NPS Oral History Collection (HFCA 1817)
Association of National Park Rangers Oral History Project, 2012-2016

Scot McElveen
November 1, 2012

Interview conducted by Hannah Nyala West
Transcribed by West Transcript Services
Digitized by Marissa Lindsey

NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

ANPR Oral History Project

Alan Scot McElveen

1 November 2012

Interview conducted by
Hannah Nyala West

Transcribed by
West Transcript Services

Audio File: MCELVEEN Scot 1 Nov 2012

Note: Narrator is known now by middle name, Scot.

[START OF TRACK 1]

Hannah Nyala West: This interview is being conducted on Thursday, November 1st, 2012 at Indian Wells, California, on the occasion of the Association for National Park Rangers annual rendezvous. The interviewer is Hannah Nyala West, and I'm talking with—

Scot McElveen: Scot McElveen.

Hannah Nyala West: Scot McElveen. The correct spelling is in the notes, and Scot, would you like to start with just where and when you were born?

Scot McElveen: I was born May 28th, 1957 on Scott Air Force Base, which has nothing to do with my name. My father was in the military when I was young, and I was born on that base.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay, and your early years? Where'd you go to school?

Scot McElveen: We moved from that location. My father was transferred overseas to England, and so we went to England for a few years before I was in school, and then we came back to South Carolina, which is where both of my parents originally were from, to an Air Force base at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and I went to kindergarten and first grade and part of second grade at the elementary school on Myrtle Beach Air Force Base.

Scot McElveen: And one of the traumatic events of society that I remember from that time was the day President Kennedy was assassinated. I can still – I was in the, I guess I was in the second grade, I forget exactly, it was first or second grade, and I remember how affected my teacher was by receiving that news, and how much it affected all of us, being only six or seven years old, to see your teacher so emotional.

Hannah Nyala West: Did you have a sense of yourself then as part of a nation?

Scot McElveen: I'm not sure I did yet. I would say probably not, you know.

Hannah Nyala West: But this affected your community then. It felt like it was close, a close loss.

Scot McElveen: Yeah, and I didn't, I hadn't seen, we hadn't had any emotional events in my family that I was aware of at that point in my life, so I just had not seen an adult react so emotionally to anything. I mean, she was in tears, sobbing.

Hannah Nyala West: Mm. What kind of work did your mother do?

Scot McElveen: She was – ah, once I got old enough to know what she was doing – she was a seamstress in a textile factory. Textile factories were big in the Carolinas before most of all that moved overseas, but she did

that a lot while I was growing up, but I found it interesting to find out later that, before I was born – I was a late child – so before I was born, like in World War II, when they were a younger couple and my father was in the war overseas, she was doing things like working at an ammunition factory making ammunition for the war effort and doing some other things like that.

Hannah Nyala West: Hm. And your father's job in the Air Force?

Scot McElveen: He actually started in the Navy, which wasn't very smart for somebody that got seasick constantly, so most of World War II or all the time he served in World War II, he was in the Navy. He went to Africa and Italy, off the coast of those campaigns, and then he was also on the D-Day campaign, although he wasn't, again, in the Navy, he wasn't the landing force, you know, dodging bullets and making his way up the beachhead, but he was part of the support force for D-Day. But then when he switched over to the Air Force, he got – I'm sorry, he was a cook in the Navy – but when he switched over to the Air Force, he stayed pretty much in some kind of food service, either a cook or then managing liked the Non-Commissioned Officers club and those types of jobs through his service.

Hannah Nyala West: Cook is one of the most crucial roles in the Navy—

Scot McElveen: [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: —historically and still.

Scot McElveen: Yeah. Gotta keep the men happy!

Hannah Nyala West: Yes. [Chuckles.]

Scot McElveen: Somehow, and food's one of the ways on a boat.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. When do you remember first becoming aware of national parks?

Scot McElveen: Ah, as I've thought about that over the years, we did – when you go to school in South Carolina, like many states, they have some kind of iconic place that they take every school kid to, and in South Carolina that's Fort Sumter. You all, almost all go to Fort Sumter at some point in your school career, and that for me was when we were in the eighth grade, so I would've been about 13. I think I, I'm not sure I had any, I might've known that big places like Yellowstone and Grand Canyon existed by then, but I'm not sure I understood that as a national parks system until I went to Fort Sumter. But more influential on my life was, around that same time – again, when you live in South Carolina, almost everybody at that time took one of their, if they were lucky enough to get two weeks of vacation, one of the weeks was you went to Myrtle Beach every year and laid on the beach and did whatever. And for some

reason for a couple years my parents decided that they would go to the mountains instead, and so they took me to the Great Smoky Mountains for two summers in a row for a week and camped, and I learned how to trout fish, and those things were very influential when my athletic skills petered out and I realized nobody was gonna pay me to play basketball for a living. Park ranger was the next thing in my sights. [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh? So, from about early teens, middle teens?

Scot McElveen: Let's say, I'd say I knew that park ranger was – if I couldn't be an athlete, then I was going to try to be a park ranger from about 13 or 14.

Hannah Nyala West: Hm. Okay. It sounds like you enjoyed sports. Were those some of the extracurricular activities—

Scot McElveen: I did do that. I played basketball and baseball in high school and then I had some scholarship opportunities in basketball. They were very small schools and, at least for what I knew about how you prepared yourself to become a park ranger in South Carolina, I believed at the time that I needed to go to Clemson University eventually to get the degree I needed to be competitive for a park ranger job. Now that, as history, as I understood more about it, I found that's not the case, that there's no specific degree requirement and there's lots of different ways to get into the Park Service and I probably could've gone to one of those smaller schools and maybe made it, but I felt that I needed that degree in Parks and Recreation Management, and Clemson University was the place that did that in the state of South Carolina, so I didn't – I wasn't good enough to play basketball at Clemson, that's a big university.

Hannah Nyala West: Where did you first learn about Clemson and that way of preparing yourself—

Scot McElveen: Hm.

Hannah Nyala West: —for this career.

Scot McElveen: [Chuckles.] You know, I don't know. I don't remember that, if that was a high school counselor that maybe told me that that's, in typical fashion of states that have two universities that are state-supported a lot of times there's one that's law, medicine, you know, those types of professions, and one is like the land-grant college for that state and they're more agriculture and forestry and some other disciplines like that. And so I don't know if there was a guidance counselor that told me that or if I just figured that out on my own that that was the better place for me to find the major that I needed to graduate with.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Who were the influential adults in your life at that period?

Scot McElveen: Well certainly my parents. They were not very well educated, and so some of their pastimes were outdoor pastimes. My father and my mother both like to fish very much, and that was something I wanted to be good at because they were good at it, and we spent a lot of time outside doing those types of things. And falling, maybe because it was so different than going to the beach or going to the lake in the flatter part of South Carolina, going to the mountains seemed like such a revelation in learning how to catch those fish in fast-moving clear streams as opposed to other types that I had learned to catch before, just seemed very, very interesting. I had a neighbor that – my father did not know how to fly fish – but I had a neighbor named Paul DuPre that knew how. The father of that household knew how to fly fish, and I'd see him – after I first started learning or seeing it done on the years I was in the mountains, then when we were back home in flatland South Carolina I could sometimes see him out in the back yard practicing, trying to drop a fishing fly from a distance of 30 or 40 or 50 feet into a bucket, you know. Practiced casting, you know, that kind of excited me in that I could practice, even though I wasn't there. And I think I forgot to mention that we moved, after the second grade, we moved to Columbia, which is the capital of South Carolina, and that's the rest of my middle and high school and the rest of my elementary school all in Columbia.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay, and Paul was your neighbor there?

Scot McElveen: Mmhm.

Hannah Nyala West: Was he about your age?

Scot McElveen: No. He was the husband, the father of—

Hannah Nyala West: The father, okay.

Scot McElveen: One of his sons was a good friend of mine, in the same grade with me and on some of the sports teams, but he was the husband and father in that next-door household of ours.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. Dupre, D-U-P-

Scot McElveen: D-U- capital P- R-E.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. Did you have any teachers or ministers or any government officials that you knew or got to know that might've influenced the work you chose?

Scot McElveen: I don't think any at that level about through high school until I started getting to college professors that had more knowledge of how a specific education tied into a specific career. So, I don't remember that early on. But also remember that the late '60s and especially starting the early '70s when a lot of the environmental laws were passed, you know, the Clean Water Act and all those

things, was a big environmental time, and a lot of that was in the news, and I think some of that had an influence that I understood that there was an environmental movement in the country, and that seemed important to me and I wanted to be a part of that in some kind of profession that was a part of that.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. So, you headed to Clemson. When did you—

Scot McElveen: I went to a couple of other places first. I went to one called Coastal Carolina University, which is one of the places I got a basketball scholarship offer, um, because I could live at home. And by then my parent had moved – after I graduated from high school, they moved back down near Myrtle Beach, and that's where Coastal Carolina is – so I could live at home and not spend so much money and take some of those first-year courses that everybody takes that are not real related to your discipline of choice or profession of choice. Um, then I transferred on to the main, back to the main campus of the University of South Carolina for a short time, and then I started at Clemson in January of 1979.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Scot McElveen: Some of those early professors, even at Coastal Carolina, which was teaching you things like basic biology and basic chemistry, were pretty knowledgeable about, they might not have known the specifics of being a park ranger, but I think they knew that Clemson was the place to eventually go after you studied basic science to get more in-depth on how to run parks or national forests or whatever your particular path was that you'd decided on.

Hannah Nyala West: So, did they serve as informal mentors for you in a way?

Scot McElveen: I think so. I think so. Especially since my parents had so little education, they really couldn't help me with, even at the high school and middle school level, they couldn't help me with homework. I had to find, if I needed some kind of school help, I had to usually get that from the teachers. [They] were the ones I had to go to, but I think some of those early professors at Coastal – I think the biology teacher's name was Pinson, Dr. Pinson, P-I-N-S-O-N is what I recall, that was someone that had an interest in his students knowing more about the natural world than just the basics of biology. He was an interesting fellow to know and talk to at that age.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. So, when did you start working for the NPS? Were they your first employer after college?

Scot McElveen: Well, the first employer that I had any interest in pursuing a career with, I think, my first employment after college was, let's see, I was working for a city parks and recreation group, you know, where you worked like at a gymnasium that had a basketball court

and pool tables and ping-pong tables and that kind of recreation field. But I knew that was not a career job. That was just what I was doing as I graduated and did that for a short time. The summer before I graduated I had put out lots of applications to federal agencies, and I had not gotten a call, but I got, pretty late, I got a call from a concession in Glacier National Park, and one of the things I had been doing in some of the summers when I was in college was being a bartender. And this place offered me the head bartender's job at Many Glacier Hotel in Glacier National Park. And I accepted it, I got packed up, but I had a girlfriend in South Carolina, and she was much younger than me, so I started driving cross-country and I got to St. Louis and I turned around and went back to South Carolina.

Scot McElveen: And then about, somewhere between that ending and before most seasonal jobs started with federal agencies, the Forest Service called from Idaho and offered me a seasonal job in Idaho as some kind of backcountry job in the mountains of Idaho. And again, my father wasn't very educated, he didn't really understand all the differences between private concession companies working in the park and the federal agencies themselves, he didn't understand all those distinctions and so, when they called, when the Forest Service called and I wasn't home, he answered and said and then they told them what they wanted, he said, "Ah, he already came back from one of those jobs. I don't think he wants that job." So, they, I don't think they can do that today, I think they actually have to talk to me, I don't think they can just take that from my father, but that was it. They moved on to somebody else and hired somebody else, and so that opportunity wasn't there for me, and I think that was the summer of 1981.

Scot McElveen: But then the next year I applied for two parks and I forget what the second one was, but one of them was Great Smokies because that was the park I knew the best, it's actually not, the south side of the park's only two or two and a half hours even from Clemson, so I went up there some when I was in college as well, every once in a while on weekend. And that was the park I knew the best, so that was one I applied for, and I was called and offered a seasonal job at Great Smokies being the – at that time because they were more users in parks in the backcountry, Great Smokies was one of the parks that was more strict about you have to have a backcountry permit to spend the night in the backcountry of Great Smoky Mountains, that you get from a live National Park Service employee issuing you the permit. Today they have a bunch of self-registration stations, but that wasn't the case then. And they needed someone at the entrance to the park where the Appalachian Trail comes in from the south, because all those people that are trying to hike from Georgia to Maine every year don't have transportation to

get them to one of the ranger stations where they can get a permit, so they wanted to station somebody right there at the top of Fontana Dam as you cross into the park and head up that section of the Appalachian Trail, and that was my job for the summer, which was mostly a spring and early summer type thing, because everybody that's gonna make that trip has already started in March and April, May and early June, and not much in the way of that type of work happens after that, but I could do other sorts of things. Resource management, trying to like trap wild hogs and get them out of the park because they were an exotic species, non-native species, and other resource-type projects like that.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. What was housing like in that post?

Scot McElveen: It was great in that it allowed me to save a lot of money, but it wasn't exactly top-quality. It was a trail-crew bunkhouse, so it had six bunks in it, and my boss let me remove one of the top bunks so that I could have some head room between me and the ceiling or me and the next bunk, since I was gonna be staying there all summer. Or ended up being about eight months actually. So, and a small trail cabin with a bedroom with six bunks in it and then a small living area with a government couch that was who knows, God knows how old, but probably the '40s, and a little shower and a little kitchen. But the walls weren't, they weren't, you could see the studs from the inside. There was no insulation and there was no drywall on the inside of this trail cabin, so it was kind of rustic and it was down in, along a stream, that's where the ranger station and the permanent employee lived a couple hundred yards downstream. But this was kind of a narrow stream, so a lot of days the sun didn't hit the – even in the summer – didn't hit the cabin until late in the morning and it disappeared early in the afternoon just because of the angle of the mountains compared to where the sun was at.

Hannah Nyala West: Hm. So, backcountry.

Scot McElveen: It was kind of an isolated spot, and the person that hired me told me that the, one of the things that attracted him to my application compared to all the others, which were you know all of them were somewhat the same – you all have a college degree, you all have maybe some minor amount of experience – but the person that they had had in that job the year before wasn't very emotionally happy being that isolated and not having any social life to speak of around. I mean, even the next group of rangers were about 50 miles away, so you had to make an effort to go to see other rangers or to get to a town to buy groceries or anything like that, and he saw in my application fly-fishing as a hobby, something that I was really interested in, and because the stream was right there by the cabin, he thought that that might keep me interested, and he was

right. I spent almost every afternoon I got off from work that it wasn't raining that summer, you know, just getting my fishing equipment and go fishing and a lot on my days off, and that did keep me extremely happy 'cause I had never lived anywhere where I could do that that often, you know, before it was only a vacation thing, when I was on vacation.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Scot McElveen: And I think that's maybe unique in that you think that your education is important and maybe some of your experiences or at that point you could say that you are in maybe the Honor Society at your school and all those things that you think are important, but the thing that this guy picked out was a hobby that he thought was important for me to – I could do the job but, I mean, he wanted somebody that'd be happy while they were there as well, and the hobby helped him to believe that I would be the person that'd be happy there.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. What are the most memorable times of that post? Besides the fly-fishing, which sounds like it was really important.

Scot McElveen: It was. It was. I think helping relocate a couple of bears from – they were brought to our location from other parts of the park that were more intensively used by visitors like picnic areas that were along the main road or something and so Great Smokies is a park that's over 500,000 acres. It's about 65 miles long by about 40 miles wide, so it's a big area, and especially for the east, and so to get something like that from one area of the park to the other took couple hours to drive around and get the bear to us and to relocate them, you know, to see one up that close, a wild bear up that close, was pretty cool for a, basically a city kid. I mean, I'm not city kid like New York, but Columbia, South Carolina had 150-200,000 people in it, so I was a suburb, city-type kid, and to be that close to wildlife was a new and unique experience.

Scot McElveen: Memorable. It was memorable getting training that I really knew something about, but didn't quite understand fully, like you're starting to get your basic wildland fire training that year. I got that that year. Resource-type issues, I mean, I didn't know anything about exotics or non-natives in parks, so to start getting to understand that, and working through the controversy in my mind – not that anybody cared what my opinion was – but working through the controversy in my mind of trapping these wild boar to get them out of the park. That was a big compromise by the park for local interests because it would've been much cheaper just for the park to hire shooters and try to kill the hogs in place, but the local populace didn't think that was the right thing to do. They wanted to be able to hunt in the park, which of course, we were

never gonna let them do, and so the compromise was to try to trap these things and then re-release them outside the park in areas where the local populace could hunt them. So, all that understanding of exotic species and what they could do to the park, what damage they could do to the park, was memorable. I also don't think I'd ever been anywhere on a sustained basis like, at this point in my life I hadn't been – the farthest west I'd been was to St. Louis and turning around so I hadn't been out west, I didn't understand that lack of people that you can find in a big park in the backcountry, just being alone in a place like that was a new revelation for me and something that I liked a lot.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Aside from the relocations of the bears in that area, what was the bear-human interface or relationship near where you lived? Did bears come in regularly at that time or did they go in the more populated areas?

Scot McElveen: Yeah, we didn't, this ranger station was on the periphery of the park, and we didn't see 'em as much as you would see – and we didn't have a campground with this ranger station, you know a big campground which bears like to frequent. So that seemed to happen more in the – that bear, close bear interaction with people – seemed to happen more in the center of the park and along the main road. So we didn't see them as much there, and so it was interesting for me to see one occasionally, since we didn't see them nearly as much, plus my job wasn't to be, I did occasionally get a day where I could hike a trail or help the permanent ranger do something farther in the backcountry, but I didn't really, that wasn't my primary job, so most of the time—

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Scot McElveen: —I was either at the dam site or one of the old logging roads or hog truck where you could drive the vehicle to it, I wasn't away, very far away, except on my days off, kind of out in the middle of the wilderness there.

Hannah Nyala West: What were the types of visitors that you would see most of the time in there?

Scot McElveen: Well, I talked about the through-hikers going through the park on the AT, which was again to me a revelation to me. I never gave that much thought about spending six months on the trail at one time, or four months, depending on how fast they were and, you know, not being able to take a shower for weeks on end and doing those types of things, so that was one type of visitor. We certainly had our relations with local people, which – local mountain people – which maybe weren't as smooth as maybe anybody would like

them to be, because they, I think they, Appalachian mountain people are very clannish, very 'If you're not from around here, we're not sure we respect you very much' and so they didn't always respect the decisions that the park was making and park management was making and, of course, we were as employees trying to support those decisions as best we could and explain them to the local populace why it was good for the park and why it might be good for them down the road somewhere even if they couldn't see how it was good for them right at that moment. And so that was another type of visitor that you had to kind of switch your thinking when you talked to them, you weren't I don't want to say that you were talking down to them, but generally their education level was much lower, their understanding of environmental issues and policies on a nationwide level was only local, not so much in a national thought process or that the National Park Service existed and whatever policy you might be enforcing or trying to get them to comply with was something that was a national policy that benefitted the whole system even if they couldn't see how it necessarily benefited their little corner of that particular national park. Or they couldn't differentiate why a national forest, which was right outside the boundary of the park, did things one way and a national park did things another way. So, you had that type of visitor. I think we had more, I think backpacking was still a more popular pursuit in the early '80s and so I do think we just had more people that came and stayed in the backcountry, and I always enjoyed talkin' to those folks because I had a lot in common with them.

Scot McElveen: I do – again I still had a girlfriend, same girlfriend that I had the year before when I was going and coming from St. Louis, and she came up and lived for the months she was out of college, she came up and lived at Fontana Village, which is a resort right there just outside the park and worked in the village. But she came up and did that for the summer, but early, before she got up there, one of the first weeks, my boss was off duty, but he got a report that someone up the trail had sprained their ankle pretty badly, and so he, even with as little experience as I had, he said, you know, "Take the horse, get on the horse, go up the trail, see if you can find this person, and if they can't be moved you can radio me, but if you think you can move 'em, you know, put 'em up on the horse and walk 'em back out." And when I got up there, it was a father with his college-age daughter, and she was beautiful! [Chuckles.] I could hardly just talk, you know, and she was the one that had the sprained ankle. So I was able to get her up on the horse and start walking her back down the trail back toward the ranger station, which as I recall was three or four miles back to the ranger station, and there were several creek crossings where you had to, I'd have

to walk the horse back and forth across the creek. And her father was, you know, behind us. He had all the gear and, you know, what we couldn't put on the horse, he had all his gear, but we would cross the stream, you know, and I was walking then, leading the horse with her on it, and of course my feet were getting wet, you know, cause the water was up maybe to my knee or slightly above my knee, and I remember once that the horse stepped on my foot in the stream, and of course I was trying not to, I was trying to impress this young lady, I was trying not to act like this was painful, and I remember that. That was funny. And of course I was also trying to act as professional as I could, given my tenure in the Park Service, and not wanting this father to know that, boy, he had a beautiful daughter and that's really what I was thinking about, not the professionalism of my job. [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Scot McElveen: But we got her back to the car and they went on their way, and that was the end of that.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. How long was that season?

Scot McElveen: It was a long one. I started March 21st of 1982, and I believe my last day was October, something like the 16th or something. Because I was not a, I didn't know the insides and outs of becoming a protection ranger at the time, and I didn't know anything about going to the – it was required to go to the seasonal law enforcement academies – but there was one in western North Carolina in a town called Silva, North Carolina, which was only 50 or 60 miles from the ranger station I was at, and so when that six-week class started, they terminated my employment so I could get into that class so the next year I could be a seasonal protection ranger. And so, I think it was middle of October, because it was a six-week class and it was over right before Thanksgiving, so that's kinda the time frame. So nice long, very enjoyable season and because the, even though the housing wasn't certainly luxurious, it was cheap. When you stay in the bunkhouse you only pay a bunkhouse rate, even if there's nobody else in there with you, which was like a dollar twenty-five a day. So even at the salary that I was making, because I was basically spending all my free time either fly fishing, you know that was about it, fly fishing or hiking, which didn't cost me any money, I saved like $2500 for that seven- or eight-month period, which is, you know, in 1982 was a lot of money for a 25-year-old to be able to save, $2500.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. And then you finished the training course at Silva and—

Scot McElveen: Finished the training course and went back to South Carolina to live for the winter, put in my two seasonal job applications, which you could do then. You only could, as opposed to now, they can

pretty much apply to every seasonal job that they find that they're qualified for. Then you only could, you had to pick two parks in the system and that's the only two parks your application would be forwarded to. So I went back and did that and, of course I was applying for permanent jobs at the same time and the first call I got the next spring of 1983, was to get a permanent job with the Corps of Engineers in West Texas at a lake which I don't remember the name of the lake, but it was in San Angelo, Texas, which I obviously accepted because it was a permanent job. Subsequent to that offer and before I left to go to Texas, first I got an offer actually from one of the folks you may've interviewed here this week [interruption]—stop it a minute.

Scot McElveen: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: After you'd gotten the Corps of Engineer.

Scot McElveen: So, one of the people here that's been a longtime member of this association, Dick Newgren, in fact he's one of the founders.

Hannah Nyala West: I actually tried my best to find him, for the ones that get interviewed. Okay.

Scot McElveen: But Dick, Chief Ranger at Capitol Reef National Park in Utah, which was one of the two that I'd applied, two seasonals that I'd applied to, and he called and offered me a long-term seasonal protection job at Capitol Reef, which he said was mostly in the backcountry either on foot or on horseback, and that was really difficult to turn down because that was more in line with what I hoped to do with my career and my life, as opposed to working on a lake, Corps of Engineers lake. But the Corps was a permanent job, so, you know, I had a permanent job and that was, at least at that time, thought to be kind of the prize that all of us seasonals were after, even though I'm not sure I fully understood why.

Scot McElveen: What was so special about having a permanent job, you know, health benefits and all the things that come with permanent employment. I'm not sure that I really understood that, but I knew that everybody else wanted one, so I probably wanted one, too. And then a week or so later, Park Service called from the Natchez Trace Parkway in, the park is actually in three states, but the majority of it is in Mississippi, and they called and offered me a permanent ranger, entry-level ranger or technician job at the Natchez Trace Parkway, which I gladly accepted, because that was a fulltime job as opposed to Corps of Engineers job, which was only part-time. So I had a permanent job after one season, which seemed to me to be a pretty good deal, cause many of the seasonals I had worked with the previous year and maybe had already been seasonals for four or five years, and you know, they hadn't been able to find the right job, or find the job yet for them, so I thought

that was a good deal. Once I got to Mississippi I'm not so sure I thought it was a good deal because it was a highway patrolman job basically, is what you do on a place like that, and that was not my idea of the law enforcement that I was interested in doing. I really wasn't interested in writing a bunch of speeding tickets and arresting drunk drivers and investigating pretty serious motor vehicle accidents with, you know, lots of injuries and fatalities and those types of things. That, I never even gave that much thought. I was always thinking I was going to be a ranger in the backcountry somewhere and be talking to people on foot or on horseback and dealing more with environmental violations of park rules than I was with just general society-type rules.

Hannah Nyala West: Were you posted at Jackson or Natchez? Tupelo?

Scot McElveen: Above Jackson at a place called Jeff Busby Park, which is almost about halfway between Jackson and Tupelo.

Scot McElveen: I had two – at Jeff Busby Park there was two Mission 66 houses for the permanent houses for the permanent rangers. There was a campground, a Park Service campground which there were only three of those on the parkway, and a concession-operated little gas station with a little few convenience-type items in it, which was the only one on the parkway when I was there at that location. And one of the higher points in Mississippi, called Little Mountain, which is, I don't know, maybe three or four hundred feet above everything else, that you could drive up to the top of and look out, which I was fond of doing since it reminded me a little bit of being back in the Smokies. Certainly not the mountains that the Smokies have, but at least I could get up above and see something, as opposed to just flat land, which most of Mississippi is.

Hannah Nyala West: Till you get in the piney woods, which is a little south and east of Natchez. So, what was it like living there, in terms of your life outside work?

Scot McElveen: There wasn't much life outside of work at that point in your career. You were working, probably more hours of the day that you were being paid for, in most cases, just because you wanted to impress your bosses and do a good job. And, of course, your friends and family were all several states away, so you didn't have those folks to do social things with and socialize with. My longtime girlfriend, after she got out of and I arrived there on April the third of 1983 and when she got out of college in May sometime, she decided to move out there with me. So she came and moved in with me and that was, you know, certainly somebody to do something with, to do social things, but it was, the towns around were very small, much smaller than I had grown up in, maybe 500 or a thousand people, so they had a grocery store and maybe a few gas stations

and a bank and maybe a restaurant, a small restaurant or two, but nothing to do at night like nightclubs and dancing and, you know, things like that that young twenty-year-olds are used to, especially in their college years. So, none of that type stuff and even over in where one of the local, the nearest big college was, which was Mississippi State University, about 35 miles from where I was posted. Even there that was a dry county, so there wasn't quite what I was used to from Clemson or University of South Carolina, because those weren't dry counties when I was going to college, so it was a very rural part of the state. Almost everybody that I knew that lived around the parkway was involved in agriculture or somehow, either cattle ranching or growing corn or both or cotton or something. That seemed to be the thrust of the livelihoods of the people around the parkway. And this might've been, my experience at Great Smokies were that people that I contacted knew they were in a national park, they'd come to see the national park, and that wasn't necessarily the case on the Natchez Trace. A lot of folks that used it were either using it because it was the fastest road between where they were and where they wanted to go, and they either didn't know it was a National Park site or they didn't care. So that was a new experience, dealing with folks like that kinda more on a county deputy kind of level. They're just locals that are using the facilities, not necessarily care anything about why the park's there or what the Natchez Trace was, why it, how the boatmen of the Ohio Valley used it to get their goods from the Ohio River Valley down to New Orleans and sell them and walk back on the Natchez Trace, back to their Ohio homes and Kentucky homes and Tennessee homes and start that process all over again. So, they, most – many – of the visitors didn't have any knowledge of that or really even care anything about it, and I still think that's a little sad, that we have parks that the access points allow people to use them that don't really see them as the treasures that they are, but they're just a means to an end to go through the park somehow.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Just a road.

Scot McElveen: Yeah, just a road.

Hannah Nyala West: Yeah. Yeah. It's an interesting thing because that is such a deeply historied thing, the Natchez Trace, and when you drive it, I don't see how you cannot sense the history, the deep history, you know, 18-teens comin' through and, just in the contours of it, the way the Park Service has laid the road out there and everything, it's very much, I know what you're talking about people just trying to drive through lickety-split through, Jackson to Natchez or whatever. [Chuckles.]

Scot McElveen: Yeah a lot of times the big football game of the fall between Ole Miss Rebels and Mississippi State, if it's not played at Ole Miss kind of up on the northern end close, relatively speaking, to the Natchez Trace, a lot of times the game's in Jackson and so the people use the Natchez Trace to get to and from the game. And of course, then they have absolutely no interest in the park, they're just trying to get to the game as fast as they can or get back home as fast as they can. I can remember stopping six or eight or ten vehicles at a time and writing them all speeding tickets because they were all going in this caravan, you know, at 85 miles an hour on a 50-mile an hour road to get to the game, wherever the game's at and having them, you know, my girlfriend ended up working in the little gas station that was on the parkway, the concession-operated gas station, and she would sometimes when that would happen, she would hear them muttering as they came in to get gas, you know, "Can they do that? Can they stop eight vehicles at one time and give 'em all tickets? Is that – can they – is that legal to do that?" Or they'd say something and about a specific ranger and she would ask them the other, the ranger that lived in the other house from me was a much heavier man than I was, he was bigger and older, and he had children and, of course, I was 25 and still relatively skinny and so when they would start talking to her about it she would ask if it was the big ranger or if it was the skinny ranger, to see if she was gonna have to defend me or not. [Chuckles.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] What was her name?

Scot McElveen: Her name was Susan McClintock.

Hannah Nyala West: M-C-C- capital C -L-I-N-T-O-C-K?

Scot McElveen: I don't think it had the capital C. I think it was M-C- capital L, but I'm not, I can't remember that now actually, but I think that's right.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Scot McElveen: Yeah, so. That was kinda funny. What else was kinda funny. I mean, maybe not funny, maybe sad. I thought it was kind of sad that the boss that I had there had been around the National Park Service some, although he'd been there in Mississippi for quite a while, but I didn't find him especially warm and accommodating for someone that had absolutely no experience in law enforcement other than going to this six-week training academy that I had the year before, and I almost felt when my 90-day probationary period was up in April, May, June, July, in early July, I almost felt that he basically said, "Okay, here's your gun, here's your ticket book, go to it," without much other training than that, and I thought that was kind of a sad statement, but I also know that the Natchez Trace at

that time, much like Independence or the Statue of Liberty or some of those parks that many of us seasonals thought were less desirable were places that we went, stayed as little as possible and transferred on to somewhere where we wanted to be and so he had gotten, grown tired of that kind of revolving door of getting in young folks, training them, and having them move on. As soon as he got 'em trained they moved on somewhere else, and he had to start that process all over again. So, I understood that later. I wasn't sure I understood it so much at the time.

Scot McElveen: Central Mississippi is a place that has lots of tornados, and that was something new for me, because South Carolina doesn't very many tornados and so occasionally we would get a storm that wouldn't – very few of them ran up and down the length of the parkway, they'd just cross at a specific place and tear up the road and the, you know, bring down a bunch of trees for a mile or two as they crossed the parkway and went from west to east, and so we'd get called out at night to clean up the road and get it back open as soon as we could do that. And one of the things they did for us so that we didn't have to carry a bunch of equipment in the trunk was they bought us these little, which I think at the time were kind of a new idea, were little chainsaws that ran off of your car battery. They were electric, but you could plug 'em into there, I mean, you could clips, like jumper cable clips onto the car battery, and you used this little chainsaw to cut things that were of reasonable size. I mean, if there was a tree that was really big, you weren't gonna mess with this chainsaw, but we would've called in the maintenance crews to deal with those kind of trees anyway. So if it was just trees that were eight, ten, twelve inches in diameter, your little car chainsaw you could probably cut enough to get the road open anyway until the maintenance crews could get there the next day and clean it up and make it look better. And so I was doing that with one of these little chainsaws and what would, so you'd clear a little section and then you've had to drive a quarter of a mile or a half mile to the next group and then clean them up. And I don't think I had done anything wrong yet either in my seasonal job or so far in the permanent job that made me worry about my performance evaluation or anything, but this particular night I was doing that and, when I got finished with one group of trees and I went to the next group of trees, I forgot to close the hood of the car completely, and so when I got up to a speed of about 50 miles an hour, the air got up under the hood and just folded it back onto the face of the car, so it did a little bit of damage to the patrol car, which of course was embarrassing, and I was worried about how that would influence my performance appraisal and how that might influence my chances of either a transfer or a promotion or whatever somewhere down the road, so that was a funny, funny

night to forget that and then have to tell my boss that I did that the next day.

Hannah Nyala West: Did it affect your performance evaluation?

Scot McElveen: I don't recall that he wrote that in there. But I know that, because he'd had that revolving situation of people coming, getting trained, and moving on, that he wasn't very generous with his performance evaluations early on anyway, because he wanted to lessen the chances that you'd, you know, move on to somewhere else. And I think he just gave you kind of a middle-of-the-road C-kinda like grade and comments for your first performance appraisal.

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

Scot McElveen: Only about a year and a half. I went to, even though we'd go to these seasonal law enforcement academies, once you became a permanent ranger you have to go to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Academy for, at that time, was a ten-week course and I went early the next winter, starting in January of 1984 through sometime in March of 1984, which is in Glynco, Georgia, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center is. And so, once I got back from that, that's when you became more marketable, because the park you were in had to spend some of their travel dollars on you while you were in a temporary duty station away from home, and plus just having you away for that long is a hardship in some regards on the other employees that have to pull together to do the work that you would be doing if you were there. So other parks certainly would rather hire an employee that's already been through that and somebody, some other park's paid for it, both in time and in money, than hiring somebody themselves that they'd have to put through that, so once you finished that training you became more marketable and it wasn't too long after I got back, in March, I got a transfer to Gulf Islands National Seashore in Pensacola, Florida. Or just outside of Pensacola, Florida, which wasn't my – I'd spent so much time at the beach in my youth and years that that really wasn't my preferred environment – but that was just the first one. I'd had lots of applications out and that was just the first one that I got a hit on.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. What grade was that?

Scot McElveen: Both of those jobs, both at the Natchez Trace and at the Gulf Islands, were GS-5s.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Scot McElveen: And the one at, the one back as a seasonal at Great Smokies, was a GS-3. Which was interesting because apparently it was supposed to be a GS-2, and the District Ranger didn't realize it till halfway

through the year and he said, "Oh. Whatever." And just let it be a GS-3 [chuckles] all year, which was nice!

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] Uhhuh! Yeah.

Scot McElveen: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: So, what was your living situation like in Gulf Islands?

Scot McElveen: Ah, they didn't have government – this was my first time that I wasn't in government housing, so it actually, the Mission 66 house on the Natchez Trace was pretty nice. Had a wood stove in it and, you know, was pretty roomy and pretty comparable to the houses I'd grown up in with my parents, because we were definitely lower middle class, so we just had a average—

[END OF TRACK 2]

[START OF TRACK 3]

Scot McElveen: —home and this was pretty comparable to that. When we got to Gulf Breeze, my girlfriend and I – we had to – well, actually, she was my wife by then, so we had gotten married, and we had to get a little apartment in Gulf Breeze, Florida, and so we did. And both being in park housing and being in rental housing have their own separate challenges. When you're in the park, it seems like from your perspective as a renter, you never get the attention you deserve from the park maintenance crews when something goes wrong in the house. I mean, they might come when it fits into their work schedule, but, you know, because in your mind you're there as a required occupant – you have to live in this house, you don't have any choice to live somewhere else – so when you put in a request for something to be done to the house, in your mind it ought to be a little higher priority than it seemed to be to the maintenance staff, so that's kind of. And plus, you don't build any equity, so that's one of the problems of living in government housing, but when you get out in the private world, there are other issues too, especially where we were renting. So we weren't building any equity in that apartment and, once we were there for a while, it like many other coastal properties, regardless of where you were at, had lots of roaches in it, which I wasn't used to living in a place that had lots of roaches in it. So that was a new experience, living in a situation like that and not being right at work, so commuting you know to work was a new thing for me. With Park Service anyway. I mean, I'd done that in college when I had to drive to my job wherever that was, but that was new. I didn't stay there very long. I had told them when they hired me that I had a job application that I thought I had a reasonable chance at Great Smokies and, if Great Smokies called, I was gonna go regardless of how short a time I had been at Gulf Islands, and they

hired me at Gulf Islands anyway, and so I only stayed at Gulf Islands through February of the next year. So even though it was a permanent job, I was only there about six months.

Scot McElveen: And went back to Great Smokies for a GS-5 backcountry ranger type job, which was my love and my whole thought of what a ranger should be doing with his or her term.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Where did you all live then?

Scot McElveen: Back in government housing in a different ranger station. The GS-3 job was at a ranger station called Twenty Mile Station, which is in the southwest corner of the park. This permanent ranger job was at a ranger station called Cataloochee Ranger Station. C-A-T-A-L-O-O-C-H-E-E Ranger Station, which is in the southeast corner of the park. And this one was really remote. The only way in was this windy mountain road of about twelve miles. It was a gravel road, but about twelve miles long and took you about 40 minutes to get from the pavement to the ranger station, so it was a long trip to get in there. There was no television reception, there was no phone service into this location, and the house for my – the boss had one of the historic houses with the ranger station, but my lower-graded job was an old beat-up trailer that I don't know how in the world they got that trailer down the road to begin with, but apparently it was an old trailer that – whatever the predecessor to FEMA was, I can't remember who that was at the time, but a trailer they had used for some kind of disaster relief. And once that disaster was over the Park Service got it somehow and drove it down this little mountain valley, and it wasn't very high-quality housing. [Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] And what did your days look like there? What was the typical day?

Scot McElveen: Just kinda what I expected rangering to be. I mean, and it varied greatly with the season. In the spring, you have campers coming back to the campground starting, you have fishermen starting, and so your days a lot were being on the trail or on the stream during the day and then in the evenings walking through the campground, talking to as many campers as you could about things like keeping their food stored properly so the bears wouldn't get into it or, you know, you weren't allowed to cut down wild vegetation to use for the campfires, a little bit of live trees and stuff like that. And just those, making sure they had paid for the campsite for the night. Those types of questions and issues with campers. And that was – a lot of the spring and summer were like that. You might have, as opposed to the fire season in the west, the fire season in the east in the Appalachian mountains is either spring before the leaves come on the trees, if there's a dry spell where the last year's leaves get

dry enough that fire gets started. Or then again in the fall, it's the new leaves that have fallen off the trees, if you have a dry spell, and almost all the fires in the east are arson fires. They're set intentionally by, either by, some of them are by mistake, but most of them – all of them are human-caused. There are not hardly any lightning-caused fires in the east, and a high percentage of the human-caused ones in that area were arson because they, many of the locals, felt that the park was at fault for taking their grandmother or grandfather's land and moving them somewhere else, by eminent domain and all those issues that go along with that, so their retaliation point was to start fires in the park. So, at some point in the spring you might have a fire that you attended to and suppressed, and that took some time. And that was pretty much a lot of the activity through the summer. Then as the fall started and kids went back to school and hunting season was starting for various species outside the park, you were gonna start trying to catch poachers a lot. That was gonna be a lot of your fall and winter, spending times at remote locations on the boundary, sometimes for days at a time, camped in a just by yourself or maybe with another ranger at a place that was hard to get to from inside the park, but maybe not so hard from someone that would come from outside the park. There might be a private road or something that they could get fairly close to the park boundary, but you couldn't go on it because it was private – as a government employee. Or you couldn't go on it, because if you went on it, then they'd see your vehicle and they obviously wouldn't do, you know, what it was that they were, illegal activity of hunting in the park that they were gonna do. So, you had to come from the inside, and it was much harder for you to get to that location and once you got there, you probably for a few days. You didn't want to come stay for an hour and turn around and go back, 'cause your chances of catching anybody are not very great if you don't stay in a place like that for a while. So, trying to catch poachers. Maybe cleaning up after an ice storm or two, where they brought trees down across the entrance road – those were winter-time activities. We had horses, and those days rangers rode horses some, so we had horses to take care of year-round. But not many, not too many visitors to deal with in the late fall and winter, so you could concentrate on maybe just getting to places that were more remote that you couldn't get to in the summer, 'cause you couldn't afford to be away from where most of the visitors were for that length of time in the summer. And maybe getting to see an area where there were some old homesites that took some cross-country travel off-trail to get to or get to a site where there were some really large old-growth trees that logging companies hadn't cut pre-park days for the same reason, because it was so isolated, and they couldn't get

their equipment to 'em. So those trees survived and naturally they were much bigger than all the other trees by the 1980s, so getting to do those types of things. And it was much easier to hike cross-country in the wintertime because you could actually see where you were going once the leaves were off all the deciduous vegetation in the Appalachians in the winter. In the summer, you can't, a lot of times, you can't see the next ridge, or you can't see a point to focus on to hike straight line to get there because of the vegetation, and so it was much easier to get lost. Or maybe not get lost but get off the track that you were trying to make to get to a certain point.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. What – did Susan go with you there?

Scot McElveen: She did. And she ended up going to college, she hadn't finished college when she came to Mississippi, and she ended up going back to the University of North Carolina at Asheville, which was about an hour drive to get out to that, and she ended up going there and finishing her schooling there in about a two-year time period, so that was quite a trip, going in and out that road every day. And I always felt – one of the things that still happens that happened then was we would get dispatched sometime in the summer to western fire crews. They'd – as the people, all the manpower in the west was starting to be used up and getting tired, they'd start bringing crews from the east out west, and so they'd put these makeshift crews together and we'd get over to Knoxville and they'd put a crew of us together and we'd fly out and be out west for two or three weeks, and I always felt guilty about leaving her in such isolated conditions for two or three weeks by herself with no phone, you know, no television, you know, cause she was much more of a social person to begin with than I was. And so those were hardships for her, not to have other people to talk to and socialize with and spend time with.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. What did she study in school?

Scot McElveen: Business.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Scot McElveen: Business. And she ended up getting a job afterwards in the local town outside the park named Maggie Valley, North Carolina. She ended up getting a job first as a restaurant um, whatever the person at the front door is called.

Hannah Nyala West: Hostess?

Scot McElveen: Hostess. And later she ended up getting the manager's job of that restaurant, and it wasn't that much later. It was only like six months or eight months later, so she was then making more money than I was as a ranger, you know, at her, then just right out of

college and that was pretty interesting. And then, not too long after that, I changed jobs in the park and became a backcountry ranger. We had a backcountry ranger unit for the whole North Carolina side of the park, and so I switched to one of those jobs, which was not a required occupancy job. I didn't have to live in the park, and we bought a house in Maggie Valley and I commuted about thirty minutes over to Cherokee every morning, which is where I reported to work, at Cherokee, North Carolina.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. Was that also a GS-5?

Scot McElveen: The job in Cataloochee was a 5 when I got there. It had received an upgrade to a 7 while I was in it, so it had gone to a 7 and this job at Cherokee was also a 7.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Scot McElveen: GS-7 job.

Hannah Nyala West: When did you start the Cherokee job?

Scot McElveen: Sometime in May of 1987. That was an interesting – there's always an interesting argument in the Great Smokies about what rangers, what protection rangers should and shouldn't be doing. And there was kind of two camps in that discussion. There was a camp of rangers that worked a lot along the main roads, and that's where the main visitors were at and there of course were auto accidents and drunks and drugs and all those types of situations along the main road and the main campgrounds. And then there those of us that were in the more remote locations, that spent a lot more time on trails and on streams and stuff like that than we did in a patrol car. And there was always this competing discussion about what should rangers really be doing. Should we have more rangers in the front country dealing with the visitors? Or should we have more rangers in the backcountry dealing with actual violations that actually impact the resources of the park? And those types of discussions back and forth. But I thought, when the park was organized in the protection where there was a chief ranger, then a district ranger for both sides of the park, which were Tennessee and North Carolina basically were half, the Appalachian Trail cut park in half, and half the park was Tennessee, and half the park was North Carolina. You had a district ranger that was responsible for each one of those sides, and I thought our district ranger on the North Carolina side was pretty savvy in understanding that in setting up this backcountry unit, because otherwise those employees somehow the employees that are close to the front country always get sucked up into front country activities. They need somebody to cover the road for an hour because this ranger's on vacation or sick or in training or whatever. Or they need you to work the campground for half a day. You

never, in those front country locations – even though they had more rangers because they had more visitors comparatively to, say, Cataloochee, where we only had two, you know, they might have six or seven ranger, but they still, in their mind, never had enough, and so they were always sucking in more rangers. So he, rather than give them more rangers, he said, "Okay, I'm gonna dedicate a backcountry unit to this side of the park, and you don't have to – unless it's really the most dire of emergencies, somebody's dying or something – you don't have to get sucked into these other duties. Your job is to still be out in the backcountry, looking for resource-type issues and violations." And I thought that was pretty wise of him, and I would've liked to see that model followed in a lot of the other parks that I followed in. I think it's very similar to the way the states, a lot of the states organize their law enforcement folks. You almost always have a highway patrol that deals with those kinds of issues, and then you have state conservation officers that deal with wildlife and other issues like that, and they don't have to have the same skill set, they don't have to respond to every single thing. They're not more of a –the front country folks are more of a response base. They respond to the dispatcher telling 'em, you know, "There's a bear in the campground" or "It's hurt somebody" or "There's somebody that's had a heart attack at the overlook" or "There's an auto accident" or "There's something" – they're responding to someone telling them a report of something, whereas the backcountry rangers or the state conservation officers are more, they're not responding, they're going out in the remote areas *looking* for things. Because nobody's gonna report them because nobody's there *to* report them. And I think that model would fit a lot better in the other parks throughout my career, and I thought he was pretty savvy to set it up that way.

Hannah Nyala West: Who was he?

Scot McElveen: His name was Chuck Harris, or Charles F. Harris. Chuck. And he lives in Morehead City, down on the coast of North Carolina.

Hannah Nyala West: Did you all have concurrent jurisdiction through the Smokies from the outset or was that something that also had to be negotiated?

Scot McElveen: Well, I can't say from the outset, from 1934, when the park was established. I don't remember that, but we certainly had it concurrent while I was there on our side, and Tennessee side was exclusive for some of that time. But I didn't work, I was rarely working in the Tennessee side, unless I was like driving to headquarters and I saw something that needed to be handled while I was on my way there. Or if they had some special event in and around Gatlinburg that they called some of us over to help with, so I didn't have to deal with the Tennessee side courts or jurisdictional issues very often. But North Carolina had concurrent,

and I believe, my recollection was that, at some point, North Carolina had passed a regulation or law that just said all units in the National Park System in the state of North Carolina have, you know, we have concurrent jurisdiction with any unit in this state. But I don't remember when that was or how far in advance of my getting to the Great Smokies that was.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. What were your favorite projects while you were there?

Scot McElveen: Rangers used to do – before the divisions got even more separated and more specialized – rangers used to do a lot of the resource management duties as well, and I really liked those. I liked doing electro-shocking for trout studies, where you tried to determine how many fish per a section was, and they you'd extrapolate that to how many fish per mile there were, and it was size, species, number. I really enjoyed those projects. I liked the bear surveys where we'd go out and hang sardines in the trees for every half mile or so down the length of a ten-mile trail and, you know, eight or ten days later you'd come back and see how many of them had been disturbed by a bear. And you can tell when a bear tears into a sardine can, as opposed to something else say a raccoon, you can see. The bear's not very gentle with any kind of container. They pretty much tear it up to get into the food. So that was interesting, the hog stuff was interesting. While I was there the hogs weren't in the Cataloochee section of the park yet, so I didn't have to deal with that very much in Cataloochee, but once I got back to the backcountry job, I was doing the hog thing again. So, I liked the resource jobs, and I liked trying to catch illegal fishermen and illegal hunters in the park, too. I really enjoyed all that. I didn't enjoy working in the campground quite as much as catching folks that I knew, knew better than to do what they were doing in the park and decided to do it anyway. And when those things were gonna hurt park resources, I really enjoyed catching those folks [chuckles] and prosecuting them.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. How long were you in that posting?

Scot McElveen: Till May of 1990. I had accepted a promotion, I mean, I had accepted a temporary promotion in the park where I was going to be a sub-district ranger for most of that summer in a temporary location, but before that actually came to fruition, I was offered a promotion to be a district ranger at a place called Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. So, I left Maggie Valley in June of 1990 and transferred to Pictured Rocks as a district ranger, which was a supervisor of both permanent and seasonal staff. Even though I had done some supervision of volunteers and seasonals at the Smokies, even though there was no supervision in my position description, so that wasn't a requirement, but I had done it, asked to do it, so that I could get

some experience and be competitive for a promotion to the GS-9 level. So that was quite the move for a boy from the south to go somewhere that got 200 inches of snow a year. And even, you know, there were some really warm periods in the summer, no doubt, but even in the spring and the fall it was pretty cool a lot of the time. So it was a, it was very much a different experience, and plus it was, even though I had been at Gulf Islands which was a national seashore and there were some recreation certainly, some recreation attached, I hadn't been there long enough to, I don't think, to understand that I wasn't as particularly well cut out philosophically to work in areas of the park service where hunting was legal and where some other extractive recreational-type activities were legal. I liked the old parks and monuments better, where those things are not legal, and I found that to be the case working more so at Pictured Rocks cause I stayed there longer.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Scot McElveen: I guess I should back up and say, during that seasonal job in 1982, when I was at Twenty-Mile Ranger Station in Great Smokies, that's how I got my first introduction and initiation into the Association of National Park Rangers, because the Ranger Rendezvous that year was at Fontana Village, which is only about six miles from Twenty-Mile Ranger Station, and my boss said, "You know, if you're hoping for more than to just come back here and work for four or five years, if you're hoping for a career in the Park Service and even just seasonal jobs in other parks, you oughtta, you know, join and go over there, cause there'll be a lot of the supervisors that do the hiring will be there and you can meet some of 'em and maybe make a favorable impression." So that was really when I joined and the first function that I went to, and there were a lot of the students from that seasonal law enforcement training were there as well that year, so that was my introduction into ANPR.

Hannah Nyala West: Do you think that it had that effect on your career?

Scot McElveen: I don't think it did then because I got a permanent job so quickly the next year, and it wasn't from anybody in ANPR, so I don't think it initially did. But once we start talking about later on, I do think it definitely did, because I ended up on the board for ANPR and that gives you some exposure to the people at the next level that are hiring. Chief Rangers, Division Chiefs, and on up the ladder like that, so I think at that point it helped some, but not initially. Other than maybe giving me, you know, again, in those early 80s days we didn't have email, we didn't have the communications, certainly I mean obviously no cell phones, things like that, so communication was top-down. You got what you got, and it was usually in writing. I think ANPR even at that time

helped me understand more about how the National Park Service worked internally than the Park Service did itself. And so that was certainly understanding the inner workings of how the system worked and what the different jobs were and what grades they were and what kind of skills they were looking for at various grades, I think, helped me start to prepare myself to get promotions and move up the chain of command much better than the Park Service did itself.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. So, it sounds like career mentoring, that was crucial, and it played that role, probably for a lot of people.

Scot McElveen: Yeah, I do think so, and I think it, part of that is because in our own internal selfishness, when you have employees that work for you, depending on how open a supervisor you are, you might not necessarily want to tell them everything about how the system works cause then you're gonna lose 'em. And so maybe, consciously or subconsciously, you hold some of that information back so you can hold onto this good employee longer, and when you're talking to people at a conference like this, both then and now, if they're not your supervisor, they don't have that investment in you as a good employee that they'll have to train somebody else, so they're not as concerned about giving you that good information about getting around the idiosyncrasies of getting hired in the service as maybe your own supervisor would be.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. That's interesting.

Scot McElveen: I also thought, I think, that while the training at Federal Law Enforcement Training Center was good for someone that didn't necessarily see himself as a 'career in law enforcement', the strict discipline of law enforcement, it was good training to understand a lot of that stuff on how to keep yourself safe and, you know, I never imagined anybody would try to hurt me because I was writing them a $25 speeding ticket, which they will, I mean, you have to get that in your brain. So that was good training. I think the more—

[END OF TRACK 3]

[START OF TRACK 4]

Scot McElveen: —career-influencing training for me was to go from Great Smokies to the Grand Canyon to go to Ranger Skills at Albright Training Center for six weeks in 1986. That, even though the service in the park I was in didn't give me all the knowledge I needed on how the service worked and all the things it did, that six weeks in Grand Canyon gave me a lot of that, too. And that was very, very good training. And one of the reasons that later on in my life I ended up instructing a lot myself at the Training Center in

Grand Canyon, cause I thought it was such a good thing to get that early, that other employees ought to get that knowledge of NPS history early.

Hannah Nyala West: All right, so would you like to fill out a little bit more of your position at Pictured Rocks?

Scot McElveen: Mmhm. More of a general style position, in that as the district ranger you supervised both protection – which was not nearly as developed as Great Smokies, because that park, Pictured Rocks, didn't get as many visitors for one thing, there weren't as many law enforcement issues at Pictured Rocks as there were at Great Smokies – but you not only supervised protection, but you supervised interpretation as well. So I had two smaller visitor centers to supervise the operation of, seasonal employees and volunteers, and that was a new thing for me, cause I had not supervised employees in anything other than either protection or resource management-type duties out in the field somewhere. Not dealing with visitors on a specific question-and-answer kind of basis or doing walks and talks and those campfire type programs or, in our case, sometimes coast guard station programs, whatever that particular park had. So that was all new for me, and it was new to be a supervisor that younger folks kind of looked up to because you had some influence over their career. You know, that was a new role for me to be in. Pictured Rocks had only been a park since the mid-60s, so about 25 years, by the time I got there. There was still some – not to the depth it was in the Smokies – but there was some unhappiness that "That used to be our farm and our land," and there was also an issue of snowmobiling in the park. There was the county road through the park, which we didn't have, we had authority to do some things on, but we didn't have exclusive authority on, and so the state and county could allow activities like snowmobiling on that road, which is some cases made it harder on us, because snowmobilers inevitably, some percentage of them, are not going to stay on the road, they're gonna go off into the park, which was not legal for them to do. And so keeping them on the road became a kind of a difficult thing to do, especially because there's a set of dunes at that end of the park – sand dunes, really high ones – and not only did it hurt some small species of wildlife to have the snowmobiles up on those dunes, because it compacts those dunes, and they can't dig under those dunes to do what they need to do to live in the wintertime, but you know frequently up there the snow would be sparse because the wind had blown it off and they would damage some of the native plants and some of those types of things. And sometimes they themselves would get into trouble if they went down the side of the lake, which was steep and sometimes had holes in it and they would get hurt in those places that they weren't supposed to

be in in the first place on snowmobiles, so there were those winter issues there.

Scot McElveen: I also got to – it's the only place I got to combine the two loves of my life professionally, in that I got to be the assistant basketball coach for the little varsity basketball team there in this little community of Grand Marais, Michigan, which was a great, great fun to be able to do that. This, as opposed to Great Smokies where there the winter was certainly slower, but there was no time that you were kind of in a downtime completely. You know, in this park I didn't have to worry terribly about being called out for many emergencies from, you know, about mid-November to about mid-March. There might be a few snowmobile accidents, but not much, so I could devote my off-time to other things without fear of having to be in the middle of something and have to say, you know, "I'm sorry, my real job takes precedence and I've gotta go." That didn't happen very much at Pictured Rocks, so that was a nice change. Because I never – some rangers really love that emergency services work – and that was never my interest. I mean, I did it cause it was part of the job, but that was not my priority.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. What did Susan do there?

Scot McElveen: She didn't stay with me very long. She came back to North Carolina because she had, as I'd said, she got this job as the manager of this big swanky restaurant in Maggie Valley that was paying her more than I was making as a ranger, and when she got to this little community which basically had, you know, about 300 people living in it, the only job she could get was like working at a cash register at a gas station and convenience store in town, which was not very fulfilling for someone that had already had a higher level job, so she decided that she was going back to North Carolina and that, after discussions, I think she felt that maybe she wasn't going to be all that well suited for the moving around that I was going to be doing over the years anyway, cause I knew that I was gonna keep moving every two or three or five years and that was easier for me cause everywhere I went I had a job when I got there – a professional job when I got there – and every time I'd have some professional peers to socialize with if I needed to and, you know, she had to start over every time with who knows what level job and who knows what kind of social situation. So, I think the moving was not something that she was going to be looking forward to. [Loud banging noise outside. Laughs.]

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.] What was that? That's one of the recurring themes of these stories, is just the difficulty of the trailing spouse, the one who has to follow in order for it to be able to do that. From this perspective do you have any ideas on how that might be mitigated better or could be – could it be?

Scot McElveen: You know, it's really, I mean, a lot of, some parks do a better job of dual career combinations than others do. They try to wait till there's a second job that a spouse might be qualified for and advertise them together rather than immediately advertise the first job when it comes open, you know, hoping that they can help both employees. And that seems to, some of the really remote places like Death Valley and Great Basin seem to do a better job of that, because they have a hard time getting employees there anyway and, when they get 'em there, there's only so many government houses to go around so if they have two employees in one house that helps in several ways. So, I think some of them do a better job, but I'm not sure. I don't know how you balance equality of opportunity to all Park Service employees to get the job against the happiness of a couple of National Park Service employees, so I'm not sure how you could ever completely mitigate it. If you know that you want a specific skill set in a job and you want everybody to have the opportunity to equally compete for that opportunity, is it right then to attach a second job to that? I don't know.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Yeah. One of the enduring challenges, I think, for the service. So, what were some of the things that you did at Pictured Rocks that you were most pleased with or accomplishments there that stand out to you?

Scot McElveen: I liked the fact that we still were doing resource management at that level. We were doing some endangered species; a bird called the piping plover that we were protecting some nests there in Pictured Rocks. I liked that. I was able to hire a permanent employee while I was there, and I got somebody named John Pavokovich, unfortunately who just passed away from cancer about six months ago, who I think mainly shared my philosophy of rangers needing to focus on resource-type law enforcement issues with their law enforcement time, minus some real life-and-death type situation that we obviously had to go deal with, but I was happy with that hire. Although when I first got the list, it was a big list. I had probably fifty names on this list and there were a lot of them that were very qualified. And when I narrowed it down at first, I ended up going to my boss, the chief ranger, and saying, "I'd like to hire this person," who was someone also back in the Smokies that had been in a lower, kind of lower level than me, I mean, I didn't work day-to-day with him, but he was in the park. I knew who he was, and my boss thought about that for a while and he said, "I see that he's a good employee, but I think what you're basically doing is hiring yourself. You're hiring somebody that has the same skill set you have, because you like that skill set. And maybe you oughtta think about hiring, look at some of these other employees, and think about hiring somebody that has some skills that you don't have. Like snow operations and things like that."

That was a good point and so I reevaluated and hired John, and I think still got somebody that was interested in resources as well as had some of the north-country skills that a southern boy didn't necessarily have.

Scot McElveen: So, I enjoyed that process of hiring somebody. What I didn't enjoy about that particular job was the Midwest Region seemed to have an unofficial policy of holding ranger grades kind of low. You know, most district rangers – even though I wouldn't have been able to apply for a higher graded district ranger job – most district rangers in the Park Service at that time were probably 11s or 12s or somewhere in that region instead of 9s. And there was a guy in the regional office whose first name was Jack, and I can't remember his last name, and he was the regional job classifier, and he came out for an audit while I was there, and he was pretty critical of me not spending more time doing what he considered to be park management duties, which is what he felt a GS-9 District Ranger should be doing. And my argument always was that the job of field employees come first, and if you don't have anybody to do that job, then you've gotta do some of it yourself. There's nobody else to do it. So, you know, on the days when my other permanent employee that I'd hired was off on his lieu days or when he was in training or something, you know, rather than doing all these management duties, I felt it was more important to be in the field doing the field duties, and this guy didn't see it that way, and I always thought that was a difficult – he'd been in the regional classifier job for twenty or thirty years and he seemed to have a lot of power in the region – and I always disagreed with his philosophy on what rangers should be doing.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Wasn't taking into account the changes and the pressures on resources, it sounds like, as adequately as maybe he could have.

Scot McElveen: Yeah. I mean, more of a just a "Once you get to this level, you're more of a management person. You sit in the office and make, you know, plans and other people do the work. You're the planner and you think about the future and not so much the day to day." And, again, I was arguing, "Well that's fine when you've got somebody to do the day-to-day, but when you don't have somebody to do the day-to-day, then those duties take the priority over the planning for the future." So, I remember that pretty well. I enjoyed my seasonal folks, even though many of them were interpreters, which I had not supervised before, so they had a little bit different personality type than some of the protection seasonals would. And I enjoyed understanding that and supervising that.

Hannah Nyala West: Can you say a little more about the different personality types?

Scot McElveen: I think many protection rangers are more adrenalin-driven, that they end up liking incidents. They like fires, they like the big law enforcement case, they like the big accidents, they like EMS things, so they're a little more extroverted, looking for those types of incidents. I think that, from my perspective, the younger seasonal interpretive, even though they like giving their programs and they like talking to visitors, many of them are shy and introverted to start with, and very thoughtful, and just getting them to break out of that first shell to get them some confidence in their first programs that they talk in front of people and make sure they get their facts right and they're not, understanding when people ask them a question that they don't know it's okay to say "I don't know and I'll find you the answer later." You're not expected to know everything about every ecosystem or every historic resource inside your park unit. Was fun to do that. But I just think one is more of an adrenalin-junkie, for the most part, except for someone like me who is more of a resource-junkie. I think I had a difference from a lot of other protection rangers in that I am not adrenalin driven. I like to get away from that stuff as much as [laughs] I can and get into the backcountry and get as far away from all of that as I possibly can. But a lot of the people that I worked with were more big-incident-driven, "I want to be a part of a big incident, something really big and exciting that's going on."

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Scot McElveen: I also had an issue with, again, the administrative officer in the park, in that the Park Service has certain standards for how often fees have to be collected and be deposited from like campgrounds, and this park had a couple big campgrounds in it that were full a lot in the summer. And she was always pressuring us to make sure that we met those deadlines of collecting the money and getting it into the bank, and again, with not enough staff to do that by those deadlines and then do anything else, was sometimes difficult to meet. You know, if you wanted to make sure you patrolled a certain part of the park a certain number of times a week or if you were having a specific resource issue, you know, you knew you had some illegal fishermen somewhere or you knew you had something that you wanted to check on, it was hard to make the time to both do that and meet these deadlines, and I found that to be – it seemed like the duties that were being emphasized were not the most important to meet the mission of the National Park Service, and I found that a difficult working relationship. And I think that also was part of that recreation-area philosophy. When Hartzog, even though that was back in the 60s, when Hartzog set these areas up, he had a management book for each: he had a management book for natural areas, he had a management book for historical areas, he had a management book for recreation areas.

And a lot of the things you did in the recreation areas management-wise were much more lenient. You didn't concentrate on some of those things that you might concentrate on in a natural area, from a management and daily work duty standpoint. And I found that difficult to adjust to. It was hard for me to think that counting money for the salary they were paying, and the skill set that they were paying me, was more important than me, you know, checking on the resources of the park and making sure that those resources were okay. So that was something that didn't make me as happy to stay there, and so I only ended up staying about two years there and moved on, albeit to another recreation area, but I did move on to Assateague Island in Maryland, National Seashore.

Hannah Nyala West: Given the shortness of the time that we have now, would you give us that overview of the rest of your career that you talked about, so that we can have that as a structure to come back to for follow-up interviews, and then we'll get to the ANPR, briefly at least.

Scot McElveen: Sure. Okay. In 1992 I went to Assateague Island National Seashore in Maryland. It has sections in Maryland and Virginia, but I was in the Maryland section as the GS-9 Operations Supervisor for the Maryland District of the Park. And during my tenure there, that job, through the Ranger Careers Initiative, was upgraded to a GS-11 job while I was in place. So, I supervised four or five permanent rangers and then another six or eight seasonal rangers in that job. I stayed there until 1997, when I was initially hired as the Assistant Chief Ranger at Death Valley National Park, and I got there in July of 1997, but once I got there, almost immediately the Chief Ranger left, and I ended up being the chief ranger there. Of the 24 months I was there, I was the chief ranger for 18 of those months. So, I was really only the assistant chief ranger for six months.

Scot McElveen: I went from there to, I took a downgrade and went back to a Chief Ranger job which was a lower grade at a place called John Day Fossil Beds National Monument in Oregon, stayed there—

Hannah Nyala West: Back to a GS-9?

Scot McElveen: No, back to an 11. I was a 12 and sometimes a 13 at Death Valley, because the assistant chief ranger was a 12, the chief ranger was a 13.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay.

Scot McElveen: Went back to an 11 at John Day Fossil Beds, and then I went to be the chief ranger at Harper's Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia in 2002.

Hannah Nyala West: Was that a 13?

Scot McElveen: That was a 12. So, from an 11 at John Day back to a 12, which I'd already been, at Harper's Ferry. Stayed there until 2004. Then I

had my 20-year enhanced annuity retirement commitment was complete at that time. To get, you have to have that twenty-year block sometime in your career to get that enhanced annuity retirement, so I had done that. I had remarried several years – in Assateague in Maryland I had gotten remarried, and my wife ended up coming into the Park Service at Death Valley, so she had been following me around taking lower level jobs in the parks like at John Day and then in West Virginia, and so finally she said she would like to be considered for more middle- and upper-level Park Service jobs in her life, too. So, I decided, you know, I had this twenty years done and that was fine, so she could find a management job, and I'd just find whatever job the Park Service had. So she transferred to be the administrative officer at Devil's Tower National Monument, and the closest job I could find to her was at Mount Rushmore, back as just a GS-9 field ranger, and I stayed there about seven months and then the GS-7 fee manager job came open at Devil's Tower, and I went to be the Devil's Tower fee manager for the last couple years of my career.

Hannah Nyala West: Uhhuh. Okay. What is your wife's name?

Scot McElveen: Her name is Jeannine. J-E-A-N-N-I-N-E. Jeannine McElveen.

Hannah Nyala West: Okay. It'd be fun to interview her.

Scot McElveen: And she's now the administrative officer at Curecanti and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. Those two parks have the same administrative unit for both of them.

Hannah Nyala West: Awesome.

Scot McElveen: Yes. So I retired in 2007 at the age, almost as soon as I turned 50, and the neatest part was that I requested from Devil's Tower superintendent that if I could work it out to work my last day back at Twenty-Mile Ranger Station back in Great Smokies, if they'd let me go back and do that. And I got to do that. I got to work my last day where I started my first.

Hannah Nyala West: That is just absolutely lovely, to think both that you would've thought of it, requested it, and that the Service would honor it. That's one of those heart-wrenching kind of stories that I feel that the public doesn't really get to know the ranger through the mystique, but through something like that – how much that place meant – we can gain so much more insight into what these lands can mean and what the lives of the human beings dedicated to these lands for their whole careers can mean. So, thank you for sharing that. Very, very much. I know there's more.

Scot McElveen: Yeah, those places really do get in your blood and sometimes even the longer you've been away from them, somehow that builds in your blood. You want to get back and see. Even though it's always

fun to see new parks and new places, you always want to get back and see the places that you worked, you know, once in your life, and see what's changed and what's the same and talk to the ranger that works there now and see what they're up to these days.

Hannah Nyala West: Yeah, yeah. Is that a place that you still go to? Physically or in your heart?

Scot McElveen: Except for the fact that I couldn't do anything about people that were doing anything illegal that summer because I wasn't a law enforcement employee, except for that fact, that was the best job I ever had with the Park Service. Though certainly I had still go there mentally, you know, thinking about how much fun that was and how inspired I was to continue for a career in the Park Service after having done that for that summer. I don't go back there physically as much – I went a couple of times – when we left Devil's Tower, I retired and my wife took a job, a promotion to the AO at Big South Fork in Tennessee, which is about two and a half or three hours from Twenty-Mile, so, you know, I went back a couple times while we were in Tennessee, but I don't know that I would go back there, I don't know that I would take a vacation intentionally to go back there.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. So, it'd be a different—

Scot McElveen: Yeah. But it definitely is still something, a summer that I think about probably more than I think about the other times that I spent in the Park Service, because it was simple, you know, I had a pretty simple job, I had a lot of the recreational opportunities that I enjoyed, so it all just seemed to fit together for that—

[END OF TRACK 4]

[START OF TRACK 5]

Scot McElveen: —one summer where I didn't know that much about the bureaucracy of the agency. It hadn't really affected me at that level yet. And so probably I'm making it more idyllic than it really was.

Hannah Nyala West: If you haven't done an oral history for them at Smokies – I don't know if they have an oral history program active, but I think I heard that they were doing that – it'd be really, really good if they could get a copy of this, so that they would have it. So that, again, it widens the ability of people to understand the places that they're on, because it's likely that that job now, if it still exists, is much more impacted by the bureaucracy. Even if it is still a GS-5 or GS-7 job.

Scot McElveen: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: It's likely that it has changed significantly.

Scot McElveen: Yeah. I'm sure that you're correct, because if we get a subsequent interview and we talk about bigger issues in the Park Service, I kind of felt that the protection division was on the right track post-Ranger Careers, which was 1994, until 9/11. When 9/11 happened, we got this over wash of public – everything had to be related to public safety, and it just changed everything that we did, in my opinion. It changed our priorities, in some cases wrongly. We changed our priorities.

Hannah Nyala West: It's definitely changed the character of search and rescue and law enforcement and interpretation, on a daily basis, when you – like at Joshua Tree, which I worked at in the middle 80s and Joshua Tree for the last three years – really significant differences in the kinds of work that's being done and where the focus is and that sort of thing. I would love to be able to follow up and do a much more in-depth interviews with you for the remaining parts of your career and for ANPR. But can you sketch for me or us a little bit your increasing role with ANPR and what the organization means to you? And then we'll just make sure we do follow-up interviews.

Scot McElveen: Okay. My first Rendezvous was in 1982 at Fontana Village in North Carolina. I think the next one I went to was the ten-year one in 1986, which was in Jackson, Wyoming, and I had never been west until earlier that year, when I went to Ranger Skills in the Grand Canyon. So that was a big year for me going out west and seeing what the west was like and how much I enjoyed it and thought it would be a good place for me to work. So, I went to that one. Then in 1988 I went to the one in Snowbird, Utah, and back then the board was comprised of a president and a few officers and then we had regional representatives that mirrored the Park Service regions. And you couldn't be a representative for that region unless you worked in that region, and ours for the southeast region was getting ready to move out of the region, so we were going to have to get somebody new. And I decided to run for that board position and was elected for the next year to be on the board of directors of the southeast region, for that board position.

Scot McElveen: I only got to do that for a year because then it would've been up for reelection anyway, and then I moved out of the region, too, to go to Pictured Rocks, so I wouldn't have been eligible for reelection in that region the next year anyway. And I ended up, one of the questions we were continually having was, 'If we're getting three or four hundred new members each year in ANPR, why aren't we retaining them so that our membership total number increases over time?' And so I was tasked with understanding that and, you know, I sent out a lot of surveys to folks that had left the membership to try to understand why and what we could do different and those types of things. I did that for a couple of years.

I ran – what did I run for? I ran for one of the vice presidents and was not elected to that position. And then we had a board reorganization and changed some of the titles of the board, and I ran for the one called Special Concerns in 1999 and was elected to that position. And that is the position that kind of helps the president understand issues that might raise to the level that we would be asked by either the Senate or the House sub-committees on National Parks to make some kind of comment or asked by the administration in power to make some kind of comment on some policy proposal or some issue in the National Park System. So, I did that for three years. I actually ended up testifying in the Senate sub-committee in 19 – no, it was year 2000 or 2001, I forget now – because the president couldn't make it to that testifying, so I had to fill in for her and testified in regards to there'd been a big study about law enforcement in the National Park Service and a report had come out, and many of the recommendations were just sitting there. We weren't doing much in the Park Service toward getting to them, and so the sub-committee wanted to know what we thought should be focused on and what Park Service needed to do to realize some of the recommendations in that report, so I testified at that one.

Scot McElveen: Went off the board again in 2002 and even though I was off the board the president at that time asked me to testify again before the Senate in 2003, and this time the issue was outsourcing of many of the Park Service functions to contracting type agencies or contracts in the private sector, rather than having federal employees do them. And so that probably wasn't all that good for my career, since I was testifying in opposition to what the director was testifying for, because she was told what, 'This is what the administration wants and so this is what you will testify to as the director.' But I don't think she ever, I don't think she ah felt kindly about either myself or ANPR or the Coalition or the other agencies that were testifying on the other side of what she was being officially asked to recommend.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm.

Scot McElveen: So, I'm not sure that was helpful for my years later, for the few superintendencies that I did apply for.

Hannah Nyala West: Yes.

Scot McElveen: Let's see. And then I ran for president in 2007 and was elected and served as president the years of 2008, '09, and '10, and I felt that we made some strides there. We got the membership back up to around 1300, which is not as high as it was in the mid-90s but I think when I came in the membership was just at like 950 or something, so we got it back up there some, and we ended up

testifying one more time, although I couldn't go cause I was in Utah and I couldn't get there but we testified one more time. I forget what the subject was now, even though I wrote the testimony, I can't even remember what I wrote it on. And then in almost 2008 and early 2009 was tied up with the firearms in parks issue, so I did lots of interviews about why we didn't think allowing firearms in parks was the right thing to do, and we were part of the lawsuit that stopped the initial regulation that the Bush administration just pushed through without doing NEPA compliance or NHPA compliance or any of that stuff that needed to be done before they could change a regulation like that. So, we got that initially stopped. Of course, we lost when the Senate decided, and the House decided that they were gonna pass a law that didn't require any of that review. So, we won the first battle but lost the bigger war there. So, I think that's kind of it for ANPR for positions.

Scot McElveen: It's meant a lot, it meant a lot early on because we didn't have all these communication abilities like email and cell phone and all the things that they have now, and so you didn't, if something wasn't working in your park, you didn't always know how to fix it, but in another park almost – somewhere in the Service another park had already addressed that problem and found a solution that was working pretty well. And you could either take it, use it outright or maybe modify it some for the circumstances in your park and get pretty positive results, and that was a powerful reason for coming to these Ranger Rendezvous, to get that kind of experience and frankly some of it was just schmoozing to try to get your next job. I mean, I think we'd all be naive if we didn't realize that when someone is hiring a job in any organization or agency or company, and if they have got ten applications that they're looking at in which there's not a whole lot of difference between the top one and the lower one, if they don't know anybody, then everybody may be still equal. But if they have met one of those people and have talked to them face to face even for a brief minute or two, that gives that person an edge over the other nine. Or if they know somebody on that person's application that they trust, then that gives them an edge over those other nine, probably all other things being equal. So I think those relationships that you built here in those days made a greater difference in your potential for selection either to just a lateral transfer or a promotion if you had met the right person or they knew someone from this organization that they trusted that you had met.

Hannah Nyala West: There is so much that we could go into, and that you could go into and provide insight on, and that's – the employment patterns of history in the agency are fascinating in how, not each decade, but people who came in in the 50s and people who came in in the 60s,

they experienced really different career trajectories even in very individualized and almost idiosyncratic career paths in some ways. You know, people had very individual type careers and movements, but there are some patterns that begin to emerge after you interview a few people that haven't been tracked very thoroughly in any of the literature, and I think you could offer a – you, all of you who we're interviewing now – can offer a lot of just raw data for that. Start understanding that better, that crucial 50-year period behind us just now is a piece of history – agency history and national history actually – that we're still piecing together and trying to understand better.

Scot McElveen: One of the knocks against ANPR for many years was that it was a "good ol' boys club" that, you know, "you all just sit around and drink beer and help each other out career-wise," and there's some truth to that in that the 32 or 33 people that started this organization (which I wasn't one of), but they did hire, when one of 'em got to be a chief ranger and they were looking for district rangers, they did hire each other and kind of move each other up in the service, you know, in different parks and places as they went. But I'm not so sure, having known all of them that I would classify it as a 'good old boys club' as much as 'I know this person personally, I know them well, I've spent time with them talking about issues as opposed to these other people on this list that I only know their name and what they've written on paper, and therefore I'm gonna hire the person that I know and trust.' I just think that's a human trait that we all have, all other things being equal, and that continues now, and it always will continue. That personal knowledge of something gives you more internal self-confidence to make that selection than not knowing.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Yeah, it's not, you're not stepping off into an entirely unknown sector then. You at least have some things that you can count on, certain personal qualities or whatever that you know will be there. It may well be there in the rest of the applicants or some of them—

Scot McElveen: Sure.

Hannah Nyala West: —but you can't know it.

Scot McElveen: But you don't know it.

Hannah Nyala West: Right, exactly. The critical piece, I think, of a Park Service career seems to be having a set of mentors, people who really would help you to understand the bureaucracy, understand how it works, understand how to be effective in it, cause I think it is possible to be very isolated from that and not understanding it at all, and trying to be effective, trying to meet your requirements of your job, you know, under the legal regulations, and then trying to balance

all that. I suspect that these mentoring situations allowed you find very creative and ingenious solutions to what would otherwise be impassable challenges, you know?

Scot McElveen: Right. And I found more of that either here or in some of the training I went to like Ranger Skills or then I went to a Management class at Albright as well. I found more of it there than I did with my individual supervisors. Some of my individual supervisors to me seemed very self-centered. You know, I want to get what my work unit gets done, and I'm not really caring about what the bigger picture is necessarily as long as I get my work done and you help me get my work done. I'm not so sure I care about your career ten years from now. I want to get the work done that we have to get done this year, so I didn't get ah. A lot of my supervisors I would classify more as adversaries than as mentors. I mean, there were a few. My first seasonal year, that gentleman was a really good mentor as a seasonal. The guy at Pictured Rocks was pretty good, and then the superintendent at Death Valley was pretty good, but some of the others were no help, so I had to find somewhere else, and this is one of those places that I found that help.

Hannah Nyala West: Cool. Just very briefly and we'll definitely come back to this in a follow-up, from your experience and where you see the agency now, what are your thoughts on the future?

Scot McElveen: One of the things that I first perceived with the Park Service that I was totally wrong on was that there was no political influence in what I did out in the field as a field employee of the National Park Service. That all I had to do was understand what the law said and understand what NPS policy said and do those things, and everything would be fine. And I think, as the political wars in this country seem to have heated up, national parks seem to get involved in that, whether it be like from the government shutdown in 1994 that so many people screamed about national parks being closed for their very first thing, you know, was one of the things that people were unhappy about that changed the trajectory of that shutdown. Or just management policies, issues, changing the management policies, the rewrite in 2005 and 06 or any of those things – that politics plays a lot bigger role in this agency than I ever suspected as a young employee. And I'm worried that we'll end up making bad management decisions based on political needs rather than scientific or historical accuracy needs. So, I'm concerned about that. I'm concerned about our employees, because of the nature of fast communications in society now and so many other things to do, that they don't come together in as many social settings as we used to, and my generation did it even less than the guys in the 50s and 60s that were really isolated in these small

ranger enclaves and communities. The more that that happens to me, the more that this becomes a job just like any other job. You go to it when you're supposed to be there and you go home when you're supposed to go home, and you don't think about it very much when you're at home with your wife and your children or your spouse and your children or whoever you like to socialize with. You don't think about it as much where, for the people in the generation before me especially and even into my generation, the job permeates your life. You know, everything revolves around making sure you got your job done, whether you postpone your own personal vacation, or some need that you had because the park had a greater need for you to be there during that week or that month or whatever. I don't see that in the employees that I'm seeing coming up now, but then at the same time I also remember my first supervisor at Twenty-Mile, not long after I'd been there, saying, "I don't know about you new rangers. [Chuckles] You new rangers aren't like us old rangers!"

Hannah Nyala West: [Laughs.]

Scot McElveen: So I don't know how much of it is a generational thing and how much of that perception in my mind is accurate, but I just, I worry about the understanding that the National Park Service is a preservation agency, and that's what we should be about. And that we don't get changed so much that we become a recreation agency. That's what concerns me, I think, more than anything.

Hannah Nyala West: The agency's right on the cusp of that right now. That is a daily battle in the parks that I have personal experience with and people that are around in parks that I don't have experience with but that is a crushing battle, as well as the workload. And the speed of the workload, the deadlines that you get now can be today. You get the email and it's due this afternoon, and so the pace of things has drastically increased in the last 20 years or so.

Scot McElveen: Yeah.

Hannah Nyala West: What would be your hope for this agency? And for ANPR and this agency?

Scot McElveen: Well, I certainly would like to see at some point the public rally enough behind the agency to – and maybe climate change, if it ever gets accepted by the far right, is the catalyst for that but – at some point say that, Yes we really do need some part of this country that's preserved. Yes, we do need some part of this country where science is kind of the ruling factor. What we know about science and history is the ruling decision-making factors and not expediency of the moment or so that I can get reelected or whatever other factors are laid into that, that at some point we'll come back to that. Enough people will understand that having

everything right now isn't the way to go with every set of everything in your life. And I hope that the younger members of ANPR will be able to reenergize their generation to figure out what it is they want as a group. I mean, we, ANPR had four or five things that it wanted from the outset, from the organization starting in 1977 and, by the mid-90s, they got most of those things. They finally achieved most of those things, with the exception of housing rental rates and housing quality was the one that eluded us, but the rest of them we pretty much got. And I'm just not sure that the current generation has four or five burning things that they want corrected, that they think the National Park Service is doing wrong to coalesce around yet. And until they do, I'm not sure ANPR moves forward much to get a stronger or more active or more vocal membership, cause they don't have anything to rally around until they get that.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Right now, I think the sense for the entire society – the agency is not unique in this – but it's overwhelming right now. Almost everything needs to be addressed critically. So how do you pick and choose and how do you then begin to think about them differently. So, I think the mentoring that you all do for younger people will allow them to develop that self-confidence to even be able to do that now. Unfortunately, our society does not develop self-confidence in people to address burning issues. [Laughs.] They have to have some models.

Scot McElveen: [Laughs.] No, a lot of times it's 'put it off to the next generation' which is part of why we're in what problems that we're in, both fiscally and just from a standpoint of, you know, it seems like our grandfathers and mothers and great-grandfathers and mothers could see that, while our founding fathers did a great job and the Constitution's a great document, it needs to be amended occasionally to keep up with the things that are going on in society today, and we seemed to stop doing that about 1970 or so, to understand that there's a lot of things in the law of the Constitution that are great, but some of them need to be modified to fit today's needs, and we don't seem to have the ability to do that, because I don't think necessarily, my personal opinion is, that all these politicians that we send up there aren't bad people, but the system that they evolve in corrupts them into supporting their own reelection and supporting their party over the constituents that they have in either their districts or state, whatever their constituency is, cause even the most reddest of red states and the bluest of blue states, they only win with like a 66 – 33 – those are like the most far out. Most of 'em are like 54 – 47 or 55 – 45 or something, so it would seem to me that in your mind you'd say, you know, 'I've gotta do some things that the 45 percent of my constituency wants, so that means I have to make some compromises,' and right now

there's no thought that compromise is the right word or a good word.

Hannah Nyala West: Mmhm. Ironically, it's typically a tragedy in history, but the tragedies are what allow people to glimpse a different way of being, and this Hurricane Sandy has created one of the most visible immediacies of a Republican and a Democrat, key leaders involved in this, actually coming together. And it's not about politics and it's not about getting elected or beating somebody's agenda down, so they won't get elected. They're having to solve immediate crisis problems, and maybe that can be a new model of pushing us back toward thinking of the people we elect being statesmen, understanding that neither side gets exactly it wants, but they work together.

Scot McElveen: Sure.

Hannah Nyala West: I'm hoping that we get there before we get to the fiscal cliff in December!

Scot McElveen: You know, if I – I think even Ronald Reagan said – if I get 75 percent of what I want, as long as it's not a constitutional issue. I mean, I understand the abortion issue from some perspective, if you truly believe that birth begins at conception, then abortion is murder and that's a constitutional issue. I understand that. But most of the other stuff is just 'This way is the right way' versus 'This way is the right way.' And it seems to me if you can get some of what you want, you oughtta be able – unless there's been something that's absolutely proven black and white that this is the only path that you can go to get to the goal that you want, as long as there's some discussion about which path gets you were you want to go – you might try some of the ideas from this side as well as some of the ideas from this side.

Hannah Nyala West: Right, and come together for—

[END OF TRACK 5]

[START OF TRACK 6]

Hannah Nyala West: —the synergy of the great ideas, those come from really clashing hard and pushing hard that matter to both sides, and then you come up with something that actually might work that nobody'd thought about well. Yes, so we definitely will continue this.

[END OF TRACK 6]

[END OF INTERVIEW]