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Mark Flora
October 24, 2014

Interview conducted by Lilli Tichinin
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
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ANPR Oral History Project

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24 October 2014

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Transcribed by
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Reviewed and corrected by Mark Flora

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[START OF TRACK 1]

- Lilli Tichinin: Okay. This is Lilli Tichinin. It is October 24, 2014. I'm here at the ANPR Ranger Rendezvous doing oral history interviews. And if you could just introduce yourself, that would be great.
- Mark Flora: Yes. My name is Mark Flora.
- Lilli Tichinin: Great. So, Mark, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where you were born, when?
- Mark Flora: Sure. I was born 1951 in Niagara Falls, New York. Remained in that area until my sophomore year of high school, when my dad got transferred to eastern Pennsylvania [on things?]. I finished my three years of high school at Quakertown Community Senior High School in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. Went to the University of Notre Dame for a degree in biological science. After that, started thinking about junior year, what I wanted to do with my life. And I had two dreams. One dream was to work in oceanography, and the other dream was to work for the National Park Service.
- Lilli Tichinin: Hmm. Had you spent time in the national parks as a kid?
- Mark Flora: I had. Much like John Fielder said yesterday in times when this was an acceptable practice, we had a church youth group. The Youth Group leaders and priest of our church had access to an old 1948 school bus. Took about 12 of us kids with adult chaperones who had to be 19 years old. And we went out. We took our first trip across country. I believe we took the Canadian route, going through the Canadian Rockies, seeing Banff and Jasper, and then coming back and swinging down along the northern tier states, including Yellowstone, Grand Tetons and those parks. Then the following year we kind of did a Southwest trip – Grand Canyon, Zion, Bryce Canyon.
- Mark Flora: My mom and dad would take us to trips to parks. I grew up in the Niagara Frontier of western New York State, a very historical area in the War of 1812. So, my playground was Fort Niagara and things like that. We were always out there on old, basically War of 1812 sites and things that littered the whole area.
- Lilli Tichinin: Yeah. Did that really, being able to see so many national parks and being nearby things, did that influence you?
- Mark Flora: Oh, that influenced me, that influenced me greatly. Junior year of college, I had an opportunity to take a developmental biology course where the professor teaching that took us to the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts for a week afterwards. That's where I fell in love with the ocean and the ships. So come senior year, what am I going to do with my life? Well the first thing was to put in applications for graduate school. That went pretty easy, and I was awarded a fellowship to UCLA.

Had a free summer. Wanted to know what I wanted to do for the summer, so I wrote two letters. I wrote one to the director of the Marine Biological Laboratory where I had visited the previous summer and said I'd like to come and work for the summer. I wrote one to – well, I was influenced in high school by the work that John and Frank Craighead had done on bears in Yellowstone. Big *National Geographic* topic in the 1960s. So, I wrote that letter.

Mark Flora: Someone told me to write a letter to Nat Reed, who was then Assistant Secretary at the US Department of the Interior, and say, here's a small resume. I have a summer. I'd like to do something in national parks. And Mr. Reed had one of his staffers write back and say come on down to Florida, you can work as a volunteer in the turtle project.

Mark Flora: That letter arrived two days after I got a letter from the Marine Biological Laboratory saying come here for the summer. (Lilli Tichinin laughs) So both my dreams in that one summer were there.

Mark Flora: I went to the Marine Biological Laboratory which was a paid position. It was a wonderful summer. I was able then to meet people across the street at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution where I eventually signed on for an eight-month cruise as a technician going down to the South Atlantic. We left Woods Hole in November 1973. It was one-month at a time for specific science parties. They would fly in with their equipment, their students and things, probably about 12 of them. But four of us were part of a permanent science party and remained on the ship the entire 8-month cruise to do the basic data collection in bathymetry, magnetics, and gravity signatures that continued throughout the entire cruise.

Mark Flora: So, I had a chance to traverse the Atlantic from Woods Hole to south of the Antarctic Circle travelling first to west Africa. It was during the time of the Arab oil embargo, so we had trouble finding a port with oil for our ship, arriving first in Senegal, then onto Cape town, South Africa, then into the Antarctic for two one-month cruises. Eventually back north towards Brazil, with three port stops (Pio, Recife and Fortaleza) over a three-month period. Then the Caribbean, Barbados, and then home. Working for a straight 30 days or so interspersed with three or four days in port. We always had university professors and university students from the host countries on board with us when working in their waters. So, it kind of whetted my appetite for that type of adventure.

Mark Flora: The following academic year (1975) I came back and went to UCLA. Didn't particularly care for it. I lasted a semester. I wrote a letter back to Woods Hole to see if any other technician positions were available and continued doing that for three years total. I think that in that time I had an opportunity to visit a total of 19 or 20 different countries.

Mark Flora: One of my professors I remained in contact with said, "You know, if you're going to graduate school, it's time to get back into graduate

school.” So, I ended up in Indiana University doing a master’s degree in water resources management.

Mark Flora: As luck would have it, my thesis, it wasn’t a thesis, but it was a publication requirement that they had there at the time, was in energy facility siting in the Indiana coastal counties. Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore was right in the middle of it. So, I knew Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. The day after I got my master’s degree I signed on and took a three-month GS-5 position as a hydrologic technician.

Lilli Tichinin: Wow. So right away.

Mark Flora: The day after I graduated, I started for the Park Service. And just like being in Woods Hole, getting that summer seasonal position to a more stable three-year term appointment was based upon, location. If you were in a park you could meet people who knew things that could help you.

Mark Flora: Over my three months at Indiana Dunes, I somehow found my way down to the AO’s [Administrative Officer’s] office at one time. I said, “I want to be in the National Park Service.”

Mark Flora: She says, “Well, you do water. A friend of mine named Pat Phelan is AO down in the Everglades at the South Florida Science Center. Let me call Pat and then see if she’d like to take a 171.” [171 was the number of the federal employment application] I gave it to her and then Pat sent it to the correct people throughout the Research Center. They hired me into a GS-7 one-year appointment. This was under John Good as superintendent. That summer John left and a guy named Jack Moorhead came in, who was a wonderful superintendent. Jack thought broadly about the resource issues that were happening in the park. If you remember, a series of *National Geographic* articles in the ‘60s showed the Everglades burning frequently. Water had been diverted after a major flood event, I think in the 1920s or 30s from Lake Okeechobee where many people were killed, and the plan was to build drainage canals to divert water out of the Everglades and directly to the ocean to protect people. And then agriculture began to move in. So, there was major drainage in the ‘40s and the ‘50s, so that by the 1960s, almost no water was getting to Everglades National Park and they were burning.

Mark Flora: Congress acted and said here is a minimum delivery water schedule that has to go to the Everglades. It was noted by the park staff well, this is better than it was, but all our wildlife are still dying and things like that, at that time.

Mark Flora: So, someone had the idea of forming a South Florida Resource Center. It was a funding initiative to look at the problems. I don’t know how it started. I know it was very young when I got down there. This would have now been the fall of 1979. I’m giving you an article here from *Park Science*, I believe this is 1982. I’ll verify that date. They had opened up the South Florida Research Center. Gary Hendrix, Dr. Gary Hendrix, was

the research director. He hired five bright, young, newly minted PhDs. There were five science-focused areas when I got down there. One was marine resources, and the bright young PhD was this guy named Gary Davis who had his whole career with the Park Service and is one of our legends.

Mark Flora: Another one was my boss, Dr. Pete Rosendahl. Pete had just got his PhD in civil engineering from the University of Miami. One of the brightest men I've ever met. Unfortunately, he died of cancer quite young. Probably early thirties. A third was Dr. Jim Kushlin, wildlife biologist, alligator specialist. A fourth one was vegetation. It was Dr. Lloyd Loope, who'd come from Hawaii Volcanoes. And then a fifth was fire management, Dale Taylor, who'd come down from the government in Alaska. So, we had five mostly young PhDs with the program, and they were told to go out and hire a staff to study what we need in the Everglades.

Mark Flora: So, I left my job, well, I finished my season. Drove right down to Florida in the fall of 1979 from Indiana Dunes. I started work for Dr. Pete Rosendahl, mostly doing water quality work in the early years.

Mark Flora: My one year ended. Things were going well. They then offered me a three-year term assignment, GS-9. I accepted that. Over the next three years, working with Jack Moorhead, he said, "I've been meeting with the director of the water management district. They're willing to give us more water. But it's going to be water that's back pumped out of the urban area, and the water chemistry might be different. Is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

Mark Flora: I said, "I don't know. But I know how to set up an experiment to do that."

Mark Flora: So, we set up an artificial nutrient dosing experiment where we set up three 100-meter-long channels. We had points along those channels. And we artificially put in a phosphorus solution, a nitrogen solution and a nitrogen plus phosphorus solution and saw what happened to the rooted vegetation, the macrophytes, and the algae. Nitrogen wasn't a problem. But at very, very low concentrations of phosphorus, the system changed dramatically. And that was the answer to Jack that we could not take the urban water back pumping as an acceptable substitute.

Mark Flora: That research and the research of Dr. Jim Kushlin on alligators and birds on this team, the research of Dr. Gary Davis showing that the water, not reaching the estuary was having a problem, is what was the initial science that ultimately led to a lawsuit by the South Florida Audubon Society, or by the Florida Audubon Society, against the South Florida Water Management District, which start the Everglades lawsuit, which has led to the Everglades restoration.

Lilli Tichinin: Wow.

Mark Flora: My three years ended, GS-9.

Lilli Tichinin: Uh huh. And so that all started during your three years there.

Mark Flora: My three years. They wanted to keep me around. It was the end of a term appointment. In those days, they had to make a decision to make me permanent or not. There was no other way. They promoted me to an 11, gave me a permanent position. I was ready to get out of the Everglades about that time. So about six months later, I looked for positions and ended up with the water resources division in Colorado.

Mark Flora: My basic formative years were in the Everglades. In those days in the Park Service, well, first of all, Indiana Dunes, I'd just got out of school, I didn't have a place to live. There was park housing. I'm in there with seasonals, with rangers, law enforcement, with interpreters and things there. And I had my career, which was foreign to most of them.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: But we were all young. We were all starting out. And we were all quickly incorporated into the Park Service culture. And that was easy when you're living in a park. So, it was a career move, a cultural indoctrination, and you became part of the Park Service family. Moving to Everglades, that was so important. There wasn't housing in the park. But Homestead was a difficult place to live. So, all of us young people, and they were hiring the technicians and things as well as the seasonals, it was a career, and it was a family. So those are my very formative Park Service years. Any questions from there you want to back up on before we move ahead?

Lilli Tichinin: I think we'll keep going for now.

Mark Flora: Well, I moved, I was given a job with the Applied Research Branch (Water Resources Division) in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: Now at some point in time, Dr. Ray Hermann was a scientist in Washington, DC. And the decision was made to move the operational science out to Colorado. There wasn't room in Washington.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah.

Mark Flora: Ray came out with a few people to Colorado State University. We had offices there. And he had the applied research group of the National Park Service. Now we're getting here about 1983, early 1984. Somewhere around that time, a study was done. We had hydrologists – one or two – in every park region. Now the problem was, they all had different specialties. So, the gentlemen up in the Northeast, and I won't remember exactly who was up there, it might have been a coastal geomorphologist (Dr. Jim Allen). The expertise, I remember, of the people in the Rocky Mountain Region were water rights. There were people out in San Francisco who had some different specialties. There were people in Santa Fe with again different water-related specialties. So, water rights were becoming a problem for the Park Service. It turned out you had to file for a Federal water right in a state adjudication system following their set procedures. We were doing very well in the region where the hydrologist had expertise

in that, but where the hydrologist might be an expert in flood plain management or something similar, they were overlooking those things.

Mark Flora: So, somebody said, “Let’s move all those positions. Let’s reorganize and move all those positions to Fort Collins, combine them with this Applied Research Branch and form the Water Resources Division.” Our first Division Chief there – so I predate the Water Resources Division.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: Because I was out at the applied research branch. Our first Division Chief was Tom Lucke.

Lilli Tichinin: Oh, wow.

Mark Flora: Tom was a lawyer and policy person in his career who moved out and did some cultural things in the field. He was an attorney, a brilliant man. But in 1987, in the Phoenix airport coming back from Grand Canyon, he had a stroke and he died at a very young age, 47 years old, I guess. That set us all back for a loop. Tom assembled us, he assembled people who didn’t necessarily want to be moved from their lives into one place. And then he starting having to build a program where certain people – I spent my whole life working in Philadelphia or I spent my whole life working in San Francisco and now you want me to work nationally on this and all my contacts are there. So, there was a basic coalescing of the division in the time that Tom was the chief.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah.

Mark Flora: After he passed away, one of the people he had hired to lead the Water Rights Branch was Dr. Stan Ponce from the USDA-Forest Service. Stan became the Water Resources Division Chief. Stan is a bright man. He’s an aggressive program builder. He was there at the right time, very persuasively influencing people to get money to come in to build a division. We were very poor. The people were there, but the funding stayed in the regions. Stan built the program and moved on.

Mark Flora: After Stan left, Dan Kimball became our division chief for a number of years. And then Bill Jackson. Their expertise was very strongly focused on the park. While Stan Ponce had been a master program builder, the strengths of Dan and Bill were serving our clients, serving our superintendents, and providing superb customer service. If a superintendent called with a problem, it became our problem, and we would work with them and get the problem solved. So very early on, we built a reputation for customer service.

Mark Flora: We could provide technical skills that were not locally available in a park. But the park manager was the decision maker. We could provide the superintendent with all the options and the pros and cons of each option to give him the background information he needed to make the right management decision. But we would even not couch them as “recommendations.” We would say, these are, Mr. Superintendent,

considerations for your future action. Path A has these pros and cons, Path B has these pros and cons. Path C has these pros and cons, what can we do to help you at this point? That was the water resources division's mantra throughout my entire career.

Mark Flora: How I fit in that, I came out, as I said, to work in the applied research branch.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: As they began to build things out and other opportunities were there, I transferred inter-branches from the Applied Research Branch to work for the Planning and Evaluation Branch under Dan Kimball. And it was, most of our branches were in Fort Collins. But that was one that was duty stationed in Denver to be close to the Denver Service Center and the Rocky Mountain Region.

Lilli Tichinin: Okay. Yeah.

Mark Flora: We were doing more policy and planning work so we wanted to have a presence where you could walk down the hall and talk to the person. That would have been about 1989 that that happened, and I moved from Fort Collins to Denver. My job then was more providing water-related policy and planning technical assistance to the parks. We also had some project money where we would fund projects in the parks.

Lilli Tichinin: Okay.

Mark Flora: We would work with the regions to identify and develop needed water-related projects and then there'd be a panel nationwide of regional chief scientists who would set the priorities from the lists we had developed. Once a project was approved for a region, we would provide any needed oversight and accountability through project completion.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: I still was involved in the Everglades, because by this time the initial research had turned into the lawsuit stage.

Lilli Tichinin: Right. Right.

Mark Flora: So, while I left the Everglades in 1983, I was still involved in some of the technical assessment of data and was being subpoenaed to assist in the Everglades lawsuit as late as 1990, 1991.

Lilli Tichinin: Oh, wow.

Mark Flora: In this role, I would both provide technical assistance to the park and the U.S. attorney, and to serve as an expert witness where that was necessary. So that was one of my big duties, even though I had, by that time was working in multiple parks in multiple places.

Lilli Tichinin: Right. That continued to be a major, major part of it. That's incredible.

- Mark Flora: In 1993, Dan wanted to get out into the field. He did a series of details for [Karen Wade, then the regional director, serving as acting Superintendent in a couple of parks.] They placed him on detail as acting superintendent of Zion. He kind of liked the superintendency role. So, he decided to move on and do the training and become a superintendent. So, I was selected to fill his job as the branch chief from 1993 till my retirement in 2009.
- Mark Flora: A couple of the highlights during that time, and before, when Dan was in charge, was when we were very active in helping train resource managers.
- Lilli Tichinin: Ah, here we go.
- Mark Flora: Somewhere in the late 1980s, Dr. Ro Wauer put together a plan called the Natural Resource Trainee Program. I believe there were six trainee classes that went through this training cycle. We have a long history in the Park Service, but it's largely law enforcement and interpretation. Management wanted to have professional resource managers out there in the field. So, they went out somehow and they recruited broadly to bring in people for specialized training in the various resource management fields. And here's a picture from *Park Science* in 1996, when the trainees had gotten together. Here's the first class—
- Lilli Tichinin: 1982.
- Mark Flora: —in 1982. And you start looking down here, and you see names like Jon Jarvis, our current Director and you see names like Kathy Jope, a long-time resource management chief and you see names that, many of these went on to become superintendents.
- Lilli Tichinin: Right. So, this is interesting because it has a list, it has the name, what they were doing at the time of the training, and what they're doing now, at the time of 1996.
- Mark Flora: Right. And the photograph, and if you look at Director Jarvis, he has aged since 1982.
- Lilli Tichinin: (laughs) Yeah.
- Mark Flora: But the nice thing about this, there were six classes. I forget how long they were. It might have been an 18-month or two-year program. But there was a water resources segment. So, they would come out to Colorado State University and spend two weeks with us.
- Lilli Tichinin: Oh, wow.
- Mark Flora: We'd put them through all kinds of water resources-related training. So many of my great friends in the Park Service, the David Manski's, Dave Reynolds, Kathy Jope's and all, I met first time coming through here for two weeks. Then they went on to become chiefs of resource management throughout the series. And they knew who to call for water, because we trained them in water.
- Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: That was an awful lot of what we did. So, I think that was one of our proud moments was supporting the Natural Resource Trainee courses.

Lilli Tichinin: That's wonderful.

Mark Flora: The training program lasted from 1982 until the early 1990s.

Lilli Tichinin: That's really incredible.

Mark Flora: I'm sorry we don't continue that tradition today. Well, let's move to 1993ish.

Lilli Tichinin: All right.

Mark Flora: Several reorganizations happened throughout this time. Warren Hill, who was here at the conference, he was, I think, assistant regional director of Midwest at the time. And Mike Soukup who, at the time, was from North Atlantic Region, took a look at how we were organized and what we did. They came in with some good ideas how to reorganize us to become even more effective in things. So, we were divided into four branches at that time. We had our water rights branch, and all those people did was water rights. From beginning to end, the whole court case—

Lilli Tichinin: Was that still people who had come in from different regions originally? Or had some of those people—

Mark Flora: Well, I said, when people came in regionally, most of those people were gone by then.

Lilli Tichinin: Okay.

Mark Flora: One of our water rights specialists, rather than move, he was able to retire. So, he retired before coming out. Some of the people from San Francisco had some skill in it, but it wasn't the strongest thing they did. Well instead, Ponce came in. He was first brought in to form a water rights group. And by this time, he probably had 10 or 12 people working for him. So, the program had built from maybe one person, or one-person collateral duty—

Lilli Tichinin: Okay. Right. Initially coalesced—

Mark Flora: —to 12 or 15 people at that time.

Lilli Tichinin: Right, and then grew. Okay.

Mark Flora: We also had a water operations branch. Of course, the applied research branch was still there doing applied research. Very specific projects in a limited number of parks.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: But our water operations branch had grown. We started doing flood plain management, water quality, water quantity, a number of things. And then we had the new planning branch. That was the latest one to be formed in the late '80s under Dan Kimball. We began to mix up functions again. So, by the time, based on what people's skills level were. By the time I took

over in 1993, planning and evaluation branch was doing watershed planning, wetlands restoration and protection, fisheries management, and later on they stood up a coastal zone program which was put under us temporarily. It's now become a branch.

Mark Flora: I had a hiring philosophy that I would try to hire real bright people. The brighter the better. And minimum qualification was they had to be brighter than me. And I would tend to mix it, though, knowing the culture of the Park Service. This is more than a profession; this is a culture. I would tend to try to hire a person with the right technical skills who had park experience over a person with perhaps stronger technical skills would be one hire. My next hire might be a person with stronger technical skills but little park experience. But I didn't want to lose the culture aspects. When I hired people that didn't have any Park Service experience using details, using training, using the Fundamental course and things, I would get them and try to build that Park Service into them. But the best hires were people like Joe Wagner from the Everglades. Jim [Tilmant] came to work for me later in his career. A number of people from the park.

Mark Flora: We hired an awful lot of seasonals and things to come in. We hired an awful lot of young people that we couldn't keep beyond a year or two. And some of the proudest things are seeing some of those young people go onto much higher positions than I ever even aspired to. One of those would have been, he didn't work directly for us, but he worked closely with us was like Mike Reynolds [Associate Director for Workforce, Relevancy and Inclusion] who spoke today on things. So, you never wanted to lose what we're here all about.

Mark Flora: I never could consider myself an expert. I mean, I had the green blood. At the end of my career, my boss asked me to put together how many parks have you helped. And we kept very strong, accountable records. So, I knew every project that ever came into my group. I knew we had produced 352 products. Publications, technical reports, theses we've overseen, dissertations we've overseen from our work. We kept very detailed records. I had been personally involved in giving some sort of assistance, it might have only been a half a day review on a bridge proposal to four years of effort over a time on Everglades thing, to about 220 park units. I had been in 105 units of the national park system in my career on work-related visits.

Mark Flora: So, we were always proud of the quality of people we hired, the ones that stayed in the Park Service and moved up. The high accountability of getting our projects completed and done, and the fact that superintendents would come in and say, "You've met or exceeded our expectations. Thank you for being here on things."

Mark Flora: I never could put the Park Service together and get my arms around the whole picture until the Ken Burns movie came out. (Lilli Tichinin laughs) Ken visited with us in Portland at a George Wright Society meeting a few

years ago, before it had come out, with some outtakes and things. I had a chance to meet him and talk with him. And that helped get my head around – I mean, I always knew the parks were a special place and the Park Service was a special family. But that helped put my head around this almost 100 years' worth of history. Whose great ideas, and when and where and the challenges they faced, and not taking no for an answer in the early days. I mean, you know, to me, nobody from the National Park Service should be hired until they've gone through the whole Ken Burns series to know what it's about.

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Mark Flora: As I got older and started to reflect on the career, the great people I met from Pete Rosendahl in the Everglades to Jack Moorhead to Dan Kimball to Bill Jackson. More recently, Bill Wade. One of the emphases, we always mentor our people.

Lilli Tichinin: Mm hmm. That was one thing I was definitely wanted to ask about.

Mark Flora: You were never too busy to mentor the young people, to bring them up there. Nor were you ever too old to be able to benefit from a good mentor on things. And I carried that throughout my career. My job was to hire good people, instill in them a culture, provide them with an environment where they could go out and do work, hold them accountable for that work. So, the first half of my career, I was doing good work. The second half of my career, I was more like an offensive lineman on a football team in that looking at my staff I could say: you're a bright person, you know what you need to do, here's the bureaucratic institutional roadblocks. Let me work on those and try to open a hole in that bureaucracy so that you can focus your time in getting the work done. It was never the intent that you necessarily finish your career with us. The intent was you gained a lot and if you wanted to move up from, with your career. And that seemed to work. That seemed to work for me.

Mark Flora: I retired in 2009. Of course, I'd known Karen Wade, and I'd met Bill Wade on a number of occasions. So, I retired officially in 2009 but I never actually became fully retired, in that I've kept affiliate status with the National Park Service. I'm part of the Natural Resource Emeritus Program set up under Director Jarvis. We have a program where we continue to support the NPS on a voluntary (non-pay) basis. I have to do a work plan every year, what I'm going to work on. I give 200 hours of service to the director, the WRD or another entity within the US Department of the Interior. I can pick out what that is on a thing.

Mark Flora: A lot of my time I've been focusing on the International Technical Assistance Program. I was asked by Catherine Washburn (US DOI Office of International Affairs), who retired about a year after I did, to take three Jordanian park rangers on a study tour of the U.S. where we studied water

management in four desert-based US protected areas. It had been set up ahead of time with the Fish & Wildlife Service, so we'd get Bosque del Apache and three refuges in Nevada. That worked out very well. I heard about their issues. I wrote a report to Catherine. And then I found myself on an airplane headed to Jordan to provide technical assistance for them.

Mark Flora: I get back. They call up and say, "How about Mediterranean forest management? Forestry, habitat fragmentation and fire?"

Mark Flora: I said, "Not my field, but I know the people who do that. So, let me put together a proposal for you." And we spent two weeks with four people from the mountainous regions of Jordan in Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and Pinnacles National Park.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah.

Mark Flora: This was my first full exposure to every part of park operations, from maintenance to law enforcement to whatever. Because they wanted to see it all.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah.

Mark Flora: One of the rewarding moments of that is where I had a law enforcement ranger come up to me. One of my trainees, and this is law enforcement, so we had paired him up with a law enforcement ranger to shadow for about three days. The ranger said, "You know, 10 days ago when my boss called me in about this, I thought Jordan was just some dangerous place in the Middle East. Now, after three days with Mohaned, I'm ready to go over there and give technical assistance. I want to see what they're doing."

Mark Flora: So, while the trainees from Jordan are learning so much, our people interacting with them are learning so much.

Mark Flora: So, they then asked me to do a cultural resource management one. So, I was able to set up one working with the cultural resource management people in the region, in the area, where I took people from Petra, the managers, number two and number three, at Petra. And we did, again, a study tour looking at the issues of the mules in Grand Canyon, which they also have in Petra.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah.

Mark Flora: Into Canyon de Chelly, working cross-culturally with tribal cultures. Up to Mesa Verde with that culture. And then to New Mexico, we stayed in New Mexico working with Phil Young. Showed us a lot of things on conservation, restoration things. And then over to WAC, the Western Area Conservation Center, I think, which does most of the NPS cultural and historical conservation work—

Lilli Tichinin: That sounds great.

Mark Flora: —on the cultural side.

- Mark Flora: Then another issue came up in Jordan. And Bill Wade and I were selected to go to Wadi Rum and work there. So, I'm never too old for a mentor. I'm 63 years old and being mentored by 72-year-old Bill Wade.
- Mark Flora: In moving my Jordanians from Santa Monica Mountains up to Pinnacles, I wanted to stop someplace. That's a long drive. I don't know that coast very well. So, I called Gary Davis. He says, "Well, the place you want to stop, if you can get in, is Piedras Blancas Lighthouse. It's up by the Hearst Castle. Unfortunately, it's not a National Park Service unit. It's a BLM [Bureau of Land Management] unit. It's unfortunately open only for very limited hours right now. But if you can get in, get in."
- Mark Flora: So, I make a phone call. I get an answering machine. "Yeah, I'm from the Park Service. I have some foreign visitors over. I know you're only open on Saturday. Could we come in on a Thursday and see?"
- Mark Flora: I get a call back a day later from this guy. "Who'd you say you were? Who do you work for? Oh, you worked in the Everglades? Do you know a ranger named Wayne Valentine?"
- Mark Flora: "I know Wayne!" We gave him some support on water issues at Curecanti National Recreation Area.
- Mark Flora: "Well while I was in Park Service. He was my roommate at FLETC and he's my best friend now. I can't help you because I'm leaving next week. I'm a seasonal. I'm going to the east coast. And our superintendent is so busy here. I'll see if I can get his permission and see if we can talk a volunteer into coming in." And he said, "Where did you, you say you worked in Everglades? When you were there? Did you know a guy named Jack Moorhead? Well, he's one of our volunteers."
- Mark Flora: So, their superintendent approved it. So, we drive up. I call Jack. We meet Jack. Jack is in his eighties. As fit as ever, working three days a week. I said, "Jack, you were a great mentor in my career. You told me when I had a chance to leave the Everglades to take it, that fit your career, and go. You gave me some great career advice. Now here I am, retired, and I'm seeing you, a young eighty-something out here working three days a week as a volunteer. Are you mentoring me and saying the way to have a long and happy retirement and live longer is to stay active?"
- Mark Flora: He said, "That's exactly what I'm saying." So that's, again, the Park Service family. This is not just some boss, my boss 25 years ago. We're all part of the same family out there. And that's been one of the greatest rewards.
- Mark Flora: So, Ken Burns, going back to Ken, he let me get my head around the history of what this means. I've been developing certain thought patterns over the years. I could never crystallize it what the Park Service is in just a few words until Jon Jarvis one day, and I'll steal from Jon Jarvis who was in a presentation probably at a George Wright Society, where basically he defined this agency as "extraordinary places with exceptional people and a

mission second to none.” Well, any of us who’ve been around 105 units of the National Park Service know the extraordinary places that this is. And any of us who’ve properly been able to come in and work our way through the temporary assignments, live in temporary housing, bond with different divisions and people, work with the trainees and go on, keep those relationships, know that this place is full of exceptional people.

Mark Flora: My narrowness was my exceptional people, nine out of 10, were resource managers. When I started taking Jordanians in the park and we were looking at law enforcement, we were looking at search and rescue, we were looking at firefighting, we’re looking at interpretation and we’re looking at environmental education, those exceptional people are throughout the entire service.

Mark Flora: And then the mission second to none. There’s no mission out there in this government that’s more important. To protect what we’re protecting for that three generations, five generations, 15 generations from now. So, I owe Jon the ability to encapsulate 30 years of experience into a dozen or so key, crucial words on things.

Mark Flora: So here I am. That’s my career.

Lilli Tichinin: Wonderful. Thank you for taking me through all of that. You know, one thing that you mentioned that stuck with me, and I think it came up again when you were talking about being a mentor, and also being mentored, and the exceptional people, is this, you were saying that when you brought in people who didn’t have a strong Park Service experience, that you really tried to get them that experience. So, I was wondering if you could talk more about that, and about how you maybe saw that, what you saw as some of the best things that came out of that, of helping people do that.

Mark Flora: Mm hmm. Well, the first thing you’re going to do to understand this agency is spend some time in the parks. I’m going back to my first boss again, Pete Rosendahl. Pete was a civil engineer. Pete could have made a lot more money than working for the Park Service. And he came out and said, “Look, here you are. You have a master’s degree from major universities and congratulations, I just hired you for a GS-7. You could have gone to work for Florida Phosphate. You could have gone to work for Bethlehem Steel up there and be making double what you’re making right now. You’re never going to make that money in the National Park Service. But my rule of thumb is whenever I send you someplace, there’s a reason that place is a national park. And there’s a reason I’m sending you there, okay? And the reason I’m sending you there might be that there’s an issue with a leaky septic system from a visitors’ center that’s out of compliance and they want your advice on. But that park isn’t there to provide bathroom facilities. That park is there for a reason. So, whenever you go, I want you to take a day ahead of time and go in, read about the park and visit the park. You’re in Gettysburg for this reason, but I want you to know why Gettysburg is there.”

Mark Flora: I took that to heart. So, whenever I would send my people out in the field; that would be my rule. I would call whoever asked us to go out there and say, “I’m sending Kevin out; I’m sending this person out. They are new to the Park Service. Can we arrange a day where you fill them in, take them and show them the sights of why we’re here? They’ll do the wetlands delineation you want, but why are we here.” That was the number one rule.

Mark Flora: Number two rule was, I had some very bright people, sometimes with PhDs. And they were anxious to go to conferences and give papers. One day I approved someone flying out from Denver to San Francisco for a conference to give a paper on Tuesday. I look up on Wednesday morning, and that person is back in their office.

Mark Flora: I said, “What are you doing here?”

Mark Flora: “Oh, my paper was yesterday.”

Mark Flora: “Yeah, but what are you doing here? The conference is still on. So, half of this conference was you going and presenting the paper. The other half of this conference was you going and meeting all the people around and hearing what the issues and things are and bringing back five new ideas that we hadn’t heard before. So, if I ever send you on travel again to a conference, I want you there from start to finish of the whole conference. Spend the time in parks, spend the time with your peers. I don’t have a lot of money for training for you and you do have a professional field. So, I can get you training once a year. One year, go to the Society of Wetlands Scientists. The next year, go to a George Wright. The next year, you can do professional training again. The next year, in a park. Any time there’s an opportunity for a detail to come up, call me. I’m going to try to get one of my people to take the detail on things. Go live in the seasonal housing. Meet the people. Spend the three weeks there or whatever they need and do that.”

Mark Flora: So as much interaction as I could. And that works. Those are the opportunities that people need and the things that they do that, again, it goes back to you’re an exceptional person, that’s good. But you work in the extraordinary place. Come back and tell me why this is an extraordinary place. So that was always a part of the mentoring. Balancing their professional career, what they’re used to, with giving them what they need in the Park Service.

Mark Flora: Making the introductions. If I end up at a meeting with the people and I know these people from the training course—

Lilli Tichinin: Right. Yeah.

Mark Flora: —take the time to go down and introduce them around there and make contacts and things and build up your contacts. And oh, and by the way, mentor some younger people coming in, too. Our seasonals coming into the park and things like that. That’s your responsibility. So that’s basically

the tricks that I used to get them to build the culture a little bit. If we could get them into a Fundamentals course. Sometimes we could. Sometimes we couldn't. If I could get the slots, I'd invest to send them off to a Fundamentals course.

Lilli Tichinin: Who were some of your mentors? You went through some of them. Or even is there one specific project that you worked on or thing that you worked on with someone that kind of stands out to you as a highlight of being mentored?

Mark Flora: Well, the mentors I mentioned before, I think, also happen to be one way or another, with the exception of Bill Wade, a direct supervisor of mine. There were other people that you observed and that you saw and that you wished you could pattern your operation, and you would try to pattern your operation on some things that you see. So, some people, let's call them not mentors so much as people that inspired you in the ways that they worked.

Mark Flora: Several of those were some very good superintendents who worked their ways up through the ranks that I knew. Several of those were just people I saw and admired. Gary Davis was in my life in the Everglades, and he was in my life later on as a regional chief scientist and in the Washington office. So, our careers, while spanning the scene 30 years, we touched bases at several times.

Mark Flora: Probably the most formative thing for me, because I was young and this was all new to me, was that Everglades lawsuit. Took a decade of my life, either fulltime or on a part-time basis. It made a big difference. And it was my first chance out of school to prove myself doing things. So those are some of the proudest tangibles in that half of my career. Like I said, when I became a manager, my job was different. It wasn't to be out there doing water quality research in Everglades National Park. It was to make sure that my people didn't get bogged down in the office doing the paperwork or having problems with the institutional bureaucracy, which was important and had to be done. But if I could take care of that, run interference for them, let them go out and do their work, and if they were having a problem or there was a complaint, solve that for them so that they could focus on their work. So that was kind of a shift.

Mark Flora: When I go back to kind of those good management skills, I observed that again in Jack Moorhead as a superintendent. I observed that in Rick Smith as a superintendent. So, there's been dozens, if you keep your eyes open. You can go in and see when a park is being run well. You can go in and also see when a park has some major problems. And we're not going to go to that side of the equation, necessarily, today. But it's there, too. It's there, too. So, keeping your eyes open a little bit. Does that help a little bit?

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah. Absolutely. I'm also curious, going back, rewinding in your career a little bit, back to when you first went to the Everglades. What was that

like? You were there at the beginning of this creation of this team. And I was wondering if you could just talk a little bit more about what it was like to come into that situation at the beginning of that work.

Mark Flora: Well, it was exciting. I mean, I'd spent three years at Woods Hole Oceanographic, as a technician, very low level on the ships. But you're working with people like Bob Gagorian, Dan McKenzie, great people who went on to do some great science in their careers. Young Bob Ballard. Bob Ballard was a young post-doc when I got to know Bob Ballard. And so, I was, and there were a number of Nobel laureates in town. Some of whom had great personalities, and some of whom who didn't have so great personalities.

Mark Flora: So, I was used to having a lot of bright people that I kept an open mind and my eyes open, I could learn a lot from around. That was exactly the exciting time here. I don't think they knew exactly where this was going to lead. But they were able to get it together through trying to come to consensus. It wasn't always consensus. I mean, you would do things like propose a different water delivery schedule. And the alligator people, or for the birds, based on bird nesting going on out there, and bird success. Which was one of the major canaries in the bird cage, if you will.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah.

Mark Flora: In other words, the birds were having zero percent in raising young. Well, why is that? Because their nests are being flooded. Okay. Could we work with the water deliveries to get a schedule that would keep that from happening? Yes, we could. But then the alligator people are there, that's creating problems for the alligators.

Mark Flora: So finally, we kind of had to throw our hands up and say, we're never going to engineer this correctly. If we do it for the panther, if we do it for the alligator, if we do it for the crocodile, if we do it for this bird species or that bird species, we're going to be having impacts. So, let's rethink what we're doing, and let's try to figure out what the natural rainfall and water was.

Mark Flora: So, we went into a retrospective analysis, captured every rainfall record we could get for South Florida back to 1909 and said, can we create every flow record we could get, water level record we could get, which only went back into the 1960s? But we would interview, much like this, some of the retired USGS people who were there in the 1960s. And they would tell stories that the first gauge in the Everglades, which was a hard place to do, was put somewhere along the Tamiami Trail. It had this big arrow showing where the water was because it was so hard to get out there; Pan Am pilots would be trained to read the water coming in on their flight approach to Miami airport. From that primitiveness to stuff now that we're shooting up to satellites, I mean, millisecond or so.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah. (laughs)

- Mark Flora: So, I'm forgetting exactly where I was leading with this. Where did you—
- Lilli Tichinin: I was just curious what it was like to be part of that.
- Mark Flora: Oh, to be there. So, we didn't know, but we went back to, let's try to approximate the natural cycle of things. We did that and that wasn't perfect for everything. But it was the best thing that we're not going to be able to reengineer the Everglades as an engineer perspective. Let's try to get to the natural cycle perspective.
- Mark Flora: And a big lesson, I think a big lesson in that, that we're probably not going to be able to do it better than nature has already done it. So, when you get to things like the Long Lake Flood, when the Long Lake Reservoir broke up here and flooded the whole park in Estes and took out all the meanders and things, I think we learned lessons. Go back, what we're going to try to do is restore that to the natural pattern on things. And that's the best that we can approximate when we do.
- Lilli Tichinin: Wow, we have covered a lot.
- Mark Flora: Okay. I couldn't have picked a better career. I mean, it's been, you know, again, it goes back to the exceptional places and the people and the mission. It couldn't be a better career. When it got time to retire, there were younger people who wanted my job. I'm willing to keep working for the Park Service with three exceptions. I will not do personnel, I will not do budgets, and I will not do congressionals. So, I will give you free time after that. I will go to Jordan and I will kick dirt with the rangers, and I will sit around Bedouin fires and talk with the local communities. But let me say, I will not do personnel, I will not do budget and I will not do congressional. I mean, it's such a tremendous agency. You become a lifer.
- Mark Flora: I think it was Director Jon Jarvis again that said to me when I asked about this emeritus program, we could do it. He said, "Of course we can make this work. I call this place Hotel California. You can check out, but you can never leave." And I think he hit it on the head with that, too.
- Lilli Tichinin: When you started, did you have a vision of what you thought your career in the Park Service would be like?
- Mark Flora: No. No. really not. You tried to get that vision by talking to people, talking to my boss, talking to my superintendent, talking to, "Is this a good career move? Is this a bad career move?" Much like some of what I heard Mike Reynolds say today to you folks. I do know some of the secrets that I heard today that were there in my time. That you can come out with the best degree in the world and you're not going to write your ticket into a job at Yellowstone. If you want to work for this agency, you probably have to go to some places that aren't particularly the best places. You're probably going to have to, you know, the ideal places where you want to be. And you're probably going to have to go to some places, and you're probably going to have to move a couple of times a year. And you're probably going to have to live off aluminum plates for a part of the time.

But stick with it long enough and hopefully it will pan out. But don't be afraid to go to another agency to get your status if you see you're not going to get it in this agency. So, you've got to make yourself available – location, location, location – but you've got to be flexible. And you will not be writing your career path.

Mark Flora: I can pretty much guarantee that if you stay, you'll have a career path that is perfectly idyllic. Because I was talking to someone here today or over this conference that spent half their time in Death Valley and half their time in Alaska. They figured out it was a perfect 70 degrees every day of their career if you go by the mean average temperature.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah. (laughs)

Mark Flora: We'll promise you that. We'll promise you the ideal. But we can't say anything about the extremes.

Lilli Tichinin: Right. (laughs) Right. So, it was more about taking the opportunities as they came up.

Mark Flora: But using those who had been there before you.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: I can't get over the importance of the mentoring and talking to the people who've been there. Mike Reynolds, I think, mentioned it today. The talks around the campfire are where you get your most information.

Mark Flora: Another one of my tricks would be, when I used to have to go, even as a GS14 into the field to do something, if there was seasonal housing available, I would stay in seasonal housing to know what was going on. Invariably, there would be seasonals there that may be law enforcement. They may be interpretation. They may be resource management. But they all had good stories. So, I had the money. Here's the deal. I want to take you out to dinner tonight. And the cost of a ticket to dinner is I want a good story from you that I can have. I've never been disappointed. It's some of the best money I've ever spent. Going out and getting everyone's stories. Because this is an agency – you're doing the right thing in capturing some of these stories while we still remember these stories.

Lilli Tichinin: Great. Well let's see. Well, we can wrap up now and then we'll be about time if you wanted to go to another session. Or we can keep going. We have definitely covered a lot.

Mark Flora: Okay.

Lilli Tichinin: I was curious, you know, I know you did do a lot of work on policy. That is one more thing I wanted to ask you about is what that was like to work on some of that policy. You also had served as an expert witness. So those are two things that I was interested in finding out what that experience was like. And especially now that you say, working on congressional things is one thing you are not going to do for the Park Service in your retirement.

- Mark Flora: Well, policy was never my strongest love or my desire. But you can't run an agency without good policies. So, I was appointed the linkage for our management policies for natural resource management for the DO, director's order series, and the policies and things that we have. The important thing there that I learned is that we're getting into areas that I don't have the technical expertise in. So, you bring in those technical experts. You pick their brain. You use their brain. And then you work with them until you find something that is going to work for them but also it is a good policy and makes sense. It's kind of, it has to be fair, equitable and pass the red face test on things. And you do that through about nine iterations, and you can come up with policy.
- Mark Flora: The expert witness thing, the only advice I give, particularly to the young person there, is do not ever let anyone badger you into their viewpoint of things. It has to be your viewpoint. Everglades got a little bit tedious because I had set up an experiment to answer a limited set of questions. When we got to the lawsuit, it was a bigger set of questions. There was a desire and a pressure that I support the big list of questions. I had no doubt, or limited doubt, that their answers were right. But as an expert witness, I would only go so far as I can only address what I set up to do here. I think you're right. But no, I cannot be a witness to say that you're right, because my experiment was never set up to answer that question. It's a natural extension. It's a next step, but I cannot extrapolate it off my chart to that answer.
- Mark Flora: And sometimes the attorneys did not like that answer. We couldn't get behind their lawsuit, even if you're behind their lawsuit 100 percent, I couldn't support that statement 100 percent, because I don't know. I don't have the data to base it on. So always, always, always keep that in mind if you're getting involved in the expert witness thing.
- Mark Flora: Always keep our mission in mind if you're getting involved in all our decision making. The Park Service does give you a lot of discretion in making decisions. And nine times out of ten, they're going to give you a lot of backing for making good decisions. Don't be afraid to own up to a mistake. The sooner you find you made a mistake or whatever, admit to it. Move on. Take another course on things.
- Lilli Tichinin: Well, we talked a lot about some of the highlights and some of the incredible contributions and projects you've been a part of. I'm wondering if there's anything that you feel was sort of a missed opportunity. Was there anything looking back now?
- Mark Flora: Well, there were always, not missed opportunities, but there's always frustrations. And quite frankly, I think in hindsight sometimes, sometimes mistakes made. I would say we probably have gone through, over my 30-year career—

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Mark Flora: —probably over anybody’s 30-year career of periods of highs and periods of low.

Lilli Tichinin: Of course.

Mark Flora: They’re budget-related or sequester-related. They’re hiring-related, or you’ve got plenty of money, but you can’t hire any people. The Catch-22s. Those frustrations are always going to be there. You just have to learn to take the highs and the lows.

Mark Flora: I think we’ve tried some things for good intentions that haven’t quite worked out. And I think probably the biggest one in my career was the National Biological Survey, where Secretary Babbitt, I believe, was behind that, to take all the biologists from all the agencies and put them in one place and do that. I think we found out that that really doesn’t work so well. It might have worked. Maybe it had to be tried. But it caused a lot of angst, frustrations, and things that took a long time to fill back on. When you had a jigsaw puzzle with six critical pieces. Where maybe you need to have a groundwater expert, maybe you need to have the wetlands specialist right there. Maybe you need to have the policy person who can understand the water rights of what we could get and what we couldn’t get. And you needed to have the biologist and what effect this is going to have on the whole scenario.

Mark Flora: Then you turn around and your biologist is gone. He’s now working for the National Biological Survey, and it’s going to take you a year and a half to get him if you can get him kind of thing. So, there’s those frustrations, I’m sure I had. I can remember, I’ve had some bad days in the Park Service. I don’t think I’ve ever had a bad week. So, if you can go through a career and not have a bad week, I think you’re doing pretty well.

Lilli Tichinin: Mm hmm. What are some of the major changes that you’ve seen over the last 30 years with the Park Service?

Mark Flora: I don’t know. I mean, I think some of it is that we sometimes have to keep relearning the same lessons. We don’t learn enough from history. Humans don’t learn enough from history repeating itself, and agencies don’t learn enough from history on things. The frustrations expressed by some of the younger seasonal rangers today are frustrations that we had at that time. And sometimes they’re big frustrations. Sometimes they’re a lower frustration. What I hope isn’t happening, though, I’ve seen more of a movement to, in the sciences, I think, to hire the top PhD or professional that you can get and not balance that with somebody with the street smarts and field experience that you could get. And I’ve seen that particularly in natural resources as the program has expanded on things. Where there are people that get so stove-piped in what they do, they could be doing it for the Park Service or the forest service or maybe for IBM, if it’s predictive analytics or something like that. And they don’t have the time staying in

seasonal housing, sitting around the campfires or knowing what a maintenance guy or a firefighter does within their agency. I think we need to get that. I hope we're not losing that culture that was imbued in me early on in having to live with those people in close contacts in those situations.

Mark Flora: I think it's a mistake that we don't have the natural resource trainee program.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

Mark Flora: Look at where those people have gone. Before that, we had good, dedicated, green-blooded rangers. But they were law enforcement, or they were interpreters, and quite frankly, we were losing the natural resource battle. Those very good rangers in the Everglades could not go up against the experts on the South Florida Water Management District and convince them why our system is dying. You needed to have that skill in there. So, the professionalization of the resource management corps, I think, was a huge move in the right direction that hasn't been sustained the way I would have probably liked to have seen it sustained.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah.

Mark Flora: This is a discussion I think I had with Jack Moorhead at one time. He called me in and said, "You're a hydrologist. I'm law enforcement." "You don't know a thing about law enforcement. I could take you, send you to FLETC for 12 weeks, and have you come back here as a beginning law enforcement. Now I have a ranger here who's been a law enforcement ranger for 18 or 20 years. He wants to get into resource management. Where can I send him for 12 weeks and have him come back and be a resource manager?" And it just quite doesn't work that way. So, I think the plan to bring these people, pick these good people from the schools who knew a little about the Park Service, put them in a trainee program, mentor them, work with them, develop them, and then have them become your division chiefs and things, was a great way to go.

Mark Flora: Today, I was in a presentation recently on the I&M [Inventory & Monitoring] program. Some new people I met. Brighter than me by far. I'm not sure they could tell you anything about the park organization or, you know, how things work in a park. What you've got to realize, you can have the best data in the world, but if you don't have that data there when the manager needs it, you've lost that management opportunity to change the situation. So, it isn't always necessary to get your data to 99.999 scientific standard. If there's one shot to go in there, sometimes you might have to go in there with a little bit less to help your manager. Coming in with an absolutely watertight case six months after the manager needs it is not helpful to them.

Lilli Tichinin: Right.

- Mark Flora: So, I think, you know, every organization has these things. And by and large, we come out, I don't know if your plan would like to be in the Park Service or something like that. But I hope it is. And I hope it's the culture and the family is every bit as important as being a good historian or oral interpretation thing.
- Lilli Tichinin: One last question, I think, is just, what do you hope for the Park Service? What do you see as important things for it to be doing in the near future? You kind of touched a little on that, talking about the importance of this idea of the natural resources training. But are there other things that you hope will happen, or that the Park Service will be working on in the near future?
- Mark Flora: Haven't given that much thought. You know, us retirees don't have to give that much thought. We've passed the baton on. The big picture, I want, not to disappoint Ken Burns, I want, 100 years from now, to continue the story on. So that we've got something 100 years from now that is every bit as good in all to our people five generations from now as it has been to us as we've grown up.
- Mark Flora: I'm alarmed a little bit, and it's because I'm not thinking, on some of the stuff I've heard today about getting today's youth and things into the park. Why should I go to Yellowstone when I can see Old Faithful on the Internet or fly a drone – well, I can't fly a drone over a park – but John Fielder's presentation, I don't know if you saw yesterday, of taking the great picture on things.
- Lilli Tichinin: Oh, yeah.
- Mark Flora: Well, half the great picture is the hardship of getting up there and doing it. You don't want to fly a drone to take that same great picture or something. So, I wonder as a culture, as a society, can we keep the love of the parks where it should be as things change? I sometimes fear that we might not be able to do that. But my dad sometimes feared that the Germans or the Japanese might win World War Two, and my grandfather might have feared that he was cut down to one-third time on his job on the railroad during the Depression, he might not be able to feed his family. So, we tend to be resilient in coming through these things. But I want a national park system 100 years from now that 95 percent of our citizenry can look at, be proud, say we own the best idea in the world. And no other country has anything quite as good as this. So that's what I'm hoping for.
- Lilli Tichinin: Wonderful. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you want to touch on before we wrap up?
- Mark Flora: I don't think so. It's just been a great career choice, an honor and a privilege of working for the Park Service and working for the people in the Park Service. And I couldn't ask for more.
- Lilli Tichinin: Wonderful. Well, thank you so much.
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[END OF INTERVIEW]