



Oral History Interview Question Guide

Preserving our Heritage through the Voices of our People

Interviewers draw upon the following questions to ask during interviews. Interviews run 60 to 90 minutes. Interviewers research interviewees' careers in advance and select **only** questions that are especially relevant to each interviewee. The interviewee does most of the speaking. The interviewer will capture key information and gently guide the interview in a chronological order.

Personal Information

- Where and when were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- Where did you spend your early years?
- What about your parents? What were their education and careers?
- What hobbies, books, or people, or events influenced you the most?
- What jobs did you have as a child or young person?
- Did you hunt or fish, or have other outdoor pastimes?

Education

- What high school did you attend? Where? When did you graduate?
- What college or university did you attend? When?
- What degree(s) did you earn?
- Did you go on for a master's degree? Where and when? What kind of degree, and what did you study?
- How about a PhD? When and when? What kind of degree, and what did you study?
- What aspect of your formal education equipped you for the future?
- Who most influenced your education and career track?
- Did you have mentors or courses that especially stuck with you?
- Were there adverse influences?

Military Service

- Did you serve in the military? Which branch?
- What years?
- Where were your duty stations? Any overseas?
- Did you receive any decorations?
- What was your job?
- Did military service relate in any way to your employment with the Service?

Family

- Would you like to discuss your family, including parents, partners, children, or anyone else close to you?
- Did your family affect your career?
- How did your career affect your family? How did family factor into opportunities for promotions or changes in duty stations?
- What would you like to tell others about being the spouse or partner of a Service employee?
- When and where did you meet your partner?
- When and where did you marry?
- Any children?
- What are your children doing now? Did any follow you into a career in conservation or the Service in particular?

Career

- Why did you want to work for the Service?
- What was your first profession position (state, federal, other)?
- What did you do?
- What attracted you to the Service?

- When did you start to work for the Service?*
- What were your duty stations? What kinds of positions did you hold?
- What were the pay and benefits like? Were there promotion opportunities?
- Did you socialize with the people you worked with?
- What did you do for recreation in the field?
- How long did you work for the Service?*
- What allowed you to stay with the Service most of your career?
- When did you retire?*
- Why did you leave the Service?
- What were your day-to-day duties?
- Are there major projects, issues, or stories you would like to share?

Daily Activities

- What kinds of training did you receive for your job(s)?
- What hours did you work?
- What were your day-to-day duties?
- What projects were you involved in?
- Describe the science of the day.
- What tools and instruments did you use?
- Did you witness any new Service inventions or innovations?
- Did you work with animals?
- How did you feel toward the animals?
- Did this change over time?
- What support did you receive locally, regionally, federally?
- How was the Service perceived by people outside the agency?
- How were agency-community relations?

Perspective

- What was the high point of your career?
- What was the low point of your career?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- What was your most dangerous or frightening experience?
- What was your most humorous experience?
- What were the major issues you had to deal with?
- How were those issues resolved?
- What was your most pressing issue?
- Has your perspective opinion on that issue changed with time?
- What was the major impediment to your job? Your career?
- Who were your supervisors?
- Who were the individuals who shaped your career?
- Who were some of the people you knew?
- Would they be able to work for the Service today?
- What Presidents, Secretaries of the Interior, and Directors of the Service did you serve under?
- How did changes in administration affect your work?
- Who were the individuals who shaped the Service?
- What were some of the changes you observed in the Service? In the personnel? In the environment?
- What are your thoughts for the future?
- Where do you see the Service heading in the next decades?
- What advice would you offer new hires?

Closing

- Do you have any photographs or documents to donate, share, or copy?
- What did I not ask that you want to tell others?
- Who else should we interview?*

* These questions are critical for the oral histories.