



Sample Communications for Oral History Interview Planning

Preserving Our Heritage through the Voices of Our People

Thank you for coordinating an oral history interview. Everyone has a story, and your contributions help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service tell our rich history and heritage.

The following sample emails are guides. Please edit as appropriate for your circumstances. For more resources, visit the [Oral History Project webpage](https://nctc.fws.gov/history/oralhistories.html) at <https://nctc.fws.gov/history/oralhistories.html>.

Introduction via Email

Hello [*insert name*],

I am [*insert FWS Heritage Committee role or related role*], and I [*insert work or worked*] at the [*insert your current or most recent duty station*] in [*insert city, state*].

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes the rich history and heritage of the Service and the many contributions that employees like you have made to help accomplish its mission over the years. We all have a story. The Service has an oral history program to acknowledge and record these stories to preserve the heritage and culture of the Service through the voices of its employees. This is an important way of understanding and retaining our agency history. I am reaching out to you to see if you would be interested in giving your oral history via an interview.

I attached a brochure that helps explain the program and a list of questions we use as an interview "guide." Interviews are approximately 60 to 90 minutes. We need to conduct them in a quiet place in a mutually agreed upon location. Interviews are transcribed and, after interviewees have reviewed the transcript for accuracy, they are posted on the FWS website at <https://training.fws.gov/history/OralHistories.html>. The Oral History website provides more great information about the oral history program.

Oral histories are essential for understanding and retaining our agency history, and we really appreciate your considering being a part of it. We would love to hear your story!

Let me know if you have any questions, and we can continue our discussion via email or phone, whichever you prefer. [*insert, if applicable, "If you prefer to talk by phone, please contact me at..."*].

Once the potential interviewee agrees to an interview, consider the following communication, again, modifying as appropriate for the circumstances.

Interview Preparation Email

Hello [insert name],

I am [insert FWS Heritage Committee role or related role], and I [insert work or worked] at the [insert your current or most recent duty station] in [insert city, state].

Thank you for agreeing to an oral history interview. I am writing for a couple of reasons: (1) to find a date and time for your interview, and (2) to give you information you need to prepare for your interview. I am also happy to answer any questions you may have. Please suggest a couple of dates and times that work well for you. Please also [insert a request and/or recommendations for meeting locations]. I, or someone from the [insert Heritage Committee or other appropriate point of contact], will be back in touch to finalize the date, time, and location.

I attached the list of questions we use as a "guide" from which I'll draw questions for your interview. We conduct interviews in chronological order, beginning with personal background information—how you got interested in conservation, why you went into your career, where you worked, etc. You will do most of the talking, not your interviewer. Please set aside time, prior to the interview, to think about what you want to say. Here are some *tips* to help you prepare for the interview:

- Write up some sort of outline or notes for reference, so you do not forget anything important. Include answers to the attached questions, but include things such as changes you experienced, the challenges you faced, etc. Think about how you can share the highlights of your position and the great work you did, especially any involvement in policymaking, controversial issues, etc.
- Bring a list of dates with you—when you entered the Service, when you changed jobs or duty stations, when you retired, etc.
- Bring a list of pertinent names with correct spellings. Think of who mentored you, who you mentored, people you worked with, etc.
- Compile any photos and/or documents you may want to bring with you.
- In addition, know we'd like to take a photo of you when we interview you.

I attached a brochure with additional information about the interview process. A few highlights are that the interview will likely run 60 to 90 minutes, and that your interview needs to take place in a quiet location convenient for the interviewee and interviewer. If you have a partner or friend with you, they are welcome to sit in during the interview. The interviewer will bring a *Gift and Release Agreement* form for you to sign. Afterwards, your interview will be transcribed, typically in the order received. You'll have a chance to edit it for corrections before it is posted online at <https://training.fws.gov/history/OralHistories.html>. This website has the attached brochure, the question guide, and more great information about the oral history program. And, you can explore others' oral histories here.

Thanks again for agreeing to be interviewed. Your contribution will help us all understand and retain our agency history, and we really appreciate your being a part of it. We look forward to hearing your story!

Let me know if you have any questions, and we will continue our discussion via email [insert, if appropriate, or call me at ...].