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Association of National Park Rangers Oral History Project, 2012-2016

Margaret (Meg) Weesner
October 29, 2012

Interview conducted by Hannah Nyala West
Transcribed by West Transcript Services
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ANPR Oral History Project

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Audio File: WEESNER Margaret 29 Oct 2012

[START OF TRACK 1]

Hannah Nyala West: This interview is being conducted at Miramonte Resort [La Quinta, CA] at the 2012 Association of National Park Rangers annual gathering. The interviewee is Meg Weesner, and the interviewer is Hannah Nyala West. The date is Monday, October 29th, 2012. All right, so if you'd like to just start with when and where you were born?

Meg Weesner: I'll start with a name clarification, just in case. So, my full name is Margaret Weesner. M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T, common spelling. When I first started my career, my very first jobs, I was actually going by the nickname Maggie, and somewhere along the line I switched, and I have been Meg Weesner for a very long time.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: But if somebody looks back in some records or whatever, you know, they might find Maggie.

Hannah Nyala West: They might find Maggie, all right. In any of the paperwork or newsletters or that sort of thing, for parks that you worked in, right?

Meg Weesner: Of course, any of the personnel records are going to be Margaret.

Hannah Nyala West: Right. Okay.

Meg Weesner: So, I was born in Nashville, Tennessee, 1953 was the year. And pretty much lived and grew up, you know, in Nashville. I'm not sure of any kind of detail you want, but I've often gone back to try and figure out, you know, some people say, "Oh I was nine years old, and this happened, and I knew that I wanted to be a park ranger." That didn't happen with me, you know, so I've tried to think what were the seeds in my youth that made me want to be in the National Park Service or give me a direction that I would want to do something like that. And the only thing I can remember is, even really young, maybe five or six years old, occasionally my family would go from Nashville to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, which is right outside the Smoky Mountains, and I always liked the idea of hiking and, you know, being on a trail and that sort of thing, so that's kind of the – but I don't think I even knew that being a ranger per se was a career option and certainly not for a girl. You know, I'm of the generation where girls would've been, you know, teachers, secretaries, or nurses, you know, and that's about it. So, none of those attracted me, but I didn't really know what did attract me.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. So, Nashville, and then you went from there to college?

Meg Weesner: Yeah. So, in high school I had some friends that got interested in hiking. I was a competitive swimmer and did a lot of training for that, so I would be kind of envious of them. They'd gone over to the Smokies or somewhere else, and they had some hiking boots, such as you have when you're in high school, but I never had the time to do that. But I was kind of like, "That sounds kind of interesting," but never really tried it out. So, I went to Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, right outside Chicago, and from the time I first went I joined the Outing Club that was there. And many of the universities have outing clubs. And we went rock climbing at Devil's Lake in Wisconsin. We went caving near Bloomington, Indiana. Did a lot of bicycling, which I had done in high school as well. So, I started getting into more outdoor activities at that time.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. And studied journalism?

Meg Weesner: I did. I started, I played around with a lot of different fields of study for a while. I was in mathematics for a while and physical education, the history of religions, and finally sort of got really into this Outing Club stuff and decided that I wanted to write for Backpacker Magazine, which had just started up about that time, and so I switched over into magazine journalism. We did a little bit of hardcore journalism as a matter of training, but in your senior year you focus on your specialty, so I kind of focused on magazine journalism.

Hannah Nyala West: Did you do a thesis on outdoor writing or something?

Meg Weesner: No, we didn't have a thesis, but one of the classes – I think there were two classes in magazine journalism – and the one was just kind of pro forma, but the second one you would be a little bit more oriented to what you really wanted to do. This is kind of interesting. The topic I picked, which was new at that time, was hang gliding, and I actually talked myself into getting some free hang-gliding lessons because I was writing about it for my college paper.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhuh. [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: I got to fly for about five seconds [chuckles], that was about it, but that was kind of fun.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. So, from Northwestern?

Meg Weesner: Let me go back to a couple other outing club trips I remember while I was there.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: So sophomore year I decide that I want to canoe down the Ozarks, the Ozark National Scenic Riverway. It's the Current River, is the

name of the river. And for Thanksgiving the Outing Club traditionally had a trip where we would go from Chicago, drive down on Wednesday, canoe the river, and drive back Sunday. And so, I did that [Thanksgiving weekend during my sophomore and junior years]. At the time I had no idea that that was a unit of the National Park System. It was just a river that we were canoeing on. But I also started traveling to the West to some national parks and went with a couple of friends over a spring break, I believe it was, to Rocky Mountain National Park and went cross-country skiing there a little bit. And so, I was using parks, but I remember not knowing the difference between a national park and a national forest, where we were camping outside, and really not ever running in contact with a ranger. So, I liked those kinds of activities, but I really didn't perceive it as a career at that time. And then some other trips a little later on were to Grand Canyon, and of course by then I was a little bit more of aware of the national parks, so I did a couple of hiking trips into the Grand Canyon when I was in college as well.

Hannah Nyala West: Did you pair those trips with writing efforts at all?

Meg Weesner: Uh mm.

Hannah Nyala West: Write any kind of pieces for them?

Meg Weesner: No. The closest I ever got to Backpacker Magazine was when I was a volunteer working in the winter at Rocky Mountain National Park. The editor of Backpacker Magazine [came in], and he wanted a backcountry permit, and I got to issue him his permit. [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: That was kind of fun.

Hannah Nyala West: That's power.

Meg Weesner: That was kind of fun. So, but what I also realized was that a lot of those magazines, particularly at that time, were finding wonderful places to go to, writing about them, and then everybody went to them and they weren't so wonderful anymore.

Hannah Nyala West: Yes.

Meg Weesner: So, I got a little bit disenchanted about the kinds of environmental journalism that they were doing at that time.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Were you focused on environmental journalism in particular or?

Meg Weesner: I think I thought, as maybe many girls did at that time, that I was really gonna be married and have a family, and maybe I might work a little bit on the side. And so, this whole idea of magazine

journalism, probably in my mind at that time, was a little bit more like I might do a few little projects here and there and make some money, but most of the role models were not career professional women. They were others, homemakers.

Hannah Nyala West: Did you have mentors or people that you looked up to in terms of their particular type of writing, style of writing?

Meg Weesner: No.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: [Laughs.] But the one thing – of course and I've never pursued journalism, and I didn't really appreciate it at the time, [is] that politics really rules everything, and the media is a very important part of public education in a democracy – but one thing writing, ah studying writing and studying journalism did teach me was how to write to a specific audience, 'cause prior to that, you're always writing for your teacher. So unknown or not, [from] the time you start writing in first or second grade, all the way through college, you know, you're writing with the teacher in mind, and in journalism, and particularly magazine journalism, they tell us, "You know, you have a different audience out there, and you need to know what your audience is that you're writing to and write that way for that audience." And say, take magazine journalism specifically, the same person may subscribe to Backpacker [and to] Esquire at the same time, but when they – or the New Yorker – but when they open those magazines, they don't expect the same kind of article to be written. So, you might have the same topic covered by all those three magazines, but they would be written in a different way and that's what writing to an audience is. That's what I learned in magazine journalism, and to be honest it has stood me in very good stead throughout my entire career.

Hannah Nyala West: I would think so. What caused the turn? What caused you to turn toward the Park Service as a career?

Meg Weesner: So, I, you know, I forgot about this actually. So there I was, you know, studying journalism and I was probably a senior, and a friend of mine, a man, was a, I think, a junior, he was a year younger, and he had been an SCA [Student Conservation Association] at a place called Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. And his second season as an SCA, he had gotten picked up as a lifeguard on the beach at Glen Canyon.

Meg Weesner: So, it was '75, I was getting out of college, the Vietnam Vets were coming back, there was high inflation, high unemployment, and it was really tough. All kinds of college graduates – you know the baby boomers – were coming out [of college], we were all looking for jobs, and mostly being very underemployed as we first got

started. So, you know, I was just kinda looking for something to do after I finished college there. And I got intrigued by this lifeguard thing because, from my competitive swimming, the first two summers I was in college, I had worked as a swim coach and swimming instructor, and the third year I'd worked at the Northwestern University beach. The swim beach has a lifeguard. And I'm going, "Oh this is a job I would be qualified for." And by that time I'd been to Rocky Mountain and Grand Canyon, and I knew sort of what the national parks were all about and, you know, in talking to this guy I said, "Well, I think I'll apply for one of these lifeguard jobs," because I'd worked at Lake Michigan as a lifeguard and, you know, maybe I'll get hired, and I did.

Hannah Nyala West: So just cold, you went for it. Were you aware that Glen Canyon had anything to do with the park system?

Meg Weesner: Yeah. I knew that. Because my friend who had worked in the SCA, you know, had provided that background.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: For some reason I wasn't attracted to applying for an SCA job. I don't know why that didn't occur to me, but just this lifeguard connection and that that had been my background, and that I might succeed in getting a job as a lifeguard at Glen Canyon. So, when people talk about, you know, starting at the bottom and working their way up [through the career], yeah, I was a GS-3 lifeguard when I started.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. And what were some of the more memorable aspects of that job?

Meg Weesner: [Chuckles.] Not much. Sitting in the tower. Although it's amazing, you sit up, you know, six or eight feet above everybody else, and they spread their beach towels around you, it's really great for watching family interactions. Because they have no clue that you're there. And the things that you see some [parents] and kids do is just amazing, 'cause you're just out there. But what that did – I was sharing an old run-down trailer with two women, one of whom was another lifeguard and one of whom was an interpreter at the visitor center, and down the way were some of the law enforcement rangers and interpreters and all the lifeguards, and we would sit out in the sandy porch of this mobile home area and talk in the evenings, you know, just the stars overhead and the moon if that was up and that kind of stuff and just chit chat the way twenty-year-olds will do. And that was really kind of interesting, and that was when the seed about being a park ranger and having a career in the agency really sparked for me, was during that summer where I had my first contact by living in [the park] and amongst rangers there.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. And so, where did it go from there?

Meg Weesner: So, there I'm going, "Oh great, I have a degree in magazine journalism, and I have experience as a lifeguard, but now what am I gonna do?" So, I decided that I would apply for volunteer positions, and I sent out, you know, a few volunteer [applications]. A few jobs as well. But the one that I was offered and that I liked the best was to be an interpretive volunteer during the winter at Rocky Mountain National Park. Now again I'm going back to a park where I took a couple of spring break trips, you know, and did a little skiing, and, you know, so I had a little bit of experience in doing that. So, I got a ride back to Tennessee with a ranger who just happened to be moving to the Smokies – I didn't have any money back then, so I'd ridden a bus to get out to that job and had to get back. So, I didn't have a car at the time. So, I got a ride with the guy [a ranger] who was moving to the Smokies. He dropped me off at my home in Nashville, Tennessee, and my dad bought me my college graduation present – it was a few months late – but I'd done this other job so was away. So, it was a car, used car. So, I had my first car, and he showed me, wanted to make sure I knew how to change a tire, and he sent me on my way from Nashville, Tennessee up to Rocky Mountain National Park. I think I arrived there about Halloween, and I did have a flat on the way, so it's a good thing I knew how to change the tire! [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] Thanks for dad.

Meg Weesner: [Laughs.] Exactly. And of course, we didn't have cell phones then or, you know, all that stuff, so it's really amazing, just out on my own.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. How long were you a volunteer there?

Meg Weesner: So that was a whole winter season, probably six, seven months. And the next year I was pretty sure I didn't want to be a lifeguard again. For one thing I was a little upset. Of the group of five of us lifeguards [the previous year], we'd all been new; no one had been a returning lifeguard at that location. For the other four lifeguards, they were still in college, they had a senior year to go. I had just graduated. And they, none of them had lifeguarded on a beach before, and I had lifeguarded on a beach. But in spite of all that, one of the men lifeguards was selected to get a promotion and be the lead lifeguard that summer, even though I had had more experience, and that was really the first time that I sort of realized that there was a little discrimination in the system in the mid-70s, you know, that a man with actually less qualifications than I [had], but he was very charismatic, you know, and he was chosen to be the leader, so I really didn't want to go back to the lifeguard job, but because I'd spent a winter doing interpretation as a volunteer I

was able to get hired as a park technician in interpretation for the next summer. So, I went back to the same park, but worked in a different job.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. Back to Rocky Mountain?

Meg Weesner: No, sorry.

Hannah Nyala West: Or back to—

Meg Weesner: Back to Glen Canyon. Mmhm.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: So, I worked at the visitor center that's on top of the dam.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. That's a beautiful visitor center.

Meg Weesner: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: Beautiful place. What kind of challenges did you face in that position? Any particularly memorable ones?

Meg Weesner: Well, I think I had always been really stressed out by talking in front of people, and as an interpreter there I needed to give evening programs in the campground. And so, we had a little time to walk around the campground and talk to people to invite them to the program, and then we had to give a program so I think that was probably pretty terrifying for me.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Meg Weesner: But you know I got over it.

Hannah Nyala West: And what kind of programs did you give?

Meg Weesner: We were each told to develop a program, and I really can't remember at all, I think it was just a general overview of Glen Canyon or something. Of course, we were using slides at the time, and you know we had this fade-in fade-out system that we used.

Hannah Nyala West: Yes, lapse-dissolve.

Meg Weesner: Yes, exactly. Those things. And for the first part of the summer, we would do our program that we had developed, and then we would do sort of a short program afterwards for people who wanted to hang around a little longer. So, for the first part of the summer I showed a movie about Chief Seattle for the second part of the program, and then I developed a program on different kinds of personal flotation devices, PFDs.

Hannah Nyala West: Oh, okay. Uhhuh.

Meg Weesner: You know, sort of a safety message for being out on the lake and Type 1s and Type 2s and the throwables and all that kind of stuff.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. Nice.

Meg Weesner: So, I remember developing that more than I remember my main presentations [laughs], for whatever reason.

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] Well you were drawing on your background and your skills and interests and the lifeguarding.

Meg Weesner: Yes.

Hannah Nyala West: Etcetera. And also giving people really timely information for the park they were in.

Meg Weesner: Right. And interpretation at a recreation area is always a challenge because people are coming there for very different reasons and often don't know that it's a National Park Service site. So.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. Interesting. So where from there?

Meg Weesner: So, let's see. Yeah, that was the second year. The guy who had been the chief of interpretation at Glen Canyon, so had hired me essentially for the second year's position, got a transfer and started working at Joshua Tree, and so I said, "Hm, I might have a connection at Joshua Tree." So, I applied to be an interpreter at Joshua Tree the next winter. Now the only position that he had was a Park Aid, which was a GS-3 position, rather than a Park Technician, which was a GS-4. They don't have these titles anymore at all, but so I was hired there to work at the visitor center in Twentynine Palms as a GS-3.

Hannah Nyala West: What was his name?

Meg Weesner: Bob Woody.

Hannah Nyala West: Bob Woody. I've seen his name.

Meg Weesner: You have.

Hannah Nyala West: Yes, I have. So, then you were at the visitor center at the desk. Did you also give programs?

Meg Weesner: As a GS-3 I did not.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: Minimum employment now is like a GS-5. So that was sort of the difference. GS-3 was at the desk answering questions. GS-4 you were expected to develop some programs and give them.

Hannah Nyala West: And was there park housing or did you live—

Meg Weesner: No, I rented a little house in town.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. In the community.

Meg Weesner: Mmhm.

Hannah Nyala West: And what was the community of work like? Did you have quite a few people on staff there at the time, that people visited together? Did they recreate together?

Meg Weesner: A little bit. You know, typically the seasonal workforce always forms, you know, sort of a bond, because they generally are young, the men and women are trying to find mates, you know, for life or whatever, you know, all that kind of stuff that you do when you're a young person like that. Because of my Outing Club experience, I had done a little bit of rock climbing and was very interested in it, really liked that, and they didn't have anywhere near 8,000 [climbing] routes that the superintendent just reported, but even back then there was a guidebook, you know, Joshua Tree was known for its climbing but not nearly to the extent that it is now.

Hannah Nyala West: Right.

Meg Weesner: So, one of the like park ranger interpreters, he and his wife—actually his name is Dennis Knuckles.

Hannah Nyala West: Knuckles. K-N-U-C-K-L-E-S?

Meg Weesner: Mmhm. Yeah. Dennis, let's see, K-N-U-C-K-L-E-S. And his wife is Penny. Now Dennis climbs. They were both interpretive rangers at the time. And they just became really good friends, and Dennis and I would go out climbing because Penny didn't like to climb. So, Dennis took me climbing and, you know, taught me how to lead climbs and that kind of stuff. And I met up with some folks – even back then, though it was much smaller than it is now, but even back then there were a few climbing bums, you know, hanging around in the campground. I should say also I worked in the visitor center in that GS-3 position for the first half of the year. They had some turnover in the ranger ranks, seasonal ranger ranks, law enforcement rangers, and they were shy a few positions. The situation with commissions wasn't then what it is now, and the chief ranger offered me a position as a Park Technician in the Ranger field for the second half of the year.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: So which meant a promotion from a 3 to a 4, meant more outdoor activities, and I would work on – well, the lowest rank for training for law enforcement at that time was 40 hours, and so the deal was they would provide 40 hours of in-service [training] as I worked the job through the winter and spring. So, I had moved from [working in] the visitor center for the first half of the year to being – I was actually the first woman who worked law enforcement at Joshua Tree—

Hannah Nyala West: At Joshua Tree.

Meg Weesner: And that would've been the spring of 1977.

Hannah Nyala West: Who was your chief ranger?

Meg Weesner: I have no idea. [Laughs.] I don't remember at all.

Hannah Nyala West: And so, you had in-service training. You didn't go away for some particular law enforcement training, but then you were put on the road and in the backcountry?

Meg Weesner: Not on the road. It was a little different back then. And I wasn't given a gun actually. You, this is really, you have to remember that the General Authorities bill was only passed in, was it '76?

Hannah Nyala West: I think so—

Meg Weesner: '77?

Hannah Nyala West: It was in the middle—

Meg Weesner: '77. So the law authorizing rangers to do law enforcement in parks and that kind of stuff had just passed, they hadn't figured out how to implement it, but they did know that rangers were gonna have to start having some training, and that there would be two levels, a 40-hour training and 400-hour training. And I think the chief ranger's idea is, "Wow, out of my five seasonals, I've just lost three and I've gotta get some more people out there." So what they did is they told me to patrol the campgrounds on Friday and Saturday nights, which was when everybody comes out from the city and goes camping, and look for people burning the native vegetation or starting a fire out of bounds or camping out of bounds, you know, just all the little things that happen in campgrounds. And the other three days of the week I would hike backcountry trails.

Hannah Nyala West: Nice.

Meg Weesner: Yeah. So, it was a great ranger job.

Hannah Nyala West: Yes.

Meg Weesner: It was law enforcement, but not heavy-duty law enforcement, [just the campground stuff] and I had radio to backup. and I lost a lot of weight because I was constantly walking, through the campground or in the backcountry every day. It was amazing.

Hannah Nyala West: And did you hike trails through the whole park? So down at Cottonwood—

Meg Weesner: When I was an interpreter, I did, 'cause I always liked to get out and go hiking [on my weekend]. I think as an employee I was assigned to the Lost Horse Ranger District, so it was mainly just the trails that are up on top.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. What was search and rescue like in law enforcement at that time?

Meg Weesner: It was pretty primitive. They did have one research scientist at the park at the time and, if I remember right, that was pretty, he was actually a big force in whatever search and rescue that they did. So, you know everybody'd just kinda change into their field uniforms and go look for someone, like that, it was pretty informal.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: Before they started the JOSAR thing—

Hannah Nyala West: Yes [laughs]. How long were you at Joshua Tree?

Meg Weesner: So that was a winter season. I probably started in, you know, September or something and worked through April or May. Then I was trying to figure out, "Okay, what do I do next summer?" And at that point it had been two years since I'd graduated from college, I'd worked in parks for those two years, in a total of three different national parks: Glen Canyon, Rocky Mountain, and Joshua Tree. Six actually different jobs, because I didn't tell you about after the lifeguard summer? Because I wasn't going back to school, I had extra time, and I spent a month working in the reception desk. Headquarters was out at Wahweap at that time, and I was working at the reception desk and radio dispatch and a little bit of secretarial work that the superintendent's secretary would assign me. So that was another job. So the lifeguard, the receptionist, the volunteer interpreter, the field ranger, you know, I'd done all these jobs, and I was really tired of moving to new places – you know, that learning curve that you have – and I said, "I'm gonna be really specific. I want one of two jobs at Glen Canyon," I think, and those are the only two I applied for. Maybe one was at Rocky and one was at Glen Canyon. And I said if I don't get either of the jobs, I'm not gonna be working, 'cause I don't want to have to go to a new park and have to learn new things. So, the job that I wanted at Glen Canyon was I wanted them to assign an interpretive position to Lee's Ferry. They didn't do that, so I lost out on that one. And I didn't get a hire. I wasn't hired for a job at Rocky either. So, I took [the] summer off and went, started out by going to Yosemite and climbed for five weeks.

Hannah Nyala West: Nice. [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: [Chuckles.] The climbing bum thing. So, some people that I had met in the campgrounds at Joshua Tree that were climbing were gonna head up to Yosemite, so I got involved with a group of people that were climbers and joined them at Yosemite.

Hannah Nyala West: Do you remember any of their names?

Meg Weesner: Uh uhm. And they weren't, they weren't important people [climbers].

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: But I do remember being there, living in Camp Four. I did have a chance to meet Warren Harding when I was there.

Hannah Nyala West: Oh.

Meg Weesner: And he was a bigtime climber at Yosemite, yeah. [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: And then even after five weeks that got a little old, so I took some little side trips and went to Pinnacles and Sequoia Kings Canyon and eventually up to Lassen and Redwoods and Crater Lake. Then got tired of that lifestyle, and I headed to Rocky where—I told you about this Dennis and Penny Knuckles?

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh.

Meg Weesner: So, they spent their summers at Rocky and their winters at Joshua Tree, so they were working their summer jobs at Rocky, and I went over and visited with them. So, I stayed at Rocky for about five weeks, just kinda hanging out. Hiked. Climbed Longs Peak.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh? Nice. So, a little bit different kind of climbing. What was the climbing culture like at Joshua Tree and Camp Four? Were people at that point in time were you aware of people very deliberately being in Joshua Tree in the wintertime and Camp Four in—

Meg Weesner: No. They didn't do that then. [At least not at Joshua Tree.]

Hannah Nyala West: Didn’t do it then.

Meg Weesner: No.

Hannah Nyala West: So, it was just random folks?

Meg Weesner: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: That had kinda come in from somewhere?

Meg Weesner: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: Was there any international flavor to it at that time?

Meg Weesner: No. No. [Not at Joshua Tree.]

Hannah Nyala West: Local kind of folks.

Hannah Nyala West: Yeah. I probably have the old guidebook from that time somewhere.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh? Cool.

Meg Weesner: Climbing routes at Joshua Tree.

Hannah Nyala West: So, then you went to Rocky Mountain and spent time, and then, then what?

Meg Weesner: Oh, so I was applying for jobs, deciding what I wanted to do next winter, looking for permanent jobs. Again, I'd only been out of college for two years, so at the time they had a federal entrance exam called the PACE. Professional and Career Enhancement, I think it stood for? P-A-C-E. And it was an aptitude knowledge kind of test, and it was for general employment in all kinds of agencies. They later determined that it discriminated against minorities, and they threw it out, but I took the PACE exam, I scored pretty well, I started getting a few inquiries about potential permanent employment. I accepted a job with the Forest Service at their Experiment Station. So, they had national forest management, but a whole other branch of the organization is these research stations, and I got hired as a technical publications editor at – at that time it was called the Intermountain [Forest and Range] Research Station, which was in Ogden, Utah.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: So, I moved there.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh.

Meg Weesner: So in today's terms – I mean, for one thing when you get out of college you'd like to work right away but given the Vietnam Vets that were comin' back and you know the baby boomers all trying to get into the work field at the same time – actually getting a permanent job two years after I got out of college was actually a pretty good deal. But it was in a very different kind of a setting. But, because of my journalism background and writing skills, I was qualified, and they selected me to be an editor.

Hannah Nyala West: So, what types of things did you edit?

Meg Weesner: [Laughs.] [Research papers.] Some of those were the ones were, ah, the ones that were the most challenging were entomology and genetics papers. So, you had, the Forest Service has research projects, so they have fields of study that they're sort of focused on in different parts of the country, and those were some that we worked on in the Intermountain area. But the ones that I really kinda learned the most from were more the rangeland papers, and at the time they were doing a lot about classifying land into what its management capabilities – like can it grow trees, is it good for cattle grazing, what kind of wildlife would be living here, and, you know, just a classification structure, and these were the publications that sort of set up these systems that then became – even by the time I went to graduate school, these papers that were similar to the ones that I edited were the ones that we were taking out into the field to use to classify landscapes, you know, so it was like that.

Hannah Nyala West: Wow.

Meg Weesner: And I sort of laughed later on when I took taxonomy because I knew the plant names of all the rangeland plants, and I knew the scientific names, and I knew how to spell the scientific names. I had no idea what the plant looked like! but I had edited the papers with all this stuff in there. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: So later I took taxonomy, and all I had to do was find out what the plant looked like, because I already knew the common and scientific names.

Hannah Nyala West: And finding the plants would require a little bit of hiking?

Meg Weesner: Yeah. Exactly.

Hannah Nyala West: So.

Hannah Nyala West: Very nice. That's a nice way of bringing it all together, bringing the skills and the interests together to provide you with an excellent set of skills for the National Park Service.

Meg Weesner: I hated that job actually.

Hannah Nyala West: Yeah. [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: The person who was in charge of the editorial office, I think, had just left to go somewhere else. So, there was a vacuum at first. And I was assigned as my mentor to a guy in Missoula, Montana. So, I was in Ogden, Utah, he was in Missoula, and he was the most senior editor. There was another editor that worked in Ogden, but she was really weird. They didn't want me, their trainee, first permanent job, you know, working for her. So, I would be on the phone to this guy in Missoula all the time, so he was training me. And it was very urban, and I was living in an apartment and commuting through the city and all, and it was really different from what I really wanted to do.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh.

Meg Weesner: And then about halfway through that year they hired a woman from the military to be head of the editorial shop. She had done some kind of civilian work for the military, I don't know what, and she was absolutely awful. Within a year after she got there, half of the staff of nine or so that worked for her had left, and they started a real big investigation, you know, and eventually pushed her somewhere else, because she really destroyed that office. And I was part of the brunt of, you know, getting some of that. So, I was looking for somewhere else to go, so I only stayed in that editor job for eleven months. So I start pulling on my journalism again, and I found out that in the Pacific Northwest, the Forest Service

really wanted people in public affairs positions, and so I started applying for some jobs, and I got hired for one that was a 7/9, which was the same grade as my editor job, a 7/9, and got hired for that in the town of John Day, Oregon, this headquarters for the Malheur National Forest. Want me to spell that?

Hannah Nyala West: M-A-L—

Meg Weesner: H-E-U-R.

Hannah Nyala West: H-E-U-R.

Meg Weesner: So French word, standing for 'bad luck'. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: Yes. [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: The 'bad hour' to be precise, but it's kind of for bad luck. Anyway, I worked there for quite a while, and enjoyed that. That's where I really got trained in how the Forest Service works, what's their mission, how does it compare to the Park Service mission, how do things work on the national forest. In the Pacific Northwest, they do a lot of logging, you know, so an operational kind of forest, but they also have wilderness areas. So, I would spend all of my weekends, you know, hiking in the summer and skiing in the winter, that kind of stuff.

Hannah Nyala West: Was that a time when it was beginning to heat up politically with the logging? Not quite?

Meg Weesner: Well, I was in eastern Oregon and that's ponderosa pine country, it's not where the [northern] spotted owl is. It was kinda controversial because they were really being pressured to "get out the cut," as they said, you know, harvest a lot of trees. And some of the foresters were going, "Well, we're just running out of places to find this many trees." You want so many million board feet and, you know, it's just not really good management and everything. So, it was somewhat controversial, but not nearly the way the Douglas-fir forests were with the northern spotted owl. So I was there for two or three years and just kinda said, 'Well, this is really nice, but with my degree in journalism and my background, this is the only job in the Forest Service that I'm qualified to do', this Public Information Specialist they called it at the time. They now call those jobs Public Affairs Specialists. But I decided it's time to go to graduate school. Get more educational background that's in the environmental field, which is really, you know, my passion, so that I'm not having an entire career as a public affairs specialist. I didn't really want that.

Hannah Nyala West: So, what'd you pick for grad school?

Meg Weesner: So, I kinda looked around and I wanted to focus on recreation, people recreation, and wilderness or wild and scenic rivers, things

like that, applied for a few schools, ended up going to University of Idaho, in Moscow, Idaho. And I got a leave of absence from my job, so I started in a January semester, was going to come back and work the next summer and then go back to school. It ended up taking me five semesters to get the background credit I needed and get enough for graduate work and finish all the school requirements, and I took the second summer off [my Forest Service job], but I was on leave of absence, so I still had the appointment as a permanent employee during that entire time. I paid my own way. I mean, it was just leave without pay, but I got to keep my status as a federal employee.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Interesting. Did you have to do a thesis in that, some type of project?

Meg Weesner: Yes. Yeah, I finished it ten years later. Typical. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: What did you do?

Meg Weesner: Well, I – the professor I worked with at University of Idaho, his name was Ed Krumpe [KRUM pee].

Hannah Nyala West: Krumpe.

Meg Weesner: Ed. K-R-U-M-P-E.

Hannah Nyala West: Ed. K-R-U-M-P-E. Okay. Krumpe.

Meg Weesner: Ed Krumpe. Yeah, he and a couple of the other professors had started a big project on the Flathead River in Montana, and both the Forest Service and the National Park Service right around Glacier National Park had gone together to fund this. There were three segments of the Flathead River that had been designated under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and they were doing both surveys of users and also surveys of campsite impacts in order to help those two agencies write a management plan for the various sections of the Flathead River. And everybody – the Ph.D. candidates, the professors, and everybody – was focused on the social science surveys that they had done in this really big database. But they had also floated all these rivers and done all these inventories of campsites, and they had no one to analyze the campsite data. So, I volunteered.

Hannah Nyala West: Interesting.

Meg Weesner: So, my master's thesis was more related to analyzing the data for campsite impacts.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. And what was your sample size over the period of how many years.

Meg Weesner: See, they had done the surveys, so I didn't get to go on the river. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: Oh no! [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: I wasn't there for that! So I just took, you know, all of these data sheets essentially – sheets of paper – and using the computer technology of the time, you know, entering the data into a spreadsheet and programming statistical packages to do the analysis and prepare the information for their final report back to the agencies.

Hannah Nyala West: Interesting. Interesting.

Meg Weesner: But to actually convert, to go from using that data and the preparation for their final report, which they got in, it actually took me the next, you know, six or seven years before I converted it into my thesis part of the study, which is kinda typical I guess. But I was really busy in those next few years.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. What were you up to?

Meg Weesner: So again I got a leave of absence from my job, so as soon as I was through with my [graduate school] credits and I got the material to the professors for their report and was finished with all of my classes, I went back to work for the Forest Service in the Public Affairs Specialist job that I had been in and said, "Okay, now I'm educated." Because the federal government doesn't care if you get that degree or not, for the most part, the post-graduate study, you know, the number of semester [hours] of post-graduate study is what they count for being eligible for a job in a different field, rather than the fact of whether you actually finish your degree. So, I started looking for other jobs, and I knew I wanted to get back to the Park Service. At this point I'd been out of the Park Service for about six years or so, maybe even more than that, but I knew I wanted to get back into the Park Service. One of the advantages of being in John Day, Oregon, it was the National Forest Headquarters, but down the street was the headquarters of the John Day [Fossil Beds] National Monument. So every Monday they would get the new information about jobs that were being posted [it wasn't on a computer database then], and I would walk down I think during my lunchbreak or after work, and go look through their list of jobs in the Park Service and start applying. And I applied for a job at Joshua Tree, a permanent job at Joshua Tree in the ranger field, and because somebody looked over those applications and who had been there before – at that point he was the assistant chief ranger and I don't remember his name, he was kind of a funny guy, Marty was his first name, but I don't remember his last name – Marty [Anderson]. But he said, "I know her, she'd be good." That's what he tells me he said. And so, I got hired, just because of the connections I'd had before. I think otherwise it would've been hard for me with four years of working

for the Forest Service and about three years of graduate school, to actually get back into the Park Service. So, it was through that little personal connection and experience.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. And so, you went back to Joshua Tree.

Meg Weesner: Yep.

Hannah Nyala West: Were you topside again?

Meg Weesner: Yes, I was. I was asked to work directly under the chief ranger, whose name I might remember eventually, but I can't think of it right now.

Hannah Nyala West: What year was that?

Meg Weesner: That would have been '84? It, fall of—

Hannah Nyala West: '83 – '84.[1]

Hannah Nyala West: Yep. Paul Henry wasn't there yet, was he?

Meg Weesner: It was him. Yep.

Hannah Nyala West: Paul was there? Okay.

Meg Weesner: Yes, it was him. He had just started, and so I was one of his new, you know, employees, and because I hadn't been to FLETC before and I hadn't had real seasonal law enforcement training, just that kind of thing that I was talking about before, before they really had the standards set up, I was asked to do fire management and backcountry [patrol]. And it was before they had fire, FIREPRO-funded positions and the way they do it now, with the model and for how many positions you need and that sort of stuff. Parks just had, if they had a fire issue, they had to figure out how to do it themselves. And actually, Paul was kinda funny because he saw that I worked for the Forest Service and he said, "Well, the Forest Service trains everybody in how to fight fires, so I'm sure she can do that." And it's true. They do. They train everybody in your basic fire operation and so I got hired to do that. Went to FLETC the following fall, graduated from FLETC. While I was at FLETC I applied for the natural resource trainee program. It was a two-year training program; I don't know if you ever heard about it? So, let me take a drink of water here. Need a break. Does this [recorder] go forever?

Hannah Nyala West: It does. We can—

Meg Weesner: [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: [After pause in recording] There we are.

[1] During transcript review, narrator added that she began this job in February of 1984.

Meg Weesner: Okay. So, in 1980, the Park Service issues a State of the Parks report. Reagan comes in, hires James Watt as his Secretary of Interior. All this time I'm working for the Forest Service. But eventually James Watt gets replaced by some people who are a little bit more moderate, and the Park Service gets to build on the State of the Parks report and decides "We need more trained resource professionals." And so, starting in 1982, they conceive of this two-year training program in which they're gonna hire a bunch of folks, train them specifically to be natural resource managers in parks, and assign them to different parks. So, the first class was '82 to '84. Another class was hired in '84 to '86, and the '84 class, they had specific jobs that you were applying for. They would be new jobs in the Park Service that hadn't existed before and you had to already be an employee in the National Park Service in order to apply, so I met the criteria. So, I actually applied while I was at FLETC. I had told the resource manager [at Joshua Tree, Bob Moon] and Paul Henry before I left for FLETC. I told them that that opportunity was coming up and that I was planning to apply for it, and the resource manager guy, he had actually given me a bit of advice and Paul didn't seem to care. And so, I applied while I was at FLETC, and I was actually offered a position while I was at FLETC. And this was kind of interesting because I told you about the Flathead River. It comes back to the river thing. So, they had 24 positions, if I remember right, 23–24, and they were at specific parks, and they were hiring people that would be good at those parks. And the one I was selected for was at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, because I'd done work related to the Flathead River when I'd been in graduate school, and they wanted somebody to help with the river management plan at Delaware Water Gap. Very interesting, all kind of comes together.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh, it does. All of these threads of connection that seem so disparate.

Meg Weesner: Yeah. And maybe most people's careers are like that, I don't know. But there were a couple other things I didn't actually mention. So, I'd finished, when I'd finished graduate school and gone back to the Forest Service, I didn't really want to go back and do all the same job. The Forest Supervisor had changed. He didn't really [see] much value in having a Public Affairs Specialist there, so he didn't really want to use me, and my direct boss was kind of an alcoholic who slept most of the time and not someone you'd really learn a lot from, so I was looking for different kind of detail opportunities. You might remember Mount Saint Helens erupted in 1980 and by 1983, the summer I was doing this, the Forest Service had started interpreting that site, although it wasn't all opened up yet. You couldn't go out there. They hadn't built their permanent visitor center. But I did do a two-week detail at the Mount Saint

Helens [temporary] Visitor Center, and a little later the Forest Service office on the Flathead River was writing their river management plan using the data that my professor and I had prepared, and I'm a writer, and I got hired on a detail [to write the River Management Plan for the Flathead River], lasted about ten weeks, and lived in West Glacier – not West Glacier, a little west of there [Hungry Horse, Montana] – but got to write their river management plan for the Flathead National Forest.

Hannah Nyala West: Nice. Very nice, and to be able to do it onsite and without all the pressure of job duties.

Meg Weesner: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: Excellent!

Meg Weesner: Yeah, so it wasn't just the university thing, but the university thing led to the Forest Service detail, which then [after I got into] the National Park Service led to my being picked for a ranger [resource management trainee] job at Delaware Water Gap, to do something with the Delaware River.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh.

Meg Weesner: That was kinda cool.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. So as a resource management person at Delaware Water Gap, what were your primary duties? What did you do there?

Meg Weesner: Well, the way this [training] program was structured, for two years you were a trainee. And they designed a program that involved us traveling to universities all over the country and studying thirteen different fields if I remember correctly. So out of the first year, we were traveling and located at a university generally for 25 weeks out of that first year. So, then you add a little bit of annual leave onto that and a little bit of home study, so my contributions to Delaware Water Gap really weren't that great. My boss there – her name was Beth Johnson, typical spelling – and she's now, she's assistant to – a wait a second, let me think about this – I think she's Deputy Associate Director for Natural Resource [Programs] in Washington. So yeah, she went around to different places. But anyway, so she was my onsite mentor, but my actual supervisor for all of us trainees, the 23 of us were actually supervised by a guy in the Washington office, whose name was Bill Walker. He was the supervisor of – there ended up being six of these trainee classes. I was in the second one, and there ended up being six of them. He supervised [classes] number two through number six.

Hannah Nyala West: Six two-year cohorts?

Meg Weesner: Mmhm.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: Yes. So we went to Texas A&M to study wildlife, we went to UC Davis, we went to Rutgers University to study coastal processes, we spent some time at Clemson, we spent time at Oregon State, Colorado State to do water, we did mining at Colorado School of Mines. We did all kinds of stuff. At a total of 33 weeks of away travel during that two years. The first year was 25 weeks and there was an additional eight weeks.

Hannah Nyala West: So, you would go for a few weeks. Did you take courses that were already underway or did they tailor courses for you?

Meg Weesner: No, they tailored courses for us, taught by professors and people that they would bring in.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. Huh. That was a big undertaking.

Meg Weesner: Yeah. So, by the time, you know, you're talking 1980 dollars, but the training cost for each of those trainees ended up being about $50,000. And it was really nice. The second class, that I was in, we had very little turnover. Almost all 23 of those people had full careers and are still having them in the agency. One got married and went to Sweden, you know, somebody else did [transfer to a different agency], you know, just a little bit of taper off, but that $50,000 (because they hired people who were already in the Park Service), you know, the $50,000 that they invested in training each of us, pretty much everybody got to be a division chief in natural resources, and several of my classmates are superintendents now. Jon Jarvis was in training class number one.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. And they came across with a really broad-based but pretty in-depth understanding of critical issues?

Meg Weesner: Right.

Hannah Nyala West: Excellent. I don't suppose there's anything like that these days?

Meg Weesner: It got changed a little bit, yeah. So but it was that State of the Parks report in 1980 that laid the groundwork for that, you know, recognizing that we just don't have the knowledge base that we need out in parks in order to manage the natural resources responsibly, and so one of the recommendations in that report was to train a cadre of people so that each park that had natural resources would have a specialist located in that park. I mean, the original goal, of course, was to just have one, and that [eventually] grew to be larger.

Hannah Nyala West: And would you say that that training course – that along with your own backgrounds – then gave you the ability to be able to, very broad-based, be able to understand the science of different land units in a pretty deep way? Contractual work etcetera, when everything went to contracts, I mean, being able to assess the validity of people who are—

Meg Weesner: Yeah. I mean, you're covering the whole gamut of things [natural resource disciplines]. I mean, most people only specialized in wildlife or range management or even birds or mammals or whatever. But because that [training] was broad-based, it gave us a little bit of a taste for everything, so that we were very broad-based and could build on whatever specialty that we had. My specialty was a little unusual, because of my master's work, it was actually wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, you know, was kind of my specialty, and people using the landscape, you know, and how to manage people so that they are satisfied with their experience, provide opportunities for them, so that they understand and appreciate, you know, the nature that they're seeing and treat it respectfully, you know, that kind of stuff.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. And gave you access to a really good cadre of people who had specialties in other areas in case you needed them.

Meg Weesner: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: That's excellent. That's really interesting. I've never heard of that.

Meg Weesner: Yeah. So that trainee program – the first class was about 36 [trainees], but the rest of 'em were more like 20 to 24. But six classes, that would've trained, you know, 140 people, 130–140 people, and that group of people that did that training, they've actually done a little tracking, you know, to see what happened, and they all became division chiefs and some superintendents. The first class was a little different. The first class they thought that the Park Service didn't have people who would be qualified for those kinds of positions, and they hired from the outside, and they had a lot more turnover. Those people didn't stay with the Park Service. And I don't know whether they did it on purpose, but for whatever reason, but from the second class on, they hired people who were already in the National Park system, and they had more allegiance to the agency than they did to, say, biology, you know, so they stuck with it [the NPS].

Hannah Nyala West: Huh. Interesting. So where did that lead?

Meg Weesner: Let's see. So where am I now. So, in the class that I was in, we were to go to one place as a training park, to be assigned for two years, and then we were assigned to a second place, which would be our destination park. My destination park was supposed to be Upper Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River, but that park was really controversial when they got started. They weren't allowed to purchase any land, but they were supposed to work cooperatively with all of the communities and neighbors and townships to protect a river resource. And they were having very contentious hearings, and somebody somewhere said, "This is no place to send a trainee," [chuckles] you know! And so, I ended up

going to New River Gorge National River instead, in West Virginia. So, the superintendent who was down there, his name was Jim Carrico, the founding super – let's see if I can spell that right. C-A-R-R-I-C-O.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: I think. His daughter is now superintendent of Great Sand Dunes. Trouble spelling it. Same name. In case I haven't spelled it right. [He was the first superintendent at New River Gorge, and this always impressed me because] the first superintendent, you know, they get a piece of legislation from Congress, they get a map, and they drive there and check into the Holiday Inn. And it [the enabling legislation] said, "Thou shalt establish a national park," and it's all up to them [the first superintendent] to figure it out, you know. 'Well, I guess I need to buy a house, we need an office, you know, maybe I need a chief ranger and a secretary', you know, whatever, and they make it up. And they need to go in and make the community [appreciate and accept the park] – in this case it's not federal land already – eventually they're told to buy land, but they have to get money through Congress first and then go buy the land and so, by that time [by the time I got to New River] he had already started to establish, you know, his program there to start that national river. But I was working – another guy was the head natural resource person [Dave Reynolds] there and I was hired as an assistant and did that for about a year, and then, when he moved on, I applied for his job and was selected. So, I got a promotion from the 9 assistant to the level, to the GS-11 full performance level.

Hannah Nyala West: Excellent. What were your primary responsibilities then?

Meg Weesner: Whatever came along. You know, I hardly remember, it seems so long ago. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: I, you know, one of the things that I remember [is] doing projects – well, a couple projects I can talk about that I did. One was there's a lot of abandoned coal mines in that country, and as we would purchase land some of it came with the remnants of a coal mine, and sometimes there were structures that might be or might not be historically significant and mines that were probably dangerous, because not much had been done to close them up. Coal mining is regulated under the Surface Mining Law, and that law provides some funds for rehabbing abandoned mines, which hard-rock mining like gold and silver don't have, but coal mining did because of that other law that was passed. And eventually the Park Service worked with the Office of Surface Mining [Reclamation and Enforcement] and created a project to, I think first they pumped a

million dollars into the three park units, maybe five park units, I'm a little fuzzy on that, that had some pretty substantial [abandoned] coal mining problems, and so I was kinda new at this, but I was told, "Okay, New River has some of the biggest problems of any of the parks on lands that we had just purchased, and you need to work with this engineer guy over here [who works with OSM] and, you know, develop a plan to close these mines safely and allow for bat passage and all that kind of stuff." And I learned to read blueprints then, because the engineer would draw up plans for, you know, how they were going to close some of the mines by backfilling or build a bat gate in them if [needed], you know, to allow flow of air and the bats. There might've been a high wall or sort of [where they had] dug-out material [under] a surface mining strategy that somebody could be riding an ATV over the top and fall off this wall, yeah, so they had to fix all that stuff. So that was pretty exciting.

Meg Weesner: And it included, one day, there was some kind of a meeting in the National Park Service Director's office with the Office of Surface Mining to, maybe to sign the agreement where OSM would be giving the National Park Service this million dollars to get started on some of these [reclamation] projects. And I was asked to go there. It's the only time I've ever flown in an airplane without a suitcase, because I was going for the day literally, from Charleston, West Virginia to Washington, DC, do a few things, come back. That was it.

Hannah Nyala West: That's a long way from Northwestern.

Meg Weesner: Yes.

Hannah Nyala West: You took that journalism degree and put it to work in the world. [laughs.]

Meg Weesner: Yeah. [Chuckles.] So, the other project I'll tell you about is [coke ovens]. The coal that they had in West Virginia was very low-Sulphur coal, and they used it to make coke, which was used in the steel industry. So coke would produce a really hot fire and in the steel mills they would put in the iron ore that they brought in from Minnesota, you know, and the coal that they brought in by rail up into the Pittsburgh area, and they made steel. But the coal from the New River area was very low Sulphur and so they had these coke ovens, in which they would do this [turn coal into coke]. And they would use, I think it's a matter of putting the coal in and a bunch of wood and that's a process where they heat it up really hot, and the coal forms coke instead. I'm not a chemist, I'm not sure exactly how all that works. But they had some beautiful structures that these Italian stonemasons who had immigrated about that time had developed, and [the coke ovens] were getting all overgrown with

trees and all this kind of stuff. Well, New River had identified that certain ones of these [ovens] that were really nice, they wanted to preserve those, so I was put in charge of a project to cut the trees down, 'cause the tree roots were getting into the stonework on the edge of the coke ovens and destroying them. So, I didn't know how to use a chainsaw. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: But anyway, you know, I had a couple maintenance guys at my disposal and some other folks and, you know, we'd kinda go out there and trim the trees off the coke ovens.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. Interesting. Did you have any mentors during that period that were particularly helpful to you or?

Meg Weesner: Well, when I got to – I mentioned that at New River Gorge they had another person who was doing natural resources and I was hired in to assist him, later got his job – but he was probably the first supervisor I had who I felt I could really learn something from. I had a lot of really bad supervisors. And this guy was Dave Reynolds, I believe he still works in the Northeast Regional Office in Philadelphia, so he was really good to work with.

Hannah Nyala West: Did you ever find yourself wishing that people had shared more with you or had helped guide you and you might've been able to be more comfortable in the role? Or did you just feel comfortable with it and you were fine?

Meg Weesner: I had the weirdest career. Of my permanent jobs – many of them, actually up until the last one [two] – all my other permanent jobs I was the first person to be hired into that job, so I didn't have any guidelines to go on, had to make it up myself. And when I left to go do some other job, they chose not to fill the job behind me. What does that mean?! [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] That doesn't sound like a bureaucratic culture, I will have to say. Doesn't sound like a bureaucracy.

Meg Weesner: Oh, so funny. So, until I, well, when I got that guy's job at New River Gorge, that was the first one that'd been hired for that somebody else had actually done first, so I had something to go on.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. So, before that you were just having to wing it.

Meg Weesner: Yeah, first person that was ever hired into those jobs, so I got to create it myself. There's another interesting thing that happened along the line. There was a publication called *Women in Natural Resources*. Did you know it?

Hannah Nyala West: I do. I've seen an old copy of it.

Meg Weesner: Yeah. It was published out of University of Idaho, so when I went there, I knew some of the female professors who were sort of instrumental in starting that, because it was a barrier for women to start to get into forestry and wildlife management, some of those fields. And somewhere along the line I got interviewed for some little survey they were doing, and one of the questions they asked me was 'If you look back ten years and think about what you thought [at that time] you would be doing now, how does what you thought ten years ago match what you're actually doing?' And I thought about it. It was, at that point it was ten years after my first summer job as a lifeguard, and I thought back and I go, "You know what? I am doing exactly the job that I had wanted to do then." So, I had been a lifeguard and I'd done this reception job, and the person working in the next room was the first natural resource manager at Glen Canyon. His name was Bill Supernaugh, he was a very famous guy. And I used to, when I had a free moment, I used to love to go next door and talk to Bill, because that natural resource field just attracted me. Now I had a degree in journalism, I wanted to write for a magazine, you know, and I'd been a lifeguard and swim coach, so I don't think I could've said how I'd get there, but I liked talking to him, I liked what he did, and I sort of must've had this kernel in the back of my mind that I wanted to be a natural resource manager. So then come back to '86 or something when I was interviewed for this, and I go, you know what, I have a job as a natural resource manager." I had no idea that's where I was going, you know, as I took each step along the way, but I actually got to where I wanted to go. Even though I hadn't conceived of the idea totally.

Hannah Nyala West: Well the idea it seems to me would not have existed in the form that you occupied it in ten years later, ten years earlier. So, it'd become a little bit different?

Meg Weesner: No. Bill Supernaugh was the first resource manager that Glen Canyon had had. And at that time, they thought, "Oh we'll just get one biologist here. They can handle it all." You know, and now we realize the scope of the job, you know, and it takes a whole fleet of people to do it. But, you know, I wanted that job as a natural resource manager at a park. Of course, there weren't very many women at the time doing it, and I didn't have the education at the time, you know, but somewhere along the way, the decisions that I made and the path that I followed, you know, led me into the job that I'd sort of admired so much.

Hannah Nyala West: With really good preparation, some of it provided by the agency, too.

Meg Weesner: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: That's excellent.

Meg Weesner: Not as strong in science as some people have, because my master's degree was more of a social science field rather than a hard science science.

Hannah Nyala West: Do you see the social sciences being able to play more of a role in the agency than they do now? Or where's the disconnect with that, between what's happening in the social sciences out in the academy and what's needed in an agency like the Park Service, which has to meet and greet and deal with human beings and animals?

Meg Weesner: Yeah. I've never understood why social science doesn't have more emphasis in national parks, but it never has. Even though, and you say you work in parks now?

Hannah Nyala West: I did until about a month ago, lost the funding.

Meg Weesner: So, you may have known of Gary Machlis?

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Meg Weesner: He was on my master's committee at University of Idaho. And he was a Park Service employee at that time, and of course now he's the science advisor to the director, I think, something like that. You know, and even with his emphasis there, I mean, everybody seems content just to have Gary there, you know, as a social scientist who studied at the Yale Forest School, but always on the social science end of it. But even with that it just hasn't really caught on as a funding mechanism. I mean there's no, of all the different pots of money that you can go after to fund projects and research and that kind of stuff, [there's] none of them targeted to doing social science. Never has been.

Hannah Nyala West: I was doing for the last couple of years an ethnographic study with fourteen tribes associated with Joshua Tree, and one of the things that I was surprised by was that. The disconnect between understanding what it is that you have to do as a social scientist as opposed to a physical scientist. It was an interesting, interesting disjuncture there. So, huh.

Meg Weesner: That'd be a better question to ask Gary. He always has good answers.

Hannah Nyala West: It seems to me that you've described a culture of an agency that's actually changing significantly and taking some risks on these cohorts of trainees, etcetera, putting substantial resources to work to try to take new directions in particular areas where they're perceived they need to work. Are there parts of the culture now that might need to be changed or broadened or looked at with those kinds of approaches?

Meg Weesner: Well, in retrospect? I think it was a mistake to stop the [natural resource trainee] program when they did. I was part of developing the next generation of courses, but it never worked out very well, the organization. It was replaced by an initiative they called 'professionalization' where they were trying to bring more professional resource managers into parks, and rather than train people at the GS-7/9 level, they wanted to bring people in who already knew the science and train them about the agency. So, they developed a five-week training program that would focus on taking somebody who already has a master's degree in biology and teach them about park management, and they might've done a couple of courses in that. But I think training budgets were really strained at the time and stuff, and so in the long run by giving up that trainee program, they never successfully replaced it with anything else. So they've managed to muddle through, but I can't, of course, the – what's it called? – Protecting Nature in the National Parks book by Dick Sellers, yes, Protecting Nature in the National Parks by Dick Sellers was a unbelievable gift.[2] Similar kinds of works had been [done] and reports had been generated for 20, 25 years. None of them had taken hold and, for whatever reason, his book *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, you know, took hold and became a Bible and the whole Natural Resource Challenge, you know, came as a result of that, and all that kind of stuff, so that was really a watershed event.

Hannah Nyala West: Its moment had come or something? Or just the right people were there and in place to do that?

Meg Weesner: Yeah. Bob Krumenaker's the guy you should talk to about that, 'cause he was on, he did a detail in Washington office working very closely with Dick and some other folks to actually create and develop the Natural Resource Challenge.

Hannah Nyala West: Nice. It's definitely been really effective, that challenge has.

Meg Weesner: Yeah. Some places more than others. Saguaro, for whatever reason, was kind of in this gap and didn't end up benefitting very much.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. So where did you go from there then?

Meg Weesner: Mm, let me see, so I think I ended up kind of at New River, I worked there for about four and a half years. Oh, somewhere in there you can kinda figure out that I was doing all these trainings, you know, the details with the Forest Service, the new job at Joshua Tree law enforcement training, then the Resource Management trainee program, then I finally settle at Delaware –

[2] Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

excuse me – at New River Gorge, I'm going, "You know, I've gotta finish that thesis for my master's degree." [Laughs.] So I was on the ten-year plan and, at the time I started, actually you were allowed ten years to finish your thesis, and I sort of made that, you know, ten-year period, 'cause I was really tired of telling people, "Well I studied for a master's degree," and I couldn't say, I have a master's degree. So, I really did want to finish it [the thesis and master's degree], and I did! So I finally finished it, and I had told myself that I would not apply for any more jobs until I finished that, because my life right afterwards [after completing the coursework] had just been too hectic to work on a thesis, so I was working at New River and eventually made time to do the thesis work, and soon as I got the thesis [done, I] started applying for a new job, thinking it would take me two or three years. Shoot, I was offered the second job I applied for, for whatever reason, and it was the chief of science and resources management at Saguaro National Park.

Hannah Nyala West: Saguaro.

Meg Weesner: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: And part of that, that was kind of interesting, too, you've heard of the George Wright Society and the biennial conferences they have? Well, in about 1988 there was one in Tucson, and I'd gone on the field trip, and the guy who was the superintendent [Bill Paleck] had talked to the field trip about a bunch of his different, you know, kinds of philosophies about how to protect the park against growing urban city, you know, all this kind of stuff. And because I knew that, I answered interview questions when they interviewed me for the position, so I was, you know, "I really liked what you said about working with NGOs in protecting lands that are right next to parks so that you have a buffer." Anyway, I just used those kinds of terminology. I think maybe that made a difference because I had a little bit of an insight into the way he thought and some of the issues that were going on in the park, so he selected me for the job.

Hannah Nyala West: So how did you find Saguaro, coming from so many river—

Meg Weesner: Yeah, it was funny because I'd been dealing with water and mining, and I got to Saguaro and started dealing with air and animals, so it was very different. But that training in the Resource Trainee program, I mean, we had a week of air and we had a week of, you know, it covered the whole gamut, so you have the basics and you have a little, you know, some of the connections that you need, you know what [the] organization [is], what part of the National Park Service to go to. Oh, there's an Air Resource office

that works out of Denver, and there's a Water Resource office that works out of Fort Collins and, you know, those kinds of things.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. Excellent. And how big was your staff there? You were the chief?

Meg Weesner: Yeah, I was hired for the chief, so we started, I had a SCEP student who was just finishing her master's degree and was about to convert to fulltime. A permanent position. And I had a technician who was half funded by the air quality division to run the air quality equipment that we had going on there and the other half by the park. And normally a lot of people move after four or five years, and this was a personal thing, but I'd been there about four to five years and my brother moved to Tucson, worked at a major employer, Raytheon, that does missile defense industries. So, I said, "Well, you know, I'm not gonna apply for another job right now, because my brother just moved to town," which is cool. And then a couple years after that, he had a daughter and then he had a son, and so pretty soon my brother and his wife had two kids and we were all there in Tucson together, and I never ended up leaving. So, I just stayed, because there were family connections, the job was good, the superintendents have always been really good there, and I just stayed.

Hannah Nyala West: I was going to ask about that, about family, because that's one of the things that often plays a pretty big role in Park Service careers and being able to live in some of the remote places that people go and that sort of thing. So, your family joined you in Saguaro.

Meg Weesner: Mmhm. And I have a couple more distant cousins that live in Tucson as well, so it sets some little connections there. You know, and sometimes I would think, "Well, gee, maybe it would've been nice to be a superintendent somewhere," and I like to tell myself that I probably could've gotten a superintendency, but I chose to quit moving around and develop some roots there.

Hannah Nyala West: Over the course of your career, how did you see the management challenges facing the agency change over time? What were some of the big changes that you saw over time? In terms of managing lands and new approaches to land management?

Meg Weesner: Well, you know, when you start out you don't, you're not working in the realm where you're doing that. You're just talking to the visitor, pulling exotic plants or something, I don't know. But by the time I got to Saguaro – and one of the things that really attracted me to that – was what the superintendent, his name was Bill Paleck.

Hannah Nyala West: Paleck?

Meg Weesner: Yes. P-A-L-E-C-K. He went on to North Cascades after that, he's retired from there. But he was really an innovator, and that was, hearing that when I attended the George Wright Society meeting, and being able to be part of that was kind of what intrigued me about Saguaro anyway, so I don't know that I could say much about changes up to that point, because I wasn't really in a position up to that point to deal with that much and different kind of issues, but at Saguaro, the things that impressed me were you had a town [Tucson] that was just growing like gangbusters, still is sort of, and you've got Saguaro National Park – there's a unit on the east side and a unit on the west side – and the National Forest is on the north side, and so the town is just filling in the basin in between and it was coming ever and ever closer to the park. So a lot of parks, you can, well first of all they're buffered by national forest lands, so those aren't ever going to be developed intensively, so it's kind of a rare situation where you've actually got urban expansion that's coming right up to the boundary of the park. And I was very impressed by his ways of addressing that and figuring out how we're going to manage it. And so, one reaction is always "Oh my gosh! This piece of land is threatened, it's right next to the park, we need to buy it and protect it." Okay, so you could buy that one eventually, for millions and millions of dollars. And then it would be the next one, you know, and then the next one? Well, you know, there's only so much space and eventually the urban development and the protected area or parklands are gonna meet, and so rather than react to that way, he [Superintendent Paleck] had the philosophy of "Let's manage that interface. We need to move to the next step and look at managing where the juncture comes together." Now this never happened in Phoenix. If you drive through Phoenix, they've got their city parks or county parks or whatever, and they've got dense subdivisions right up to the boundary and then all of a sudden, you've got this desert, and it's just right there. Tucson is not like that. Partly because of Bill Paleck's, you know, foresight and some of the other people he was working with at the time, that you have this transition from dense housing development to sort of rural, you know, suburban ranch houses on like three-acre properties and no commercial development at all near any of these protected areas, parks or national forests. So, you've got this transition through a sort of semi-rural landscape until you get to the parklands and the wilderness area, and it's really a different kind of thing.

Meg Weesner: Now you're still, because there are houses pretty close, there are some species that are blinking out, the mule deer in Saguaro just didn't have enough lower-elevation habitat in the surveys that we were doing there, ah, just, it was really hard to find any mule deer. But the whitetails that were up on top of the mountain were

actually moving down and occupying habitats that would traditionally have been mule deer habitat. So, you know, javelina don't too often run around neighborhoods. There's some of the lizard species, Gila monsters, desert tortoise, you know, some of the sensitive species that [are disappearing] a little bit, but it's still a lot better than most times when you don't manage that boundary. Well, just to go a little bit further, you had a couple of – so, in managing the boundary, well, how do you do that? So, this was started by a developer who] had control of about a thousand acres [actually several thousand acres] right on the south boundary of the park, had a five-mile common boundary with the park. And he submitted a proposal that would build four resorts and 25,000 homes on that property. So that was the situation that presented itself, and that's when Bill Paleck started talkin' to people. And, of course, environmentalists in Tucson were outraged and all this kind of stuff. So, they started lookin' at it, doing surveys of the property and everything, and to try and make a long story short, they identified some key habitat areas. So, getting from what the old park boundary was down to the stream and the riparian zone was really important. That was a critical natural resource. And so the developer agreed to pull back the scale, size, and scope of what they were gonna be developing, identified what the key natural habitats were that were important to protect, and scaled it back to two resorts, restored streambed on this creek that ran through the property, and more like 8,000 to 10,000 houses instead of 25,000 houses. And the bill passed Congress in 1991 with support on the conservation side and the developer's side – everybody involved supported this, no controversy whatsoever – to add 4,000 acres to the national park, because the inventories had been done, they knew what the critical habitat values to be added to the park were. So, there's still a two-mile common boundary between this developer's land and the park, but the three miles that were the most important from an ecological point of view were protected into the park, and over the years they got land acquisition money and were able to purchase those lands. So that's kind of the legacy I've been working at, you know, that was part of what was set up to begin with, and the twenty years that I worked there were sort of figuring out what to do with these expansion lands, [protecting them], figuring out what to do with these expansion lands as well, figuring out what else needed to go on in that interface between the new lands and the old ones.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. So, you probably brought your social science background into how you worked with people and everything?

Meg Weesner: [Chuckles.] Not really.

Hannah Nyala West: It didn't?

Meg Weesner: No.

Hannah Nyala West: Interesting.

Meg Weesner: Political at that point, not social. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: But it actually, his idea was more than just identify the critical habitats and see if you can get that added to the park.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Meg Weesner: He also wanted the people who live in that subdivision to know more and appreciate the park, because they're gonna be the neighbors. Now the resorts have never been built to this day, and there are two housing developments in there, but they're not very dense. But what he set up was he founded an NGO, nonprofit, called the Rincon Institute, you may have heard of the Sonoran Institute which is kinda related.[3] But the Rincon Institute actually came first, and the Rincon Institute is focused just on this valley, this piece of land where the controversy developed. And the key is to make this perpetual. So, the Rincon Institute had three missions. Let's see if I can remember them. Managing the open space that's gonna be in this development, cause they're gonna cluster the housing and leave large open tracts. So, the Rincon Institute was charged with managing the open space, developing education programs for the homeowners and the visitors to the resorts, and might have been restoring the creek, doing science to restore the creek, something like that. Okay, great, you've got an NGO, you've got a mission, it's a – but you need to fund it. So, it's written into the rezoning for those properties that every time they sell a house – not just the first time, but every time they sell a house – in that whole area, a hundred dollars will go into an endowment for the Rincon Institute. If they ever build the resorts – they probably will sometime – fifty cents' bed tax for every night people stay in the resort will go to fund the Rincon Institute.

Hannah Nyala West: That's an incredible feat—

Meg Weesner: It is.

Hannah Nyala West: —and for a federal employee to be able to put something like that—

Meg Weesner: It was. To work together with other partners in a community—

Hannah Nyala West: That story needs to be told. I hope somebody is writing—

Meg Weesner: I tell it every chance I get— [Laughs.]

[3] During transcript review, narrator added "Actually, he encouraged others to found the NGO rather than founding it himself."

Hannah Nyala West: A book or magazine article! [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: So anyway, you know, that was one of the things that intrigued me that I heard him say early on and that I was kind of able to echo back when he interviewed me for the job, and he – I only worked for him for about two years, maybe even less before he left, and there was a whole, you know, I've worked for four other superintendents there – but that sort of formed the foundation for how Saguaro is working with the community next to it, because as somebody once said, you know, "As goes Saguaro, so go all parks in the future." Because these communities are going to be more and more living right next door. And Saguaro has been a leader in figuring out good ways to do that.

Hannah Nyala West: That's interesting. I'd like to see that story get out to more people, 'cause that's very inspiring and heartening. I've been to Saguaro, I know about the Sonoran Institute, you know, I've paid a little attention, but I had no idea that the Park Service and one of their people would've been involved in managing those relationships with that level of skill, to be able to get something really viable.

Meg Weesner: Yeah. So the guy that got hired to be the executive director of the Rincon Institute to start with, he was a little confined by just having it deal with that one little area, and he wanted to take the same concept broader, so that's why he started the Sonoran Institute, which has a broader mission all over the west, looking at gateway communities next to them and the protected areas next to them.

Hannah Nyala West: Hm. Interesting. That's just fascinating. We are almost out of time.

Meg Weesner: [Chuckles.] We haven't talked about ANPR.

Hannah Nyala West: I know – we haven't gotten to ANPR. Well, one of the things that we hope to be able to do is have follow-up interviews, and I think that a follow-up focused interview on your time with ANPR and Ranger Rendezvous, etcetera, would be really worth doing, if you would be interested in that, either in person or over the phone, because five minutes is not enough time for that. [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: And I don't want to keep you away from the reception.

Meg Weesner: We started kinda late, didn't we?

Hannah Nyala West: We did. We started about ten minutes late, but I was wondering if you have any specific kind of, not parting advice 'cause obviously you're staying involved with the organization, but would you have any advice for people who are coming in at this point, into the agency, for resource managers, superintendents, etcetera, given your range of experience, any advice?

Meg Weesner: No. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: None. [Laughs.]

Meg Weesner: But I do have a couple more stories I want to tell.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay, good! Let's have that then.

Meg Weesner: So, you asked about the staff that I had at Saguaro to start with. I want to tell you the staff that I had at the end. Now I can't say that I really did all of this, because they did some of it themselves – the people that I hired – but at the end, it was me as the division chief, five professional positions underneath me, two permanent technician positions, and as many as thirty seasonals.

Hannah Nyala West: Wow.

Meg Weesner: So, in a twenty-year period, I mean, that program really grew in responding to the various challenges.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. And you were able – you had to have played a huge role.

Meg Weesner: [Laughs.] I just hired the right ones to begin with, and then they did most of the work.

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] In securing the kind of funding that would allow that to be possible?

Meg Weesner: Yeah. So, you know, at the end I had a wildlife person, I had a plant person who worked mostly on exotic plant removal, a GIS position, a compliance and other kind of special projects position, and I'm missing somebody. Through kind of a quirk we ended up getting a cultural resource specialist, too. That happened because the Western Archaeological [and Conservation] Center, which was in Tucson, was sort of downsized and everybody moved to Santa Fe and some people didn't want to move to Santa Fe, and so they worked out a deal where one of 'em stayed and now works at Saguaro. So, we had a cultural resource person for the first time, too.

Hannah Nyala West: Hm.

Meg Weesner: So that went through a few iterations. And the other thing that I'm really proud of, and, again most of my staff helped do this, I just opened the doors to allow it to happen but they have always recognized that University of Arizona being right there in Tucson is an incredible resource for helping Saguaro, as well as working with young people to get them in [to working with the National Park Service], and it was just really thrilling that I was able to hire some people who liked doing that kind of stuff, and we always had young people around. Interns, volunteers – hire 'em on for a two-month assignment to do some project or, you know, you get a little money for a research project from Western National Parks

Association, and you hire one of 'em to, you know, to get seed money that helps them start their master's project or something like that. But all these people, you know, I mean, a whole slew of young professionals just coming out of school and grad school, had worked at Saguaro for a little while and might've gotten a job there or might've gotten a job at a different park, but, you know, you were converting young people studying natural resource management into Park Service employees, and that was really cool.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. Excellent.

Meg Weesner: Just to take advantage of being right there, you know, using a lot of STEP and SCEP appointments. So, we would select the employee. Now they've changed all that to something new that they don't even know yet, but that was kinda neat to be a part of that. And then one of my employees started just the best program in the world. I think it was National Park Foundation was doing some grants for, wow, the names just escape me, but – it's not Parks as Classrooms but it's something like that [Youth in Parks]. And he developed this scheme where he wanted summer interns, he wanted eight summer interns to work for him, and he didn't have the time to do all of, to manage it himself, so he got two at each grade level. He got two GS-5s, who were graduate students. He got two GS-4s, who were undergraduate students, you know, upperclassmen. He got two GS-3s, who were either high school seniors or high school graduates. This doesn't sound right. There were eight positions, and I'm only coming up with six, so something's wrong, but anyway he had the whole graduate school – oh no, there were upperclassmen and underclassmen. So, the GS-3s were underclassmen. The high school – either the ones just out of high school or starting their senior year, if they were already 18 – were GS-2s. And so, he would have this team of eight young people working every summer, and he's now continued it about three or four years. And, you know, some of them, they do it the first year, then they come back at the next higher grade the next year. But to actually develop a program where you're hiring GS-2s, who are just out of high school, to actually go out with biologists and do work in the field and get a taste for it – you know, it's really pretty amazing.

Hannah Nyala West: Yeah. That's really innovative. That's a heartening thing to hear.

Meg Weesner: So, I just love to be a part of those kinds of things.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. Well it sounds like you excelled at making the opportunities available for people, getting the right people in and then making opportunities available and letting them—

Meg Weesner: Sometimes it took a little twisting the arm of the superintendent, you know. And then just maintaining all those linkages with the other professionals in the Tucson area and with university professors and keeping all those channels of communication open.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Excellent. So, does, I mean, you have so many things to choose from to be your proudest accomplishment while you were in the National Park Service, but what would be the one that you are proudest of?

Meg Weesner: I can't think of any right now. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] Just your career, of being able to put it together. Do you have any thoughts on the future of the agency?

Meg Weesner: Well, I, you know, I'm tellin' folks now that no matter who gets elected, you know, it's gonna be rough times. We've been through these before, and it's interesting after you, when you look back on thirty years how you see the ups and downs, and they're always claiming that they don't have enough money and all that kind of stuff, but just when you think, you know, things are really bad and you don't have enough money, things start lookin' a lot worse. And I remember in 2009, when the economic stimulus package was coming in and all that kind of stuff, people around town were saying "Gosh, are you really hurting because of the economic crisis and everything?" And I would say, "You know, we're the federal government, and we're not hurting yet. In fact, we're benefitting from the economic stimulus." Saguaro got a million dollars to close abandoned mines. And I, because everybody else was really busy, I implemented that project. But it's gonna come back. Eventually the piper's gotta be paid, and it's gonna come back around, and we're gonna go through a period that's pretty rough. And we're seeing that now, no matter who gets elected, you know, and the fiscal cliff that we're going over or whatever, it's gonna be really tight for a few years. But, you know, there's pockets of hope there. You try to get optimistic people and support 'em in what they like to do.

Hannah Nyala West: Yeah. Well, if you're okay with it, I would like us to be able to interview you about ANPR and what you all were hoping to do. You've been on since 1986 with ANPR?

Meg Weesner: Yeah. So, I'm not in the first group. I may not even be in the second group, but I'm sort of like the third tier of leaders that came in to ANPR.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Yeah. And what the organization means and how you see its role with the agency itself and with helping to nurture young leaders coming forward in the agency, so that would be something

that I think probably would be, ah, takes a little bit of time, so we can do that now or stop and we can do a follow-up with that.

Meg Weesner: Yeah. We probably need a break.

Hannah Nyala West: I think so, too! [Laughs.] Is there anything else you would like to add before we end today?

Meg Weesner: No. I don't think so.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. Well, thank you so much for your time. I really [appreciate it].

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Hannah Nyala West: All right, let's continue for just a couple minutes, I want a chance to say that on tape [laughs].

Meg Weesner: There's not really any tape in there, is there?

Hannah Nyala West: There's not. It's an old habit. [Laughs.] I started interviewing people when there was actual tape!

Meg Weesner: So, about my mentor, Gary Machlis, who is a sociologist and has worked for the Park Service many years. He describes organizations as rewarding one of three different kinds of things. The first reward might be how many widgets you make – so, business. The more widgets you make, you know, the more successful you are. You get rewarded in the agency. The other [second] one is you're rewarded for your ideas and your thoughts. Universities are like this, many professional associations like doctors or lawyers probably, even foresters – the Forest Service rewards you for your thoughts and innovations. And the third one is the social connections that you have, and the Park Service rewards the social connections.

Hannah Nyala West: Yeah. And that's where some of its real strengths come. I think that it can have downsides—

Meg Weesner: And downsides, too! [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: —as well. It's sort of like a cutting edge, it goes both directions. It's really, and that might actually be something where ANPR comes into play, and it'd be really interesting to see what those of you who've been involved for a long period of time see as the future of that, given the new kinds of hiring practices that are on their way now. So, we'll definitely have to do a follow-up interview with you. This was really good, though, very – and there's a slew of other questions that I would love to ask [chuckles] but we can do that another time.

Meg Weesner: Yeah.

[END OF TRACK 2]
[END OF INTERVIEW]