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Vincent Santucci
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Interview conducted by Nancy Russell, Molly Williams, and Emma Squire
Transcribed by Rev.com
Edited by Molly Williams

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Transcript

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Emma Squire:	00:00:03	Today is January 9th, 2024. I'm Emma Squire, an archives intern, and I'm going to go around and have everyone introduce themselves first. This is the third session with Vince Santucci, of the oral history interviews we're doing with him.
Vince Santucci:	00:00:25	Thanks. Yes. Hi, my name is Vince Santucci, senior paleontologist for the National Park Service.
Molly Williams:	00:00:32	Molly Williams, archives intern.
Nancy Russell:	00:00:35	Nancy Russell, archivist for the NPS History Collection.
Emma Squire:	00:00:39	And do we have your permission to record this?
Vince Santucci:	00:00:41	Yes.
Emma Squire:	00:00:42	Great. Thank you. So again, this is the third session. Last one was back in early November, and I wanted to first check and see if you had anything that you wanted to revisit from the previous two sessions.
Vince Santucci:	00:00:57	Once I transfer that information, it erases from the hard drive.
Emma Squire:	00:01:02	Understandable. So, I was wondering if we could start with you discussing how you ended up at Fossil Butte.
Vince Santucci:	00:01:12	Sure. So first of all, Fossil Butte is an incredibly lesser-known unit of the National Park Service in Southwestern Wyoming. It's near the town of Kemmerer, extremely remote, but it preserved as this extraordinary 50-million-year-old lake deposit, Eocene in age, that has skeletal remains of animals that died in these very quiet water conditions where there was rapid sedimentation of fine grain sediments preserving entire skeletons. The details of the fossils that are preserved there, they're primarily fish

but there are birds and mammals, feathers from birds, insects, plants, leaves great detail. There are bugs that the details are so well-preserved that you can not only see the venation in the wings, but you can see coloration of what that animal looked like. And that's a very, very rare preservation. The scientific term that's used for that type of preservation is called Lagerstätten that's based on a German word and where it was defined originally.

00:02:20 It's a real gem [Fossil Butte], certainly crown jewel the paleontological parks, in terms of all of the work that's been done and research and fossils that have been described there. They filled in gaps in the fossil record where we don't have good preservation of say, fossil bats other than ice age cave deposits where you have fossil bat remains because of the very delicate nature of the bones of bats. You typically don't find them that much in the fossil record. But here, 50 million years ago, we've got these beautifully, completely 100% preserved skeletons of bats with all the delicate articulated bones together. And so, it's an extraordinary opportunity. To me, it's just one of the cool things that the people that come to Fossil Butte are really going out of their way to get there. It's off the beaten path. It's in a remote area.

00:03:18 And so we only had about 27,000 visitors, but those visitors that came there wanted to be there. It was a destination because they knew enough to say, this is a place that we want to put on our bucket list. And so, we [the NPS] certainly were able to reward them with incredible opportunities. And so, for a year, we were able to get one of these very beautifully preserved bat specimens on display in the visitor center so that the visitors could come in and not only hear the story about this very delicate preservation of this [rare fossil] bat but be able to walk out the door and look at the units of geologic strata where it came from. They can't do that at the Smithsonian. They [Smithsonian] got some cool specimens there. But here, we could make the connection between the fossils and the geology and the story that connects them. And I think that visitors really appreciated. We got a lot of positive visitor comments.

Nancy Russell: 00:04:17 So why do you say only for a year? Is that specimen not in the park collection?

Vince Santucci: 00:04:22 No, it was a temporary loan from the state of Wyoming. They are extremely rare. There's not many of them. And those that are studied and published on, oftentimes, they're holotype specimens. They're one of a kind, and so they would be in a collection where they're very protected. And so, we were able to get one of those bats on loan from the University of Wyoming and put it on display at the visitor center.

Emma Squire: 00:04:50 What were some of the challenges that you encountered at Fossil Butte in your time there?

Vince Santucci: 00:04:56 There were a lot. I would say that the rewards were much greater. I was hired as the chief park ranger, and I knew the superintendent previously, Dave McGinnis, who hired me back as a seasonal ranger in 1985 at Badlands National Park, and we maintained a really good personal and professional relationship. And when Dave heard that I was looking for a higher-graded position, he reached out to me and said, "Hey, I'm going to be filling this position because our chief ranger is hiring. If you're interested, I would suggest you put your application in." So, he knew that I was a pistol-packing paleontologist. I had a commission, I could fill the role of the chief ranger, but I also had a very broad knowledge of paleontology given that that was my academic focus.

00:05:52 And so in a small park, you find out when you work in a small park, you've got to wear lots of hats because you probably only have six or seven staff, whereas Yellowstone may have 200 staff and so they have more specialists that can handle the workload. But for us, we still had to reply to all those memos that came out of the Washington office asking for information about our park. We had to respond to visitors' requests. And so, you have to become very holistic and be able to be adaptable, whether you're just going out to suppress fire because of a wildland fire or the wide variety of things that come up in managing a small park. But I think I probably got some of the best experience in the park service that I had by working at Fossil Butte and having to wear those many hats to make it through each day. So, the challenge is, and I don't know if we've recorded this previously, but I did mention to you at least in a conversation that we had is that, so it's a real park.

00:07:11 I mean, it's got wildlife and vegetation and there's streams, and then there's a lot of external pressure. So, we were

surrounded completely by Bureau of Land Management land where there was lots of grazing, there was hunting, there was all the things that we don't normally do [allow] in a national park, and we didn't do them at Fossil Butte National Monument. And so, it was trying to maintain the integrity of a National Park Service unit, about 8,000 acres, that not only preserved fossils, but also preserved a fairly large herd of elk that are of great interest to hunters in southwestern Wyoming. And it turns out that we actually had mountain lions periodically and we had wolves because they were drawn in by the elk and the moose and pronghorn and the other animals that we had there. And so, the concerns about poaching were ever present. It wasn't a little sleepy little park. It was a park that you needed to be on your toes and alert.

00:08:18 And so particularly during the Fall during hunting season, we had to get out and partner mostly with the Wyoming Game and Fish, who are great colleagues to work with in terms of managing our resource. I'll never forget the day that I received a call. I was on duty, and I was being called from an airplane, the Wyoming Game and Fish, wildlife ranger was flying over the monument, and he said, "Vince, there are two individuals that have taken their snowmobiles onto the monument. They knocked your fence over. They're carrying firearms. I'll try to get to you as soon as I can. We'll send some backup, but in the meantime, you might want to look into seeing what this is." And of course, your adrenaline goes up when you hear this sort of thing. And so went out and had no idea what was going on, thinking that these might just be poachers that are coming onto monument, disregard to the fence line, everything else.

00:09:33 And so I got out there [east boundary of the monument] and I had found that there was a truck parked, and it had US government license plate on it from the US Department of Agriculture. And so eventually made contact with the two individuals that were on snowmobiles, and we had chatted about, what in fact they were doing? Why did they disregard and damage our fence? Why were they driving where they shouldn't be on a snowmobile? And also having firearms with them. So, they had explained that they had learned that one of the Yellowstone wolves had come onto the monument and they were going to remove it. And I'm thinking, okay, I went through explanation. We understand what your job is. You need to understand what our role is

as a National Park Service, that you can't do that for a lot of reasons. And I probably wasn't as calm at the time when I had that conversation with them, but they proceeded to tell me is that "Well, you probably don't know about the new law that was signed by President Bush, the Farm Bill." Which essentially hadn't even come off the printing block to get circulated distributed.

00:11:03 But the Farm Bill essentially was looking at the interests of farmers [rancher] and sheep herders and cattlemen in the West. And it was a very pro kill all predators. It was very anti wolf and wildlife [predators more so] and other sorts of things. So, APHIS [Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA] is the bureau within USDA that does predator control. And so, these two men worked for APHIS. They were on our monument. And so, we had a very, very strong, very serious discussion. Fortunately, the Wyoming Game and Fish arrived at the same time and so I felt a little bit more comfortable with him there. And so, they started to explain that this new Farm Bill is very proactive in terms of killing off predators in Wyoming that pose any sort of risk or threat to domestic herds. And that they said that they had received a report from a local rancher who drives sheep along our boundaries, that he has had some of his sheep taken and they're out doing their job that they were now authorized under this new legislation.

00:12:25 So of course, I didn't know anything about this new legislation at the time. Quickly learned about it. I was very surprised in terms of how it read. But in essence, when you first read this legislation, it said that the Secretary of Agriculture is given jurisdiction over predator control on all federal lands, all federal lands, including national parks, if those predators pose any threat to domestic animals. And so, they were interpreting it that they can come in even on National Park Service land and do what they want, even though it doesn't say you are authorized to knock fences down and drive snowmobiles and all that sort of thing. They interpreted it as they felt appropriate to achieve what they were going to do. So, my immediate first reaction was to go back. I need to call our regional criminal investigator and chief law enforcement ranger and explained the situation.

00:13:32 We wanted to call the US Attorney's Office because taking action against another federal agency is not really a good idea. It's not a good way to make friends, particularly in

southwestern Wyoming given the issues. But it turns out that they appeared to know what they were doing, and they targeted Fossil Butte. Even though the issue of the wolves is one that's been fought heavily in the media around Yellowstone, they weren't going to be going into Yellowstone to do this. They were going to go into sleepy little Fossil Butte that most people have never heard of and test out this new law. And of course, being on the other side, the only commissioned LE ranger that had to stand there on the line and draw, that we had some very, very difficult conversations working through this.

00:14:28 It resolved in a positive agreement and understanding of how we'll go forward in the future. But we were told by the US Attorney's office and our [regional] chief law enforcement that we cannot raise this and take this so that they would be cited or anything like that legally or any sort of criminal charges filed on it although they violated federal law. That under the circumstances, we were going to work out a reasonable compromise and that would be that if they ever need to come on the monument again, they have to be accompanied. They are not permitted to come on without being accompanied during their visit to the monument. So that was one challenge. Did I mention to you the problem with the maintenance person who had a bad temper?

Molly Williams: 00:15:29 I don't believe so.

Emma Squire: 00:15:30 No, I don't think so.

Vince Santucci: 00:15:32 All right. So, during the few years I was there, so I arrived at Fossil Butte in 1997 and I departed in 2003. And so, I lived at 7,000-feet, you know, heavy snowfall, southwestern Wyoming, economically depressed area. And not everybody loved the federal government, including some of the local law enforcement. And so, you had to be very diplomatic and cautious because you're representing the agency, the uniform, and the integrity of what we were trying to do. So, when I first came onto the monument, I was just getting a feel for everything that I needed to do, becoming familiar with the coworkers, the chief of maintenance, administrative staff, et cetera, and to try to figure out what my role is. Shortly after I arrived, my superintendent, Dave McGinnis, breaks the news to me that, "Hey, the regional office just offered me an opportunity to go to Padre Island for three months on an

acting detail." He said, "Would you be willing to be the acting superintendent?"

00:16:45 I'm thinking if I'm here, I'm happy to do it. And so, he didn't necessarily brief me on everything that I needed to know. And one thing that came up almost immediately after he departed was that we had seasonal staff and SCAs that were there, and they started complaining that the newly hired maintenance guy gets pretty aggressive [with the seasonal staff]. And if they dare walk into the visitor center with mud on their feet, he was going to show them why they don't ever want to do that again. But apparently, he had been going into their residence [apartments at the monument], even for the females, without permission. That's not an appropriate thing to do. So, I called the chief of maintenance in, and I said, "Hey, can you talk to me about your employee because I think we're having some issues here?" And we chatted about it. He says, "Yeah, I'll talk to him. But he's gone this week because before Dave left, he approved for him to go to fire training at Grand Teton National Park." You're shaking your head; did I tell you this already?

Emma Squire: 00:18:06 I don't think it was on tape.

Vince Santucci: 00:18:08 Okay. All right. You asked for challenging situations.

Emma Squire: 00:18:12 Yeah.

Vince Santucci: 00:18:13 So I thought I'd give you one, even though it doesn't have a lot to do with paleontology. So, as I'm trying to address the various issues as the new acting superintendent in the park that I was not fully familiar with, I get a call and it's from the criminal investigator at Teton [Grand Teton National Park], and he said, "Vince, are you somewhere where I can talk to you on a secure line?" And so, I called him back and I said, how can I help you? He said, "You know this name of an employee who worked at Fossil Butte?" And I said yes. He said, "Do you know that he's here at Teton involved in training?" And I said yeah. Do you know what type of training he's involved in? Yeah, I think it's fire training. And I said okay. He said, "Well, I want to tell you why we're concerned about this. Do you know his history?" I said I don't. He said, "Do you know that he was a convicted felon?" I said no, I didn't know that. He said, "Do you know what his felony charges were?" I said no. He said, “Homicide by arson”. He's in training for fire. I told him, "I

can see your concern." And so, it really began one of the most difficult supervisory positions I've ever had to deal with because I had already got indication that he was aggressive towards some of these employees. And so, I called the chief of maintenance in, and I said, do you know he was a convicted felon? And he said, "Yeah, I think so." And I said, what do you know about it? He said, "Oh, he checked off the box on his application saying he was a convicted felon."

00:19:58 I said that's good. Did you look into it? When you did the reference check, did you get any information that led you to believe that there might be any concerns here? He says, "Oh, I was so anxious to get somebody hired, I didn't do any reference checks." And I said [to myself], “Dave, I'd like to revoke my acting superintendency immediately”. And so, I learned a lot through this process that in talking to the chief of administration in the region and the criminal investigator, [they] said we made the mistake, and the burden is on us that if he disclosed that he was a convicted felon, then he did what he is required to do by OPM and by federal law. And if we didn't check into it and we offered him a position, then he's got rights [and protections]. And there's case law that defend those kinds of individuals from discrimination because he served his time, he did time in jail, he paid his debt to society.

00:21:05 And the way that it is viewed, the way that the court sees it, is that we cannot discriminate against him because we gave him that job. Now, that doesn't dismiss the fact that he's treating people not so nice and there's other things that we'll have to start documenting and going down that road. But they said that we have to be very careful because if he lawyers up on this thing, he's going to be able to take this quite a long ways that it's going to make our job more difficult. So, in the process, I learned more information about the homicide by arson, and this is a very scary guy. He was having difficulty with his girlfriend, and so how he would deal with things would be aggressive, physical violence, et cetera.

00:22:04 And the woman came out one day and found that her dog was hanged from a tree on her property by this man to send her a message. He wound up killing her by burning down her house and she was in it, and he went to jail for it and he's back out. And so, we hired him at Fossil Butte at the perfect time in my life. So anyways, this self-resolved, I

		can't really talk about the details of that, but it was interesting to see how we [NPS] were so limited to be able to do something right and protect our employees because of all this case law precedent that our agency made sure that we adhered to.
Nancy Russell:	00:22:59	And because the steps weren't followed in the hiring process.
Vince Santucci:	00:23:01	Yes. Yeah. Nothing to do with paleontology.
Emma Squire:	00:23:09	Does not sound like the easiest first acting superintendent position?
Vince Santucci:	00:23:14	Makes you wonder what other people are going through out there.
Emma Squire:	00:23:19	What is something you look back on at your time there that you're particularly proud of, any achievements or folks that you mentored?
Vince Santucci:	00:23:30	Yeah. So, we were very fortunate to be able to actively recruit researchers to come in and do some fantastic work. And they published a lot of new papers. There were new descriptions of fossils and things that were on our watch. And so, because we absolutely were thrilled, excited, to be part of all of this, it became synergistic, and it defined how we wanted to go forward and best practices to make sure that this little out of the way national monument is on the map of a really cool place to visit and worth preserving. Another issue that we had to deal with is that our local chamber of commerce in Kemmerer, Wyoming, again, relatively challenging economy in this little town. The primary employers were the coal mine and the power plant. And it was cyclic that periodically, there was a [economic] boom and bust.
	00:24:46	And so the people that worked in the mines pretty much grew up in the town, got a job in the mines, made really good money, bought all the toys, the pickup trucks, all the other kinds of off-road vehicles, boats, et cetera. And then as soon as the mine shuts down and they're laid off, then it's a disaster financially for them. And people live through cycles of this in their lives and were sort of accustomed to that. But anyways, the local chamber of commerce, because we were getting all this scientific publicity about the resources at the park, came up with a great idea, is that let's

do a media campaign with the State of Wyoming Tourism and talk about how Kemmerer, Wyoming is a great place to fish in the waters, in the streams, and to go collect your fossil fish at the monument.

00:25:45 How many times people came in the visitor's center and said, "Hey, this is the fossil fish place, right? Where could we go collect our fossil fish?" And so, we have to explain to them that we can't do it here [within the monument], but there are commercial quarries outside. And so what it did is that it made us realize that the perception of what we are may change slightly in the mind of people coming to the park, reading these advertisements, and developing the expectation, “that during the morning, I'm going to go fish for trout and in the evening, I'm going to go fish for fossil fish”, is that we were concerned about what kinds of impressions that [advertising] left on the public that may lead to illegal [fossil] collecting activities.

00:26:34 And so how that turned out is that we worked with our region to get funding to hire the Virginia Polytech, their social science program, to look at visitor attitudes, perceptions, and understandings as it relates to fossils and how those perceptions and understanding relate to the behaviors [while in] the monument. And a woman got her PhD for this project, and it really was a useful tool. They did interviews of the public asking them, okay, what do you know about Fossil Butte? What can you do? What can't you do? Why do you think that you can do certain things or why do you think you can't do certain things? So that we had a better understanding of the wider attitudes and understandings of the public so that then we could address interpretation to try to direct to those misunderstandings that are out there. So that was a really valuable exercise doing that social science study at Fossil Butte.

Emma Squire: 00:27:43 Had there been a history of illegal fossil collecting at Fossil Butte or did this publicity maybe spark something new?

Vince Santucci: 00:27:54 So there had been periodic cases, but it hadn't been a really big problem, in part because there are so many opportunities [for the public] to collect [fossils] outside of the park.

Vince Santucci: 00:28:03 Because there are so many opportunities to collect [fossils] outside of the park in these quarries where you pay $25 [or other fees], you can go in for a couple hours and collect

your own fish to take home. So, there was an outlet or there's a little gift shop in town where you can buy fossil fish that are legally collected. And so there hasn't been many really big problems. A couple years before I arrived there, there was a break in, there was a burglary. And the thing that they did is they stole some of the fossil fish that were on display there. They took the park radios with them so that the two individuals could communicate on the park radio, not knowing that every law enforcement person in the area is going to pick up this information. So, they were captured and apprehended. But it's not as great as you would anticipate that it could be. But there had been some isolated issues.

Emma Squire: 00:28:58 Could you talk a little bit about your job share that you had while you were at Fossil Butte?

Vince Santucci: 00:29:03 Yeah. My boss, Dave McGinnis, he's the greatest nurturing mentoring boss out there. Because he'll support anything if it's reasonable, without getting him put in jail or anything. And so, he was very supportive when the Geologic Resources Division of the National Park Service, that's an office in the Natural Resources Directorate, they have a handful of specialists in geology that deal with issues like landslides, rockfalls, caves, karst, paleontology, volcanoes. We can't have these specialists in every park, but if we have central people that can provide support across the agency, then at least there's a subject matter expert that understands the issues and can figure out solutions. And so, they didn't have a paleontologist in 1997 there, but they recognized that the increasing information that we were gaining about fossils, and the work that we have done specifically in terms of doing inventories at Yellowstone and elsewhere, that they looked to us, whenever questions came in from the parks, saying, "Hey, can you help us to answer these questions?"

00:30:21 So it became so regular that the Division Chief, Dave Shaver, the Geologic Resource Division, spoke to my boss and said, "Hey, look, Santucci doing this work already for us. Why don't we get a formal job share where he works 50% for you as your chief ranger and 50% for us as the servicewide paleontologist, and let's see how this works?" And so, I did that for several years. Of course, it was extremely rewarding to have both elements of that career, to be an actual ranger in a park and dealing all the wide

variety of issues, and then helping servicewide, to try to assist where there are needs across the agency.

Emma Squire: 00:31:09 What sort of projects would you be working on with the GRD?

Vince Santucci: 00:31:15 So they could range from simple requests to review a research and collecting permit to say, "Hey, is this legitimate? Or could you tell us whether or not this is something we should perhaps forego?" Or to make recommendations on how we might build some conditions so that the researcher then works appropriately in a national park. It could be there's a new fossil discovery in a park that they want to figure out what to do with [these fossils]. Because of a rockfall, all of a sudden here they have a partial dinosaur skeleton exposed, they've never dealt with it before. And so, what do we do next? That sort of thing. So, there was just many, many opportunities, and I was already well networked with a lot of the parks already, based on the inventory work that I've been doing. So, we were able to get the funding to go out, do park visits, to build partnerships with professional paleontologists that work nearby, to be able to resolve some of these issues that had come up during that time.

Emma Squire: 00:32:33 So you left Fossil Butte for George Washington Memorial Parkway. Is now a good time to talk about the transition?

Vince Santucci: 00:32:43 Well, there's a couple things that happened during the Fossil Butte tenure in addition to what we've discussed already. And one is that because I had a law enforcement commission and a tremendous interest in protecting paleontological resources in parks, this was a time prior to the Paleontological Resource Preservation Act being enacted into law in 2009. And so, it was working across the agency without getting myself into trouble, to advocate responsible stewardship and ways that we can protect the resources when we don't have that ARPA-like law that makes it easy as a deterrent and for prosecution. And so, several things that I did, is that I had began developing paleontological resource protection training for LE [law enforcement] rangers when I was at Petrified Forest. And so, I had received lots of requests to provide that training.

00:33:52 And so something I did is that in 1998, I applied for and was awarded an Albright-Wirth grant, and basically it was to develop in conjunction with the Albright Training Center

and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, FLETC, a series of training modules for paleontological resources. And that there was a two-hour module, a four-hour module, and an eight-hour module. In the archives I gave you today, my final report on that particular Albright-Wirth grant and how it went forward. This led me to be invited to be a guest speaker at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center for new recruits that were going through their initial law enforcement training to become commissioned federal LE Rangers.

00:34:47 So that was all very worthwhile because my approach is that whenever I go in and talk to people, I want to be the person that learns the most from this conversation. Because it makes you a more effective instructor. And so, listening closely to the questions and seeing what things click and don't click, I utilize that in the development of the training modules that we put together. So, I was invited back quite a few times to present that. I went out and I presented probably four or five times a year, to law enforcement rangers during their 40-hour refresher, which they're required to do. Usually, I did a two-hour session as part of that 40-hour refresher. And so, I think the list of names that I have, from the first time that I gave the paleontological protection training back at Petrified Forest, I had a signup list, and everybody put their name and their phone number, and their job title.

00:35:53 And so I think it was like 900 rangers by 2002, 2003. And I think now that list is about 2,500 people. I was just at Santa Monica Mountains, and I have a handwritten list of people's names. But it's getting the word out there and it's been very useful. And oftentimes I get an invitation from somebody that's participated in one of those trainings previously, they've moved to a new park and say, "Hey, our folks need to know this information. Can you come here?" So, I'm really happy with the opportunities, being able to get out there and talk to the rangers. And you always find out little tidbits of information that help wrap up and tie things together in a more big picture way.

Emma Squire: 00:36:43 Kind of briefly, what is the overview of one of these training modules? What topics do you hit?

Vince Santucci: 00:36:51 Sure. And it's evolved. Again, listening to what the audience is interested in helps you to refine it. Whenever I prepare for an individual training session, I absolutely want

to focus on that park's paleo, and provide a little bit of information on what's in their backyard to make it relevant to them. But the two hour is the basic training. It's the introductory information. It includes now information on the Paleontological Resource Preservation Act, which before the law, I didn't have anything really to use as the authority. And so that's part of it. That's usually the first question. "Can you tell us about this law, what it says, and what it means to us? How can we utilize it?" And so, the four hour is very much more in depth. There's opportunity for question and answer, dialogue and things like that, and to touch on things at a much deeper level.

00:37:57 The eight hours is when I develop a field component where we get out in the field, we actually see fossils. I create a mock [fossil] crime scene, and say, "Okay, how would you investigate this as an experienced ranger? What are the questions that you need? What kind of evidence is potentially out there?" And because most of these people never investigated a paleo crime, these are very important discussions. I think that rangers that go through the archeological resource protection training, they learned the skills, they understand the skills, and the why that they're documenting this information. One of the most important things is to make sure that you bring in somebody who understands geology and paleontology. Because some of the evidence that you're collecting will require that level of information.

Emma Squire: 00:38:53 Can you discuss how you set up these mock [fossil] crime scenes? Or do you have a specific example?

Vince Santucci: 00:39:04 No, I can't tell you.

Emma Squire: 00:39:04 That makes sense. Yeah.

Vince Santucci: 00:39:04 Because you're going to spoil it for those people that need to be surprised. Basically, you go out to a site where there are fossils, and you leave evidence. So, it might be a little bit of plaster. Because oftentimes a field technique that's used, is that when you find a fossil, if you just pick it up, sometimes it's going to just crumble. And so, creating a jacket, like when you stabilize a broken arm by putting plaster around it, will allow you to stabilize that so you can lift the entire thing out, take it back into a better condition, dry environment where you can work in a prep lab under more ideal conditions. It would be a crinkled-up receipt

from a hardware store saying they bought plaster, and they bought a rock hammer, so that it can lead you to say, "Okay, I'm going to go back there and interview the people and see if they can tell us. Or if there's a credit card associated with this receipt." Those kinds of things. It's a lot of fun.

Emma Squire: 00:40:10 Sounds like it. Do you have any other topics you'd like to bring up as we're sort of closing in on Fossil Butte? Or is it even time to close in?

Vince Santucci: 00:40:23 Yeah, so let's see. We talked about the Albright-Wirth grant, we talked about the paleo training. The final thing is that before I left Fossil Butte, I was invited to assist with training at the Albright Training Center. The natural resource training manager who was there that was scheduled to put on this five-week fundamentals of natural resource training, probably one of the most important training courses for a new natural resource specialist, he accepted another job. And so, Albright contacted me, wanted to know if I could come on a detail there. I came about a month in advance to begin to prepare, because we had to schedule speakers every day for five weeks. We had to develop logistics and planning for field trips and things like that. So, I came there for about a two-and-a-half-month period. And it was just a wonderful experience.

00:41:28 As an instructor, you need to understand all the dimensions of what you need to convey to individuals. And you may not have all the information in your head, but you want to find the right people that are going to come there and be able to present on NEPA or other topics. And so, I was able to contact across the agency, and bring all these subject matter experts in. Whether they were scientists or policy folks. And when you get that box, you're going to see that this was a really incredibly worthwhile educational opportunity for new young, natural resource managers. It really laid out that full perspective on what they could potentially face in their careers.

00:42:21 When I think about that training, the one thing that comes to mind first, is that when we had somebody come in and talk about Guam, War in the Pacific, and he talked about the concerns are that the local community, people that lived in the area, economically depressed, they would go in and dive into the coral reefs, and they would capture tropical fish that would bought by dentists around the world to put

in aquariums. Beautiful things. But to learn that they're doing this in a national park, and part of the procedures that they use is that they just dive down, they have a little bottle with something like Clorox in it. And they spray it into the cavities of the coral reef where the fish are hiding. And it forces them to come out, and then they're stunned.

00:43:20 It doesn't kill them, it just stuns them, and then they can easily capture them to take back to sell on the commercial market. But in the same time, it's killing the coral reef. I mean, permanently killing out big sections of coral reef through the use of this. And so not only did they need to have scientists to try to understand how do we protect, how we stop this, but they also needed interpreters to be able to communicate with the public to make them understand that what you're doing is very shortsighted, and it's going to leave very damaging effects that are going to impact not just the native life, but also income for you down the road.

Emma Squire: 00:44:09 How much of the natural resources training--Is there a kind of standard syllabus to follow, or how much of it did you create from scratch?

Vince Santucci: 00:44:19 So it was hybrid. So, what the first thing I did is I went in, and I looked at all of the files for the previous fundamentals of natural resource management that was offered five years before. And I took that. And it allowed me to see who's still out there that could potentially be speakers, and formulated from what they had put together previously, in terms of a slightly more modern approach to it. Because we went through a tremendous reorganization in the Park Service developing the Inventory and Monitoring Program, which didn't exist during the prior class. And so, we wanted to make sure that we were capturing the modern look of how we're doing resource management in the Park Service.

Emma Squire: 00:45:15 Well, I think it's maybe time to move on to the next position. Do we want to take a break?

Nancy Russell: 00:45:20 Yeah, can you pause it for a second?

Emma Squire: 00:45:28 Mm-hmm. So, I'm wondering now if we could go over your position at George Washington Memorial Parkway? Kind of the transition from this more rural area to this urban environment. And then what you were doing with paleontology while you were at the physician as well.

Vince Santucci: 00:45:44 Sure, absolutely. So, I was under increasing pressure to get back closer to home in Pennsylvania, where family lived. My dad was getting older, and so we had spent 20 years out West in western parks. And so, felt that it was time to probably do that. And I'm glad I did, because we had about two years to spend with my dad before he passed away. And so, we're really thankful of that. But trying to figure out the right position. And of course, George Washington Memorial Parkway, there's no fossils in the asphalt. And so, it was advised to me by a friend and a mentor in the Park Service. He said, "Look, you've done the paleo thing and you've done okay. And why don't you prove that the capabilities that you have to do anything, can be applied in other ways to demonstrate your value to the Park Service?"

00:46:47 And so I thought a lot about that. Talked to family, the chief ranger position at the George Washington Memorial Parkway came open. And they did a lot of research, I knew some people that worked there, and they encouraged me to apply. And I think what was interesting about this is that it was totally different than many of the other things that I did. But what it had; it had a really high graded GS-13 chief ranger position. A lot of responsibility, and more aligned with the traditional ranger role. And that is broad responsibilities in all aspects. So, you're a chief ranger that you oversee the natural resource program, the cultural resource program, very diverse park. You oversee interpretation education; you supervise rangers that are providing visitor services. You're overseeing permitting, the NEPA compliance program. You're liaison with the US Park Police because of the jurisdiction in DC.

00:47:59 And they had some cool things that they did, like big incidents and big special events like July 4th. And so, it was really different. And it was also recommended that, look, get an experience in another region because you'll find that the way one region works and operates is very different than another region. And if you survive National Capital Region in a big park like that, you could pretty much go where you want to go after that. And so anyways, I interviewed and the more that I thought about it, it was like, "Wow, this is a fresh start. There'll be a lot of things to learn, a lot of experiences to gain, and we'll be close to family." And it all seemed to work out. So, I was offered the position and I accepted it. And oh, my goodness, I never realized how complicated life can be, working in the National Park Service, coming into a park like George

Washington Memorial Parkway, that definitely suffers an identity crisis.

00:49:03 Outside of Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, which everybody pretty much knows what those parks have to offer, that George Washington Memorial Parkway is an enigma in that it's not just a road transportation corridor. It was the first parkway. It defined the concept of parkway. A roadway with park-like elements and design. But it tied together lots of important sites. The Great falls along the Potomac River, an amusement park, Glen Echo Park, Clara Barton's National Historic Site, Civil War fortifications, Theodore Roosevelt Memorial, Arlington House, the home of Robert E. Lee, the US Marine Corps War Memorial, Netherlands Carillon, Mount Vernon Trail. I mean, wow, there was a lot that was packed into this park. But until you work there, you don't realize that this is amongst the top 10 parks in terms of visitation and in terms of budget. And one of the things that they don't necessarily put in the foundation documents, is that it is a strategic corridor getting out to the western side of Washington DC.

00:50:24 So maintaining those roads 365 days a year under all weather conditions is absolutely essential for people to get in and out of the nation's capital. And the other thing I didn't tell you in the interview is that, by the way, we've got a lot of cabinet members and members of Congress that drive the parkway, that has the Secretary of Interior's number on speed dial, that when there's a pothole or something else that's delaying them from getting into DC or out of DC, the secretary or the director of Park Service get a call. So really under microscopic view by important people in our government. And so, it's a very political position. Your head spins in terms of all the things that go on.

00:51:18 We had people dying in the river, in the Potomac River, drownings, large numbers of them. We had people dying on the parkway itself, because people speeding and not being cautious. And so, there's a lot of things that come to the attention of Congress that we need to keep on top of things. The one thing that I saw that the park management had that I was really impressed with, is that George Washington Memorial Parkway is the park that's prepared to spend end of year money in the region that they can't obligate on big projects. They're talking about millions of dollars that are sitting there that need to be spent, or they

get returned to the Treasury Department. And our park was able to do so. I mean, they've got expensive vehicles and equipment, and things like that, that they've already got contracts, they've already got purchase orders that are sitting there, starting at the beginning of summer, to say, "Hey, whenever you need to get rid of some money, we got a long list."

00:52:28 And so we were certainly in the eye of the region, and very well respected for being on top and helping to obligate money very, very fast. When I came there, it was just a year and a half after 9/11. And if you think of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, amongst everything else, our neighbors are the CIA, the Pentagon, Reagan Airport, the Saudi Crown Prince. Lots of security issues. And so, meetings all over the place. It's cool to run around a gift shop in the CIA building. And then the Pentagon. You're meeting with a lot of interesting, important people, some that don't have names, at least they won't tell you, their names. But they're very interested in us because we are a transportation corridor that allows their folks to get in and out of work safely and do the work that they have to do.

00:53:25 So in addition to that, there's some really cool natural and cultural resources that are preserved there. The whole Great Falls of Ohio and Mather Gorge is just an incredible ecological area. And here we are in this big urban metropolitan area. And within a pretty long stone's throw, you've got these areas where you can feel you're in the middle of a wilderness at Great Falls Park and looking at the beautiful river and all the features. So, there were lots of demands, lots of pressures. And you can't blink because you'll be taken down another pathway in moments. And again, particularly after 9/11 when the culture of the federal government changed quite a bit, where you had all these entities, particularly law enforcement entities working independently, being forced to work under Homeland Security, a new department in the defense of our nation's capital, because we've been threatened successfully, and they want to prevent further things from happening.

00:54:35 So you can imagine that hosting big events like July 4th, are potentially high risk. And the largest event that the National Park Service hosts is the July 4th event on the National Mall. 27 law enforcement jurisdictions being forced to work together. And they did, and they worked well together. And I had done incident command on small

scale events in the past, but nothing like this. I mean, you're involved in months of planning, and preparing for communications, and scenarios. And of course, after 9/11, the way that they controlled Washington DC, is they put gates up, and you have to pass through metal detectors to get onto the National Mall.

00:55:28 But there's a lot of people that view July 4th fireworks from Virginia along the river, and there's no way to fence those areas out to have that level of security. And so, we were the most vulnerable aspects of these whole scenarios. And the training and the planning and everything that went forth in that, in the best interest of keeping everybody safe, and everybody goes home at the end of the day on July 4th, worked with some really incredibly bright, dedicated people, that are committed to protect the public.

Vince Santucci: 00:56:04 But there was a lot of scary incidents. When somebody leaves a box or a bag or something at the base of the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial. Oh no, who do you call? I mean, we were prepared for all those scenarios, and we realized a lot of those scenarios. I think I may have mentioned to you, but perhaps not on tape, that when David Vela, who later became the National Park Service Director, acting director, he came in as the superintendent at George Washington Memorial Parkway, just an incredible person to work with. I mean, so positive-minded and clean thinking on things. And so anyways, his first, July 4th being the chief ranger, being the incident commander for our part of the event, he came on an arrive-along, and we put our staff through a lot of training and preparation. There's a lot of fencing that maintenance puts up and everything. And so early in the day, the first call, David's with me in our vehicle, a missing child on Columbia Island. Mentally handicapped child has an affinity for water.

00:57:27 David and myself go there. We start calling in a team to start spreading out and doing a search. And David and myself, we ran with our hearts pounding thinking, we are responsible to try to find this child. And when David and myself found that child, I mean, that was a gift to have our superintendent to experience the kinds of things that we deal with from moment to moment and to be able to be embraced by the family and see that child back so they could enjoy the fireworks that day. That was very rewarding. And to do it with your new boss right there.

00:58:11 So yeah, we can talk at great length about George Washington Memorial Parkway. I promised you to tell you about Clint Eastwood. So, Clint Eastwood, one of the things that we get a lot of are different kinds of permits, including filming permits. And so, we received a permit to film a segment of a movie that was later named Flags of our Fathers. It's a story about the flag raisers at Iwo Jima, U.S Marine Corps, and the Navy corpsmen that is memorialized in the U.S Marine Corps War Memorial, a very sacred important site part of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. And that as we were reading through it was something that was going to be produced and directed by Clint Eastwood. And we just started to begin are we going to get to meet him.

00:59:13 And we did. And it was a really good experience because our rangers at the George Washington Memorial Parkway, we knew about Robert E. Lee. We knew about Clara Barton, we knew about the natural history of the park, but we also knew about the Marine Corps War Memorial and what it meant to the Marines. I remember the night I was called at home by David Vela and said, "Vince, I just got a call from US Marine Corps headquarters. Tomorrow, they want to know if we can be available at noon to host 26 Marine Medal of Honor recipients." It's like, "Oh, you're kidding me. What an honor to be able to stand at their memorial, their symbol, with 26 Medal of Honor recipients Marines." It's like, wow. I mean, what a wonderful opportunity I was provided at GWMP.

01:00:13 So anyways, the first day we came out to meet with the producer, the director of some of the actors, Ryan Philippi was one of them. That it was exciting, and we wanted to find out how we can help them to be successful. And so, we engaged in some conversation, and it appeared to me that they knew a lot about the history of these men that raised the flag, but they didn't know one really important thing. And that was that three of them were buried a stone's throw away from where they're standing in Arlington Cemetery. And when I brought that up, Clint Eastwood, he looked very interested and he walked over and whispered into the ear of his director and the director came over to me and said, "Do you have time to take Mr. Eastwood over to the cemetery to see those?" And we did. And that was a great experience because he's investing his time, his energy, his passion into making a film to tell the story. And here he has this moment to meet each of these men at their gravesite.

And that was another memorable moment. So, he took us to lunch. Anyways, so that's the Clint Eastwood story.

Emma Squire: 01:01:41 Thank you.

Vince Santucci: 01:01:41 Yeah.

Emma Squire: 01:01:41 Thank you for sharing.

Vince Santucci: 01:01:41 So the part that ties to paleontology, as I said, there are no fossils in the asphalt at the George Washington Memorial Parkway that I had continued my Park Service tradition in making sure that we don't forget about the fossils of the national parks. And so, I had worked with a number of professional paleontologists, student interns to start developing these inventory and monitoring network reports, which started with a northern Colorado Plateau Network. And actually, that got started when I was still at Fossil Butte and kicked that one off. But because these were so successful, and the other networks, well, a handful of other networks got word of it and said, how do we get this very inexpensive undertakings provides baseline data that they have absolutely no knowledge about, help inform them about the resources that are under their stewardship. That after we got about four or five of them done at almost no cost of a federal government or a taxpayer, it's just people that are enthusiastic that want to be part of this. And it's like painting the white fence, right? Tom Sawyer.

01:03:07 And so we got a lot of people involved that began their careers and have gone on and done great things by that being their first real venture into federal paleontology. After we got about five or six of them done, we said, "Somebody upstairs in the Park Service needs to know about this." And so, Bert Frost was Mike Soukup's deputy, and he was always open. Bert was really approachable. You could walk in his office and talk to him about things. And we set up a meeting with him. Lindsay McClelland was our GRD liaison who arranged to schedule a meeting, and we did a briefing and a show-and-tell of our first five reports and Bert asked some questions. And again, this was right after the natural resource challenge that we talked about before. And that is how do we manage, how do we protect, how do we interpret, how do we make decisions if we don't even know the resource is there?

01:04:12 And they had already selected their 12 natural resource themes that they weren't going to do anything else. No more money until we get these done. And then we'll look at other inventories. Bert gave us funding because he said, "This is amazing. This is inexpensive. The cost of one mammal report for Grand Teton will cost more than doing the entire National Park Service based on how you budgeted this." And so, we got the funding to do all the rest. And we spent between 2002 and 2012 doing 32 baseline paleontological resource inventory for all the parks in the 32 networks. I mean, we were determined, we on a mission and it was a lot of discovery. New things. I mean, every day, three or four times, hey, somebody calls me and says, "Guess what? We found that this park has fossils and now that takes us to 120 parks from the original 12."

01:05:11 And so very, very positive reinforcement. Got a lot of really bright young people involved in this. Got them good experiences. They're presenting at conferences, publishing papers, and we got it done in 2012 and all under the auspices of the chief ranger of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. I wasn't receiving a dime for that. It wasn't in my performance plan. Anything else. It's like a lot of my career, I really had looked at that broader vision that there's such a need here. There's a need for legislation, there's a need for a pistol packing paleontologist. There's a need for paleo resource protection training. There's a need for a law, there's a need that we understand this baseline information because the concept of the Inventory Monitoring Program is so absolutely germane to what we do in the National Park Service that we were going to do it and we did it. And I don't know how we did it, but we did it. And that was our-

Nancy Russell: 01:06:06 Did you not even get an award? Nothing?

Vince Santucci: 01:06:13 No. Grumble, grumble.

Nancy Russell: 01:06:19 Well, I mean you were already doing four full-time jobs as the Chief Ranger, and then this is another fifth full-time job.

Vince Santucci: 01:06:30 The answer to that question is people that are empowered to do that, they'll say, "Well, nobody asked you to do it." So, we feel very rewarded by what was accomplished by virtue of the fact that we've now educated all these park staff to know that we've got a broader baseline data. We're

at 286 now we're looking for 287 all the time. And the important part is that we developed this small cadre of people that understood the importance and the value of this work because it was kind of an enigma. What's a bureaucratic paleontologist do? And so, I think we defined that. We defined it for Interior. I think things that we did wound up going into the legislation. That's why inventory and monitoring is enacted into the language of the law. And it's one of the things that we feel is the most important thing that we do is providing that understanding of the scope, significance, distribution and management issues related to those issues, because then that provides us a lifetime of work to do until retirement. So, we did all that from GW Parkway.

Emma Squire: 01:07:55 It strikes me that during this time period between 2002-2012, while you're working on all this, there are some important events that happened in 2009. I'm wondering if you could talk about-

Vince Santucci: 01:08:05 Yeah. So, amongst all this, 2009 is a very important year for me in my mind because it was a convergence of a lot of really important things. So, 30 years of lobbying for a fossil legislation in 1979--When the Archeological Resources Protection Act was signed into law, it did not include paleontology other than if fossils are found in an archeological context. And it wasn't that the paleontologists weren't part of that discussion. It was that the archeologists and paleontologists viewed things that fossils and archeological remains are already so confused, people don' understand it. Let's have separate laws because it'll continue to perpetuate that confusion. But the archeologists got their law in '79 and went forward and had done great things. The paleontologists slowly struggled with the fact that we didn't have the laws that we needed.

01:09:11 Even when we had big criminal cases of fossil theft, the U.S attorneys were figuring, "How are we going to prosecute this? We don't have an Endangered species Act. We don't have an ARPA to be able to throw at these folks. We'll have to charge theft of government property," and those sorts of things. And that's what we had to do in the Sue case, for the fossil fish from Badlands National Park.

01:09:36 And so you've heard the story before about lobbying and all the efforts to move forward that in 2009 under the administration of President Obama, Congress passed, with

the good work of Senator Harry Reid, pushed forth and enacted the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act in 2009. Now, do you think there was some celebrations that year? Oh my, because this issue has spanned my adult life in terms of the biggest need that we thought we would never accomplish and to see it happen. Yeah, there were some tears that were shed. This was important. And so, this was a jump start for a lot of things. When we heard months before that, oh my goodness, the committees are going to approve this for a vote. You can imagine it was like drinking caffeine. Our energy was going 24 hours a day, let's start moving forward with all these other parallel things. And so, we moved forward, applied for funding under the Junior Ranger Ambassador program to create a junior paleontologist booklet. Again, it's--Go ahead.

Nancy Russell: 01:10:53 Are you still at GW at this point, or have you moved to another position?

Vince Santucci: 01:10:56 I'm at GW.

Nancy Russell: 01:10:57 Okay. Still at GW.

Vince Santucci: 01:10:59 So I left GW in this time period. So, I'm wrapping up the inventory and monitoring stuff. And this is the period that I transitioned to go over to the permanent paleontologist because the Geological Resource Division said we need to have a paleontologist if we now have a law that's telling us things that we need to do. So, we started working as we felt we were getting closer to legislation. And the first thing was, let's see if we can create this junior paleontologist booklet. I had been talking about it for years, and we would kid about it, but we had a concept in mind, applied, and were awarded funding for it. We hired an intern that helped us design the booklet, and it really represented the first, not park specific, thematic junior ranger kind of booklet that was out there. And it was an instant success.

01:11:58 Not only did the fossil parks all want it, but a lot of other parks saw the value in it and requested it. And so obviously very, very rewarding thing to do to chat with kids, a classroom of kids about fossils. Very excited and to say, and by the way, how would you like one of these badges? And you can really connect with kids when you have those kinds of opportunities available. So, the junior paleontology booklet was an instant success. It continues to be, and we're very proud of it. But the other thing that we

saw is that it was the Park Service that suggested that we put language in regarding public education and paleontology. And it's a one-line sentence that, "The federal agencies shall promote a greater understanding of paleontological resources with the public." That's all it says. And so, we said, "Okay, that's pretty open. You're giving us this opportunity?" Thank you."

01:13:01 And so the first thing I did, and again, I talked about this for a couple of years, the concept of something like a fossil day. So, because we had already partnered with the American Geosciences Institute, they are the host for Earth Science Week, and that's a huge educational outreach. It's always in the second week of October and it's a weeklong, and it's all kinds of great educational things for students to learn about earth science. And so, Park Service participated in Earth Science Week. They send out an Earth science toolkit and all kinds of good things that happen, all kinds of events, speakers and things like that.

01:13:45 So the light bulb came on and said, "Now's time to approach AGI and see if they would be willing to establish National Fossil Day as one day distinct in the middle of Earth Science Week. We want it on a day that's a school day so we can have classroom interaction and all this." And so, we came in and it's like they didn't say no to anything. They said, yes. Their question Is, "Isn't there a Fossil Day already?" And so, they absolutely were on board. They have been so supportive because they're a huge organization. They have like 45 different professional organizations that are part of them, the Geological Society of America, the Paleontological Society, they're all part of that group. And so, to get their endorsement was just unbelievably exciting.

01:14:43 And we didn't know where we were going to go with this. We had some ideas, but it started that we began to reach out to the Smithsonian, to the National Science Foundation to museums and elsewhere, "Hey, guess what? We're going to host a National Fossil Day event on Wednesday of National Fossil Day in 2010. Would you like to be involved?" Nobody said no. And it grew really quickly. I mean, I remember when we got to 60 partners, formal partners, that were posted on our website and got the endorsement of these big names. And it wasn't just scientists, it was also teachers. So, the National Association of Earth Science Teachers, the National Teachers

Association, they were into this. They know the value of being able to use fossils to get kids interested in reading and science. And so that first year was an incredible excitement, and it evolved so rapidly in terms of where it wound up going. I think I've mentioned to you, but now that we've been doing this for several years, and did I tell you about the first National Fossil Day event on the National Mall?

Nancy Russell: 01:15:55 No.

Vince Santucci: 01:15:55 I didn't.

Emma Squire: 01:15:56 Mm-mm.

Vince Santucci: 01:15:56 Okay. I need to tell you that.

Nancy Russell: 01:15:57 Not on the tape.

Vince Santucci: 01:16:00 Okay. So, we used to have a public information officer for the Park Service [in the Director's Office at WASO] named Dave Barna, and I love Dave. And one of the secrets about Dave is where he worked early in his career after he got his undergraduate degree in geology? He worked at AGI, American Geosciences Institute. And here he is in this really important position, heartbeat away from the director's office. He's the spokesperson for the National Park Service. So, I remember skipping down the hall in Interior, going to talk to Dave to let him know that AGI wants to partner with us. And Dave was like, he was so excited, and he said, "I want to be involved in this. Keep me updated," on and on. And so, I'd get emails or calls from Dave out of the blue saying, "Hey, what's the update? Let me know what's going on."

01:16:52 So the Friday before National Fossil Day, because it was on a Wednesday, we were planning our first National Fossil Day event. This was the kickoff event for the first National Fossil Day. So, this was the national kickoff day on the National Mall with the Smithsonian, with the other federal agencies, National Science Foundation, AGI, and others. And we were all set up. We got tents out there with arrowheads, we got banners. We were having the biggest party for fossils ever. And to do it right there on the National Mall was pretty cool. And so, Dave called me the Friday before and he said, "Vince, I can't promise you, but if I can get out to the Mall on Wednesday, next Wednesday

on National Fossil Day, keep your eyes open for me." I said, "Oh, that would be so great to have you there as part of this." And I didn't know what he was up to.

01:17:49 So right before, we're ready to give the Junior Paleontologist pledge to about 500 inner city school kids that were bused into the Mall. And by the way, most of these children, they're inner city. These are African American, Hispanic, Asian, Caucasian. I mean, it was a really nice mix that were there. And the one thing that we have learned as paleontologists when we're at conferences and we're talking to paleontologists from China or Australia or Brazil, is that it's universal. All kids have a natural affinity and excitement about fossils. And so here we are ready to give them the junior paleontologist pledge and pass out the badge and all that. And everybody's excited for the moment. And all of a sudden, I see somebody [in the distance] yelling and waving their flat hat in his class A uniform. It's Dave Barna sprinting across the Mall. "Wait, wait, wait." And so, he ran up to me out of breath, and he said, "Vince, you need to read this to these children." And I didn't know what it was.

01:19:08 And I opened it up and on White House letterhead signed by President Obama was a proclamation for National Fossil Day. And it's like, I got to pull myself together here because these kids are going to want to hear this. And so, I read word for word what President Obama put into that. And when I said, President Obama, everyone, every child, every teacher, every school bus driver stood up and they cheered. And again, President Obama was recently elected, the first African American president. Here we are with probably at least half of these children are African American children. We knew at that moment we had to do this again next year. And oh my gosh, this has been such an incredibly valuable journey, be able to connect with kids on this topic.

Nancy Russell: 01:20:08 How has National Fossil Day evolved since then?

Vince Santucci: 01:20:13 Our partnership is about 440 different partners across the country. We have partners in every state of the union allowing for a child, a teacher in any school, in any jurisdiction across the country, to have a local connection to paleontologists or museums in their state that are hosting events. And so, we thought that's a really valuable thing to

be able to in your backyard, what are the fossils and how you can connect to paleontology at that level?

01:20:49 We've had donors call us, Celestron that make the telescopes. They said, "How can we become involved? Although we're focused in space, we think what you're doing is really cool." And so, they donated us a dozen microscopes to have out on the National Mall so kids can look at fossils. And the microscopes are so cool because when you put a fossil under there and you put it in focus, they can take a picture and we could email them the photograph of that fossil that's there that they picked out of sediment and identified with the paleontologist. You know, NFL (National Football League) like us, NFD and NFL, they've hosted us on the NFL News Broadcast. By the way, next week is National Fossil Day. The NFL is endorsing us. And so, it has been a lot of fun.

Emma Squire: 01:21:49 Could you talk about the logos of National Fossil Day?

Vince Santucci: 01:21:51 Yeah, yeah. Thanks for asking that. So graphic identities, David Vela was really big on this. And when we were at George Washington Memorial Parkway, as part of our campaign to get over this identity crisis that people don't even realize all these important places are connected, that he supported me to create a number of graphic identities, logos for each of the sites, for Clara Barton, for Great Falls, for the U.S Marine Corps War Memorial. And I can show them to you later. They're wonderful. They're really well done. And so, when we started with National Fossil Day, we said, hey, look, we need to have some sort of graphic identity or logo for National Fossil Day. And we went to the same artist, and the artist did a really great job for us.

01:22:42 We found that when we posted it on the website, we probably got more feedback on the logo than anything else. And they loved the logo. And the thing was that instead of picking something that somebody could immediately recognize, like a Tyrannosaurus Rex, we said, "No, we have to do the opposite. We need to put something that looks really crazy prehistoric that they have never seen before, likely never seen before." And it's worked.

01:23:09 Because when you show it to them and they look at it and they can tell instantaneously, this is foreign. This is something from the past. Their question is, "What is it?" And that's the hook. That's what brings them in. And it

gives us an opportunity to tell that really rich story about the non-dinosaur part of the fossil record that's really cool and important. And it broadens that understanding. And we can see it. Communicating with kids in the school room now that they may not have known what a Eurypterid was or these things in the past, but now they're iconic because they were featured on National Fossil Day logos, and they're part of the normal vernacular and vocabulary of elementary school kids. And we like that.

Emma Squire: 01:23:55 What about the art contests?

Vince Santucci: 01:23:58 Yeah. One more thing about the logos.

Vince Santucci: 01:24:00 Because they were so popular, immediate in the first year, then we decided, "Well, maybe we should do an annual logo," and we've carried that on ever since. They're very, very popular. You've seen them and they just tell another piece of the story as it relates to paleontology and national parks because we create various versions of the logos using the same art, but one will be the National Fossil Day logo for that particular year with the date and then we also have a fossil park version of it. So, it's Petrified Forest National Park, or Fossil Butte or Death Valley that matches that scene where those fossils were used to drive that artwork. The art contest. The art contest came about the second or third year when we got a lot of energetic people saying, "What else can we do to make this fun for people, and particularly for people that can't come to DC or they're in some remote locality." So, we created this art contest where they can mail their art in and there would be a team of people that would judge them.

01:25:05 It just took our breath away to see some of the beautiful art. Our view is every one of these are a winner. As basic or as sophisticated as the art is, you can see that some little heart put their soul into that artwork, and they did a great job and so they're all treasures. Do you want 10,000 of them per your collection? There's a couple you might want. So anyways, the one-

Nancy Russell: 01:25:43 How about a sample?

Vince Santucci: 01:25:44 Yeah. I'm usually not selfish about things, but the one thing that I've held close is that I take the personal responsibility to call the families or the teacher of the kids that won in the art contest. Oh my gosh, how rewarding that is. Because of

course when you tell them your 6-year-old won a national contest so and so about the National Park Service and came in first place or second place or honorable mention, there's a lot of happiness. And then they get a package that has the certificate and the letter and then some prizes. They're posted on the website and that's big time because this is a National Park Service website. I can go to the National Park Service website and there's my art and it's going to be there for a long time. We can go back to the first year of the art contest and we've got them all archived, and you can see them. I'm sure some of these people are in their 20s now.

01:26:44 But one conversation, I'll never forget, I was calling the winner first place winner in the youngest age category who came from a small town in Florida. I called the teacher because the teacher's the one that submitted it. When I called them, I said, "Hi, my name is Vince Santucci, I'm the chief ranger at George Washington Parkway. I wanted to let you know that Austin's art that you submitted is a winner. If you're not sitting down, you should sit down because they were the first place in the entire country. It's like you normally hear a lot of cheers and accolades and I heard nothing. And then it got uncomfortable that I heard nothing after saying this and the next thing I heard was the woman sobbing. I'm thinking, "Oh no, did this child have misfortune or something happen?" When she collected herself, she finally said, "You don't know what this means. You don't understand how important this is." She proceeded to tell me that this child who has both physical and mental handicaps loves dinosaurs, absolutely adores dinosaurs.

01:28:14 Everybody recognizes this child as the angel to the dinosaurs. His bedrooms all decorated, his clothes. Everybody recognizes him as that little paleontologist, the angel to the dinosaurs. When we heard this, we decided we've got to do more. And so, we got all his certificate and letter and all the prizes, and we shipped them to this principal of the school. The principal of the school because this child was so well loved and recognized, they invited the entire city council, the mayor, the firemen, and they had a big school event and presented this young child, the National Fossil Day.

Nancy Russell: 01:29:01 That's cool.

Vince Santucci: 01:29:02 Yeah.

Nancy Russell:	01:29:03	Yeah.
Vince Santucci:	01:29:04	Yeah. You never know how you're going to reach people and connect people. We've done a great deal with National Fossil Day.
Nancy Russell:	01:29:13	You know what would be really cool. You know how now you can take a kid's drawing, and somebody turns it into a stuffed animal. That could be their prize when they win for the-
Vince Santucci:	01:29:20	That's a really good idea.
Nancy Russell:	01:29:25	--littlest ones. That would be really fun and then they'd have that forever more.
Vince Santucci:	01:29:33	Yeah, I love that idea.
Emma Squire:	01:29:34	I'm curious how the concept of changing for each Fossil Day, having it be a specific specimen or a specific park, how did that idea come about and is there any decision-making process behind it?
Vince Santucci:	01:29:50	Obsessive compulsive thinking about it day and night, discussing it with as many people as you can to try to come up with just the perfect idea. What's so exciting is when you present the idea to the artist and you hear him, "Oh yeah, this clicks, I got some ideas." He doesn't let you know what he's going to do and so the first thing you'll get is a rough draft sketch. Under the contract that we work with him, we can make changes to that and then he'll come back with the final draft sketch. And then once we tweak it and we make sure all the elements are accurate scientifically and other things, and they're tied to a particular national park story that he then does the color rendering, and it brings it to life. It's not in any way that you could ever predict what he's going to do because when you see it, he is so gifted in being able to colorize things to bring to life that it's just so much fun to go through that process.
Nancy Russell:	01:30:57	Who is the artist?
Vince Santucci:	01:30:59	So local, Studio 105, Tom, I can't remember Tom's last name. Anyway.
Nancy Russell:	01:31:10	It's been the same artist the whole time.

Vince Santucci: 01:31:11 Yeah, Shepherdstown. So, Tom Connet.

Nancy Russell: 01:31:15 Okay.

Vince Santucci: 01:31:15 Tom works out of Shepherdstown, West Virginia, and he's got this graphics art company, Studio 105. We learned about him initially because of the producing the logos for the George Washington Memorial Parkway. He's been with us for a long time.

Nancy Russell: 01:31:33 Cool.

Vince Santucci: 01:31:33 Yeah, so stylistically they're all associated and we've been doing it for a long time.

Emma Squire: 01:31:45 So could you talk a little bit about moving from George Washington Memorial Parkway to your current position? Is that the correct trajectory?

Vince Santucci: 01:31:56 Yeah. So when the Natural Resources office and the Geological Resource Division saw that this law was happening and they were reaping the successes of National Fossil Day, when the Chief Public Information Officer is coming in and excited to tell in the director's meeting about the fun that he had and all that, it was decided that they wanted to fill the paleontologist position permanently and full-time position in GRD. So, when that occurred, I had left GW Parkway and went to work for the Geological Resource Division.

Nancy Russell: 01:32:42 So what changed about your job when that happened?

Vince Santucci: 01:32:46 Absolutely nothing other than my office space. I did the same darn thing, but with a little bit more travel money.

Nancy Russell: 01:32:56 And a little less law enforcement on the Parkway.

Vince Santucci: 01:32:58 Yeah. Yeah.

Nancy Russell: 01:33:02 So since you've been senior paleontologist, we've already talked about National Fossil Day and the legislation, what are some of the other things that you've been most proud of or seen happen in the field that you're very excited about?

Vince Santucci: 01:33:23 So getting the law made the difference because it gave us legislative authority to constantly nag about the needs to do more and the need for funding and the need for more staffing. We've made a little bit of progress, although we

have a long way to go. But we have a few new paleontologists working in parks. We've been able to get funding for projects that we may not have gotten funding for otherwise. So, our directorate is called Natural Resource Stewardship and Science and so we do stewardship, we do science, and we integrate them. We do a lot of things that others don't do. Most paleontologists that are working in a museum or in academia, they don't think about inventory and monitoring. In fact, when we wrote the monitoring plans for our prototype park at Glen Canyon, that was brand new stuff. There were no references really to cite, we had to cut some new ground. Now, the Park Service is credited for implementing strategies that now are becoming practices for federal agencies. We're certainly very proud of that.

01:34:41 We had to go through a rulemaking process, which was required by the law where we develop a regulation that took a long time to do a lot of investment at times. And boy, when you get attorneys and solicitors involved, the wordsmithing, I don't know, a lot of hours spent on that sort of thing, but we finally got those passed. We're looking at updating director's orders for paleontology because they were written well before PRPA was in place and there's a lot of things we've learned in the process. But science, the science part of this is some really incredible discoveries have made by virtue of doing inventory and monitoring, the mummified bats in Grand Canyon, the Late Pleistocene megafaunal footprints in association with the human footprints has changed the scientific and historical paradigms of entry of humans into the New World, which up until a few years ago, the archeological community was dogmatic that there could not be humans in the New World prior to 13,000 years ago and if you're finding anything, you're delusional. That was a tough battle to fight, and we're still fighting some of that.

01:36:11 But I think we've received support for this new paradigm that changes all the North American archeology textbooks that humans were here at least as far back as the last glacial maximum between 21 and 28,000 years ago. To be part of that was incredible because the first day that I went out and looked at these footprints, when David Bustos, the natural resource manager at White Sands called me, sent me photos, he said, "Vince, look at these. These look like footprints." I saw the pictures and I said, "Oh my goodness, they are." They're preserved in these Playa Lake deposits

that are ice age, and those are the lake deposits that lie below the shifting gypsum White Sands, and everybody's focused on the sand and David's out there, he's focused on what lies beneath. He made this very important discovery that really has changed dramatically our thinking about things relative to these discussions, and in particularly as they relate to the Native American history. Scientifically, this is a really important contribution that we've made. We knew going into this that we can't publish on this stuff until we can definitively be able to say that we're not going to jeopardize the integrity of the Park Service by throwing out something. And my goodness, we would've wanted to shout out the news about this a long time ago, but we waited a little more than a decade before we published our first publication. Again, because we couldn't compromise the integrity of the Park Service by throwing out something that all of a sudden, first kid that looks at it is able to find where we were at fault. We brought in a very, very, very good multidisciplinary team of experts from around the world to be able to try to address these questions as precisely as the science would allow us to do it. I think we've accomplished that. I don't know if I've mentioned this to you, but one of the big critics of our date of 21 to 23,000 years ago was a geochronologist well known in the archeological community by the name of Vance Haynes. Vance Haynes is out of the University of Arizona. He's 96 years old, he's still going.

01:38:54 He is quoted in so many textbooks. He's taught so many students. He was a big supporter of human entry post 13,500 years ago. We've interviewed him and he's a nice guy and he's a good scientist. He was involved in Tule Springs in the original big dig there, but we did an oral history interview with him. You probably have seen that. He's a gentleman. He's from that greatest generation of people that can be respectful and have a difference of opinion, but not to be condescending or not to be terse in terms of rejection. But he politely said, "Keep up the good work guys, but you're wrong." He even published an op-ed in opposition when we published the 21 to 23,000 years ago. What I like about our team is that they recognize that when we're getting critical peer review, look at it, these are the questions we need to answer, these are the mysteries that we need to solve, and we need to figure out how the technology can allow us to answer these questions.

	01:40:17	We didn't get upset when we got three powerful letters critically critiquing our nonsense that we actually looked as closely as we could to answer those questions. Our most recent paper from October of last year is the one that provided the independent corroboration that the dates and the chronology that we have is absolute unquestionable because of independent tests. We may not have gotten there. We may not have pushed ourselves in that direction if it wasn't for the oppositional views telling us where we may be wrong. We feel very, very lucky. Again, another memorable moment was the day that we received an email that had an attached letter from Vance Haynes saying--I should give you a copy of it, I'm just paraphrasing. He says, "When I saw your most recent paper, I analyzed it over and over again for days. You guys got it right."
	01:41:29	From Vance Haynes, the guy who writes textbooks that advocated for the 13,000-year limit to humans in the New World, that goes into the National Archives. That's a letter from Vance Haynes endorsing our work. So very, very much for rewarded by a young boy in Florida for National Fossil Day artwork, through the letter from Vance Haynes, from getting the legislation. This has been a very rewarding life.
Emma Squire:	01:42:09	Is this a good--
Nancy Russell:	01:42:10	Well, do you have a few more minutes you want to talk?
Vince Santucci:	01:42:13	Sure. Sure.
Nancy Russell:	01:42:13	I don't know what time it is.
Vince Santucci:	01:42:14	Sure.
Nancy Russell:	01:42:16	I just thought maybe the Tule Springs, since you mentioned it.
Vince Santucci:	01:42:24	Let's see. So, let's see, Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. When Jon Jarvis was the director of the Park Service, he had the enviable tenure to be in places of the director during our agency Centennial. National Park Service was established in 1916 under the Organic Act. And in 2016, it was Jon Jarvis' watch, and he did all kinds of stuff to try to help promote that. What was that initiative that he had where he had all these tasks like foundation documents and things?

Nancy Russell: 01:43:09 Yeah. It'll come to me. Second Century.

Vince Santucci: 01:43:17 Second Century. Yeah.

Nancy Russell: 01:43:17 Yeah.

Vince Santucci: 01:43:19 One of the items in there, it's called Filling in the Gap. And the Filling in the GAP initiative was to look to see where we may not have representation in the Park Service currently of things that we might want to preserve that part of American history or natural history. I wrote a several page letter to the planning team that was part of that Filling in the Gap, advocating to say, "We've got some great parks that preserve Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Mississippian, Pennsylvanian, and Permian, Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous, Paleocene, Eocene, Oligocene, Miocene, Pliocene, but we don't have a Pleistocene fossil park. We need one." I wrote in advocating, we have two opportunities, either at Waco Mammoth site, which was going through an Adelphia process to determine feasibility as a potential national park or Tule Springs that had been hinted that it needs to be preserved because the way it was being managed, it was in derogation of the valuable resource there. I wrote both of them. I even went up to Director Jarvis and I said, "Hey, I'm going to submit something because we need an Ice Age fossil park." He smiled and at me.

01:44:47 I don't know if he even heard me. I was very, very interested to receive a call saying that there is legislation being introduced to create Tule Springs as a unit of the National Park Service. It wasn't going to be established through the Antiquities Act, because we know how controversial that is, the abuse of the Antiquities Act, that it was going to be through legislation. Harry Reid got it pushed through by putting into the Defense Authorization Bill, creating that site. In December of 2014, it was established as a unit of the National Park Service. I was absolutely thrilled. We got our Pleistocene park. I had people calling me from the Pacific West region saying, "Hey, can you help provide us some technical assistance advice on how we get this set up?" I got a call from the superintendent at Lake Mead who was assigned to oversee the new monument because it was right there in Las Vegas. It was an offer to say, "Hey, could you come out here for a couple of months and help us as our first acting

superintendent?" It's like, "Okay, let me ask my wife. Let me ask my boss."

Nancy Russell: 01:46:11 In that order.

Vince Santucci: 01:46:11 These things wouldn't have happen without all that support. So, I did it. I had a blast. We made things happen every day. It was such a positive synergistic thing that everybody was on board, the local political entities, the local teachers, recreation planners. Everybody was really excited about this new monument that was coming to Las Vegas. A lot of good things happened. We had to transition it from a fairly beat up BLM site with shooting ranges and ATV and dumping and all these other things and turned it into a real national park. To be part of that during the first formative days was really an incredible experience and opportunity. Lots of media interviews, lots of scientific attention, but we got that.

01:47:06 Of course, you know, that I had a chance to interview Harry Reid very briefly about that and thank him for that. Because Harry Reid was the individual who pushed through not only Tule Springs, but he was the one that pushed through the Paleontological Resource Preservation Act. It's like we owe a fossil to be named after Harry Reid and one after President Obama. It's on my bucket list before they force me into retirement.

Nancy Russell: 01:47:39 So what fossils are named after you?

Vince Santucci: 01:47:42 There are several of them. There is a brachiopod from Glacier Bay. There is a fossil shark from Grand Canyon. There's a plant from Petrified Forest that I had discovered in the collections and showed it to the paleobotanists that worked on that, Sid Ash. He never told me. I showed it to him, gave it to him and he says, "Oh, this is important. This is new." I was excited about that, but I never heard anything. Five years after I left Petrified Forest, I get a paper in the mail naming the species, Androcycas. It was a cycad. Andro means manly cycad. Santuccii, this is perfect.

Nancy Russell: 01:48:34 Okay, I think that's a good stopping place for today.

Vince Santucci: 01:48:37 Sounds good.

Emma Squire: 01:48:37 Okay.

Nancy Russell: 01:48:40 Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]