



# National Park Service Paleontology Program

## *Oral History Interview – Vincent Santucci*

Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/028



**ON THE COVER**  
Vincent Santucci

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Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2020/028

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

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

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## **Background**

This interview was conducted over the telephone on Monday, November 9, 2020 between Erin Eichenberg (EE), National Park Service in Boulder City, Nevada and Vince Santucci (VS), who was at his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. At the time of the interview, Vince was the National Park Service Senior Paleontologist and Paleontology Program Coordinator. Jon Burpee (JB), with the National Park Service and Jill DeStefano (JS), President of Protectors of Tule Spring also participated in the phone interview. The interview was recorded on a digital audio recorder and a mp3 file was created. A written transcription of the interview was produced from the digital audio recording by NPS volunteer R. Sky McClain, and this document contains the discussion during the interview. Vince Santucci signed a release form for the National Park Service for the preservation and use of the interview in the future. If present, PII has been omitted.

## Transcript

**1:45:21 Total**

[START OF INTERVIEW]

EE: So, let's begin. Today is Monday, November 9, 2020. My name is Erin Eichenberg. I'm the Integrative Resources Program Manager for the National Park Service at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. Today we are interviewing Vincent Santucci, who served as the first Superintendent at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. The interview is being conducted by telephone from Vincent's home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. He is currently the Senior Paleontologist for the National Park Service Paleontology Program. We are joined on the phone by Jon Burpee, a former Superintendent at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument and Jill DeStefano, the President and one of the founders of Protectors of Tule Springs. So, welcome, Vincent.

VS: Thank you.

EE: So, let's get to know more about you with this first question. When and where were you born? And also, where did you grow up and go to school?

VS: These are good questions. I was born in Pennsylvania. I grew up in the inner city and attended public schools. Went to Peabody High School. My first venture into fossil collecting, I was probably 11 years old, and we took a group of young boys that were friends of mine and we hiked down to the Allegheny River to some of the big outcrops. And had our first discoveries of fossils. Of course, that was very exciting at that age and had some influence on where I was going to go with my education.

EE: Thank you. Can you give us some background on how you wound up working for the National Park Service? And also, what parks have you worked for and the position titles that you held at those parks?

VS: Ok. Great. Thank you. When I was a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh in the geology department they required their Master's students to do original field work. One of the projects that was of great interest to me happened to involve fossils and geology in Badlands National Park. I decided that I would apply for a seasonal position at Badlands—a seasonal interpretive position—that would logistically provide me a place to stay and stage field work, provide me income, and it really worked out well. I was offered the position. I worked as a seasonal for two years between 1985 and 1986. Lots of the experiences that I had at Badlands, including encountering people who were stealing fossils, really helped to shape where I went with my graduate career and my professional career with the National Park Service. So, completed my master's thesis based on a project in Badlands National Park. From there I was offered a position under the Outstanding Scholar's Program at Petrified Forest National Park.

The Superintendent had learned that I was completing a seasonal law enforcement training program at Slippery Rock University. And he was very intrigued by the fact that there was somebody out there that was going to be a pistol packing paleontologist to help him deal with petrified wood loss at the park. So, I was offered my first permanent position at Petrified Forest in 1991. I was there for just a few years. I had to deal with my mother who became terminally ill with pancreatic cancer in 1993. So, in 1994 after the passing of my mother I took a one-year appointment at Grand Canyon National Park to help write their last ever integrated cultural and natural resources management plan. We went on in the Park Service to do resource stewardship strategy. So, it's one of the last integrated plans for the National Park Service System. Let's see, I worked at Yellowstone National Park. I worked as a Law Enforcement Ranger at Madison Junction. While I was there I was involved in the first comprehensive paleontological resource inventory for Yellowstone National Park. I was hired as the Chief Ranger in 1998 at Fossil Butte National Monument, a small monument in southwestern Wyoming. During my time between 1998 and 2003 I served as the Acting Superintendent there on two occasions. And in 1999 I actually became involved in a job share between Fossil Butte National Monument and the National Park Service Geologic Resources Division supporting the service-wide paleontological program.

**5:19**

VS: So, I came in as the first person to serve that role in the Geologic Resource Division. I did so on a half time basis until 1993. I'm sorry, I did that until 2003. In 2003 I took a position at the George Washington Parkway as the Chief Ranger. We needed to move back east to be closer to family that were aging. And so, this position was one of the last big Chief Ranger positions that retained all of the traditional Park Service responsibilities under it. Not only was I involved in Resource Management—overseeing both cultural and natural resources—was involved in supervision of Interpretation, Education, Visitor Services for the Parkway. Oversaw the permit system, the compliance program, and was the liaison with the US Park Police. So, it was a really big position; gained a lot of experience through all that. I guess it was around 2011 I was offered the permanent position with the Geologic Resource Division. I would serve as the liaison between the Geologic Resource Division and other Directorates in the Park Service. I also served as the Paleontology Program Coordinator. That position evolved and three years ago I was offered the full-time paleontologist position – Senior Paleontologist position, giving up the liaison responsibilities. I did a short acting assignment in 2015 between March 23<sup>rd</sup> and August 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2015 as the Acting Superintendent at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument, shortly after its creation.

**7:41**

VS: Did I answer everything?

EE: Yes, it sounds like the National Park Service is lucky to have you with all the experience, especially working at all the other National Park units.

VS: Thanks, I appreciate that.

EE: I guess we will go ahead and start the interview related to Tule Springs Fossil Beds. The first question is related to pre-monument. The Monument was established December 19, 2014. We will be talking about all of the events you were involved with prior to the Monument being established. So, prior to the establishment of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument, Tule Springs was known to contain a rich and well-preserved record of late Pleistocene ice age fossils. What pre-monument events do you think were important in demonstrating the need for designating the lands as a National Monument?

VS: Very good. Thank you. So, one of the things that is really important as a starting point for the discussion of an eventual creation of the monument was the work by Ted Fremd. Ted Fremd was the paleontologist at John Day Fossil Beds. He also served as a science advisor to the Pacific West Region [Director] at the time. And that was Jon Jarvis. Jon Jarvis would later become the Director of the [National] Park Service. In April 2009 Ted submitted a report with recommendations relative to the paleontological significance and aspects of Tule Springs Fossil Beds that may be conducive of this area becoming a unit of the National Park Service. So, this was right at a time when Jon Jarvis was transitioning from the Pacific West Regional Director and becoming the Director of the Park Service. And it was a month after Congress had passed the Paleontological Resource Preservation Act. So suddenly at the federal level there was a lot of talk about paleontology. And so having this document from Ted Fremd, referencing the importance of this particular fossil site in Nevada, going to the incoming Director of the National Park Service, I think, was a really serendipitous coincidence that probably went a long way toward what eventually happened at Tule Springs.

**10:20**

VS: For myself personally, in November of 2011 I was able to visit Tule Springs Fossil Beds for the first time. At that time it was still being managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Society of Bird Paleontology was hosting their annual conference in Las Vegas. Erik Scott and Kathleen Springer and Jeff Begody and Steve Rowland hosted a field trip to the site. You could tell right away there was a lot of real excitement about this particular site both from a scientific research perspective. Also, in terms of advocacy groups. So, Helen Mortenson and others in the community were talking about preserving this site. Anyways, I left the field trip. Flew home after the paleontology conference with a feeling, "Boy, this could make a remarkably important new addition to the National Park Service." And what was weighing in my mind, part of my obsession and my gathering of information about fossils within National Parks, is that we have lots of parks that were established that were dedicated to different phases of the history of life and geologic time periods. Hualapai Mountains National Park preserves the late Paleozoic, the



Permian fossil record. Then Triassic is preserved at Petrified Forest, the Jurassic at Dinosaur National Monument, Cretaceous in several parks such as Big Bend National Park. Then if we get into the Cenozoic there's so many parks that are dedicated to the Eocene, the Oligocene, the Miocene, and the Pliocene. So, Badlands National Park, Florissant Fossil Beds, and Fossil Butte National Monument were great parks preserving Eocene deposits. The Oligocene was well represented at Badlands National Park, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument in Nebraska was a wonderful representation for the Miocene, and for the Pliocene Haggard Fossil Beds National Monument was certainly a crown jewel. So, we didn't have a Pleistocene fossil park per say established although we had an Ice Age historic trail or we had an Ice Age Trail—it wasn't really set aside for the paleontology of the Pleistocene but more geologic phenomena. So, it seemed to be in my mind there was a void in terms of our opportunity to preserve, for science and for education, the story that is preserved in the most proximal portion of time period closest to human entry into the new world. We didn't have a fossil park that was designated for the Pleistocene. However, we had two places that had great potential. So, at the same time there was discussion emerging related to the Tule Springs Fossil Beds being preserved in some capacity there was also a lot of effort put forth in terms of a special Resource Study looking at the Waco Mammoth site Waco, Texas. So, they went through a whole study looking at feasibility, suitability of a National Park Service unit. They went through it in a Delphi process. So, there was discussions about two areas merging as possible areas to preserve Pleistocene fossil record. In 2011 we began to hear Director Jarvis push the initiative forward called 'Call to Action.' It was part of the planning for the National Park Service Centennial that would be coming forward in 2016. Looking towards tasks and accomplishments that could be achieved as we approached the second century of the National Park Service. I remember there being planning meetings where those of us in the Washington Office in Interior were called in – met with lots of people. Director Jarvis was there to share his thoughts and perspectives. And when they talked specifically about a portion of the 'Call to Action' called *Filling the Gaps* my heart raced. Because what was essentially called for in that portion of the 'Call to Action' was listed as Action Item #1 *Filling the Gaps* means: where do we have opportunities for better representation of stories. Whether they are historic, cultural, or natural and preserving those stories as part of the units of the National Park Service; filling those gaps. So, when we were requested to – we were offered the opportunity to fill in some information in terms of possible ideas, in addition to suggesting that they preserve Wiggly Field—if ever the chance that Wiggly Field was going to be closed down— to preserve as a National Monument to tell the story of America and baseball; that I put in a pitch for the need for a Pleistocene National Park. I wrote a couple page document suggesting that we might consider either Tule Springs Fossil Beds or Waco Mammoth as our considerations to fill the gap as it relates to Pleistocene paleontology. So, the rest is history and lo and behold, not only one of those sites but both of those sites wind up becoming units of the National Park Service. So, I'm very excited about it. I don't know if I had anything to do with it but that it happened, to me is what's important.

EE: Great. Thank you. I'm sure you did have something to do with it, with both of them actually, with all your effort advocating for the fossil park.

**17:00**

EE: Jon, do you have any pre-Monument questions for Vincent before we move to the next question?

JB: Vince, I was wondering if you had any, during the pre-passage period, did you have any outreach where the Nevada delegation was reaching out to the Park Service. And do you have any correspondence you were responsible for responding?

VS: Actually, I did not. I was very cautious about that. But, when you were asking that I just thought that was probably about the time that you and myself met. I don't remember the year you came to D.C. Sometime prior to the creation of Tule Springs you and myself had a chance to meet. Is that correct?

JB: Yes, I am not exactly sure of timing. More specifically I remember our first major interaction was actually post-passage when it was announced that you were going to be the acting at Tule Springs. Of course we ran into in the hall. I was curious as to whether or not the delegation had asked specific questions that had gotten to your desk about the possibility of creation of the Monument?

VS: I don't recall anything although I did communicate with the Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs about this before it was established. Because they gave me early warning that it looked like the Park Service was going to support this. There was testimony before the committee and Congress about the Park Service support for this site. I'm trying to remember the woman who I communicated with regularly on this. She wound up going to Denali as the Deputy Superintendent.

JB: I'm not quite sure who that was.

VS: Ok. Very good.

JB: I was just curious.

EE: Thanks Jon. Jill, do you have any pre-Monument questions for Vincent?

JD: Vince, did you have direct discussions with NPCA about the legislation or the support of the Park Service for the legislation?

VS: Yes, so in 2011 when I attended the Society of Bird Reptilian Paleontology meetings was the first time I had the opportunity to meet Lynn Davis from the National Parks and Conservation Association. She was very enthusiastic. She felt that NPCA had some real interest in seeing the area preserved and protected. Of course in 2011, nobody had any idea that

protection would involve the Park Service. But I do remember that over the course of the next few years before the Monument was actually established that the idea came up that the Park Service might be well-suited to serve that role instead of the BLM. There was some discussions there certainly.

JD: Ok. Thank you.

VS: Thank you.

EE: Thanks, Jill.

## 20:36

EE: Now we'll move on to the second question. Immediately after the Monument was established on December 19, 2014 the National Park Service needed to select the one to get the new National Monument up and running. Can you tell us about the chain of events that in which you were selected to be the first Superintendent of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument? Also, what preparations were made prior to the start of your detail / temporary role?

VS: Excellent. Thank you. So, of course there was a lot of celebrating once the Monument was created. Even though it was approaching the Christmas and New Year's holiday I did receive a call from a writer who publishes *National Park Traveler*. He asked my opinion about the new Monument. Did an interview with him. He published an article and once that was published I figured I better send this off to folks at the National Park Service at Pacific West Region. At the time it was told to me by someone in the Regional Office that Lake Mead [National Recreational Area] was probably going to take the temporary role in overseeing the new Monument. So, I was given Christie Vanover's [Lake Mead NRA Public Information Officer] name. I still have the e-mails between her and myself. I sent her the link to the National Park Traveler article. She was very pleased with it. And lo and behold shortly after that I received a call from Jennifer Haley wanting to talk about the article to talk about all the support they're going to need to try to figure out what they're going to do with the new Monument. Fortunately, I was already scheduled to come through Las Vegas to do some work at Death Valley National Park. So, I modified my travel schedule to come and meet with Patrick Gubbins, the Acting Superintendent at the time, Jennifer Haley, the Chief of Resources at Lake Mead, and Christie Vanover to talk about ways that we might be able to support the development of this new National Monument, Tule Springs. When I came out there we had two dedicated days of conversation and a lot of ideas were thrown around, including whether or not I would be interested in supporting them through a detail. And so, the idea came up to go ahead and do that. Of course, I would have jumped on it and stayed there and not returned home other than that I had a family and I had supervisors that I needed to get permission from. But I immediately contacted my supervisor who also immediately said, "Absolutely, we can support that." We had to run it through our Associate Director, Ray Sauvajot, at the time and Ray supported it. Ray came out of the Pacific West Region so I didn't have to explain much about what Tule Springs was and its significance. So, I had permission and

so we made arrangements to come out there and everything came together. I started on March 23<sup>rd</sup> [2015].

EE: Thank you. And then prior to coming to Tule Springs you also traveled to Death Valley for a law enforcement training meeting with the Lake Mead Superintendent? Do you have anything else to add about that?

VS: So, I provided law enforcement training at Death Valley. Then I came back and also provided training at Lake Mead. Erin, you might have participated in that? It was at a Bureau of Reclamation facility.

EE: I don't recall that. I don't think I was involved with Tule Springs at that time.

VS: Ok. So, anyhow I was able to provide the law enforcement training. It was specifically targeting resource protection, I did also want to point out that I remember in my notes that on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the first discussions about using the acronym T-U-S-K, TUSK, instead of T-U-S-P as the acronym for Tule Springs Fossil Beds and that was run up the chain of command to the Region. Everybody felt it was kind of a cool acronym. So, it was easily supported, and it still sticks. That was a fun conversation early on.

EE: Yes, TUSK is a lot easier to say.

VS: And I had that in my notes, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015 that that decision was made.

EE: Thank you. Jon, do you have any post-Monument, the beginning of the Superintendency questions for Vincent?

JB: When you actually got out here how quickly did you have conversations with Russ Dapsauski and what was your understanding of what Nevada State Parks wanted to do with their land at the time?

VS: Very good question. I didn't meet Russ until the first week officially on duty as the Acting Superintendent. So, between the time that I had approval to take the Detail assignment and actually arriving in Nevada I was on the phone every day with Jennifer and with Patrick. They would be giving me my first weeks' list of To-Do's and accomplishments of who to meet and who to talk to. So, I didn't meet Russ until my first week on board after March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

JB: Thanks.

EE: Jill, do you have any post-Monument the beginning of the Superintendency questions for Vincent?

JD: No, not at this time. Thank you.

**27:50**

EE: Moving along, this section of the interview will be talking about your Acting Superintendent Detail at Tule Springs, which was from March 23, 2015 to July 21, 2015. Your Acting Superintendent Detail at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument began during this time frame. With so much to accomplish in so little time, what were your first few weeks of your Acting Superintendency like?

VS: Because of the pre-detail conversation with Jennifer, Patrick, and with Christie Vanover we had a whole set of meetings already lined up and scheduled. So, it was just bouncing around from one location to the next. Lots of note taking. The first thing that I can recall from that week was wow, how everybody that I spoke with were excited about the Monument, wanted to be part of its planning. Many, many ideas for the future of the Monument. It didn't seem like there was one negative thing that came from any direction regarding the Monument. Short of the firing range and the dumping of trash and debris. There were some complications that I was alerted to about the energy corridor. Obviously, that was addressed in the legislation as well. And although there were some big issues that eventually were going to be dealt with, that first week I can just characterize it as a Honeymoon Week. In terms of getting more and more excited about everything that I was hearing from people. And people of influence and power that were very excited about what was coming forth. This included not just the staff from Lake Mead, not just staff from the Regional Office, the Congressional staff, local politicians, stakeholders, Protectors of Tule Springs, Helen Mortenson, NPCA, City of Las Vegas, City of North Las Vegas. Eventually I was able to meet with Benny Tso, the Chair of the [Las Vegas] Paiutes. I would say one of my most memorable meetings was with Bob Brown from Opportunity Village. Bob was somebody that eventually became part of the Advisory Committee for Tule Springs. Bob just stood out as one of the most positive people I ever met. I felt like when I was talking to him, I was sitting in the room with Walt Disney. With somebody with huge dreams. Very, very positive minded individual who dedicated his life to help people with disabilities and handicaps to have a rewarding, rich life. Again, very much moved by Bob. Bob and myself talked about some ideas that were dreams that he wanted to see and to help come true.

VS: Let's see. The one thing I did—and this was based on my training and experience working for the Park Service since 1985 was a lot of people that I talked to—this doesn't include Jill DeStefano for sure—a lot of people I talked to hadn't even put their foot down at Tule Springs. And that included staff at Lake Mead. So, one of the things that I had built into my initial days or at least the first couple weeks was to get on the ground and try to see the resource firsthand and try to do assessments. So, I had a field orientation plan and one of the things I negotiated with Patrick Gubbins, who was my Supervisor, is that I wanted to get out into the field at least half a day every week in the morning when it was cooler and get to a different part of the park so I can observe, photograph, and have first-hand experience about that piece of the resource in its entirety. One of the questions Jon you had asked that first day, first week – there was uncertainty about where I was going to be in terms of an office space. I did get a vehicle right away from the park. It was dedicated for my use so that was really handy to have that. It was a four-wheel drive

vehicle so I could use it to either get around The Strip or to get across the back country on the Monument. One of the first meetings about office space involved me going over to Nevada State Parks and meeting Russ Dapsauski and others that worked in that office. Before I even brought up discussion Russ had offered the use of space within his facility. He thought it was a good idea from a number of perspectives including proximity to the Monument. To have a close working relationship with Nevada State Parks and so we took advantage of that. So, I had an office there. I probably didn't use it a whole lot, but I was in there at least twice, maybe three times a week. It was a place where I could set up meetings with people locally and then interact with Russ and other staff for the State Parks. I think one of the best things that I think happened, and boy another serendipitous thing, is that I was all alone. Except that is I knew Erin and had some communication, good communication, so I was able to convince individuals that it would be good to have some extra people as part of a planning team. And so, our TUSK Team during those early weeks included Erin Eichenberg, Jannell Miller. Jannell was Mark Sappington's significant other and she was volunteering her time. And then because we knew we were going to have renewable energy issues we were able to bring in one of the Pacific West Region Renewable Energy Specialists, Amy Howard. I think our team did a really good job. There are notes that this team documented that are in the archives now about those formative questions that we were addressing. Looking at converting this dusty Monument into a real unit of the National Park Service. So, I am forever indebted to Erin and Jannell and Amy for that. And wow isn't it cool that Erin wound up getting her permanent position with the Park Service at Tule Springs.

JB: Amen to that.

VS: So, she was there essentially from day one as part of that effort. That team, not only did we do all of the busy work and try to answer or address all the questions that were being thrown our way. But the team built a vision and they laid a foundation for the new Monument that was in consideration of everything we were hearing. Everything that we were seeing. Everything that we were experiencing. And right now, I have this warm feeling in my heart just thinking back at those moments. To have that opportunity to stand there. Even if it was just for a few months to be able to help raise this new child of the Park Service and help to take the first footsteps together with Erin and the rest of the team.

**37:12**

VS: When I went to Senator Reid's office for the first time of course, you want to be sure your hairs combed (Laughs) and you look presentable. I wasn't sure what they wanted to discuss but I have to say they were just so overwhelmingly joyful about what had happened. That Senator Reid was able to help negotiate the establishment of this Monument just outside of Las Vegas. That excitement was shared by the team; by Shannon Raborn and Vinny Spotleson and others. The conversations with them, even though I went into them a little nervous, not knowing what to expect. It was just great fun to see they were like the rest of us. They were like kids in a candy store. So pleased with accomplishments and everything that was done. Knowing that they were

representing the constituents like Jill DeStefano and Helen Mortenson and all the others that have passionately advocated for the preservation of this Monument. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, just about three weeks into the Detail I was asked to prepare a power point, a presentation to give before the Las Vegas City Hall. We did that. It went well. It was televised on TV. You could watch it 24 hours a day because they played it over and over again. From every level that we were able to reach out: scientific community, teachers, politicians, the community advocates, etc. Everything about Tule Springs was a positive advancement and it was just fun to be part of all of that.

**39:20**

EE: You mentioned that you got out to the Monument as often as possible to better understand the Monument's resources and issues. In what ways did you become familiar with the Monument's natural and cultural resources?

VS: I don't remember if I slept during that four-month period, during the detail. Other than the regular calls home and things like that I was all consumed. I had a big stack of things that I wanted to read through and understand, the legislation, the science, etc. Being on the ground, these were moments when I was often alone. I could access it. Having worked in lots of different parks and lots of different roles I looked at it from as many different perspectives as possible. From a geologic perspective obviously great meaning to walk in the dirt and see the fossils in situ. One of the things I was profoundly influenced by was the fact when I got out there a big part of the boundary is adjacent to the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. And of course, that Refuge is there for very important reasons, particularly at Corn Creek. You have the wetlands there. You have seeps. That's an area with a high concentration of birds for a desert ecosystem. And the fact that we were adjacent to that land, I was not surprised but I was really excited to be able to get out there and see some of the bird populations that were out there. Had days when I observed burrowing owls on a regular basis in that area close to the Fish and Wildlife boundary. That was the first time I had ever seen a Le Conte's Thrasher. Those are fairly rare birds and came to the conclusion that there are many more dimensions to Tule Springs then just the geology and paleontology and hopefully we will be able to advocate in ways to promote this entire National Park area. In consideration of all those other resources.

**42:00**

VS: The other thing that was very exciting and we only had just a little glimpse into it at the time, but the history of Tule Springs was something also that was very, very exciting. Some more recent work with Erin and with Jill we've really been able to flush out that history much more extensively. But, at the time we were aware of the 1960's Tule Springs Expedition. The fact that Vance Haynes was part of that, and he was still alive was something that intrigued us. The work of Willard Libby that contributed to him receiving the Nobel Prize for his work in development of Carbon-14 age dating and on and on. The other part of the history that I really felt and feel even more strongly now is the history of Tule Springs is one of the best stories of

conservation of paleontological resources that I'm aware of. The grassroots work of the Protectors, Helen Mortenson, the advocacy, the excitement that they generated amongst the community and the school children and the politicians I think is unprecedented and I'm hoping that Jill or somebody will eventually write the history of the conservation of the fossils at Tule Springs because clearly the Protectors of Tule Springs and others like Helen Mortenson are largely responsible for that unbelievable achievement that was accomplished.

JD: Thanks Vince. Put me on the spot there. (Laughter)

**44:10**

EE: What were your first interactions with the local Native American tribes? And how did they feel about the new Monument?

VS: So, when I scheduled my first meeting with Benny Tso from the Paiutes, we went out to their beautiful facility that's right on the edge of the Monument and had about an hour of one-on-one time with this tribal official. He was able to give me his perspectives on what he felt was valuable about Tule Springs. An area that his ancestors are part of and have left their record there and are part of him. And so that was just a very valuable experience and thinking how much greater the responsibilities that we have to develop this Monument in so many ways on behalf of so many people. Again, the excitement that Benny had was equivalent in his own way to all of the others that are part of this discussion.

EE: Great. Thanks. And you kind of touched on this a little bit earlier. The Protectors of Tule Springs was integral to the establishment of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. What series of conversations and helped determine that they would need the Monument's Friends Group? And how did they assist you in starting up the Monument?

VS: I became aware of the Protectors of Tule Springs through Lynn Davis, through Steve Rowland and through Kathleen Springer and eventually Christie Vanover and the staff at Lake Mead. Before I had the opportunity to meet Jill DeStefano in person, I had a vision of somebody who is very powerful and very dedicated and committed to things that are very important to me. The day I was actually able to meet Jill I already felt that I knew her. And I had very good thoughts. And after I had the opportunity to walk into Tule Springs and to look at some sites and listen closely to Jill DeStefano. Believe me that when we departed that day it was to depart with a hug because I knew we had an All-Star team to help to develop this Monument. You could hear it in every word and the expression of those words coming from Jill as we talked that day. I'll never forget it. And then she showed me her scrapbooks (Laughter). Then I was really impressed.

**47:30**



EE: Can you tell us a little bit about the scrap book and the first impression to the Tule Springs Fossil Beds Museum Collection?

VS: Erin I think we had talked about ‘How do we convince Jill to turn this over to the Park Service?’ Do you remember having those conversations?

EE: Yes, I do. (Laughter)

VS: Yes, so out of respect for Jill we knew that she had invested her heart and soul into that creative, historic archive. We had to be very humble in saying, “Jill, will you give this up so we can put it into the Park Service collections as one of the?” It might not be the first collection, the first accession, but it is one of the first catalogue records for Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. When we brought it up to Jill there was no hesitation. This was personal for Jill, but this was more than personal. She realized what she was doing was not just for her own pleasure benefit. But she was doing this for the resource and for the people. The fact that she generously was willing to turn that over to the Park Service demonstrates who Jill is.

EE: Yes, and that will definitely help us, it has already helped us to gather information for administrative history for the Monument also.

**49:12**

EE: Moving along. In the Tule Springs enabling legislation it states that an Advisory Council must be formed to help develop the park with the General Management Plan. How and when was this Council established and who was involved?

VS: The discussion of the Advisory Council began before I even arrived. Discussions with Patrick Gubbins. Course he was talking to Region about this. So, when I came in that was one of the big priorities to communicate with Pacific West Region and Washington Office about the process for nominating any individuals and how we go about that. Because the legislation indicated that a General Management Plan would need to be created in some rapid time. I can’t remember. Two years or something from the creation of the Monument. And it was the Advisory Council that was charged with to navigate that. Everybody felt an urgency to get this Advisory Council pulled together, assembled. To pull together the right people, the right composition of people that could take all of the positive momentum and move forward. So, fortunately the beginning portion of the nomination process went well. There were a few hick ups and a few sensitive issues that needed to be worked out. Issues that I probably wouldn’t want to talk about in a recorded interview like this. But there were a couple of sensitive issues regarding individuals on the list of names that were interested in becoming part of that. Eventually the Advisory Council list was given to the Secretary of Interior, approved, and published in the Federal Register. Thank goodness that Bob Brown was on that list.

**51:32**

EE: Speaking of difficult things, we are going to talk a little bit about the boundary of Tule Springs. The boundary of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument is quite irregular as it follows the path of the Upper Las Vegas Wash and is bounded by the City of North Las Vegas, Las Vegas, and other state and agency lands. Additionally, the Monument is divided in half by a renewable energy corridor. Can you tell us what strategies you developed to more easily manage areas of the Monument that has different visitor use and land management issues?

VS: Yes, this was another one of those immediate discussions because if you look at the legislation, you know, they publish a map and it's a complicated map. A couple individuals that were very, very helpful in trying to determine why boundaries were drawn the way that they were – Lynn Davis was one of those individuals. She was apparently involved with some of that planning. Then Russ Dapsauski from Nevada State Parks also helped to clarify some things. What we recognized right away is that there were some complications. The biggest being the energy corridors that existed and the potential for future energy corridors on the Monument. Now the National Park Service, although we do manage right-of-way permits for energy corridors all across the country, that these are fairly substantial energy corridors with the potential for more growth of those on the Monument. So, we spent time and met with the BLM early on to try to get their understanding and negotiate an arrangement [for] how those permits will be managed long-term and whether BLM will do that. I think Jon Burpee, when he came in as the Superintendent, worked out those details far greater than we could of in the short term that we had. But it took them a while to pull all the historic records and permits together for the National Park Service. I don't think we resolved much of anything during the time that I was there. Other than to try to get those records moved forward, so that we had the best information to go from, depending upon how the future management of those permits were going to be handled. I want to tie this in with a discussion of the boundary because the boundary had a lot of bearing on the right-of-way corridor. By reading the legislation and talking to a number of the people in the [BLM] lands office and Region at WASO there was a bit of ambiguity of interpreting things. There was some areas of the Monument that it seemed as though we would benefit by having some slight boundary adjustments and modifications to. So, there was hope. We had a limited window of time to do a technical correction and Jon Burpee can probably explain more. Explain about this a little bit better than I can. But you can do some technical corrections on legislation for a period of time. We wanted to propose some technical corrections because there were portions of the Monument that were so developed that we didn't feel that they were probably something that we wanted to manage. There were areas that we could have extended the boundaries that may have protected the resources a little better by creating a buffer between development and things like that. That never occurred and it's kind of unfortunate. The other thing tied to that was the big question of whether or not the state land within the boundaries of the Monument were part of the Monument or they were an in-holding in the Monument. There were opportunities to develop that discussion further. Unfortunately, they went in a different direction than what everyone had hoped. We wanted to try and do a technical correction that identified that and there were was some initial discussions with the Governor's office about it.

But the way that it wound up going forward was the State lands remained separate from the Monument. Although they were completely within the Monument boundary they were not part of the Monument. That was the other thing that if we had dealt with it early on we may have had a different outcome. And Jon do you have any thoughts about that?

JB: That was for me when I arrived one of the more challenging things to fully understand. It became pretty apparent early on that Russ had a much different vision for how the State Park lands would be managed then what I was advocating for. The technical correction side is always challenged because it usually requires legislation to make it happen and with the change-over with the Congress that happened as a result of the election. During that session it was really going to be very difficult to get in terms of a technical correction. Add to the challenges that we faced because of the hopes of Nevada State Parks, it really wasn't something that was attainable.

VS: Right. Thanks. One other note related to the boundary. I remember, you know I had stacks of papers on my bed in the apartment that I had rented while I was on Detail. I remember going to sleep one night looking at the map, studying the map. And then waking up in the morning laying on the map. (Laughs) And coming to the idea that it makes sense to divide the Monument into a North Unit and a South Unit. So, I advocated for that probably the second or third week of the Superintendency and nobody opposed it. Everybody seemed to agree with it. And I think that has continued forward and that's still the basic make-up of the Monument, is the North and South Units. Is that correct Erin?

EE: Yes.

JB: Can I add into that?

VS: Please.

JB: That's a really important point because the designation of North and South Unit had become pretty well accepted, people including the civic partners, the cities were using that phraseology as well. That's in many ways one of the key indicators for me as to how we could proceed on the questions of the Grand Teton Road and whether or not Eglington would be severed from the South Unit. I was really pleased that the naming of North and South Unit really helped make the argument that we can't cut off yet another piece of the Park into another Unit. That actually was pretty well received. So, thank you for coming up with that.

VS: It made sense geospatially.

JD: This is Jill. Can I also make an update on the boundaries?

VS: Sure, Go ahead.

EE: Go ahead Jill.

JS: Just because I don't think Jon and Vince know as of October 13, 2020, NV Energy has applied to the BLM for that additional lines across Moccasin. So, here we go.

JB: Yeah, I knew that was coming at some point. Just because it's too valuable of essentially real estate.

EE: And for the purpose of the transcript, she's [Jill] referring to the renewable energy corridor that's referenced in the Tule Springs enabling legislation.

JB: Correct

EE: As far as the North and South Unit goes, I just wanted to add that I do think it was very useful in separating it since there's vastly different land use. In the North Unit you have a lot of illegal target shooting that we've been trying to manage and less visitation. Whereas the South Unit has more visitation closer to the cities. You have a lot more visitors doing hiking and other activities there, so I think it is useful having the two different Units to be able to justify different uses in those areas.

**1:02:34**

VS: Very good. Thanks, and it seemed to work geo-spatially as well. One other thought, relative to that Erin, is that we worked with the Bureau of Land Management regarding the cadastral survey of the boundaries of Tule Springs. There was really good support by the folks involved in the cadastral survey and I don't remember the names off the top of my head. But I've got all those e-mails. And I've sent those on in the past so there should be a record of them. But the plan was, and everyone was in agreement during the time I was there, is we wanted to focus the time the BLM would invest initially in trying to complete the North Unit's cadastral survey. By doing that, would enable us to start dealing with the fencing issue which we desperately needed to address on the North Unit for a variety of reasons including the illegal dumping and the firing range that had been in existence there. So, we felt instead of trying to say, "Let's get the complete cadastral survey done for the entire Monument." The advantages of doing the North Unit first as a prioritization is that most of it was already done. The portion of the boundary survey for the fencing with the US Fish and Wildlife Service was done. They just had to double check it. But they wouldn't have to spend the investment in time to just get out there and physically re-survey it. The little section with the Department of Defense land was already taken care of. There was a general survey along the highway corridor, and it wasn't going to take them as much work because they already had good groundwork for the surveys when the road surveys were being done. Essentially there would only be the portions of the Monument south of Corn Creek where you start getting the angulation of the boundaries that would need to have physical surveys done. The idea is obvious. If we can focus on the North Unit and get it completely surveyed, we could start getting that fencing up. It was the only way we were going to be able to stop the illegal trespass, the dumping, and the firearms use on the range. I think we all agree that it's frightening to get out there and take a look at portions of the North Unit of Tule Springs,

given that everything that has gone on – the amount of debris that's there. The amount of lead that's there from firing range activity, etc. So, that was really the hope and the strategy to try to get that going. For some reason it went in a different direction, and I can't even tell you where you are right now.

VS: Erin, where is the boundary survey currently?

EE: I believe it should be complete and all the maps are being created right now. Should be in the end stages and finalized I would assume this month or so.

JB: Yeah [mention of survey map in progress at his park].

VS: Yeah, I think we realized going into it that if we wanted 100% of the Monument's boundaries surveyed it was going to take a long time. And to get the North Unit, given how much of it was already surveyed, seemed like something that could be done in a more timely manner. I have an e-mail from BLM from November 2015 where they say they've got the North Unit completely surveyed and they're ready to go. So, whatever it is worth I don't know what has happened. Apparently, I guess one of the individuals retired or something. Is his name Mike Hamet?

EE: There's a Mark Harmening but he's still there. If that's the same person.

JD: I know, Vince, that the South Unit cadastral survey was completed three years ago in the middle of 2017, but we didn't find out about it—at least I did not find out about it—until the summer of 2019.

VS: Look forward to it getting completed.

**1:08:02**

EE: If you don't have anything more to add to that section we'll move along to talking about how did you initiate reaching out to the various stakeholders of the Monument? And let the general public know about the new Monument?

VS: With the support of Jill who knew most of these people and Lynn Davis, who knew most of these people. They were really useful go to individuals to help pave the way to all the individuals we needed to meet. So, for example and this was opportunistic on April 18<sup>th</sup> there was an event at the Nevada State Museum. I think Mary Manning was part of that. Was that a POTS event with Charles Rozaire, Jill?

JD: Yes, it was.

VS: Ok, well that was very exciting, and I had nothing to do with it other than to be invited and to show up and to meet Charles Rozaire. Charles Rozaire was part of the Tule Springs Expedition and I guess he must have been in his 90's or so. But at least 80's. He still recalled

some of his involvement of the early work at Tule Springs. That event was on April 18, 2015. On April 27<sup>th</sup> the Park Service hosted a tour for the Mayor of Las Vegas, Carolyn Goodman, and Councilman Steve Ross and Mauricia Baca was there and Mayor John Lee was there as well. And then Christie Smith from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. A day that was really a lot of fun. Jill, were you there the day we installed the first sign at Tule Springs?

JD: Absolutely. I have all sorts of pictures of that. I was there actually prior to that. When you received that you, Sandy, and I are standing up off from Decatur with one of those signs. When you surprised us with one of those signs.

VS: So, all I did was bring the signs. I honestly admit that it was Jill and Sandy that decided where they were going to go. And I just agreed with them. And ran it through the chain of command at Lake Mead and it happened. Jill had an important influence in terms of where those signs were placed. But symbolically placing a sign like that is really important to the public, part of the identity of the Monument. It made it more real. This place was just not another chunk of land in the desert. It was standing behind a National Park Service sign. Big thanks to Alexander Keiling at Lake Mead. He's the sign person who helped design those and get them constructed for us. I think the first was on Durango and the second on Horse and Aliante. Is that right Jill?

JB: Yeah, it is.

VS: Ok. So of course, we were overzealous in terms of our excitement and thought we could do anything with all this positive energy. Early on we were able to use a little bit of funding to purchase the first framework for a kiosk and I think the Protectors provided donated funds to purchase additional kiosks. We muscled through the compliance at Lake Mead which is usually a slow process for getting the kiosks erected. And Leslie Paige [Lake Mead] was helpful in looking at design concepts for the kiosk as well. And just because it was confusing initially, and even now, the word kiosk was used for two different entities. There were kiosks which were items that were installed at gateways around the Monument. We had planned at that time for four kiosks. Sort of these interpretive structures that have maps and information for the public. There was also these educational exhibits that were two of them that were referred to as kiosks that already existed. They were actually in storage when I arrived there at the San Bernardino Museum. They are really beautiful interpretive exhibits that include really good information. But, they were designed to actually house real fossil specimens that were part of the exhibit. Just want to make sure for clarification the work 'kiosk' was used for both of those entities. The interpretive sign and then the exhibit.

**1:14:16**

VS: Lots of interest in educational outreach. There wasn't much staff to do much stuff early on. But Jill and others got us engaged in the Nevada Science Festival. We were able to get some website development. We created the logo for Tule Springs which was used for the 2015 Fossil Day logo. We produced a rack card. Christie helped us right away to get the passport

cancellation stamps. We participated in the Helldorado Parade on May 16<sup>th</sup>. Lots of little things to promote the identity through educational outreach at the Monument. Christie Vanover, the Public Affairs person, did a good job in trying to schedule media. And so, I had an interview with Henry Brean from the Las Vegas Review Journal. There was an interview on KNPR public radio and a lot of positive feedback in terms of the community learning more about what's happening with their new Monument. We've mentioned these names already, but I just want to mention them one more time. In addition to Jill DeStefano, Helen Mortenson, Lynn Davis, Alan O'Neill, the retired Superintendent of Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Josh Bonde, paleontologist, Steve Rowland, paleontologist, Kathleen Springer, paleontologist, Eric Scott, also paleontologist, the staff at the Nevada State Museum. We had two geologists from the park, interns who worked with us during 2015, Aubrey Bonde, and Fabian Hardy and they produced a report. On and on.

1:16:36

EE: Thanks Vince. As the sole employee and first Superintendent of Tule Springs Fossil Beds it was necessary for you to acquire more help from more established land management agencies. I know you touched on this a little bit from the other questions. What types of technical assistance did Lake Mead National Recreation Area provide to Tule Springs Fossil Beds and what other agencies or organizations provided assistance and in what way?

VS: Great. I was immediately asked to join the Lake Mead Leadership Team meetings that were held weekly so I could engage / interact with the various other chiefs – Chief of Maintenance, Adam Kelsey the Chief Ranger at Lake Mead so that we can explore avenues where Lake Mead can provide support to Tule Springs because there was no staff. Through the Leadership Team meetings, we were eventually able to arrange for some Law Enforcement support, that the Lake Mead Chief Ranger helped us, to get a ranger out there a couple days a week. To have a uniformed presence on site. I learned at my attendance at the first meeting, the Lake Mead Leadership I sat in on, they told me, "By the way, here is the Corn Creek road construction project which begins next Monday. And you need to review the compliance on this." And I'm thinking, "If the projects starting this is a little late in the game to be reviewing compliance documentation." But, you know, I took it home that night. I read through it. I made a couple of recommendations. The construction company supported those in terms of monitoring during the construction phase. It was kind of interesting to see that coming in right away that the road was going to be paved the week after I arrived.

JB: Can I just add in contextually on that – there was concern from the Congressional Delegation from Senator Reid's office that the Park Service was going to be opposed to that road. So, when I was in Washington D.C. at the time, I was the Pacific West Region legislative liaison out of the office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. I got a call from the Senator's office, Senator Reid's office, basically asking, "What in the heck is the National Park Service opposing this?" And of course, we weren't opposing it at all. But that was a very fun moment before I even knew

I was going to be part of the Tule Springs future. That's where I began to realize how communication was going to be so incredibly important. It worked out just fine but I just wanted to add that context in, there was Congressional interest as well.

VS: Very good. So, I never saw the asphalt being put down, but they had graders out there the entire time that I was there. I look forward someday to seeing the paved road.

JB: The only disadvantage of the paved road was the challenge of now that it was paved it became a popular drag racing sport and actually led to a fatality there. It is a beautiful road.

VS: Oh geez. One of the things we tried to push through unsuccessfully was to say, if there was project money available, is it possible to put up fence on the northwestern side of the Corn Creek Road to keep traffic from going off from that road into the brush. Didn't get that obviously but I think that was the one thing that we asked for that was turned down. Or not considered.

EE: The new North Unit boundary fence is part of that project that includes the desert tortoise fence that will go on both the north and the south side of Corn Creek Road. I think that will deter off-roading also.

VS: Very good.

JB: I know when we tried to cost it out that was one of the option sections was the north side of the road in particular but I'm glad to hear that. Very cool.

**1:22:25**

EE: Vincent, in your prior National Park Service positions as a law enforcement ranger you're the federal government's only 'pistol-packing paleontologist' which you mentioned earlier. How did your prior law enforcement experience help you identify and mitigate law enforcement issues at Tule Springs Fossil Beds?

VS: There were, and I think there still are, some very serious issues and primarily in the North Unit. The shooting range is a nightmare. In fact, one of the things that I took great pleasure in doing was taking down the BLM signs for the rules for target shooting. I'm thinking, 'What a liability this is.' First of all, we're Park Service land and we're not BLM. More importantly BLM was almost condoning target shooting by having signs up explicitly saying what the rules are. So, I think my third day in we had to go buy some tools so I could go down and physically take those rules that BLM had up for target shooting down. Because we didn't want to give any impression that it was ok that the public was out there firing firearms on Park Service land. During the time I was at Tule Springs we had two fatalities. The first one was the shooting. I think it was a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the area referred to as Muddy Creek. It happened at 12:30 a.m.—I think that's what the record showed on March 9, 2015 that someone took their life. There was a second fatality. It was in the South Unit. It involved someone that was involved in parasailing that went wrong and so they fell to their death. I think they had survived for a while but



eventually died from the wounds associated with it. One other thing of note was that [at the end of] Durango the BLM didn't take down a number of Christian crosses. There were two of them that were erected on Monument property. I believe they were associated with a very serious motor vehicle accident where a young person lost their life. So, anyways it is a sensitive issue, but I think eventually I think those crosses were removed. Correct?

JB: Yeah, they were removed by Curt [interpretive ranger] actually.

VS: The illegal dumping was maddening. It was just so continuous and so extensive. The dumping that was going on in the North Unit. And it wasn't limited to the North Unit. What went on in the North Unit went hand in hand with the target shooting. If you went through some of those two track roads you'd see where somebody intentionally was shooting at big screen televisions in their target practice. There were two places where I saw what basically looked like bomb craters. Where somebody had presumably intentionally shot propane tanks and they blew these huge holes in the ground. Jon, did you ever see those?

JB: Oh yes. We went out there multiple times. There was actually a question of whether or not they were missed bombings from WW II from the gunnery range. But in reality, they were most likely done by the shooters who had put together massive amounts of

EE: Tannerite.

JB: Yeah, Tannerite. Thank you. And they were most likely just craters from huge amounts of Tannerite. Truly terrifying the amount of stuff in the ground.

VS: Yep. And I recall another maddening moment was shortly after the Tule Springs sign was erected on Durango the City of North Las Vegas said they were going to come out and they were going to clean that street up in that area because there was lots of dirt and debris. And now that the sign was out there they wanted to make the area presentable. So, I was out there one day to take a look at the sign and then I came back the following day because I wanted to see what they had cleaned up at there. And I'm saying—there's a refrigerator out here now that wasn't here yesterday. There's all kinds of wood that's thrown out here. I called the City Manager and said, "I thought you guys were going to clean up?" And they said, "We did." I said, "Did you see the refrigerator and all this other stuff?" So, they swore and said, "You're kidding me." And after they cleaned up somebody came in right afterwards and dumped this stuff. It was continuous. I don't know how you fix that systematically cause that issue is fairly widespread. I don't know if it's associated with the fact that so much construction and development is going on. People are taking advantage of that. But it's worse than I've seen anywhere.

VS: But on a positive note, Nancy Bernard, who is the Volunteer Coordinator. What a gem she is. So, when I first met her, she had talked about scheduling a clean-up at Tule Springs on April 11, 2015. The great thing about Nancy is she said, "Don't worry. I'll do everything. Just tell me you want to do it and we'll make it happen." I didn't have to do anything else other than say

‘Yes’ and show up the day of the clean-up. Because Nancy completely managed that event in every detail to make sure that people were safe. There was a dumpster available to put everything that was collected. She worked with the media to have some media come out and report on; a very, very positive day. The Air Force, they had a great team of young, really positive, energetic, young Airmen that really did a tremendous job. After the big haul that they brought in, before they left, their last question was, “When can we do this again?” And it’s like this is a real community that has been built around this Monument. Very, very positive things that I got to see. So, when we reached out to Adam Kelsey [Lake Mead Ranger] to see here are the issues that we have: We’ve got the shooting range. We’ve got the dumping in the localities. We’ve got the illegal driving and trespass over natural resources. He did allow us to program and schedule time for LE Ranger Gordon Gilbert. Once Gordon got on board we had a lot of fruitful discussions. Those discussions again motivated me to say we have got to get a [Superintendent’s] Compendium. We don’t have a General Management Plan. We don’t have really any other documents, per se. Let’s get a compendium together. And so, between May and June we got the first Compendium in place. Most people said this is too ridiculous. You don’t have time to do this in your short detail, but we got it up there. And Erin, is it still the Compendium of record?

EE: Yes, it is. It doesn’t have – it hasn’t changed a lot because we can’t make it more detailed until we get our General Management Plan.

VS: You remember those discussions when we were having them, right?

EE: Yeah

**1:32:00**

VS: This is digressing a little bit. I just want to see if I missed something. Yeah, I did want to mention something. And this is sort of going backward. The other thing that we were able to pull off during the time I was there was because I work for the Geologic Resource Division, we were able to get the Geologic Resource Inventory Team to come down and do a scoping meeting. Looking at what’s the map coverage and what are the geologic issues that would eventually be put into a report for Tule Springs. What was challenging about that was because Tule Springs wasn’t one of the official 270 Natural Resource Parks that we had to pull some strings to be able to get the funding to bring them down to host that meeting. So, there is a Scoping Meeting Report Summary that’s available for referencing.

EE: Thanks for bringing that up. That’s important to add.

**1:33:10**

EE: So, one of your main goals of your acting superintendency was to help return some fossils that were collected from Tule Springs back to Nevada. Can you tell us about that trip to achieve this and how the news was shared with the public on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015?

VS: The issue of the return of the fossils was one that came up more than anything else short of the firearms. And it came up time and time again in the context of – now that we have a Monument when are we going to get the fossils that came out of this ground in Nevada back into the state? Recognizing this is going to be a really challenging undertaking we developed a two-pronged strategy that actually worked. And Erin you were a big part of that planning because of your role at the time, as the curator for both Lake Mead and Tule Springs. You were instrumental in terms of the actual planning. We had gone out on two occasions. The first time we justified going out and picking up the exhibits. The kiosks, the exhibits that had the interpretational along with the fossil specimens, we brought those back so we could set those up and use those for outreach. It gave us a chance to look at and access then a larger return of collections back to Nevada. And so, Erin was helpful in terms of being able to negotiate with the Nevada State Museum in Las Vegas the return of these collections. All of the storage space and curatorial cataloging. All that kind of transfer of that stuff over to successfully do this. This was kind of an impossible thing to make happen and there were some aspects of it that were unexpected and entangled things a little bit. There were a couple of people in the Bureau of Land Management that were ‘sour grapes’. They never wanted Tule Springs turned over to the Park Service and they were very resentful about that. So, they didn’t want to cooperate on any level and provide support. And so, they tried to stop the transfer of the collections from the San Bernardino County Museum back to the Park Service. We had paperwork that we had given to the BLM. We were communicating with BLM office in Las Vegas that we presumed was the right people to be talking to and they were happy to transfer these collections over to the Park Service. We could take over control and management of them, signed off the paperwork. And when that paperwork ended up at the State Nevada BLM office there were a couple of people that took offense to it. And they tried to undermine this whole thing by portraying things inaccurately. By portraying the Park Service as trying to steal fossils from the BLM. So, anyway we worked through all of that consternation and in addition to that what I think made this a really fun undertaking was that we wanted to surprise the people in Las Vegas. So, we kept it top secret. Part of that planning was once we began to see this was happening, we were going to get these collections back. We have a good, responsible place to curate them, on and on. We planned an event for July 18 that announced to the public that the return of part of the collections to Las Vegas from Tule Springs. So, it was a public event. Congresswoman Dina Titus was there. I think one of the really fun things was through this whole process we were quietly recruiting the new Superintendent that was coming in and no one knew who he or she was going to be yet. We were able to talk Jon Burpee into coming to Las Vegas so we could introduce him and announce his acceptance of the position to this crowd this same evening. There were lots of fun secrets. We gave recognitions to various people like Gayle Marrs-Smith and Kathleen Springer and others. We did an unveiling of

a new Tule Springs Pleistocene Fauna Sculpture by artist Cliff Green. We had a public viewing of part of the collection and there was a little recognition for Junior Paleontologists.

**1:38:50**

VS: I thought while we are on this topic it would be good to ask Jon about his recollections of that July 18, 2015 event. His excitement about being part of that. The top-secret aspects of it and how you were received that day.

JD: This is Jill. I'm sorry to interrupt and I hate to do this, but I have an Advisory Council meeting at the Aliante Kiosk. People from the Air Force and the City are meeting and so I am going to have to drop off. I am sorry not to hear this part. I will have to read it, I guess. So, thank you all very much.

EE: Do you want to reschedule a time where we are all available? Or do we want to continue out in this section?

JB: Well, at 1 o'clock local I've got a meeting I have to be at as well. In a few minutes I will have to drop off as well.

EE: We still have another question to go so I am wondering if we should pick this up another time?

VS: That's fine. I would say if Jon you could just address that question that was part of this discussion. Do you have time to do that?

JB: Yes, absolutely, absolutely. I will say that that event and all the excitement it created was just an extraordinary introduction to the people that supported it. It was so great seeing how excited people were for the return of the fossils. The synergy between all the groups. I was sad that Jill couldn't be there that day because I was really looking forward to meeting her. But meeting all the members of POTS. Seeing them in the crowds with their vests on. Meeting the Congresswoman as well as the representatives from the Senator's office – Senator Reid's office. And then just hiding around the corner. Vince is an impeccable showman and he had me hidden around the corner for about the first half of it. And then made the announcements about the exhibits. Made the announcement about the fossils. And then said, "For one more surprise we've got the first permanent Superintendent who's flown out and he is here." And I have to admit Vince, that at the time it was all a little overwhelming because it was like, "My gosh, how do I follow this guy?" Because you were such a showman. (Laughter) It was one of the more heartening things I saw during my time there. That was just such an obvious love of place and passion for the place. You know I returned to that thought, as well as many others as part of my time there, when I would get overwhelmed with more broken fences, more dumping. The slowness of many things. That always reminded me of what was possible there at Tule Springs. A very good day.

VS: And when we re-convene for the final part of this interview, I do want to mention the process we went through to select you Jon Burpee as the first Superintendent. And I tell you, you made it easy for us because you were an extremely strong candidate. It was unanimous by all the panel, by the Regional Office. The references were glowing. But I have to say as good as you came in you left the park in really good shape and you did some tremendous work during your time there. I also want to state, "Thank you for doing an Oral History Interview with us on June 29<sup>th</sup> and again on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. We were able to capture the story that you provided for us about Tule Springs. I think that this is a good place to stop at this point Erin.

**1:43:45**

EE: That sounds good to me. We will have to reschedule.

JB: Can I just add in one little piece? Is the recorder still going?

VS: I can shut it off if you want me to.

JB: No, keep it going. Vince, did you develop the SNPLMA request or was that done primarily by the folks at Lake Mead?

VS: Largely the Lake Mead staff did that. I reviewed it but I didn't do most of the legwork on that.

JB: Looking back on it I just wasn't aware whether that was more your influence or Jennifer Haley, who was really strong in that. Awesome. I just wanted to get that on the record for possible future questions. Probably be good if we had a chance to talk to Jennifer as well.

VS: Good idea. Well, thank you to you both.

EE: Well, thank you Jon for your time.

JB: Well, thank you. Good job Erin.

VS: Yes, very good job.

EE: All right you guys. I will talk to you on part two.

VS: Sounds good. Bye Jon. Bye Erin.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



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