



# National Park Service Paleontology Program

## *Oral History Interview – Senator Harry Reid*

Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/005



**ON THE COVER**  
Senator Harry Reid

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The National Park Service, Paleontology Program publishes a range of reports, plans, oral histories and other documents that address a range of paleontological resource topics. These reports are of interest and applicability to a broad audience in the National Park Service and others in natural resource management, including scientists, conservation and environmental constituencies, and the public.

The NPS Paleontology Program disseminates comprehensive information and analysis about paleontological resources and related topics concerning lands managed by the National Park Service. Given the sensitive nature of some paleontological resource information, such as the specific location of fossil sites, some publications are intended for specific audiences and are maintained as restricted access. When appropriate, sensitive information is redacted from reports in order to allow greater access to these reports by NPS staff, partners and the public. This work supports the advancement of science, informed decision-making, and the achievement of the National Park Service mission.

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This oral history transcript is available in digital format and is maintained within the NPS Paleontology Program Archives and Library through the NPS Geologic Resources Division. If you have any questions regarding this transcript, please email [vincent\\_santucci@nps.gov](mailto:vincent_santucci@nps.gov).

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## **Background**

Interview with Senator Harry Reid: This phone interview was conducted on May 6, 2020. The phone call was between Senator Harry Reid, who was at his home in Las Vegas, Nevada and Vince Santucci, who was at his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. At the time of the interview, Vince was the NPS Senior Paleontologist and Paleontology Program Coordinator. The interview was recorded on a digital audio recorder and a mp3 file was created. A written transcription of the interview was produced from the digital audio recording and this document contains the discussion during the interview. Senator Reid signed a release form for the National Park Service for the preservation and use of the interview in the future. If present, PII has been omitted.

## Transcript

(18:16 in length)

VS: Vince Santucci

HR: Senator Harry Reid

SA: Senator's Assistant

(Music in the background before phone call connects)

[START OF INTERVIEW]

SA: Hi, this is [unclear] with Senator Reid's office. How are you?

VS: Hi, how are you?

SA: I am good. I am good. I can connect you to the Senator if you are ready.

VS: Yes, thank you. Did the questions look ok?

SA: Yeah, they look great. I sent everything over to him and he is ready to go.

VS: Thank you so much.

SA: Yes, of course. Hold on one moment. Hold on one second. We are having technical issues.

(Pause and then connection occurs.)

VS: Yes, good morning Senator Reid (HR). Hi, my name is Vince Santucci, I work for the National Park Service as the Senior Paleontologist. Thank you so much.

HR: I am curious here. When you were a little boy at Forbes Field, did you get any autographs?

VS: I did. That is one of my best memories in the world. I got autographs from Roberto Clemente and Bill Mazeroski.

HR: Oh you did. Wow!

VS: And we had a good time growing up. I grew up close to both Carnegie Museum of Natural History and Forbes Field. And so we spent a lot of time at both places.

HR: Ahh, that's great. All right.

VS: Did you ever have a chance to visit Forbes Field?

HR: No, I spent 37 years in Washington and for much of that time the only baseball game in the area was Baltimore because the National's came later.

VS: Yes. Well, I greatly appreciate your time this morning. Excited to talk with you.

VS: First thing, assume that I know nothing about the topics we are discussing, so you can feel free to provide as much detail as you would like. I have a little introduction, and then some background information and then I have a series of ten questions if you are ready.

HR: Ok, I'm ready.

VS: Thank you so much.

VS: Today is Wednesday, May 6, 2020 and we have the pleasure of interviewing Senator Harry Reid from his home in Las Vegas, Nevada. My name is Vincent L. Santucci, the Senior Paleontologist for the National Park Service, Paleontology Program. The interview with Senator Reid is one of a series of interviews to better understand the history related to preserving fossils in the national parks. By way of just a little bit of background, I wanted to share some information. One of the many contributions you are recognized for Senator Reid, is your involvement with the Conservation of Lands and Resources, including over five million acres in Nevada alone. The paleontological community acknowledges your efforts to protect fossils through your work and leadership in the Senate. In addition to the establishment of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument as a unit of the National Park Service on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014, you were also instrumental in the enactment of the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act and the establishment of the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument in 2009. The Paleontological Resources Preservation Act was included in the Omnibus Public Lands legislation which passed into law on March 30<sup>th</sup> of 2009. This is one of the first big legislative packages signed into law by President Obama shortly after his inauguration.

VS: Our hope is to gain your firsthand perspectives related to work involved with the legislation which led to the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act and similarly to the legislation that led to the creation of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument.

VS: So, the first question, Senator Reid is: do you recall any discussions with the Senate or the Administration related to the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act that was signed into law in 2009?

HR: Well, as I recall this was part of our big public lands bill. That right?

VS: Yes, that is correct.

HR: And that is something we had been trying to get done; I had been trying to get done for a long time. Republicans wouldn't allow it to go forward. So, when Obama became President, the first thing I did was get that bill with public lands stuff in it. It was a bill, had a lot of stuff in it. We had national park namings and just a lot of things we did that had been left over that needed to be done as a first step. You know just normal. But then the Republicans wouldn't let us do that. So this was kind of a time to catch up on some of the things that had been left over. So, the paleontology part of it was just one of those things we added to the bill.

VS: Thank you very much. I think that many people were very happy about that. In 1979, well before your role in the Senate, the Archaeological Resources Preservations Act was put into law. And it took 30 years, from 1979 to 2009, to actually get the equivalent legislation for fossils. So, whatever you were able to do certainly worked well and we greatly appreciate all of your help with that.

HR: Ok.

VS: I am going to go to the third question. Were there any factors that contributed towards why the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act was supported in 2009 within the Omnibus Public Lands legislation? And I think you addressed that a little bit already.

HR: Yeah, I think we did that just because there had been a lot of things that we had tried to get done that we couldn't. In the past there had been like, house-keeping issues, no controversy. And we ran into some problem there. So, we gathered all the stuff we had been stopped from getting done into this bill and the paleontology part was one aspect.

VS: Thank you. So, we're actually at a very interesting moment in time, given that although it has taken ten years to get here. We have been working on the final regulations for the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act and in fact two weeks ago, four Assistant Secretaries in the Department of Interior's Office and the Solicitor's Office all signed off on the final regulation for the Paleontology law. So, we're very excited to move forward and get that published in the Federal Register.

VS: With that said, do you have any thoughts related to this milestone for paleontology and the law that was established under your leadership?

HR: Well, I just think it is time we focus on this. I can remember the first time a group of people came to see me. I frankly thought they were "goofy." (Laughter) I couldn't believe that all these fossils – right here in Las Vegas. I thought, "I can't believe this." That was my actual feeling. And, sure enough they were right and I was wrong. Right here in Las Vegas metropolitan area, there were all kinds of saber-tooth tigers and all kinds of things that we thought were in other places, not in Nevada.

VS: Very good. We are going to focus the remaining questions on Nevada and the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. So, the next question is, since you were born and raised in Nevada, do you recall hearing about the "Big Dig" at Tule Springs, the expedition that took place between 1962 and 1963?

HR: I was still away going to school.

VS: Alright. In regard to the Tule Springs Fossil Beds, do you recall your earlier conversations regarding interest in preserving and protecting Tule Springs Fossil Beds?

HR: I can remember, and I have indicated my first conversation about fossils in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. I can remember that clearly. It was quite a leap of faith from that to actually doing something to preserve them.

VS: So originally, before the Monument was created, the Tule Springs Fossil Beds were managed by the Bureau of Land Management [BLM]. Do you know, were there any specific reasons that the Tule Springs Fossil Beds Monument was assigned to the National Park Service for management, rather than keep it with the Bureau of Land Management for administration?

HR: Well, there were a lot of times during my tenure in Congress. BLM had large areas of responsibility and the [National] Park Service did not have as many things to do. I think that's the main reason the Park Service got it.

VS: Tule Springs is the only National Monument, per se, in the state of Nevada. So, that is exciting from a number of perspectives.

HR: Well, that's really not so. We have two [additional] National Monuments. We have one, the Basin Range [National Monument], that is almost 800,000 acres and we have the Gold Butte National Monument.

VS: Absolutely, you're correct. I was referring to National Park Service administered Monument.

HR: Ok.

VS: Thanks.

VS: In terms of your staff, do you recall who the primary staff were from your office that were most involved in the Tule Springs Fossil Beds?

HR: Yeah, as I look back, I think that was Tom Lathe. Kai Anderson did a lot of my environmental stuff. A man by the name of Alex McDonough. They were the two main staff people.

VS: Very good. When I was in Nevada, I had a chance to meet with Shannon Raborn—

HR: Oh yeah, she did great.

VS: Yeah, absolutely, fantastic.

HR: Shannon was lower – in Nevada [Senate Office]. The other two folks were in Washington [D.C.]

VS: OK. Do you have any personal vision for the future of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument you'd like to see and the Park Service implement in the future?

HR: Well, I would hope that someday we can have a decent visitor center there. At this stage we don't have much. I think we would do well to have a visitor center that was one you had exhibits and you had, (what do you refer to when they have) - when you can press a button and different thing show up. There's a word for that. I don't have it in my vocabulary right now [interactive]. I think that I would rather there were more done to allow someone to better understand the importance of this – of these processes.

VS: One of the things we have been talking about is the development of a handicap accessible trail for visitors to be able to have greater access to see the resources.

HR: Great idea. You know, since I am not as able to get around as much as I used to, that's a great idea. You know, there are a lot of people just like me that are terribly interested, simply don't have the mobility to enjoy as much as those who do have good mobility.

VS: And I guess the final question is, is there anything that you would like to share that we haven't yet asked you?

HR: Well, I think a lot of people would have the same reaction that I had when they were told. "You realize here in the Las Vegas area that you have a number of sloths, saber tooth tigers, mammoths?" They would probably react just like I did. Like, "What the hell you are talking about!" And that's why I think we need more emphasis so that people can visualize and have a visitor center; some of the things we have there. In addition, we need to develop a path where people know where to go to look to see them [fossilized bones]. And make sure that people aren't vandalizing or pillaging these sites that are so important to keep, so they are protected at sites. Make sure they are protected.

VS: Well, know for sure that all those involved in the management of Tule Springs, if they ever get funding for a visitor center, you will be the first person that will be invited to the dedication.

HR: Well, I wish I were in a position to get that. We had a Great Basin National Park—it is a very remote area—and until we got our visitor center, it really wasn't as difficult to get as now. Visitor Center is really a tremendous asset for that National Park we have.

VS: Absolutely. Well, I think that concludes the questions that I had and what a pleasure to speak with you. I very much appreciate your time.

HR: Call anytime. Thank you.

VS: I wish you well and I hope I get a chance to talk to you again soon.

HR: Thanks.

VS: Have a great day. Bye-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



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