



## **Oral History Project Guide for Interviewees**

*Preserving our heritage through the voices of our people*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) recognizes the rich history and heritage of the Service and the many contributions of employees and others to the mission of the Service. The Service has an oral history program to acknowledge and record these stories.

### **Goal of the Oral History Project**

To preserve the heritage and culture of the FWS through the voices of its employees.

### **How it Works**

#### ***Nomination Process.***

Service employees and retirees nominate candidates for oral histories. Interviewers contact candidates to confirm their willingness and ability to be an interviewee.

#### ***Candidates.***

We want to talk to anyone who played a role in our history. Interviewees include former Directors and Regional Directors, project leaders, biologists, clerical and support staff, maintenance people, people who worked closely with the Service as contract pilots, guides and members of conservation organizations, and personnel from every part of the country.

#### ***Key Steps.***

Oral history interviewers are current or retired Service employees or FWS volunteers. Interviewers arrange an interview time and place with the interviewee, and record the interviewees' stories with audio or video recorders. Interviewers send the recording to the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in West Virginia to be transcribed. The Service shares the transcriptions online at <https://training.fws.gov/history/OralHistories.html>.

### **Preparing for the Interview**

- The interviewer will contact the interviewee by phone, mail or email prior to the interview.
- Together, you'll determine the date, time and location of the interview.
- The interviewer will provide guidance to the interviewee about the interview.
- If the interviewee would like to show any pictures, letters, maps, etc., you should inform the interviewer and bring them to the interview.

### **Conducting the Interview**

- The interviewee and interviewer both sign the [\*\*\*Gift and Release Agreement\*\*\*](#).
- We strive for a monologue rather than a dialogue.
- The interviewer will jot down names and places to verify spellings or get additional explanations after the interview.

### **Submitting the Oral History**

- The interviewer sends the digital audio file and/or the video and the [\*\*\*Gift and Release Agreement\*\*\*](#), with key information that arose during the oral history, such as people present, interview location, people and proper names mentioned, and projects and issues discussed, with visual aids if they were used, to NCTC via mail or email as noted on the back of this brochure.

- After the interview is transcribed, the interviewer may review the draft transcript and make corrections before the transcriptionist (or the interviewer) forwards it to the interviewee to review the transcription is finalized.

## **Oral History Questions**

The interviewer draws upon standard interview questions and guides the interview in chronological order. Here are sample interview questions.

### ***Personal Information***

- Where and when were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- What hobbies, books, or events influenced you the most?

### ***Education***

- What college/university did you attend? When? What degree(s) did you obtain?
- What most influenced your education and career path?

### ***Military Service***

- Did you serve in the military? What years? What branch?

### ***Family***

- Would you like to discuss your family, including parents, partners, or children, or anyone else close to you?
- How did your career affect your family?

### ***Career and Day-to-Day Activities***

- How did you come to work for the Service?
- How long did you work for the Service? Year started, year retired?
- Are there major projects, issues, or stories you'd like to share?
- Describe the science of the day.
- What was your most dangerous experience? Most humorous?

### ***Issues***

- What were the major issues you had to deal with? How were they resolved?

### ***Perspective***

- What was the high point of your career?
- Who were the individuals who shaped the Service?
- Why did you leave the Service?
- What advice would you offer new hires?
- Who else should we interview?

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

Q. How long is the interview?

A. Interviewers should limit interviews to 90 minutes.

Q. Where will the interview take place?

A. The interviewee and interviewer determine where to meet. It needs to be a quiet place with minimal noise and distractions. It could be in the home of the interviewee, in a nearby Service office, at a Service

reunion, or any place conducive to a good interview. When interviewers and interviewees speak clearly and concisely in a quiet environment, transcribers are best able to capture the oral history.

Q: Will the interviewee be able to see the transcript before it is published?

A: Yes, the interviewee will be asked to review the transcript before it is posted.

Q: Will the interviewee be able to change the transcript to make it “sound better?”

A: Not really! The transcriber removes filler words (“ums” and “ahs”) from the transcription. However, the interviewee cannot remove words or edit sentences to change their meaning. It’s best to prepare for the interview with dates, names, places, and career highlights in mind.

Q: Will the interviewee be provided a copy of the final transcript?

A: Yes, if requested.

Q: Can someone be interviewed more than once?

A: Yes.

Q: Can there be a delay before transcripts are published online?

A: No, the transcript will be published in the order that it was received. Transcripts won’t be held until people retire or management changes. Keep these things in mind while doing the interview.

### **Tips for a Good Oral History**

- Record interview in a quiet location.
- Keep the interview to the chronological format.
- Be sure the interviewee’s start and retirement dates are recorded.
- If doing a group interview, use a video recording along with a digital audio recording.
- Have water available for the interviewer and interviewee—talking is thirsty work!
- Know you can pause the recording if needed for a break, to ask questions, or just have time to think.
- Ensure the agreement form includes:
  - Accurate spelling of all names and proper nouns.
  - Key projects and issues.
  - Interview date and location.

This guide comes to you from NCTC’s Heritage Branch and the [Heritage Committee](#), comprised of FWS employees and FWS Retiree Association members serving on the Oral History Subcommittee.

**Questions?** Contact Mark Madison, FWS Historian, at [history@fws.gov](mailto:history@fws.gov).

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