TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEWEE: **Rob Lee** (RL)
INTERVIEWERS: David Todd (DT) and David Weisman (DW)
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DT: My name is David Todd. I'm here for the Conservation History Association of Texas. It's October 12th 2002. We're in Lubbock, Texas and we have the good opportunity to visit with Rob Lee who has been a—a special agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a number of years and has done some creative and effective work in—in trying to enforce the—the wildlife laws that the Federal Government has. And I wanted to thank you for taking this time to—to talk to us, tell us about your experiences.
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RL: You're welcome.
DT: I'd like to start by—by maybe visiting about your—with you about your—your childhood days. If there were early experiences that you might have had that first introduced you to the outdoors and conservation of wildlife those sorts of things?
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RL: I think that's when my interest did develop. I grew up in the country in Toledo Ohio o—outside the city limits near a hardwood forest and a small creek. And I was quite a ways from most of the people I went to school with. And didn't—and very few other kids lived near us. So a lot of my time was spent alone walking in the woods and
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searching in the creek and fi—you know, looking at critters and watching butterflies and having an insect collection and things like that. And there were a few—I remember a few old books in our home that had pictures of exotic animals, African animals and things like that and I think that's when my interest in wildlife, in general, probably started.
DT: You—you mentioned that you had an insect collection. Can you tell about trying to collect those and—and what you were looking for?
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RL: We were primarily looking for butterflies as I remember. That was the big attraction and—and moths. We were fortunate that a lot of the North American Silk Moths are found in Ohio there in those cecropia and polyphemus moths. We would find their cocoons in the winter and we would collect them and then they would hatch usually, you know, before springtime and quite often we made those part of our collection. We—
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we—we tried to let them go, but in the winter they didn't survive very well and so we were more careful. We would also collect praying mantis egg cases sometimes and that was usually a disaster when they ended up hatching quickly i—i—in the early spring when their in our home.

But I can remember making our own butterfly nets and—and chasing around trying to catch the illusive tiger swallowtail butterfly. That was the one that we always wanted to try to catch and we were seldom successful.
DT: You—you say we. Were there other kids that you did this with?
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RL: There was one family that lived across the street from me, Sandy and Albert Haskell was their name. And—and we would often team up together and go out exploring.
DT: So was there anybody that—that might have led you or—or taught you about this or did—did you feel like you were sort of on your own?
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RL: Well, the early experience was by myself or with a couple of friends that lived nearby. But I do remember a few instances where as a typical young boy, you know, I would get my hands on bb gun or something and I—and I at that time I thought it might be important for me to go out and try to shoot something. And—and my father was a very quiet man and—and his—his lessons to us were usually very subtle. But he
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didn't really tolerate me going out and shooting anything needlessly. And that was a lesson that I learned early and that was very meaningful to me and it helped really develop an appreciation for wildlife in its natural state. Ra—and it was not important for me after that to necessarily have to kill something to be fulfilled.
DT: I guess this—these were some of the activities that you had as a—as a young boy. Can you tell about anything that…
DW: (inaudible)
DT: As we were discussing before you—you told us a little bit about your—your childhood in—in Ohio. And I was wondering if you could maybe recount—so the next phase that might have been influential in your interest in conservation?
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RL: Pretty much through my teenage years and into high school it's kind of foggy to me. I don't have a lot of recollections and a—about—about thinking about a career. And—and I really didn't and when I got out of high school the only thing I wanted to do was just go to work so I could buy gasoline for my truck and things like that and do some traveling. A—but then I spent a couple years in the army and that's really what
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enlightened me to help me realize that—that I really m—maybe did want to do something particular and that in order to do that I—I wanted to go to college. I developed a desire to go to college to find out about what's available. And when I got out of the Army and I used the G.I. Bill then to start junior college. And that's really where I—I was introduced to some people who were instrumental in helping me to decide on a career
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track. Because I still had this idea that I wanted to do something with wildlife. I didn't know really what was available and certainly didn't know what direction I wanted to go in, but it had to do with science and primary biology and—and wildlife. And I had two instructors in an introductory biology course. They team taught the course and it was Mr. Heinrick and Mr. Moore and they really presented biology in a way that made me want to learn. And it also helped me sort of get over some social fears that I had of performing
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in front of other people because we had oral examinations in small groups. So you had to be ready. And I was in this class with a friend of mine named John Bartavian and so we sort of took it upon ourselves to try to be the—the best in the class. And we'd have a big test day and everyone's frantically studying going over their notes in the hallway and John and I would just stroll in with our long hair and briefcases and then we would just say, ask me anything. And so that's what really helped me get to where I wasn't afraid of
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going to college and I wasn't afraid of performing in—in front of other people and—and sort of came out of my shell so to speak. And finished junior college and then went on to go to Sacramento State University in Sacramento California and—and getting a Biology Degree.
DT: And was a lot of your work in—in Lab Biology or was it Field Biology or a combination?
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RL: The beginning was traditional academic biological studies taking the courses, but we did do field trips. And in fact I was part of a conservation club there on—at the junior college where we did environmental education programs for grammar schools that would come to college because we had s—a lot of specimens and some wild animals there that we kept. And it worked out that I started to work for Mr. Swinehard who was the Natural History teacher and that was the next big step for me. And not only did I take the class but then he wanted me to be his teaching assistant. And then I got to take care of all the animals and he was a—a—a big motivator for me as well.
DT: Can you recall any of your experiences teaching students at that (?)?
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RL: What we—what we liked to do was to bring them through and sort of just, you know, and wow them with different kinds of specimens and—and show them the different animals that we kept there. I—I really enjoyed seeing the young students get enthused about what I was enthused about and for awhile I felt that maybe I would—teaching would be a career for me. And that was one of things that I considered for sometime, but then it—those—those desires gradually changed as—as I continued going to college and sort of learned other things. I—I always kept involved in teaching even though I decided that it wasn't going to be a profession, I did want it to be part of what I do as an adult.
DT: You mentioned that you had some early interest in—in wildlife as a child in Ohio and in California you—you worked with young kids as well. Do you think that—that—that children have a—a natural interest and affinity for wildlife or do you think it's a foreign exotic thing for them?
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RL: I haven't really encountered very many young children who weren't excited about learning about wildlife. It's just one of those things that once your exposed to it it's sort of easy to comprehend. It's not like having to interpret some complex mathematical formula or—or try to visualize some chemical reaction in a test tube because wildlife is right there and it can be part of our lives. If you stop and look around you'd be surprised at how much is really around you. And—and just in—in this discussion it makes me
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think back to one early encounter in grammar school when we had a man come and he presented a reptile show and I'd forgotten about that. But he had all these different kinds of—of snakes and he was there on the stage in our school, in our little inner city school in Toledo and I was pretty fascinated by that. And I think, you know, that sort of—I remember him and how exciting that was for me and I think that's sort of what I tried to do when I was involved with—with

educational programs.
DT: Well, growing up in Toledo you—you had access to a hardwood forest and a creek. I think a lot of children now who grow up in the cities don't have that access. Do you think that that changes their attitude about wildlife?
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RL: I think that being able to be there and sort of being surrounded by natural resources of course had—was a big part of what led me into this career. And like you say a lot of people aren't exposed to that. You don't necessarily have to be exposed to it to develop an appreciation. There are other ways. I think I was just fortunate to be able to walk outside my door and—and go right into the forest.
DT: I—I—I think it's intriguing that—that you have this interest in—in teaching about wildlife and also enforcing the laws that protect wildlife and—and it seems like those are two very different avenues. I mean one that involves forest and the other persuasion and—and—how do you think those—those two interests correspond in your life?
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RL: Well, I think they mesh very well because in my current career enforcing natural resource law I believe that every encounter I have is an educational experience, both for me and for the person I might be interviewing. And I don't simply have a desire just to catch bad guys. I—it's important to educate people as well and to help them develop an appreciation for natural resources because it's going take a lot more people than just one fish and wildlife agent to really make a difference. And so I—I look at every encounter as an opportunity to do that.
DT: So do you feel like all lot of these laws are in sense self enforcing that you have to encourage people to have a conscience about what they do and how they act?
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RL: Well…
DT: Since you're not always looking over their shoulder?
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RL: …there are a lot of ways that people are motivated to obey the law. And one of them might simply be because—because there's a law some people will obey it. Other will obey a—a law if they have a fear of being caught and punished. And other people will obey a law if they can be shown that maybe it's important. And so I look at all of those motivations when I'm doing an investigation to see what that particular subject,
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what might be the trigger for them to maybe tell me the truth. And that's what I strive to do in—in criminal investigations. We're just—it's a—to me it's a search for the truth, but along the way if I can change someone's attitude even a little bit then I think that's helpful.
DT: How did you first get introduced to wildlife law enforcement?
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RL: Law enf—law enforcement is a career actually came that came fairly late for me. When I graduated from school I had an interesting experience. I was a senior and I was very interested in birds and bird watching in California. And I heard about a phenomenon where the nest of a marbled murrelets that was found for the first time in California and this was in the 1970's. And I just couldn't believe that we have a bird—a sea bird that's fairly common and that we really didn't know where they nested in the
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1970's. And I saw a little article about that in Audubon Magazine and I went to my Ornithology

Professor and that was Dr. Nicholas Uvardy. And I asked him about it and he was sort of impressed that I was curious and I thought that that was curious. That someone would be interested just because I was. And so he talked to me about the history of that bird and—and he knew something about the nest being discovered and he 00:15:15 – 2239
said to me Robert he says "what's—what's your plan for the future?" And I told him I didn't really know. I just wanted a job in biology. And he says, "Well you need to go to graduate school first". He says, "you sign up with me and—and we'll get you a Masters Degree". And s—I had never thought about graduate school before that day and so that's what I did. And I ended up being his teaching assistant and continued on with my education there.
DT: What was your focus (inaudible)?
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RL: My—my focus was Ornithology and that was his primary focus. And so I did some research and I studied the nesting biology of black terns in rice fields in California. Is what I did that. And I was—I was very excited about that and I completed all of my course work. I did two summers of research and I began to write my thesis up. And at the same time someone told me that the Fish and Wildlife Service was taking applications for biologists and for jobs, you know, and that was pretty exciting. So I applied and it 00:16:24 – 2239
wasn't very long after that that I was actually offered some jobs with them. And I dropped out of graduate school without writing my thesis at that point because the objective for me was a profession in the field that—of—of my choice. And I was offered a job as a wildlife—I'm sorry as a—as a Wildlife Refuge Manager with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Merritt Island, Florida and that was a dream come true. It was my ultimate objective and—and so I quit school at that point. But as a Biologist and a
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Refuge Manager I would often be the person selected to coordinate research on the—on the refuge. So all these young students would come through and I would help them develop their graduate programs and their research on the refuge and monitor their research and help them edit their thesis. And I just decided that, well, if I can do it for them I should do it for myself. So after six years of being gone from college I dug out all of my old data and started to analyze it and—and wrote it up and—and did receive my—my Master of Science Degree in Biological Sciences from California State University Sacramento. And I did it while I was working at the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge in Georgia.
DT: Maybe you can tell us a little bit about your thesis and—and it seems intriguing to me that you were looking at the behavior of a wild bird black tern I believe you said…
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RL: Black Terns.
DT: …in a landscape that's been changed by people in these rice paddies. And—and I was wondering if—if that's given you a special opportunity to look at how mans use of—of—of natural resources can affect the behavior and habits of—of wildlife?
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RL: I—I think it really has. I—I've always been intrigued by endangered species and critters that are losing habitat or their population is de—declining for one reason or another. And in the Central Valley of California, of course, if—if you studied that area you know that the vast majority of the national ret—wetlands have been drained and turned into parking lots and agricultural fields and even cities and things like that. And part of that dynamic has—has been s—supplemented by rice growing. And there are

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possibilities—we certainly know that animals are attracted to rice fields because they're like huge shallow lakes, is what they are there. And what I wanted to look at was—and—and we knew that black terns—it's a species that ha—that actually builds floating nests in shallow lakes. And we knew they were attracted to rice fields and someone posed a question, I don't even remember who, but you know we should maybe look at that to see if that's beneficial for these birds and if it is we need to get that information
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out because that's—that's a positive thing where you have a wildlife and agriculture not necessarily in conflict, but possibly the agriculture benefiting a wild animal and—and that's what I looked at. And—and pretty much what—what we found out in those cases is that there were some ways to manage rice growing in California that were beneficial and there were other ways that were less beneficial. And so it really—it posed more questions then it answered, but it was—it was interesting and—and there—I found out there were lots of other critters out there in those rice fields as well.
DT: Such as?
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RL: Millions of crayfish and—and dragonflies. The—the rice fields actually produced the primary food source for the terns, which was dragonflies. And they—they could, even with the pesticides that were being used, the dragonflies did survive in the rice fields and in the canals that—that—where the water was fed into the rice fields. And when the—once they hatched that's what the Blacks Turns would feed on primarily as adults. A draw back was that the—the dikes that were formed through the rice fields were the only dry land around and they were colonized by rats. And when the rice fields were
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drawn down as part of the man—normal management scheme they would draw the water down and they would become mud flats. The rats would come off the dikes and forage across the—the flats and they would find most of the black tern nests. And so if they were drawn when they were young or eggs in the nest they would all be destroyed by
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rats. And that was interesting and may—got me thinking that there would be—that there—that we could develop ways to maybe avoid that extensive predation and at the same time work with the farmers so that it didn't interrupt with their normal agricultural practices. So those kinds of challenges have sort of stuck with me and a lot of what I do now is resolution conflict. And I just find that—that as—as sort of an exciting little aspect of the job.
DT: I—I may not have this story entirely complete in my mind but I think that out in California there's a debate going on right now about trying to divert some agricultural water to the cities and you know some environmental advocates feel like this is a—a good alternative to save some of the water that should remain in the Colorado River by making more efficient use of it in agriculture, but other environmental advocates say well, you know, a lot of wildlife has come to depend on the water that's used in agriculture. And I was wondering if you have any thoughts about that sort of dilemma that's—has split the environmental community?
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RL: I always try to look for something positive in—in every situation and how can I use—can I use something in any kind of a conflict. How can we get something positive for natural resources whether it be habitat or wildlife or just to help people develop an appreciation? Those conflicts

are only going to become more common and more complex as we have more and more people. And I think that the trend is going to be that we're going to discover more conflicts than we're going to be able to solve.

DT: Another thing that—that comes to my mind when you tell me about your thesis work is that there are some creatures which are very opportunistic and flexible and have been able to accommodate people. And there are other kinds of creatures which are—are less so. And I—I was wondering if it gives you any sort of value judgment about the fitness of these creatures?
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RL: It seems that the—the influence that humans have on our environment helps us to identify those—those critters that are more pre-adapted to be able to co-exist with us. And—and th—while there are certain species of animals that do better when they come in contact with humans we can also look at human history and see that there are cultures that were—are more adaptable to both climate change and to social change. Because wi—there are all kinds of cultures that are now extinct along with certain species of
animals that are extinct. And that—that will—that trend will continue what—what I tell people when we get in discussions about conservation is that you really should expect
that things will change because they always have and they always will. And so with that
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change how do we—how do we save a little bit of the natural world. And I—I do continue with the education even in this—this career with law enforcement. And being here in Lubbock I'm—I'm associated with Texas Tech University and they have a really wonderful Range Wildlife and Fisheries Department over there. And so I—I have usually three or four opportunities every year to go over and—and teach one aspect of one of their classes. And I just lost my train of thought.
DT: You're—you're talking about animals that—that are good at co-exist—co-existing and those that maybe aren't so and—and similarly how some cultures have been able to co-exist with civilization and—and then you were—you were going into educational opportunities that are related to that.
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RL: Let me take a breath.
DT: Rob you were telling me earlier that—that when you got out of—out of graduate school you took a job in—in first one refuge and then another. I was wondering if you could tell me about what those refuges were originally set up for and how you went about managing them and—and also trying to direct the research that was done on those refuges?
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RL: My first job was as an Assistant Refuge Manager at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and that's on the East Central Coast of Florida and it's actually land that's owned by NASA. And it's—it's where—it's the Kennedy Space Center and the primary purpose of that land was f—to develop the space program and launching pads and everything that goes along with that, but there—there's over a 130,000 acres and most of that area is not operational area. And NASA came into an agreement with the
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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to allow our agency to manage the non-operational areas and it is such a dynamic and unique place there. Not only because there is a space program, but because of the natural resources that exist there. There was something like 12 endangered and threatened species that occurred on that refuge. And that was an opportunity to be involved in a program

where you have the—actually the world's grandest technology being utilized and we're sending people to the moon and space
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walks and things like that. And then you also have a national wildlife Refuge where you're managing to—you're managing the resources to save endangered species. We had sea turtles nesting on the beach. We had bald eagles nesting in the pine forests. We had the Atlantic salt marsh snake in the brackish water marshes and there were alligators everywhere and it was just a really exciting place to be. And when I came there it was
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the beginning of the space shuttle program. And prior to that I didn't really have an interest in space exploration, but I was kind of thrown in the middle of it. And because I had this interest in working in—with conflicting objectives and things like that I was sort of thrown in to the—the realm of planning the environmental monitoring that was going to occur when the first space shuttle went in—went up and was launched from there.
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And I—it—I would sit in these meetings with these, you know, high priced and very knowledgeable rocket scientists, basically is what they were and they're talking about the microphysics of raindrop formation and acid fallout from this giant cloud that comes up during the launch. And I'm thinking there, you know, sitting there with, you know, a little bit of experience and a brand new employee wondering how I could have any say in what's going on, but—but NASA was really good in that they—they really have this—
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this idea that going to launch these rockets and continue to launch them and still maintain the integrity of the natural resources that were there. So we were able to set up some very basic monitoring and research programs where we looked at the effects of just the—the noise involved with the—with the launch and—and how it affected the nesting eagles and ospreys and the wading bird colonies that were there. How the water quality was going to be changed around the launch pad because this huge cloud that goes up when a
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rocket is launched or when a space shuttle is launched, it just looks like a big smoke cloud but really what it is is a giant acid cloud in that—with a PH of 1 or less. And eventually that falls out a—out of the sky and of course if it lands on plants it—it tends to—to kill the—the leaves and—but it is a very complex research and I was—it was just fun to be part of that.
DT: I've heard some people have sort of am—ambivalent attitudes towards the space program. You know, in one sense they—they see it as kind of an extravagant effort to get off a very good planet that we already have. And other people say, well no this is a wonderful platform for investigating the earth and appreciating the earth and monitoring it and so on. And I was wondering which side you feel is more valid?
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RL: Well, it—it's interesting and while I say it's—it's not a particular interest to me I—I would never be one to say that we shouldn't explore knowledge no matter where it leads us. And—and if it would be under the sea or in the—or in space. And really when you're talking about being in space and astronauts walking around in space they're only about 200 miles away. You know that's—that's not even as far as it is from here to Austin for crying out loud. That's really not very far away. So it's still within our sphere
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of influence, but an interesting consequence, of course, of the space program is that that—that several miles of—of very dynamic and a diverse natural habitat that's there on the East Central Coast of Florida would not be there today if wasn't for the space program. Because it would just be a continuation of—of Coco Beach and—and all the other coastal developments that are around there. So it's—it's a very large expanse of—of beach and dune area and coastal marsh and—and even sand dune pine forest that—that would simply not exist if it wasn't for the space program. So for—for that alone I think it's—it's very valuable.
DT: You—you also mentioned that—that in working at the refuge there you helped work with—with bald eagles and alligators, both of which I think have staged pretty significant recoveries. Can you maybe speculate about why those two creatures have done relatively well relative to some of the other species on the endangered and—and threatened list?
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RL: The—the reasons for the decline of both bald eagles and alligators were very directly human-caused. In the case of alligators it was drained of marshes and swamps, which is the—a lot of their habitat and the actual killing of alligators. And—and it's one of the—one of the situations where humans killing an animal could actually lead to their decline. And we've proven that with the Carolina Parakeet and the Passenger Pigeon. That can happen. We can—we can make them extinct if we want to and we did
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with those two species. And alligators were headed in the same direction. Their—their hides, their meat, their skulls, and their teeth are all in demand by humans. We—we want to eat them. We want to adorn ourselves in them and in some cases we just don't like them so we kill them. And that was happening with alligators and we—we were the cause but then we were also the solution. And that through the implem—implementation
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and enforcement of wildlife laws we were able to stem that tie of—of wholesale slaughter of alligators. We were also able to conserve some of the wetlands and so they were able to come back. And—and they are no longer in danger of—of becoming extinct. I think their—their role and—and their place in—in our society is probably secure. And it's the same way with bald eagles. We had a direct impact on their decline. Both through directly killing them and through the misapplication and misuse of pesticides, which
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caused their egg thinning, which caused the eggs to be broken during incubation. So there was no reproduction. Well, we were smart enough to figure that out and then to turn it around. And so doing that and—and augmenting the wild population with captive raised chicks and—and the enforcement of laws and—and that's a big part of what I wanted to discuss about today is that we—we have laws. But if their—if their not enforced th—there—there won't be enough voluntary enforcement or voluntary
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compliance to ens—to ensure that they work so that—we have to have this idea of incentive for people to obey the laws. And that's where I was kind of leading to the—when I lost my train of thought a while ago. In that we have laws and—and some people will obey the law no matter what it says if it's written. And other people, like I say, they will only obey the law if they're afraid of being caught and punished. But there are other people that—that just have this idea that some laws are worthy of being—of being
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complied with, but most laws won't work unless there's some kind of incentive and it has to be one of those three things. And our job is to pro—provide one of those incentives and that is the fear of being caught and punished. So that's our role in—in wildlife conservation. Other people are just going to do it because it's a good thing to do and other people are going to do it just because it's a law. But there are still those out there that will violate laws and will illegally exploit natural resources. And they'll continue to do it unless someone enforces the law. So everyone says how great some laws might be, but without enforcement they really will never be effective.
DT: Was this a—a lesson that—that sort of dawned on you when you were working at those first two refuges or is it something that came along later?
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RL: When I first started as a biologist I had no inclination to go into law enforcement. I simply wanted to manage wild lands and to do educational programs and things like that. It was interesting because the first day on the job at Merritt Island Refuge and this is a high security area because you're dealing with NASA. And refuge employees had security clearances. So the first day I showed up for work and they didn't know me from Adam, I was given a wad of keys that I could barely fit into my pocket, a security badge
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with my picture on it that allowed me access into all these interesting areas and a brand new stainless steel 357 Magnum Pistol and a badge to go with it. And I had no idea that law enforcement was going to be part of my assignment there. But because we're on the refuge and we're there it was a sort of a traditional thing that you would also have law enforcement authority so that you could enforce the regulations that were in effect on that particular refuge. That was a big surprise to me, but it was also a big surprise to me when I discovered that I sort of liked doing that work. And we had a large hunting program, primarily water fowl hunting program on that refuge, as well. And my first assignment in law enforcement was to work the duck hunt to make sure that everyone was in
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compliance. So—and my very first case involved a group of hunters that were hunting on a dike on the northern part of the marsh there. And a flock of double crested cormorants flew over and one of the guys blasted one right out of the air. He jumped out of his blind and ran over and picked it up and held it by the neck and was grinning from ear to ear and when—was yelling to his buddies "look at the size of this black duck it's the biggest one I've ever seen." And then of course me and—and the—the partner I was
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with we came out of the bushes and the group saw us and they just sort of hung their head. They knew what was going on, but the guy in the marsh still thought it was a duck. So this is a—just a prime example of someone who violated the law and he didn't even know it. Some people say that what we should've done—the way we should've punished them is—is to let him think it was duck and let him go home and eat it, but we decided to issue him a ticket instead. And so that was—that was my first encounter with law
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enforcement work. There's really no one else in my family that's in law enforcement. I never thought about being in law enforcement, but it was an aspect of the job that I liked there. So we continued doing—we had a lot of trespass problems because of all these resources that were tied up on the space center. There were some of the biggest and most abundant red fish in—in the

coastal marshes there. So there were always people wanting to come in and sneak in the security areas and go fishing or—or poaching different animals or stealing the hearts out of the—the palmetto hearts for—that was a big delicacy in that part of the country. And—and they would do this at night and so we were always
00:38:37 – 2239
on call and we'd have to go out and chase people around at night and do these different kinds of things. And I—I liked it. And I sort of gradually got more and more involved in it while I was there.
DT: I'm intrigued by this story of the—the—the cormorant hunter who thought he was a duck hunter. Do you find that often that—that people you—you apprehend are just operating out of sheer ignorance and negligence or that there's real criminal intent?
00:39:13 – 2239
RL: The ma—the majority of the people that I investigate know what they're doing and they know that it's wrong. This guy was really the exception as far as the kinds of people that I encounter. He truly was ignorant of what he had shot. Now if you—he knew that he could only shoot ducks and he thought that was a duck. So his ignorance was just in being able to identify his quarry. But most of the people that I deal with they—they know what they're doing and they go through all kinds of shenanigans to try to avoid detection. And so that's our job to—to try to figure out what happened, you know to get to the truth.
DT: You also mentioned that some of your cases when you were at the refuge or the calls you got were at night. And—and I was wondering if you could talk about sort of being on—on call and working after hours and sort of unusual circumstances?
00:40:16 – 2239
RL: I—I think that the combination of a surprise call in the middle of the night having to go out on your own in—into an area that maybe you've never been before and you weren't sure what you were going to encounter, that was part of the lure of doing that kind of work. It was a—it was exciting. It was like every—every call was like a big adventure.
DT: Was it frightening?
00:40:39 – 2239
RL: I don't think it was frightening. I—I do believe that I took precautions knowing that there could be danger there. And—and certainly if—if someone was just hell-bent on doing harm to a game warden or something like that they can do that. But we try to be as careful as we can, but I don't allow that fear to prevent me from doing what the job requires to be done.
DT: After you were at Merritt Island you went onto another refuge. Can you tell about your experiences there?
00:41:13 – 2239
RL: From Merritt Island I transferred to Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge was—which is in the—in Central Georgia about 35 miles North of Macon and it was very different because it was an upland refuge. It was primarily the—the primary focus was on managing the pine forest for the benefit of red cockaded woodpeckers. To show—in fact we were a demonstration forest to show how you could have long—long rotation and harvest trees in such a way that it benefits wildlife. An—an interesting consequence
00:41:50 – 2239
of that was that the—the wood that came off of Piedmont was the most valuable wood on any of the private forests out there. The wood was older. We were on a 100-year rotation and we were able to show that you could do that. You didn't have to just go in there and clear cut the whole

thing all in one year and make a big profit in order to be profitable and that was a—a big part of what we did. So, again, this was in an area to show how you can resolve conflict where we need paper and wood products, but we also like to have wildlife in our lives and so we were able to show that—that the—the two things were compatible.
DT: Were—were these stands long-leaf pine or what type were they?
00:42:36 – 2239
RL: They were loblolly pine.
DT: And were—were some of them planted as—as pine plantations or…
00:42:43 – 2239
RL: The refuge was—was purchased after a l— the depression and the dust bowl days and most of that area had been logged over, both the uplands and the—the riparian areas where the hardwoods were. And the idea was to show that these areas even as badly eroded and over grazed and—and totally harvested could—could recover and be very productive wildlife areas. And that's—that's—that's what Piedmont was purchased for initially. No one really knew about red cockaded woodpeckers back in the 30's in
00:43:20 – 2239
that they would become a, you know, an endangered species some day. But the primary original objective was to show that these lands could be restored so these were a lot of agricultural areas and a few tree plantations that were purchased. And if you go back there today you can't really tell there was—you may have to look closely to see the old homesteads. They're all over grown. And the old pine plantations have sh—slowly been—had selective harvesting so they don't look like just rows of trees anymore. And the—the whole idea now is through natural revegetation and natural reforestation so that the pine plantations will gradually be phased out.
DT: You mentioned that—that you did some selective harvesting and—and had longer rotations. Did you also use any prescribed burning?
00:44:12 – 2239
RL: Burning was a—a big part of the—the work there at Piedmont. And, in fact, it was required to keep the stands open and to provide the regeneration of the gr—the under story grasses and things that were important for the red cockaded woodpecker stands. If you have too many brush species and small saplings crowd the understory then it's—it's not—it's not a desirable habitat for red cockaded woodpeckers. They happen to be one of those species that have very narrow habitat requirements and the—they're not very adaptable.
DT: Can you recall any of your early experiences in conducting some of these burns? I—I imagine that at that time they were still working out the kinks and how to do this.
00:44:59 – 2239
RL: My fire experience actually began at Merritt Island Refuge. It's the—the fuel model there is one of the most intense and explosive of—of any fuel models. I—it rivals the—the chaparral fuel model of the California Foothills. In that you have lots of very flammable very dense understory vegetation and then you have a pine canopy and all—all those things combined in the absence of fire over long periods of time create a very dangerous situation. And—and it's not all that beneficial for the widest diversity of wildlife. And on Merritt Island the fires had been suppressed for many decades because
00:45:46 – 2239
they just didn't want to deal with fire around the operational areas. So what they concentrated on was suppression and decades of suppression resulted in—in some very dangerous fire loads. And it's one of the highest densities—or highest concentrations of lightening in North America occ—

occurs right there in that habitat. And so we had lots of wildfires at Merritt Island and we—we had a—an extensive ca—prescribed burning program that was just beginning to reduce that fire load. And so we all got involved in it almost right away when I started there on—on doing fire work, but we really didn't have
00:46:30 – 2239
much of a plan. One of the really unfortunate situations that involved was a—a big fire. It's called the Ransom Road Fire. It was a lightening strike on an afternoon and it was in a—one of these areas—a very dense fire and we didn't have very much fire training at that time. The—the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on refuges—we just kind of did things because we wanted to protect the area, so if a fire started we tried to put it out. If we were doing a prescribed burn we'd just do the best we could, but we were not
00:47:06 – 2239:
anything like what the forest service had as far as—as knowledge and expertise. And we got involved in that fire that day and a dozer operator and a spotter went out to try to put in a firebreak to keep it out of an operational area. And while they were there the—the winds shifted on them and they were out in the middle of this very dense area—saw palm meadow over your head and then a pine canopy above them. The wind shifted and started to come toward them and they took the dozer and tried to escape the fire and it got
00:47:43 – 2239
hung up on an old lighter stump and the—the dozer was stopped. And they ran to a grassy swale and deployed their emergency fire tents, but the—the fuel load was so high that the fire ran over both of them and—and it ended up killing them both. And it was a turning point both for me and—and really for the whole Fish and Wildlife Service on—on how we—how we deal with fire on federal lands. And we then became part of the—the inner agency fire system that's headquartered out of Boise, Idaho. And then—things changed very—very fast after that as far as our training and—and we would get help from—from people who had experience and would allow us to do those things and do them safely and—and hopefully not—not have anyone else killed.
DT: And how—how did the—the prescribed burn regime differ from Merritt Island to—to the Georgia Refuge?
00:48:47 – 2239
RL: The thing about the Piedmont Refuge was that prescribed fire had been a part of the management scheme there for—for a long time. And so we did not have the explosive fuel loads and—and—and we would set the fires when we wanted to rather than have to deal with the fire that was started in—you know, in the middle of the summer during a drought when the winds are high. And—and so the—the fires were very—very low key on Piedmont Refuge as compared to Merritt Island.

DT: Something else that—that I'd like to ask you the Piedmont Refuge I guess, had significant stands of pine. I'm curious if you had any problems with Southern Pine Bark Beetle and if you did how you dealt with those insects and what your neighbors thought about the way you were managing them?
00:49:40 – 2239
RL: Pine—Pine Bark Beetle—the beetles did exist on Piedmont Refuge and we would have small outbreaks, but we—we were watching that forest all the time. There were two foresters on staff. And we tried to identify them as quickly as possible and keep them from—from spreading

and—and wiping out large portions of the forest. But we didn't worry about small outbreaks because that simply added some diversity. We had a healthy forest so we—our trees were less susceptible to disease and then when we would
00:50:16 – 2239
have small outbreaks we would go in and harvest—selectively harvest some of those trees and get them out of there. But we—the—the dead trees just created snags which—which are necessary for a lot of the critters out there that require dead wood to make cavities for nesting and things like that. So the Pine Bark Beetle never became a—a real problem in the—in that refuge while I was there.
DT: As an ornithologist did you ever entertain hopes that you would see an Ivory Bill Woodpecker?
00:50:53 – 2239
RL: When I was at Merritt Island Refuge we would get probably get five or six calls a year from people whoever—who either saw an ivory-bill woodpecker or a Florida Panther. Of course neither one of those species had been seen on Merritt Island for probably more than 50 years. And we were never able to substantiate that either existed there. You—usually the panther sightings turned out to be feral pigs. And the Ivory Bill
00:51:27 – 2239
Woodpecker sightings, of course, turned out to be pileated woodpeckers. But we would have people come in or call or even write letters and—and they would perfectly describe an ivorybill woodpecker like they were looking at a picture in a book. And my experience of course is that you usually don't see that detail in a fleeting glimpse of a bird going through the canopy, especially if you didn't have any experience with it—hadn't seen it before how are you going to be able to—to give that kind of detail. And we were—we were never able to substantiate that—that those sightings were valid.
DT: Well, after working at these two refuges what was your next step?
00:52:11 – 2239
RL: When I was on Piedmont Refuge I—well, even—even when I was on Merritt—when I was on Merritt Refuge Island I met a couple special agents with the Fish and Wildlife Service and I was able to do a few short term details with them. One of the agents needed some help identifying some stuffed birds that were being sold at an antique store. And so I—I went in with them on that and I thought—I thought that was pretty neat and pretty exciting. And then I was able to do some details during dove season on
00:52:40 – 2239
s—where the agents needed some help and as a refuge officer having law enforcement authority on the refuge I was allowed to take that authority and work off the refuge provided we had the—the okay of our regional director. And so our authority was really good anywhere, but by policy we didn't work off the refuge unless there was a special circumstance. And I—and in talking with the agents I thought that the work was pretty exciting, but I—I didn't really like all the travel away from home that they were describing. And—and—and in those days in the 70's and early 80's they did a lot of travel and details for well over a month sometimes away from home. And—and because of that I didn't want to pursue that as a career. But when I got to Piedmont Refugee I
00:53:30 – 2239
started to look at—at law enforcement a little more seriously and I talked with Tom Warden in our Atlanta office. He was the assistant special agent in charge there and—and he had worked

with me on the refuge before and I told him that I—I was interested in—in that special agent as a career and that I would like to do some other assignments. I would like to increase the amount of cooperative work I was doing with the special agents. And he said, "Well, when could you go?" And I said well, anytime. He says,
00:54:03 – 2239
well, pack your bags we got an assignment for you in Great Falls Montana starting next month." You know, and so it was just like boom I ask and—and it happened and I went up there in a witness protection detail and got to meet a lot more of the agents from around the country. And then I—a few months later he sent me on a—a big assignment that involved the execution of search and arrest warrants in North Carolina on a big
00:54:30 – 2239
striped bass case that was going on over there. And—and having those—those—that kind of experience and—and interaction with them it just—it just made it final for me that this is really what I want do as a job. So in talking with Tom Warden and Dan Sursey there in the Atlanta office, I told them I want to do as many assignments as I can and that the next time they are going to hire agents that I'm going to try—that I'm going to apply and see how I shake out.
DT: Well, tell us about the first two assignments, the witness protection program and the striped bass case.
00:55:04 – 2239
RL: The witness protection program was for Operation Falcon and that was a—a case that involved agents. They uncovered a—a wide variety of people from—really from around the world that were capturing birds of prey as chicks and—and then selling them in the falcon remarket. It involved peregrine falcons and prairie falcons and goshawks and all kinds of interesting birds. Eggs and chicks were being stolen from Canada and, you know, Northern U.S. and some of them—and then some of them were being sold all
00:55:41 – 2239
over the country including foreign countries. So it was a very complicated investigation and one of their primary witnesses, a cooperating witness by the name of Jeff McPartland, lived in Great Falls and he was a cooperating witness. And then when all of these search warrants were issued and a lot of birds of prey were seized, well, they ended up at his place because he was a master falconer and he had the facilities to keep all these animals there. Well, he had a lot of people threatening his life for being part of that
00:56:15 – 2239
for—for working with the government. And so while the trials were going on and after the trials he was provided 24-hour protection at his home. And—and that was our job to be there. And we had a trailer and we—w—we had posts set up around his house and we just kept an eye on him 24 hours a day. And it wasn't real dynamic work, but it was exciting. And I got to meet a lot of agents and long hours at night in the cold winter in Great Falls, Montana. You know, you talk about—I heard a lot of war stories from them and I really liked what I was hearing. And—and thought that kind of work would be exciting.
DT: Do you recall any of these stories that you were told about?
00:56:56 – 2239
RL: Well, there were—there were some—some of the o—old timers, you know, talking about chasing poachers around in the Chesapeake Bay area. I met some agents from—from California and I met one, Doug Morris, he was from Houston Texas. And it was interesting that—that he was the—one of the guys that I ended up working with when I became an agent when I came to

Region II and work—in being in Texas he's—he was there already. And so it was kind of like he sort of helped me out learning the ropes a little bit.
DT: Well, did these old war horses tell you at all how times had changed from between this particular witness protection program and some of their earlier days?
00:57:44 – 2239
RL: They changed a lot, you know, a—and at the time I thought that the agents were traveling a lot, but in talking to the people the—the old timers, I call them. They use—before we had a lot of the laws—a lot of the complications of the Endangered Species Act and the Lacey Act Amendments—during the summer time the agents didn't do much in investigations. They were involved in banding details. So they were a combination of law enforcement officers and biologists. So in the spring they'd go up into Canada for a
00:58:15 – 2239
month or more doing—banding water fowl and then many of them would end up going down in—into Mexico after that and banding those in water fowl down there. So they were gone a lot and not doing investigations year round. And that—that was a big change over what—the way we do business now.
DT: Your—your second detail I think you mentioned was—was in a striped bass case in—in the Chesapeake. Is that right?
00:58:41 – 2239
RL: That was in North Carolina.
DT: Oh, North Carolina. Wh—what was that involved?
00:58:45 – 2239
RL: Well, that was the first one—first assignment where I was involved in—in serving search warrants and arrest warrants and—and was exciting. The—the—the coordination and the planning and everything really interested me because it was very meticulous work in making sure that you were able to—to achieve all your objectives and—and no one gets hurt. You get all the evidence you want and no officers get hurt and—and no citizens are hurt. So you form teams and we planned it out. And, you know, serving the warrants early in the morning. Sometimes they were at—we were involved in both
00:59:20 – 2239
arrests and search warrants and I was just really excited about that. And finding evidence that you're going to use to prove someone committed a crime that violated natural resource law. It was just a different way of—of being able to be involved in conservation.
DT: What were the violations that you were concerned about?
00:59:40 – 2239
RL: In that particular case it was people who were commercially exploiting striped bass when the—the seasons were only for sport fishing. So they were—in—that kind of reflects on—on why our ag—our division of law enforcement was even formed in the first place and is over commercialization of wildlife resources, in fact, commercialization at such a level that the populations couldn't recover. And—and again going back to the passenger pigeon, you know, they—they were killed because they were a nuisance, but
01:00:11 – 2239
they were also killed because they were food. And—and this is the case with striped bass. They were—had these fisheries that were being developed on the East Coast and they were important from an economic standpoint in that they provided all this recreation for sport fishing. Well, these people were over harvesting them and then putting these fish into commercial markets and

sending them all around. And it was—it was sort of like deja vu in that this idea of—of commercialization and how many wildlife species simply cannot sustain the demand that's put on them once they become a commercial commodity.
(misc.)
[End of Reel 2239]
[Beginning of Reel 2240]
DT: Well, let's—let's resume. We were talking earlier about one of your first assignments as a I guess a—a Fish and Wildlife Service employee who was just detailed to help out with the enforcement case on striped bass and I had a—a follow up question. There—there seems to be a lot of tension at least in Texas and maybe true elsewhere between the sport fisherman and commercial fishermen who are in some sense battling over the same fisheries resource. And I was curious if you have any insights about that tension?
00:01:52 – 2240
RL: Well, if you look at the recreational versus commercial fisheries and if you want—if you want to let them battle out—if you want to let them battle out their—their differences, the commercial fishermen will always win. Because the—the technology and—that they possess and the demand for commercial quantities of fish are such that most of these recovering populations that we have now that—that are abundant for recreational angler would soon be vastly and very damagingly reduced by commercial
00:02:27 – 2240
over exploitation. And so just because we have some fisheries resources now that are recovering doesn't mean that we just necessarily need to open them up to commercial exploitation. The population simply can't sustain that kind of impact. And I don't want to take one side or the other because I am a fish eater. I do like to eat fish and I like to—to fish once in awhile, but recreational fishing contributes vast amounts of money to economies because you—people travel to go fishing. They buy gear and things like that.
00:03:03 – 2240
And of course you have—you can argue the same side of the comer—on—for commercial because you have to buy boats and equipment and then you're selling your product to restaurants and—and stores so people can buy fish to eat it. But the—the demand for natural resources continues to rise in it at a time when we have less and less habitat. And if we simply allow people to over exploit populations we'll be right back where we were a few decades ago. And all of the efforts that people put into reestablish
00:03:36 – 2240
fisheries would be for not. There's just—you know, people always want to know how—they want to take something. Everyone wants to take, take, take and it would be nice if—if some aspect of society would want to give something back. And—and while recreational fishing might be a take, it's not a huge population influencing take. And in fact there's even a trend toward catch and release. And—and so I'm—I'm not sympathetic to a commercial industry that wants—that sees a resource become available and they simply want to jump in there and exploit it on the short term for personal benefit. I think we need to look at the long term and make sure that we provide natural
00:04:23 – 2240
resources for future generations and that might be a cliché. When I talk to—to classes at the—at the university I explain—one of the things that I say is that we could live in a society where we shop at a Super Wal-Mart. We can buy our gas there, our food there, our clothing there. All of

our needs can be satisfied there. And throw in a Home Depot so we can do some home repair and get garden ex—garden supplies. That's all we need. We don't need any interesting little independent stores where you can buy specialty
00:04:57 – 2240
goods to survive. It's not important for survival, but its important f—I think that we have this diversity of—of retail outlets to enhance our lives. You know, if we want some specialized rustic furniture, for instance, or a—a hand—hand made jewelry and things like that. You can't get those in the big stores. You don't need them to survive, but it adds to the quality of your life. And it's the same way with natural resources. We could function in a world that just has pine plantations, wheat fields, cockroaches and pigeons.
00:05:32 – 2240
We could sur—we could—we could survive that way and we would do fine and we could be healthy, but we lose a big part of the quality of our lives when we reduce diversity And—and—and diversity is a—is a key to natural systems in allowing them to function and—and allowing us to ha—to be able to have California condors in the Grand Canyon and hawksbill sea turtles on the beaches of Puerto Rico and, you know, and snail darters even. We may never see those animals but because their there it means that we're—we're conserving a system that—that will function and provide diversity and abundance in our lives and it adds to the quality of our life, in my opinion.
DT: You—you just mentioned the hawksbill sea turtle and—and its habitat in Puerto Rico. I understood that you had an assignment there as well and I was wondering if—if you could tell what sort of significance that had for you?
00:06:36 – 2240
RL: When I—when I was at Piedmont Refuge and I made the decision that I wanted to convert to special agent as a career, I was able to do one more assignment. During the time period when I applied to be an agent it was a very—in fact, it took over 18 months for the whole selection process because of some government shut downs and budget concerns and things like that that was dragging on forever. But I had an opportunity to do a temporary assignment and there was some concern on Mona Island it's a small
00:07:08 – 2240
island in between Puerto Rico and Haiti. It's a controlled—managed by the—the Common Wealth of Puerto Rico and they have a small staff of Department of Natural Resources people out there. It's—it's out in the middle of the ocean and—and it's just a small—relatively small island. It has some very interesting wildlife resources there including the—the Mona Island iguana, which is a large—a large land lizard with a head the size of a football and then it has a—many beaches. Just beautiful white sand beaches
00:07:45 – 2240
and several species of sea turtles nest there. And there was some concern that s—people would, you know, would land there, you know, fisherman and—and recreationists and that there was some over exploitation or actually some illegal killing of sea turtles and some harvesting of their eggs. And so they—they sent some agents out there and they didn't really care too much for the conditions. They were sort of primitive. Lots of mosquitoes and—and lots of rats. The island is overrun with rats and—and no
00:08:21 – 2240
communication with the mainland, things like that. And they weren't too comfortable doing a traditional criminal investigation out there. So it was decided to send someone out there in a

covert capacity, someone posing as something else. And the decision was made to put a—someone that would pose as a sea turtle researcher. And I had done that work at Merritt Island and I had experience with backpacking and—and living in some primitive conditions. So I said, yeah, I'll go. I'd—I'd love to go. It's like, you know,
00:08:54 – 2240
throw me in a briar patch.. That's—it seemed like a really neat adventure. So I went on a 30-day detail out there. And during—all night long I was working with the university researchers that were out there conducting sur—sea turtle research and we'd get back to camp at sunrise and then I'd have to go to work again trying to gather intelligence on—on what island visitors were doing when they were there. We were looking at the staff and—and what they might—may or may not be doing regarding sea turtles and then keep
00:09:26 – 2240
track of all the commercial fishing boats that came. Try to photograph them, learn who their—who their crews were and things like that. So it was—it was exhausting work. And being surrounded on—by all these natural resources on a basically a—a deserted island out in the middle of the ocean with live coral reefs just offshore right past where—where we were living and it was a really fun experience. I was able to gather
00:09:52 – 2240
some interesting intelligence. And then one time while we were there we were evacuated off the island because of a hurricane. It was eminent it was going to strike the island and there really isn't anywhere to go there to—to be safe. So we were evacuated off the island and I went to the Caliber Natural Wildlife Refuge Headquarters—is where I was staying there. And called into Atlanta to check in—just tell them everything was okay
00:10:17 – 2240
and that's when I got the good news that I had been selected as a special agent. And I would be going to school as soon as I returned from the island. So that was a really exciting time and pivotal point in my career and exciting investigation and—and then got to go on to the rest of my career from there.
DT: Well, maybe you could tell us about some of the—the next steps in your career as a—as now a special agent?
00:10:43 – 2240
RL: I was 38 years old when I converted to full time law enforcement and that's sort of old to get into it from the start. I was the oldest—the oldest guy in the class and I shared a room with the youngest guy in the class. And it was 8 weeks of pretty intensive learning and just waiting for that day is kind of like being a kid again and waiting for Christmas. It just seems like it never gets there, but finally it did. And I went off and my first assignment was—as a training agent in San Antonio, Texas and my supervisor was
00:11:18 – 2240
Jim Stinebaugh, who was a former Texas Game Warden and sort of legend in his own time. And subsequently retired and became the colonel for the law enforcement division with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. And Jim was like my dad in a lot of ways. His—he had a lot of experience and knowledge, but his lessons were very subtle. And so you really had to go off on your own. That's what he wanted you to do. Be independent and make contacts and develop cases, investigate them, get them prosecuted
00:11:53 – 2240
and go onto the next one. I was only there for a year and I had heard about an opportunity for a

new station being opened in Lubbock, Texas. And as a trainee I had to go somewhere and I really wanting to get back to California. There weren't a lot of positions open then. In fact, there was no possibility at that time to go to California. And so they said, "Well, how would you like to go to Lubbock, Texas?" And—and so I kind of like—not only no, but hell no. Wh—why would I want to go to Lubbock, Texas? I
00:12:24 – 2240
didn't really know anything about Lubbock. But at—at—at—at first—first being proposed to me it didn't sound exciting. I have a—when I was 13 years old my family moved from Ohio to California and we—my mother drove alone with four kids and we took Route 66 and we went through Amarillo. And west of Amarillo I have one memory of—of being 13 years old and going through there. Going through this dry parched land and the litter on the road was so extensive in those days that people—you were actually—had created graffiti with beverage cans. And they—they would stop on the side of the road and you would see where people just placed these cans and spelled out
00:13:13 – 2240
things like, you know, where they were from and the date they were there. There was so much litter and that was my impression of the Panhandle of Texas and so it wasn't a place that I really wanted to go back to. But I came out here anyway just to look around and—and I liked the town. I liked the small town atmosphere. I liked the weather and I liked the opportunity of doing the work that was going to be required here. Because there was one reason for putting an agent in Lubbock, Texas at that time and that was to begin
00:13:44 – 2240
investigating what was perceived as a very severe problem regarding oil pits in the oil production areas that were like small lakes that were attracting and killing at the time which we really didn't know how much, but we thought that the—the number of migratory birds that were being lured to these pits and they were dying was very significant. And it was an interesting problem and I felt that it was just right up my alley
00:14:16 – 2240
and something that I wanted to tackle. Open a new station, develop the—the investigative priorities, you know, based on what was important both to the Fish and Wildlife Service and to me personally. And so I took on the challenge and—and—and we moved here in 1970—1987 and be—began that investigation.
DT: Maybe you could describe what a typical oil pit looks like and how it functions. Why it's so attractive to birds? What the problem is once birds lay in there?
00:14:55 – 2240
RL: Before there were very many environmental laws regarding the—the exploration and production of oil it was a common practice to dispose of waste—waste oil. Simply make a depression in the ground and—and pump it into the ground let it sit there. And when you're done with that well you just walked away from it and you left it there. That was common. Gradually the state be—started developing some regulations to sort of discourage that practice because there were a lot—even though it wasn't like a oil spill it
00:15:29 – 2240
wasn't going everywhere. Just having these pools of oil there had po—possibilities for water pollution and air pollution with the to—these things volatizing constantly into the air. But then in the early 70's one of the real problems was—was discovered, which no one really thought about or cared about at the time. These pools—this is a very aired area out here and water is at a

premium and we have lots of migratory wa—birds that go over here. They stop for short periods of time and when they're flying high and—and they're
00:16:08 – 2240
exhausted and they're tired and they're hungry they look for a place to land. And from the air these pools of oil appear to be pools of water to birds. They really didn't have the ability to distinguish from oil—between oil and water. And, of course, when they landed in it they didn't have the opportunity to learn to avoid it because it's always fatal. Once a birds feathers are oiled, they're never able to clean it off and so they're going to die because they can't fly or they can't thermo-regulate or they have dermal poisoning because of the—the material that they landed in. And no one really knew or cared much about that un—until Midge Erskine from mid-land Texas. She's known as the Bird Lady
00:16:54 – 2240
down there. And she just stumbled on one of these huge lakes one time and found literally hundreds of dead and dying water birds, ducks and grebes and other kids of water birds and brought it to the Fish and Wildlife's Service attention. And in the—in the early mid 70's even into the late 70's some investigations were attempted, but at the time the—the Fish and Wildlife Service didn't have the clout to really get anything done. There were some prosecutors that were unwilling to take these companies to task over
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what they were doing. And so the primary law that was being violated, The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, the—the federal prosecutors at the time were not willing to apply that law to this type of killing because it wasn't deliberate killing. And it took another decade or so before we felt that it was of such as—such a serious problem that it really needed to be addressed. And could only be addressed through the federal court system because the state regulating agencies at the time were not willing to put additional
00:18:12 – 2240
burdens on the oil industry. And it was a time during the oil embargo and—and high oil pric—high gasoline prices, low crude oil prices and this—those laws that prohibited that kind of disposal of oil were simply not being enforced at the state level. So we stepped in and decided that we'll center that investigation out of Lubbock, Texas. And that's why that—what I came here to do. I began that in 1987 and—and here it is 2002 and we feel we've achieved a lot success in that investigation and—and—and in that issue, but it still occurs. It was a long battle and we feel that the—the results have been worth it and through selective prosec—selective enforcement and how we—we developed a strategy to address the problem and for the most part we think we've been able to drastically eliminate it.
DT: Can you give me an example of one of your first cases investigating one of these oil pits and how it was?
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RL: When I first came here I could go in any direction from town and go to any oil production field and I could find an oil pit at nearly every pump jack. I would find an oil pit at nearly every tank battery. And—and then I could find oil and chemical pits on—on virtually any kind of a refinery or chemical factory. These things were easy to find and they were all filled with dead birds. And it was—it was very eye opening. We started up in the—up in the panhandle and we went to a refinery up there that had several very, very
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large pits. We would find literally hundreds of dead ducks, hund—dead raptures, birds of prey.

Not only would—for instance, a duck flying over might land in—in a pit and die. Well, that dead carcass attracts scavengers. So birds of prey—they don't necessarily kill everything they eat. They also scavenge. They would come down, try to scavenge on these things and they would get trapped in the oil. Songbirds would land on the edge
00:20:29 – 2240
and—and try to drink from it and they'd get oiled and they would die. And it was just a modern day La Brea Tar Pit is what—what these things amounted to. We would find evidence of old carcass's that were in the old oxygenated dried oil and there'd be old bones stuck in there and—and then you'd find old, you know, maybe bones from a few years ago and then you'd find carcass's that were—that were fairly fresh and then you
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would find birds that had just landed in there and died. It was—I'd never seen so much evidence everywhere I looked in my life. I never com—had no comprehension that we would find so much death ev—in all of those pits and tanks. And I spent about, oh, several months, 6 – 8 months collecting frez—literally, freezers full of—of these dead oiled birds. And had evidence against many scores of different companies and we then went to our regional director and decided how are we going to address this? We—we
00:21:35 – 2240
decided that we would develop a strategy where we would go to the oil industry and we would present them with all of this evidence that we gathered and we would show them how serious a problem it is. We would do the same thing with the—with the oil regulating agencies, the state enforcement agencies. We brought everybody together and we put workshops on all over Texas and Oklahoma and New Mexico. And we asked for the industries cooperation. We indicated that we had evidence that we could prosecute
00:22:07 – 2240
companies with at this time, but we'd rather work together. And we'll just use this evidence basically to inform you. Help us out. Stop the needless killing. And the response was basically that the—the major oil companies—oil companies are sort of divided into two groups. The ma—what are called the majors and independents. The majors are a company where they'll—they'll explore, produce, refine and sell a finished product under their name. And—and those names are—are—are common to people like Exxon, and—and Mobile and Texaco and things like that and then you have
00:22:46 – 2240
independents. And these are people who will produce oil, but then they don't sell it under their name. They simply sell it to someone else who refines it. So all the independent oil producers sell their oil to the majors. The response we got was that the majors, the people that sell a product under their name, they had more money to invest in clean up and they had more money to lose if they were associated with criminal activity. And so they responded first to eliminate these hazards. We had what we called the three
00:23:26 – 2240
C's. If you have a mess, clean it up. If you have lots of messes, try to consolidate them. And—and then at the very end—and if you had to have some kind of facility for storing your waste oil you had to cover it in such a way that it wasn't accessible to wildlife. So those—that's how we sort of went over this. We developed educational materials, video- tapes, we worked with lots of news—different new media to get the word out. We're not going to prosecute initially. We want your cooperation. Some of the big independents

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went along with the majors and—and—and eliminated a lot of those hazards. But the reaction from most of the small independent oilmen were that they didn't have a lot of money to spend on clean up and to change their operating procedures so they ignored our plea for cooperation. So the first year was spent collecting that initial evidence and doing the outreach and we—we gave a date of October 1, 1988. And at that point any company we found that was killing migratory birds in that manner that we would take that evidence and present it to the U.S. Attorney's office for prosecution. And there was certainly still plenty of places in non-compliance and that's what we started to do at that
00:24:54 – 2240
time. We started to get cases into—into court and we had a couple of significant prosecutions with relatively meaningful fines, but not huge fines. It—it generated a lot of interest by the news people and so we were able to go then through another basically educational process and now we—we're doing what we said we were going to do. We were going to bring—hold people accountable, hold companies accountable and so then we continued that for the ne—another year. And—and—and our—our decision at the
00:25:34 – 2240
time was not to get the biggest fine that we could, but it was to—to generate prosecutions against the greatest number of companies and to generate lots of publicity about it. Because we really felt that the solution—in order to eliminate this source of mortality for wildlife we had to ha—people had to be aware that it was happening. And they had to be aware that there were consequences. And so we issued—basically we issued citation notices to most of these companies. And over the first year the average fine was only
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$500 per company. And that—and that might even be for killing, you know, 10, 20 or even 30 birds. The average—the biggest fine was $5,000 and the average fine was $500 and that was enough to accomplish our objectives. We didn't go for the—the big bucks. We went for the big bang. And there were some people in the environmental community that were critical when we decided on that strategy. Number one, to wait a full year before we started to prosecute and number two, not to go for the big punitive sort of fines, but what we discovered is that that was actually a good strategy. It worked very well and one of the immediate results was that the state regulating agency the—the
00:26:57- 2240
Railroad Commission of Texas developed some new regulations to basically prohibit most of the situations that were involved in killing these migratory birds. And that was critical because we—there were only a few of us agents that were working on it and if we could get the whole state enforcement office working on it, that gave us literally hundreds of more people helping us try to accomplish this goal. We did some research and we looked at—at some of the published literature and we estimated that approx—in Texas
00:27:37 – 2240
alone… I'm sorry in—in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma we were losing approximately 500,000 birds per year on a very, very conservative estimate. That—that exceeds the—the amount of birds that were killed in the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Up until that time in—in most—most people's knowledge the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska was probably one of the most damaging and the mo—the mo—that killed the most animals. The estimate there was 300,000 birds. We were—we figured in this three state

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area we were losing almost twice that many every year, after year, after year and that had been going on for decades. And so to—to tackle a big prob—problem like that is—is an interesting challenge for an enforcement officer. But to be able to turn that around and prevent that many mortalities every year is more satisfying than anything else I can do in my career. I mean that what's basically called a career case. That—that's the in my opinion the most important case for natural resources that I've been able to be involved in and to actually be able to make a difference for natural resources is, like I say, it's just tremendously satisfying for me and really I'm just really proud to be part of that situation.
00:29:03 – 2240
It was—it was an effort that has since expanded into all of the oil producing states in America. We—we found that everywhere oil was produced, that we had the same mortality going on. And it—the investigations continue and just two years ago we found situations in Arkansas, while not involving not as big an area in a concentrated area they
00:29:29 – 2240
were worse than anything we had ever seen up to that point. And that still exists there today and that's still a—a situation we're working on. We have some complications there and because a federal judge in Arkansas has decided that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act does not apply to that kind of mortality and will not allow for federal prosecutions for killing the birds in that manner. So that's—that's the next big challenge for the agents in Arkansas.
DW: Was there stuff going on like oil company employees trying to scoop up the birds and get them out of the way before you could…
00:30:14 – 2240
RL: Sure.
DW: …find the evidence? What are some of the technicalities you came across along those lines?
00:30:20 – 2240
RL: Sure. When we first went to the oil industry and—and explained to them what we felt the extent of this mortality was, one of the first things out of their mouth usually was that I've been in the oil field for 30 years and I've never seen a dead animal, a dead duck or a goose or anything in—in the oil pits on my property or on my leases. And of course our response to them was that if you don't see it—our response to them was that you don't see it because you're not looking. These things don't look like birds once they're
00:30:53 – 2240
covered with oil and they're just this mass of—of stinky rotting flesh and bones. There's—there's no search image there that this is a bird. So we educated them on what to look for and, of course, one of the consequences of that was that some of the operators who didn't want to clean up, they would simply take these birds and either mash them down into the oil or—and often we would find—we would find evidence of where the birds were being retrieved out of the oil pits, which we never saw this happen before but
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once we went to them, then we started to see evidence where there'd be a few feathers in the oil and then there'd be this oil trail coming out and then it would disappear. And—and so they were being disposed of that way. And so rather than taking responsibility for what they were doing, some of them were simply trying to hide that evidence from us. And—and our satisfaction, of course, was that they're not good at finding dead birds. They're not as good at finding dead birds

as we are. And even after someone would go into a pit and try to remove all the evidence I could still go in there and—and I would
00:32:02 – 2240
usually find something. If I didn't find it today, I would find it tomorrow or next week or next month and then sooner or later we could—we could hold them accountable for what was happening there.
DT: When you found that—that folks were concealing evidence or removing evidence did—did the prosecution change from a civil to a criminal case?
00:32:21 – 2240
RL: The prosecutions were all criminal from the beginning because the law that we were—that we were enforcing is the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which only has criminal liability. Had there—there is—there are no civil aspects of that law at all. So this was all criminal and that was one of the things that really was different about this investigation.
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Because prior to that these—the oil companies were use—they were very use to having civil matters against them and they knew how to deal with that. But—but these were criminal and that was a little more scary for them because you—we can't arrest the company and so quite often we wouldn't file the charges against the company we'd file them against the owner or the president.
DT: Personally.
00:33:06 – 2240
RL: Yes. Personal, criminal, culpability.
DT: And did they take offense to that?
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RL: Usually when you catch someone doing something wrong they take offense to it. That was very common, but you know, eventually most of them came around. Now the—the most drastic opposition to what we were doing happened when—when a state game warden Wynn Bishop and I were investigating the oil refinery of Phillips Petroleum Company in Borger Texas. They had huge, huge areas, in fact, lakes that were 10, 15 acres in size covered with oil and literally thousands of birds are being killed there. And
00:33:56 – 2240
this was during the time when we hadn't gone public with our investigations yet. And we would go to that refinery—we went there several times to gather evidence so we could show the extent of what was happening over a period of time. And we would sneak into a refinery, now that may have not really be safe or—or really smart, but that's what we did at the time because that's how we felt we needed to get the evidence before it could be destroyed. And we—we decided were going to go one last time and we didn't really
00:34:26 – 2240
care if anyone knew what we were doing because we were ready at that time to go public with our investigation. So we drove in—in a marked vehicle and his marked vehicle and my vehicle and we collected several giant garbage bags full of dead oiled ducks. And as we were leaving two employees approached us to ask us what we were doing out there. Well, it turns out that—that Wynn Bishop knew one of them because he'd handled them as a state officer before on some poaching matters. So—so he knew who Wynn was and
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Wynn knew who he was and they took offense at us being out there. Now they were—they were just laborers at the—at the refinery. They got on their radio and they called their headquarters

and told them what was going on out there. We explained to them what we were doing and the order was sent back to those guys to detain us there as long as possible. Well, if you as a citizen try to detain the law enforcement officer while they're performing their duties, that comes under the statue of assault on an officer
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because anytime you interfere with an investigation, basically it's a violation of the assault statues. So they were in a large long bed crew cab pickup and they drove over on our exit road to a narrow place at a railroad crossing and they put their vehicle across it and blocked the traffic and we couldn't leave. It was at shift change at this—unfortunately, so all of these people that were coming to work from one direction were stopped there and everyone leaving for work in the other direction and so all of a sudden
00:36:03 – 2240
in about five minutes we basically had a mob. And the word spread quickly that there were some game wardens out there and they were doing something was going to make the refinery look bad. And plus they were—the guys going home they were anxious to go home, the guys coming to work they didn't really care because they were on the clock. The guys going home they—they got sort of impatient and they surrounded us. About 60 refinery workers surrounded us and then began taunting us and things like that. And—and Wynn and I were fairly concerned for our safety because it was this crowd mentality
00:36:37 – 2240
that was developing and they were edging closer. So we tried to make it clear that we're in the performance of our duty and that they should disburse and they didn't really care about that. There were so many that we didn't feel we—we just couldn't start arresting people. We only had about three or four sets of handcuffs and that would've probably escalated the—the situation. S—we radioed for help from the local sheriff's office. And they arrived and they gave the order over their bullhorn to—for everyone to clear the
00:37:06 – 2240
area and all they got was a bunch of profanity and jeers. And I remember one of them standing there in—in a very typical—he took his cap off and scratched his head and said, "What do we do now?" You know, we really didn't know. And so by staying cool we were able to avoid any actual violent conflict. And eventually the—the—the supervisor for the refinery came out and—and—in fact, he suggested to me that—he says, well, this is—this is really causing a problem for our workers. He says, I'm—how about this how
00:37:42 – 2240
about we—we pull the truck back and we let everybody else leave, but you stay here. And I said, I don't think that's a really good idea. I said if that truck moves I'm the first one out of here. Because I figure if we're going to handle this situation we can always come back later. So we finally agreed to have a meeting and, you know, I was—I was okay about it and—and Wynn was a little upset. But—but on the drive home I got kind of upset over what happened. I just didn't—you know, it was kind of a silly thing for them to do and—and it really i—involved some criminal behavior on their part. And so I—I took some pictures while we were there. I pulled my camera out while they were all surrounding us and took a few pictures. And I had those developed and showed them to
00:38:24 – 2240
the U.S. Attorney here in Lubbock and he was pretty upset about it. He—he wanted to go forward with prosecution for under the assault statues. And that investigation was turned over to

the FBI and they sat on it for several months. And they end—and then they ended up about six months later they interviewed a few people and basically it was their opinion that well, no blood was shed so were not going to recommend prosecution. And I felt that was a slap in the face for—for—for agents for the Fish and Wildlife
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Service and for game wardens, in general, because this—this was a bad precedent to send. We were—we were never able to resolve that in a criminal court. And that—that was a disappointment, but the result of that was that Phil's Petroleum, the company, they were very embarrassed about the behavior of their people. And because of that they became partners with the Fish and Wildlife Service with—in the north—in the North American Waterfowl Joint Ventures. And they became a corporate sponsor and they–
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they actually assign a person to be a representative on that board and the whole idea of—of what the—the Joint Ventures do is enhance habitats for—to augment waterfall populations. So that—that was a good—a good thing to come out of that and they're still a partner and a lot of people wonder, they—they often ask me, how did Phil's Petroleum get to be a partner all of a sudden. They came out of the woodwork. And so then I have to tell them, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the story.
DW: I was wondering, what's the role of civilian and government contact? How does that work when you're in the private partnership?
00:40:19 – 2240
RL: Okay. An important thing to remember in—in this whole scenario is that the key person was Midge Erskine, a woman who was a wildlife rehabilitator and had a concern for natural resources. She—she brought it to our attention like I said in the 70's. Of course, she suffered financially from that because her husbands a petroleum engineer and he was pretty much blackballed in the industry in—in the midland area for that, but she stood—she stayed with it. She would go to conferences and she would make people
00:40:53 – 2240
aware. And like I say we tried these initial prosecutions in the late 70's and they didn't work, but Midge stayed with it. She continued to notify Albuquerque that something really needs to be done. And it was through those efforts that resulted in the regional director deciding that we are going to open a station in Lubbock and the primary purpose is to investigate this oil pit situation. So one—when I came out here one of the first people I contacted, of course, was Midge because that was important for me to—to know
00:41:26 – 2240
the history behind the situation and to have her point out to me different areas where I should look. And I took Midge in the field with me i—initially and she was one that had this—she had this institutional knowledge. She was the only person that really cared out here and she knew where to look. She took me down to a place along the Pecos River near Iraan, Texas. And she knew there were some oil pits there, but she saw them from afar. She didn't really know how bad they were. So I used my authority to go in. And I
00:41:59 – 2240
took her as—as my assistant, basically. And we found these in this area of terraced oil pits that went right down to the banks of the Pecos River. And that day was at least 100 degrees in Pecos and we're down on the river so it's humid. And we're down in these—in these—in these pits behind these berms and there's no—no wind. It was at least 110 degrees and we pulled the

carcasses of 32 great blue herons out of those pits that day. Midge stayed with me the whole time. And she continued to be a great assistance to me
00:42:34 – 2240
in pointing me in the right direction, telling me who the major players are and who I should talk to. And then one day I got a call and she said—she said Rob she says "your missing something" she says "you're only looking at pits" and I said well yeah that's—that's what I'm looking at. She says, "You need to start looking in those oil tanks". And I said well what oil tanks? And she says, "Well, if you go to these tank batteries usually you'll see two, three, four, five or six tall tanks, they're about 20 feet tall". And most of
00:43:04 – 2240
them are solid top. But she says, there's a lot of them out there. They're only about six feet tall and they don't have tops on them and they—they have oil in them. And that's where the wastewater goes, the brine water. When you pump water from the ground it's a combination of oil and water. You have to separate them. The oil you can sell and the water is just waste. So the waste would go onto these above ground storage tanks. And of course the extraction process is not a 100 percent affective so you put the water in that tank and—and it sits for a while. Microscopic bits of oil, because they're lighter than—than water, they come to the surface and then they'll—they'll drain the water out for
00:43:49 – 2240
disposal. These pumper trucks will go around to all of these tanks. They take—they siphon the water off of the bottom, but that crust of oil stays on top and over time it gets thicker and thicker, but it just stays there. It doesn't go anywhere and so it just—it fluctuates with the level of the water in there. And birds see it in these tanks. They're 16 feet in diameter and I'm thinking well, Midge, you know, I don't really think there'll be any birds in there. And she says, "by golly you should look". And so I went out and
00:44:17 – 2240
looked and in 25 to 35% of the tanks at any one time I would find dead birds in them. I—i—it was a big surprise to me because we were addressing the pit situation, ignoring the tanks and we found out that the mortality in those tanks was probably as great as it was in the pits. Even though they're tiny and they're inside a tank, birds would go in there. Now it wasn't much in the way of ducks, but what was going in there—what would happen is that these tanks would—insects would be attracted to them. And—and
00:44:51 – 2240
there'd be this whole coating of solid in—dead insects on the oil and s—wind blown seeds and all kinds of things that basically looked like a cornucopia to a bird. Songbirds would go in there and they would get caught in the oil and they would die and there'd be all these mocking birds and pyrrhuloxia and lark buntings and—and things in there and then just like in the pits the predators would be attracted. We found kestrels and barn owls and great horned owls were the most common that would go in there. They're all birds that are capable of hovering and they don't mind going into cavities and going into these areas and they would go down there trying to pick these things off the oil and they'd be
00:45:32 – 2240
flapping their wings. As soon as their wing tips would hit they'd get oil and then they—boom. They'd be stuck down there and then they would die. I—I found whole families of both kestrels and barn owls in one tank. And i—i—it would amaze me and so it was just another aspect of—of this thing and—and—and the impact of—of wildlife resources. And it's only because Midge was

an insistent and—and looking at everything and making sure that we didn't leave any stone uncovered. And—and—and so then the state
00:46:06 – 2240
agency had been addressing the pit issues, but they didn't address the tanks. So we asked them to come up with a regulation that would require these tanks to be modified in such a way that it—wildlife couldn't get into it. And I talked to some of the producers and when you buy these tanks at—at that time you had an option or I should say a top was an option. It's just like if you buy a car. There's all these options. Well, a top was an option. Over out—out here where we only get anywhere from 10 to 18 inches of rain a
00:46:38 – 2240
year and so that much extra fluid in there didn't amount to anything for disposal costs so they—and the—the top costs about $300 so they didn't get tops on them. And—and that's why they don't have tops on them today. So we went—went to the state agency and, in fact, a—a state senator, Senator Lyon introduced a bill outside of the—of the wildlife code. And outside of the Railroad Commission this was actually to make it state law that these tanks would have to be modified so that they don't—so that wildlife don't have access to them. Basically, they had to be netted. And we were—we were—went to
00:47:22 – 2240
Austin to testify and we had a lot of data to show that they were a problem and things like that and we showed the size of the tank and where they were and the kinds of things they were killing and—and we—it was out first introduction to political lobbyists. We thought we had a very strong argument and support of the law. The oil industry came out against it. They just didn't want any additional mandates on their operations and they lobbied very effectively. And in fact behind the scenes and we didn't know about, but—
00:47:53 – 2240
but the Senators aids and things like that the—the law and the way it was going to be proposed was basically gutted and not enforceable and it exempted all tanks that were 16 feet or less in size. And those are the ones that were doing all of the killing. And so we got pretty—I go—personally I was pretty fed up with that aspect of legislation. And that was how the law was presented and it was so worthless that we withdrew our support and it just basically—the senator got a lot of publicity during election year and then it fizzled
00:48:32 – 2240
and never—never materialized. But then we went to the Railroad Commission and we asked them to basically do the same thing through regulation rather than a new state law. And they did and they proposed and put into effect the regulations and at the very last minute it said that only tanks greater than 16 feet applied to that new regulation. And so here we are back again in the same situation where we have a new regulation that's—basically doesn't address what the problem was. So then we started our own—basically it was a lobbying procedure and encouraging the Railroad Commission to go back and to modify that regulation. And we were successful there. It was—it was a big victory for
00:49:17 – 2240
us and a big victory for wildlife. In that now we do have—the Railroad Commission has this regulation. Is the first one that directly applied to the conservation of wildlife. They had no regulation that even mentioned wildlife before that. But now it says that they have to be modified—those tanks have to be modified in such a way that—that—that wildlife can't get into it. And it also has in there a little caveat that if something does get into one of these tanks that it

is a criminal violation of federal law and—and so it bas—basically put the industry on notice. That number one, now there's a state regulation and
00:49:55 – 2240
number two, we're going to continue to enforce it on—for—on a—under a criminal statues. And so I have a—a really good working relationship now with the Railroad Commission and if they find a tank that the nets torn or if it doesn't have a net, they immediately issue an order for them to have it fixed. And if they find any dead wildlife in it they call me and then they get a notice from the Railroad Commission to fix it and they also get a notice from me for a criminal fine. And those fines now a days are—are much higher than they use to be. They've been enhanced since the—since the 1980's and for a company now the fines usually start out at $1,200 for even a single bird killed in one of these tanks in this manner.
DT: I'm…
DW: (inaudible)
DT: I'm intrigued by the—the situation after you as scientists you put together what you felt was a strong technical argument and as a colleague in the law enforcement field a sound legal argument for either a law that would protect these birds and—and impose requirements on these pits and the tanks. And then that wasn't successful and a similar effort at the Railroad Commission was initially unsuccessful. What sort of arguments do you think that the folks on the other side were making that were so much more persuasive?
00:51:25 – 2240
RL: I—I believe that the lobbyist were—were able to indicate that the oil industry, of course, has more voters and—and more contributors than the Fish and Wildlife Service does. Basically, that's what it amounted to. That's why their side won initially on—on gutting the—the proposed state law that would—would have provided some protection. People—this industry had just never been taken on in this manner before and it was new territory for them and it was new territory for us. And it was a David and Goliath sort of
00:51:59 – 2240
situation. The oil industry provides more revenue to the State of Texas than just about any other industry. The Railroad Commission of Texas, which regulates the exploration production refining transportation of crude oil is the most powerful state-regulating agency in America. And that's what we were taking on. And we were taking it on for the benefit of wildlife. And initially no one really took us seriously. But the big challenge for me was to—to—to bring together the science involved in showing that the—the amount of mortality was biologically significant and to sh—and to sh—and to
00:52:46 – 2240
indicate why it happens, why wildlife is attracted to it and the impacts on their populations and then combine that with the—with law enforcement to achieve a solution. Neither one alone—I think neither could be successful. It really was bringing them together and—and it was the initial attraction for me into law enforcement was to combine science with enforcement for the benefit of natural resources. That—that was—that was my goal from the beginning and this particular investigation allowed me to—to do that. And that's another reason why it was so satisfying.
DT: We don't have a great deal of time left, but I was wondering if you could talk about any of your other significant cases that brought together these same sort of talents and interests you have and—and the science end of things and the legal end?
00:53:40 – 2240
RL: A few cases that come that to mind that—that allowed me to use forensic science to make a

case. I really enjoy working with the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics' Laboratory. I——that's—that's our crime laboratory in Ashland, Oregon. They analyze evidence for wildlife crime. That's what they do. They can do everything from—they have a mass—mass spectrometer, electron microscopes, fingerprint analysis, protein analysis, DNA analysis. When we work an investigation we often don't know what the victim is initially. The—the type of investigations we do are very similar to what a homicide detective would do. Same thing. We have a victim, we have a crime scene, and we try to link them to a suspect wi—through evidence. A homicide detective knows
00:54:30 – 2240
what the victims is. It's always human. And—and the human always has a history and they have relatives and friends that you can go to, to help you solve that crime. Wildlife doesn't have a voice. We—we can't—we don't know anything about their history and a lot of times when if it's just a part of like I said this—this mass of putrid flesh and bones, we don't even know what it is. And first thing is, we have to determine is it a species we have jurisdiction for. And so—some of the interesting science that we do is to take that
00:55:02 – 2240
and we submit that to our—the forensic laboratory. And they're able to then—using—using either protein or DNA analysis or bone feather analysis they can tell us what it is. And that's the first step i—i—in solving a crime and so they helped us a great deal on the oil case because I could identify a lot of the birds when they're mostly whole, but when they're just parts and—and just this mass of flesh, well, I need some help. And—and they've helped me in other cases, too. I—we had a situation here in Lubbock where a
00:55:32 – 2240
person systematically was going around this property killing hawks during the winter. And—and we were finding the carcass's. And I was able to—I got a tip from somebody actually sh—saw someone shooting and wounding a hawk. It flew away, but they saw feathers fly and so they know it was wounded. So I had my suspect and then I found—and wh—was out there and when I started looking around I discovered that there were hawk carcass's everywhere out there. Not just in this one spot. And some of them were fresh so we had a witness that would put our suspect at the crime scene at a certain date and time. And then I found fresh carcasses and—and I was able to bag them and freeze them and get them to a forensic entomologist who was able to then look at the—the
00:56:16 – 2240
maggot development on the carcass's and then was able to determine a time of death of the different hawks and the time in the window of the time of death of the hawks fell perfectly on the time that our suspect was at the crime scene. So that was some pretty strong circumstantial evidence that we—that we had the right person. And it was eventually enough evidence to provide enough incentive for this person to eventually to, you know, admit to the crime. And we were able to do a real—a really nice prosecution.
00:56:49 – 2240
Got a pretty significant fine from them. I helped the National Parks Service up at Lake Meredith Recreation area up north of Amarillo. They had a—a situation where a mule deer was poached on the park. And they actually found a person who they had as a suspect who was found with a deer, but they were off the park at the time. But they felt that the deer came from—was on the park where during a closed season where you couldn't hunt. And so we had the carcass that the suspect had and then we had the gut

00:57:22 – 2240
pile and we were able to take DNA from both of those situations and submit it to the lab and they were able to make a match with—through DNA analysis. That not only is that gut pile from a mule deer, but it's from the same mule deer that the suspect had in the back of their pickup truck. So we were able to make that case based on—on the DNA Analysis. And—now we could only do DNA analysis on the species that they've done the research on. I mean while they can tell me just about what anything is any species in the world and we do international investigations, they don't have—we don't have DNA research necessarily to do that kind of analysis if it's some obscure animal from a foreign
00:58:06 – 2240
country or even an obscure animal or even a common animal. For instance, I don't—we can't do it with mocking birds because they haven't done the research. There's not enough mocking bird cases to warrant doing the—the expensive research it takes. But I had a big horned sheep—I've never seen a big horned sheep in the wild, but I have a nice big horn sheep prosecution from Colorado where a guy went up there and simply shot into a herd of big horn sheep with a high powered rifle just for the heck of it to see
00:58:36 – 2240
what he could kill. He had no license, he was from out of state and wasn't in season and he didn't—and he was trespassing. And he went out there to cut the head off and he got spooked and left—left the area. And all we had was a vehicle description with Texas license plates. So the state game warden went to every gas station in that area and pulled the credit card receipts for every credit card with a Texas address and then ran the lic—in this—these gas stations a lot of times they take license numbers and this one particular—
00:59:11 – 2240
they would write it down on the credit card slip. I don't know why, but he took all of the addresses from Texas and then he ran these license plate numbers and we came back with one vehicle that fit the description that was from Texas and it was from Amarillo, Texas. And so I—I went—this was three weeks later. We found the vehicle. It turned out that it was lend—loaned—he loaned the vehicle to someone else that went to Colorado that day and he allowed—he gave us permission to search the vehicle. So we—we took all kinds of trace evidence; hairs, stains, and I found an old rag in the back and, you know, we just took all the evidence and we sent it to the laboratory. Well, the stains on the seat were
00:59:54 – 2240
chocolate, the hairs were cat and dog, but the rag had some stains on it and they turned out to be sheep blood. And then there was a piece of fuzz stuck to the rag and it had a tiny piece of flesh on this little piece of fuzz and that was sheep. Well, at that time in the late 80's they could not do DNA analysis on big horn sheep. In fact, they could only take it to the genus ovis, which is big horn sheep and its domestic sheep are the same genus. And so that's the only thing we could do. We could say this is sheep blood, but
01:00:26 – 2240
through some creative interviewing and interrogation were—I was able to call his bluff. And—and—and elicit a—a confession finally from this guy and he was very stubborn, but when presented with the evidence and a little bit of bluffing on my part he finally confessed too. So that was using the lab again and using the science to—to help make the case, which I couldn't of made it otherwise because the stain didn't—the stain—the blood stain on that rag looked no different than the oil stain to me. And so once it went

01:00:55 – 2240
to the lab they were able to pull the rabbit out of the hat. And I—I appreciate their help and they can do more and more every day. They—new—new kinds of techniques—they can help us make cases.
DT: You—you gave us some examples of where you used this technical analysis to—to seal a case. Can you talk about some of your—your sort of personal skills, communication skills, bluffing skills to elicit a confession or to find evidence in that way?
(misc.)
[End of Reel 2240]
[Beginning of Reel 2241]
DT: When we left off on the last tape you'd been discussing some of the forensic techniques that you use; used DNA evidence, protein analysis, and ballistic work to try and figure out these cases and bring people to justice. And I—I'm curious if—if you could talk about some of your personal skills in trying to elicit these stories from people. Were you basically using your—you know, your natural communication skills?
00:01:58 – 2241
RL: In doing this work the thing that I assume when I interview anyone initially is they're going to be lying to me because if I'm looking at them they're—they're already a suspect. And—and I—and I have and I have thought that they're involved in whatever crime that—that I'm investigating at the time, but I do assume they're going to lie to me and so I—I—I'm—most of the time you get denials to begin with. So then the skill of an investigator is, of course, is to try to elicit the truth. And no matter what anyone says about what a lawyer does, my job is to get to the truth. And—and—and in fact I—I
00:02:38 – 2241
believe it's more important for me to prove someone's innocence than it is their guilt. If—if they're—if I'm going to say they're guilty then by golly they're going to be 100% guilt—guilty if I'm going to file charges against them. So I don't—I don't have any—any cases where, you know, they're iffy. Their either—when we get to the end it's black or white. They're either guilty or they're not. They've either committed the crime or they haven't committed the crime and—but you get these denials all the time. And—and
00:03:07 – 2241
we—we've gone—we get training on—on investigative techniques and interviewing techniques and I find them pretty—pretty useful. One of the things that I look for—one of the things I use, of course, is to listen as much as I can and let people do the talking and to just ask them some direct questions. And I usually start out in a fairly non threatening way and try to just elicit some behaviors that you can, you know, sort of interpret how they're talking when they are telling the truth and then see if that—if those behaviors
00:03:39 – 2241
change when you think that they're being deceptive. That's one way of doing it and the other way of doing it is to witness the crime. That's kind is neat, but you're almost never there. And—and that's where we use covert work or undercover work. And a lot—people find that interesting. I find it a really interesting and challenging aspect of the job and we have a group of agents that do that full time, our special operations branch. That's all they do is undercover work. They don't maintain a—a regular office that's open to the public, but we all get to be involved in that sooner or later and—and I like
00:04:11 – 2241

doing it and I've had a couple of interesting ones here in town. One—when I first got here I had to buy all the equipment for this office and one of the things that I—I bought was a boat. I had a boat and a motor, but I didn't have a trailer. So I had to go down to a local vender a—a boat sale place to buy a trailer. And up on the wall everywhere in this—in this boat office were these pictures of this hunter where—with all these trophy animals from all over the world, South America and Africa everywhere, including a
00:04:43 – 2241
picture of this guy with a polar bear. And while I was in San Antonio I worked a case of polar bear smuggling and so I—I knew at the time that the laws prohibited importing polar bear trophies in—into America. A lot of restrictions and there are a lot of reasons for it, but you ca—even if you kill a polar bear legally in Canada you can't bring it into the U.S. because of conservation concerns and the—the—that America has and some regulations under the Marine Mammal Act. And so all the Polar Bear hunters were s—
00:05:20 – 2241
temporarily storing their trophies in Canada because it was anticipated that the law would change and because they were legally taken that they eventually would be allowed to bring them in. And all the polar bear hunters know what that law is. And of course many of them just—their ego will not allow them to leave a trophy behind and they're very impatient and so they devised a bunch of ways to smuggle these trophies into the U.S. and I seized two polar bears in San Antonio. Well, I saw this picture and I saw there's this guy with all these pictures. Obviously, he has a big ego because he's got his picture everywhere and he has all these animals that he's killed and I have no doubt that he probably brought that bear home with him. He's not the kind of guy—and the more I
00:06:07 – 2241
found out about him the more I—I felt strongly that was the case. But he's a very prominent physician here in town and well known in hunting circles. And I just needed to find a way to find out where this trophy was and to find out if he did bring it in. So I said well, I'll go talk to him. But I—I—I'm not going to go talk to him as a fish and wildlife agent. I'll go talk to him as some poor blue collar worker off the street that would really like to be involved in this kind of hunting, but really can't afford it. So I'm
00:06:35 – 2241
playing on his ego so that he will maybe brag to me. So I put on some construction clothes and messed my hair up and put some dirt on my shirt and I went to his—his physician's office and just walked in thinking that there'll be a bunch of trophies there and maybe I can just talk about them with somebody. And so I walked in and said I heard about, you know, what a hunter, you know, this guy was and I saw the pictures at the boat shop and, you know, could I look at some of the trophies. And they said well we
00:07:04 – 2241
don't have any trophies here. I was talking to the office manager and they said, but the doctors in his office and he doesn't have any patients why don't you go up and talk to him. So I said cool. So I went up there and sat down and we began talking about hunting and all of his exploits all around the world and he loosened up pretty good and the conversation about polar bears came up and he was very anxious to tell me—he said—he said now—now son, he says, you got to understand that kind of hunting isn't for everyone. He says, it's really expensive and so I said well, how expensive it is. And he was telling me how the—the license cost $10,000 and that you had, you know, all these

00:07:42 – 2241
Airfare and you had to be up there for weeks at a time. And he—and he described the hunt and how vigorous it was. I mean it was a real hunt. He was out on the ice for seven days and you stay in an igloo and it's pretty darn cold. And—and hygiene in an igloo is that if you get up in the middle of the night and you have to take a leak you—you just walk over to the wall and you relieve yourself on the wall and it freezes before it hits the floor. I mean it's too cold to go outside to do that. And so we had some long talks and—
00:08:12 – 2241
and so I asked him about, you know, where—where do you keep the bear and he told me it was in his bedroom. And I said—and he says, but don't tell anyone. He says, tha—you know, you can't bring them in. You have, you know, there's some stupid law and you can't smuggle them. I mean you can't bring them in legally, so you—what you do is you just put them in your camper and you go through Canadian customs and it's nothing and you tell them you don't have anything and you go on your way. And I—I said, that's
00:08:35 – 2241
how you did it and he goes yeah, I said well, that was enough information for probable cause for a search warrant. He—I suspected it was there. I had experience that other—other hunters do that and he admitted that he did it. So we served—we were able to serve a—a warrant on his house. I kept his house under surveillance on the 4th of July prior to the search warrant to see who visited him because I heard he was having a party so I got all these license numbers and descriptions of people that were there so that I could maybe go interview them afterward. And so then we served the warrant on his house here in town and it was like a 6,000 square foot house and there was only one trophy in the
00:09:13 – 2241
whole house and it turns out that his spouse didn't like trophies in the house. So we didn't really know what to do. We didn't know where they were. And so I went through his—his phone book was there. I looked in his phone book and I remembered seeing his—this—some people think this is kind of dastardly for me to do, but I remembered there was an old woman there at—at his house at the party and he walked her out to a cab when she left the party. And I thought it might be his mother and I found her name in his
00:09:41 – 2241
phone book so I called her up and I said, you know, I just told her—I just gave her my name. I said, I'm over at Don's house, that's her husband, and—ov—over at your son's house and we're supposed to take some pictures of his trophies today and he's not here. She goes well, that's just like him. He just—he went to Canada. He's on a fishing trip and he's always gone and he never comes to see me and on and on and on. And I said, well, we really want to get some pictures of his polar bear. And she said, well, is that that
00:10:09 – 2241
big white one? And I said yeah, that's it. She says, well hell, it's not there. It's in his house in Durango. And so I said, okay well, we'll just catch him when he gets back from his fishing trip. So we were able to find out where his house was in Durango and got that information to a—the agent there. Of course, during—during the search warrant it took us seven hours to search the house. His attorney found out and he called and I was talking to the attorney and so he knew what we were doing there. We gave him a copy of the search warrant and we didn't tell him about anything else that we were doing. So I—the agent in Colorado was able to get a search warrant for the house there in Durango and

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they were going to serve it the next afternoon was the soonest they could get it signed off. Well, by the time they get there they get to this house, there's all these trophies and there's no polar bear. But there's this big giant open space in the floor where one—there should have been a polar bear rug. So he was able to get down on his hands and knees and he found some hairs. And they were—and they turned out to be polar bear hairs. And it—what we discovered was that his attorney warned the housekeeper in Colorado
00:11:14 – 2241
that the—that the feds were looking for a polar bear and that they're probably coming there next. Well, if you're an attorney you know that that's against the law to warn a client of a pending search. So the, the—the attorney had committed a felony by warning about the search. They had—they hid the polar bear rug. They hid the guest register book. There's a book there of all the people that come to visit and they also hid a musk oxen trophy that was there that we didn't know about and it turned out that that was
00:11:45 – 2241
smuggled also and one of the—why else would they want to hide it? So we were eventually able to find all those things at a—at a third residence where someone—a friend of his came over and knew what he was doing took the things to hide them and we're able to put the whole thing together. And not only prosecute the hunter for smuggling the bear, but we prosecuted his attorney for notification of a search. So that—that turned out to be a pretty interesting case. Another in—another interesting under a more elaborate covert investigation involved some outfitters who were advertising some very exclusive dove hunts in the Permian Basin Area of Texas over—actually, near the
00:12:24 – 2241
New Mexico border in Winkler County. They had a large ranch there, a lot of historic buildings and a very rustic rural setting and very good dove hunting. And the woman who owned the ranch was quite an accomplished hunter and marksman. And she started a—a business where she would bring in exclusive clients for a three day dove hunt on her ranch. And then she'd put you in a little fleabag motel in a little community there and you'd have these dove hunts, but she offered gourmet meals and safari tents with open
00:12:58 – 2241
bar and everything out on the ranch at night. And she advertised it in such a way that indicated they were probably doing a little more hunting than they're supposed to do there. So we were curious and so I decided to open an un—undercover case against her. And—and called her up to—just to see what kind of situation they had there and in talking—and it was a $1,000, by the way. This was the most expensive dove hunt that any of us had ever heard of. You had to pay $1,000 to be a part of this and so I called her
00:13:28 – 2241
and indicated, you know, I had the means to—to—to, of course, pay her for this kind of a hunt. And sh—and in talking with her she sort of loosened up and was indicating to me that well, we'll go hunting in the morning and we'll get a limit of birds an—and, you know, we'll feed you lunch and then you can sack out and then we'll go—we'll pick you up and we'll go out in the afternoon and we'll kill another limit of birds and we'll do that, you know, a couple of times. And so we knew that what she doing was what we suspected. So we booked some hunts. And I got to go out there posing as a rich hunter and so I had to—I had to get some special clothes and borrow some fancy guns that we

00:14:05 – 2241
had seized in some other cases and go out other and pose as a hunter and mingled with the—the customers that she had there. And I was able to, you know, kill my limit of birds in the morning and then we still had them in our truck in the afternoon. And it was really interesting because we're going out to hunt in the afternoon and she sent one of her employees over, oh, I got to get your birds ou—out of your truck. He said, we can't, you know, let the game warden catch you with the mornings limit. So we had some pretty
00:14:29 – 2241
good evidence that—that they were doing that. And then I documented what all of her other clients killed and they killed two limits on those days. And we did that—I did that one year and another agent Nick Chavez did it the—the previous year and made similar cases. And then before we were going to take this case down some of the clients that he hunted with invited him to come to Louisiana for a big duck-poaching weekend. So we couldn't turn that down, so we sent him over there. They picked him up at the airport and
00:15:02 – 2241
they wined him and dined him and they went out and slaughtered ducks. And they—they would just kill them and let them lay. They were shooting other kinds of birds and everything. So we were able to make the case in Louisiana. And—and he used—he had a GPS unit with him and he was in a remote area. No one knew where he was. So he had GPS coordinates and he used their cell phone to dial a predetermined number and all he did was punch in the GPS coordinates. And, of course, that was the pager of the other agents in—in Louisiana. So they were able to then use their GPS units to find out where they were and to—to make those cases. And once we had that established then it was a
00:15:43 – 2241
few months after that that we let them know that, well, we also hunted with you on the dove hunts in—in Texas. And plus those are the clients that Nick made and then the clients, of course, that I hunted with we were able to make cases on them. And then we served a warrant on the outfitter and the ranch owner's home. And we uncovered records of other hunters going back five years. So through a variety of telephone interviews and in person interviews we were able to make cases on over 30 of her clients over a period
00:16:14 – 2241
of five years. And, you know, fair—fairly significant case and lots of people and I ended up citing people from California and Pennsylvania and Boston and Main and New York and Kentucky and all kinds of places. It was a—a very interesting case. One of the people that I hunted with was a—a paraplegic man from Tennessee who was confined to a wheel chair. He had no use of his legs and he was quite a good shot. And he was also a poacher, but he was a pretty neat guy and we had some interesting conversations
00:16:53 – 2241
during the hunt. But I never encountered this before and this was a very remote area of sand trails and sand dunes. We would actually load him in his wheel chair, he was a big guy over 200 pounds, into a back of a pickup truck and drive out to the—wherever we were going to hunt and then we'd have to take him off and there was like four us—would carry him over the sand dunes to where he was going to hunt. And this is a guy who hunts all over the world and a pretty interesting guy. And in—initially he was a little bit hurt that—that I basically befriended and then betrayed him, but you know, that's the job that we do and it didn't matter that—that he was, you know, handicapped or not. He was still poaching birds so.

DT: Maybe you can speculate a little bit about the—the motivations of some of these people who clearly are not hunting for meat but hunting way in excess of that and sometimes just for the trophy, no meat at all?
00:17:50 – 2241
RL: What we find is—what I've f—encountered a lot of people that—that are doing hunting and this is just one aspect of the people that we deal with. Is they're—they're successful busy people and—and they have a lot of money, but they don't have a lot of time. And so when they have an opportunity to go hunting they want to do it in a big way. And they don't really perceive it as being anything like money laundering or bank
00:18:16 – 2241
fraud or anything like that. It's just a little game violation, you know, and—and they don't have any qualms about doing it. It's—it's pretty common so, don't have much time, I want the—the biggest bang for my buck, so lets go out and—and basically lets see how many things we can kill.
DT: Well, in—in general when you look into the future do you think this kind of disregard for game and for wildlife is—is a major challenge or what do you think the significant challenge and opportunities are for conservation
00:18:49 – 2241
RL: The challenge for conservation is going to be—to be able to have enough habitats so we can sustain wildlife populations. And I really see sort of a—a movement from doing investigations that involve killing individual animals toward emphasizing more violations that lead to the preservation of habitat and—and that's done in a lot of different ways. And then a lot of times you can reach settlements that will allow habitat to be preserved because we, you know, we can do all the animal enforcement we want, but if there's no habitat to support these animals then sooner or later they're going to be gone anyway.
DT: Are you talking about Section 7, the critical habitat?
00:19:30 – 2241
RL: Could be—could it—could be critical habitat for endangered species. It could be preserving wetlands. It could be enhancing what already exists. It could be augmenting habitat through the creation of new habitats where they don't exist now. I have a—a project that I'm working with the city of Lubbock and their Parks and Recreation Department in re-establishing riparian corridors along the water courses that we have here. And—and creating basically a cotton wood forest where one used to be, but hasn't
00:20:01 – 2241
been there for over 80 years. And—and that's a result of some illegal dredging work that they were doing one time in a creek where—where I caught them. And they were cutting down some trees in order to get into the creek with a bulldozer so they could dredge it out because they though it would hance—enhance this particular park. Well, technically it's probably a violation. I didn't have a whole lot to prosecute him on. But I was able to then just sort of develop a working relationship with them and indicated to them that I wouldn't prosecute provided they would work with me on some enhancement projects. And so that's turned into a multi year project, which I hope will continue even after I'm—I'm retired.
DT: You are facing retirement soon, I think, voluntary early retirement. Do you have any plans for those years? Conservation?
00:20:50 – 2241
RL: Yeah, I am going to retire. In fact, I'm what—what I call a two digit midget. And in the

military when—when you don't have very much time left in and when you're going to get out they call it getting short. And when you have less than a 100 days that's a two-digit midget. You're getting really short then and—and I'll retire on January the 4th of 2003. And I'm but—but I'm not retiring from being involved in conservation. And so I want to continue my work with the city to help them to realize that they can
00:21:21 – 2241
enhance natural resources here and the public will appreciate it. They will like what they're doing. It's not expensive. I can get government grants to help them do it and it han—it enhances natural resources and that there's a value—help them realize there is a value and—and, in fact, an ecotourism value and a recreation value to wildlife and to natural resources. I also hope to start a coalition of organizations to help with the conservation and preservation enhancement of short grass prairie ecosystems out here
00:21:53 – 2241
because they're—they re being lost to a variety of different land uses. And we have some landowners out here now—some big landowners that are thinking about how they're going to parcel out their property when they die. And some of them want to do something meaningful with it and not just turn it over to a bunch of ungrateful siblings. And so they're willing to—if—if we can work with them and do some conservation easements and maybe some outright purchases and then—and take these pieces of land
00:22:25 – 2241
and manage them for natural resources. And basically they're over grazed right now, we take the cattle off and we can create habitat that's suitable for black tailed prairie dogs, and lesser prairie chickens and all kinds of critters out here that are suffering severe population declines. And—and that's kind of one of the things that I want to be involved in.
DT: Well, again looking into the future do you have any advice for younger generation of people coming up that might be interested in this kind of field?
00:22:57 – 2241
RL: When—when I give programs over at—at Texas Tech University the professors want me there. One of the reasons they want me there is—is to advise their students that are interested in conservation careers and one of the first things I tell them that my advice is no different than the advice their parents give them. You need to go to school and you need to get good grades and that's just a given. And what I tell them is that when you go out looking for a job in this kind of field you have one thing in common with everyone
00:23:28 – 2241
else that's looking for that same job and that is that you have a college degree. Everybody has one if you're going into that career. So you have to do something more than—than just go to college and get a degree. You have to be involved in extra curricular activities that show that you have initiative, that you can do things independently, that you can be involved in aspects of conservation outside of a—a job. You can do volunteer work. There are lots of opportunities and I've had interns help me,
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college students, take on a small project; something that they can do that doesn't involve enforcement of the law. And they help me with things like simply organizing my evidence freezer and—and preparing specimens to be shipped off to the eagle repository or our old evidence that's from closed cases that they're—they're going to go to museums. A lot of birds that we get here go to our forensics laboratory for—for their museum for standard so that, you

know, to allow them to have specimens on hand to help
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in investigations. So you have to be involved and help graduate students. When you're an undergrad you need to be volunteering to work with graduate students to help them on their research. Join a local conservation organization. Do things like that, but there are jobs out there, but getting one is harder than going to college.
DT: One last question. You've spent a lot of time outdoors on your cases, but I hope that you may have also been able to do it off duty as well. I was wondering if there's any particular a spot that gives you some sense of—of serenity and—and pleasure maybe you can describe it?
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RL: When I think about an answer to that question there—there isn't one place that comes to mind. To—to me the most important place for me is where I am at the time. And so I could find that serenity on the Canyons of Palo Duro State Park or on the shore of a playa lake park that's right here in town, walking underneath a rai—a railroad trestle, doing some bird watching. There's no—so the—the special spots for me is where I am at the time. And when I retire I actually hope to be in those spots a lot more often. I
00:26:02 – 2241
hope to get out and to be able to enjoy some of those resources that—that I've been working to protect; to enjoy them more personally. Basically, selfishly enjoying them, I hope, so more backpacking, more canoeing. I won't have to come back to the office to write the report. I won't have to go to the five days of training on the east coast every year. I won't have to do the district meeting in Albuquerque. My time will be my own and—and I'll spend it—I'll be as involved in conservation as I ever was.
(misc.)
[End of reel 2241]
[End of interview with Rob Lee]