOE: It's not going to be converted to something worse.

LIBBY: Right. I think a lot of that enthusiasm for establishing this new kind of refuge came out of that.

JOE: Yeah. When we heard that, we realized the Strategic Growth Policy was already in place. So, we needed to make the case for shrubland-dependent migratory birds. So, we did that. And Bill did a great job. We were working with Randy Dettmers and Migratory Birds to get that, so that it was a bird project.

LIBBY: It wasn't just rabbits.

JOE: It wasn't just rabbits. It was not easy to do that. It's kind of a contortionist project.

LIBBY: It was a lot of work. I remember being involved with some of that on a very basic scale. What I was pleased about was that I never felt shrubland-dependent birds or land birds even, with Partners In Flight and never really, when it came to acquiring land for conservation, the money just was never there. The migratory bird money never went to land birds.

JOE: No, it just went to waterfowl.

LIBBY: It always went to waterfowl, to our detriment in Region 5.

JOE: Yeah. As I mentioned this morning, I was on the Strategic Growth Team, and we spent two years working on policy recommendations that were pretty much totally ignored. Rick Schultz was the ARD in Region 3, and he was our team leader. He was very, very discouraged after that because he thought we were onto something different, something more forward leaning than just our three, standard fallbacks – waterfowl, migratory birds and T & E. We were trying to do something more ecosystem-wide, and it just didn't fly. It didn't fly. I kind of understand a little bit why, but we did maybe miss an opportunity there to do something a little different. But, with our three targets, we can still do an awful lot of good work.

LIBBY: What were some of the other highlights, when you were Realty Chief?

JOE: Well, it's almost kind of inside baseball stuff. But I remember my first Realty Chief's meeting, and we were talking about the budget and project list, which was the main thing that we were responsible for. There was a process in place when I got there, and we only had, I think, one or two projects that scored really well in the priority system. And we had opportunities there to spend money on those projects. But Region 4 always had a lot of projects that scored high. So, we go around the room and say, "Okay, the number one project in the country is Saint Mark's [NWR] in Florida. Realty Officer from Florida, what do you need for Saint Mark's?" "We could spend three million easy there." "Okay, three

million." You go to the next one, and the next one, and Blackwater [NWR] was usually up in the top five. So, I would say, "Yeah, we've got a project, 1.5 million," or whatever it was. Then we'd go around. The way we did it; there was a total funding target.

If we had 100 million to spend, here's our project list. If we had 80, here's our project list. So, some would fall off. If we had 50, more would fall off. Now, we're going to round two. We've already done the thing where we had unlimited money, so now we are going to round two. "Saint Mark's, what can you use?" "We could use 5 million." And I think we did that for another round. Then, we got back to Saint Mark's, "We could use 8 million." I guess, we were going to the higher numbers, starting low and going high. And I went, "Time out. We're not getting any further down the list. The top projects suddenly are taking all the money." So, you never get down to 10 or 11, you know. And that's where our projects were. I'm like, *this seems messed up to me,* you know? So, that was the last time we ever used that process because it was so flawed. People were scamming it. So, I kind of had to call one of my colleagues. It was like, *really*? Three, five, six, ten. Why don't we just give you all the money? (*laughter*)

Tony told me that the Realty Chief meetings, when he was there, were bloodbaths.

LIBBY: Yeah. That's what I heard.

JOE: I mean, really unpleasant because the Chief of Realty liked conflict. He liked that, apparently. And so, the meeting devolved really quickly into not pleasant meetings. But you know, Eric Alvarez, I thought, was a great Realty Chief.

LIBBY: I've heard good things about him.

JOE: He has my utmost admiration and respect. He's now the Deputy Chief of Refuges. I know we acquired a lot of really good [land].

Where are we - two hours?

LIBBY: Two and a half hours. We've got to wrap up. *(laughter)*

JOE: Well, we can wrap up. There's so much I could say, but mainly, I just want to leave with saying I'm so grateful for all the people that helped me. I was glad to have the opportunity to help some others. And I'll just leave, too, that there were impacts on my family from all of this. I don't know how there could not have been. I'm very amazed, really, at the spouses who accompany their Refuge Manager husbands. They're like co-partners. They're partners in this whole adventure. My wife was, too. She really was, but it's different now. Looking back on it you go, *yeah, Jesus*. My toddler was in a house that was uninhabitable. That shouldn't have happened. *And you were gone, when I was pregnant, for eight or nine weeks.* That shouldn't have happened. So, those memories aren't all peachy for the spouse.

LIBBY: No. That's right.

JOE: In my case, for my spouse, they're not all peachy, and I have to deal with that. I acknowledge it. The only thing is you can't do anything about it.

LIBBY: You would do some things different now.

JOE: I would absolutely do things differently.

LIBBY: Because you're a different person, you have hindsight, but also, times are different.

JOE: Times are different.

LIBBY: And, back then, people really didn't care about the spouses or the families.

JOE: No.

LIBBY: It's just the way it was. And I think it's changed a lot.

JOE: But they were my family. I have to credit them for the sacrifices they made for my career. I am just so appreciative because I had a marvelous career that is still going on.

LIBBY: Yeah. I know that you retired in 2015, and you're still doing some conservation work. Why don't you just tell us real quickly about what you talked to us about this morning?

JOE: I was lucky enough to, in 2016, shortly after retirement, got on with Chesapeake Conservancy, a nonprofit headquartered in Annapolis, but their sphere includes the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed, which is the largest watershed in the country. In the course of that work, I was able to keep working on properties that remained threatened at Rappahannock by development. I also discovered, during my time at Rappahannock, that the Rappahannock people are still there, despite all the obstacles that were put in front of them, they remained a cohesive people. And in 2018, they received federal recognition. So, they are a federally recognized tribe, and their tribal homeland is within the Refuge boundary.

It was a big study that Chesapeake Conservancy, and the Park Service and the Tribe undertook to map, actually, and try to understand where the Tribe actually was on the landscape. This one area that we have been trying to protect for years, threatened with development, was integral to their quest to return to their homeland. At the Chesapeake Conservancy, part of our mission is involved in celebrating indigenous cultures, so that's been a part of our mission from day one, to remind ourselves that these indigenous people never went away. They're still here, and we need to help them tell their story and help them get resources to do what they need to do for their people. So, we've been doing that. And that involved trying to fundraise with them to buy a piece of land on the Rappahannock River that the landowners had approached the tribe about selling. They wanted the tribe to have it, but it was appraised at $4.2 million. It's waterfront. And this is in an area that largely looks much like it did 400 years ago. No big developments, no marinas, really nothing. It's amazing.

So, we were fundraising to help them buy this land, and we were introduced to a donor who wanted to buy land and donate it to the Refuge. That was all we knew at first. So, we contacted them. The family of William Dodge Angle, MD, deceased, wanted to do something in his honor because he was a big waterfowl guy. His wife, Carol Angle, an accomplished MD, with a family of accomplished children, all were interested in doing this for their dad and husband. So, we were introduced to them, and they said they wanted a project that was ready to go. So, we said, "We have a project that's ready to go, but it's not waterfowl habitat. It's got a little bit, but not a lot. But here's what it does have. It has bald eagles out the kazoo and, more importantly, it's an area where the Rappahannock tribe once existed. They were driven from these lands. We're trying to help them get back to these lands. And that's what we have." So, there was a couple field trips where all the family came out. We got them on a pontoon boat.

We took them up to the top of the bluff where you can look out. You can look up and down the river for 20 miles and not see a house. There are a couple silos but, literally, you just don't see any evidence of 21st century habitation. And at that spot on the river is where the Rappahannock people attacked John Smith in August of 1608, when he came up the river. It was the first place they defended their homeland. It was right there.

LIBBY: Wow.

JOE: Unmistakably. Smith described the high white cliffs with three native villages on top. When I realized what was there, I'm like, you can look down on that spot and you look around you and not see any evidence of 21st century habitation. Just think about the interpretive opportunities that presents to tell that story, where people can literally stand there and put themselves in the position of a Rappahannock warrior 400 years ago going, *What the hell is this? Who are these people [coming up the river]?* Saving that place, if it wasn't already super important, became ultra important.

So, that all was happening as I was the refuge manager transitioning into Realty and was still percolating when I retired. That property was not protected. Anyway, these donors came, we convinced them to engage, and they gave us $4 million. The owners gave us a little bargain sale, the tribe got a NFWF (National Fish and Wildlife Foundation) grant for half a million, and we bought it. We gave the easement to the Fish and Wildlife Service, and we gave the fee to the tribe. So, now, the Service has an easement with a federally recognized tribe, which I don't believe has happened anywhere else in the system.

We pulled that off, and, ironically, I had to hide during that because the landowners I had dealt with when I was refuge manager. They hated me. This is all about that other land and who discredited me in public, inappropriately, in my opinion. They made it clear to the tribe, they said, “We don't want Joe McCauley to have anything to do with this.” Because they knew I worked for the Conservancy then.

LIBBY: They weren't the owners of the property. Oh, they *were* the owners of the property, right? So, you were involved, but you couldn't…

JOE: I did the whole deal.

LIBBY: Right, but you couldn't be there to be part of the celebration.

JOE: I was prepared to stay away when the Secretary came down to celebrate in April of ‘22. But then I was asked to help drive a pontoon boat for the pre-event celebration. There were so many people that wanted to be at that thing. We had three pontoon boats, and I knew someone that had one [Correction: two.] I ran it [one of them.] I got that for the two tours for the Angles, because we really couldn't use the Refuge boat for that. We could for the Secretary, but for the other ones I had to borrow a pontoon boat from a friend.

So, I was operating a pontoon boat with some second tier VIPs. I went to the event and the landowners were all there. I made sure I arrived a little late, and they were all up front and I was in the back. So, I went but could have been a little more satisfied. I was asked to write remarks for Carol Angle, the 94-year-old matriarch, I'm like, *seriously? You want me to write her remarks?*? She's like the most accomplished person I could think of. Articulate. I mean, really? And plus, she's 94. I know a little bit about their background, but… So, I said “Okay,” because that's what I do for them, all the time.

All the time. You know? “Can you write this up?” or “Give us another update on Fones.” I have so many Fones updates, Fones Cliffs. Anyway, I wrote Carol Angle's remarks, and she talked to Joel Dunn [of the Chesapeake Conservancy]. I guess they discussed her speech, and she said, “Well, I'm just going to read it,” because she called him a gifted orator. She thought he wrote it. “You're a gifted orator.” Can’t correct her. Okay, I know how that goes. I've written enough stuff for other people that I know how that goes. But anyway, when I heard her reading my words, that was powerful. That was powerful. They were damn good words, too. So, yeah, that was quite a finale to that whole 20-year effort. And now, it looks like we've wrapped it all up.

LIBBY: That is so excellent. What a great way to end the interview. It's like the capstone on your career.

JOE: It was. I can't think of anything I've done that was more significant, and that’s saying a lot.

LIBBY: That's wonderful. You had a great career. You did so much. You really had a great career. And I'm so glad that you were a part of our Region 5 family, the Northeast Region, which is a fabulous Region and generally doesn't get the credit it's due.

JOE: I don't know why, man. I think we're a rocking Region.

LIBBY: We are. All right, well, I am going to end the interview. Thank you, Joe, for everything. Any last words?

JOE: Thank you.

LIBBY: Thank you. That's it.

End of Interview

Key Words: camping, endangered and/or threatened species, farms and farming systems, grants, hunting, internships, invasive species, law enforcement, maintenance, parks, partnerships, planning, public access, realty, research, training, trapping, tribal lands, waterfowl, water management, wildlife refuges