



National Park Service Paleontology Program

Oral History Interview – Gayle Marrs-Smith

Natural Resource Report NPS/PALEONTOLOGY PROGRAM/OHI—2021/019



ON THE COVER
Gayle Marrs-Smith

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Background

This interview was conducted over the telephone on Monday, August 30, 2021 between Gayle Marrs-Smith [retired and previously] with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the Southern Nevada Office in Las Vegas and Vincent Santucci (VS), who was at his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. At the time of the interview, Vince was the National Park Service Senior Paleontologist for the National Park Service Paleontology Program Coordinator, Erin Eichenberg (EE) was the Integrated Resource Manager at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument, and Jill DeStefano (JS), a Founder and President of Protectors of Tule Spring, also participated in the phone interview. The interview was recorded on a digital audio recorder and a mp3 file was created. A written transcription of the interview was produced from the digital audio recording by NPS volunteer R. Sky McClain and this document contains the discussion during the interview. Gaye Marrs-Smith signed a release form for the National Park Service for the preservation and use of the interview in the future. If present, PII has been omitted.

Transcript

1:09:37 Total

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Santucci: Today is Monday, August 30, 2021. My name is Vincent Santucci and I am the Senior Paleontologist for the National Park Service Paleontology Program. We are interviewing Gayle Marrs-Smith [retired and previously] from the Bureau of Land Management Southern Nevada Office in Las Vegas, Nevada. We hope to discuss Gayle's work as it ties to the history of Tule Springs Fossil Beds [National Monument] particularly when it was managed by the Bureau of Land Management, prior to being established as a unit of the National Park Service. Today we are joined by Erin Eichenberg the Integrated Resource Management Specialist at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. And Jill DeStefano a Founder and President of the Protectors of Tule Springs.

Santucci: Thanks very much, Gayle. We really appreciate your time. So, the first question will be the easiest. If you are willing to share, when and where were you born?

Marrs-Smith: I was born in Mesa, Arizona; grew up in Phoenix and was there for 28 years before moving with my husband to California where he finished his post-doctoral work. We then moved to Reno for a year and a half and then my husband finally got a position in the Life Sciences Department at UNLV. We've been in Southern Nevada close to 32 years.

Santucci: Great. And in terms of your post high school education. Where did you go to school and what did you study?

Marrs-Smith: I went to Arizona State University for my Bachelor's and my Master's degrees. My Bachelor's is in Biology and my Master's degree is in Botany.

Santucci: And how did you come to work for the Bureau of Land Management?

Marrs-Smith: I was really lucky. It was very fortuitous. I had a friend who worked for the U. S. Forest Service and she was aware of my degree in botany. She called me up and said, "Hey, there's a position for a botanist in Southern Nevada. You really ought to apply for it." Well, I'd been away from botany for a while. But I decided to throw my hat in the ring. I put my application in and amazingly I got the position. So, that was in 1992.

Santucci: Was that in the Southern Nevada office?

Marrs-Smith: It was and that office has reorganized a couple of times. At that time it was the Las Vegas District Office. I've been in Southern Nevada my whole career in the Bureau of Land Management.

Santucci: OK, great. Do you recall the first time you heard the term Tule Springs Fossil Beds?

Marrs-Smith: It was when the legislation happened. I had not heard of Tule Springs Fossil Beds. Well, I guess I had heard a bit about the fossil resources when BLM was planning the Harry Allen transmission line and that area had the "Big Dig". I had heard that before. And that was

really what precipitated the interest and the focus of that area for my office. Prior to that I had not heard of it.

Santucci: OK. In your role for the BLM capacity—doesn't have to necessarily be limited to Tule Springs—did you ever have any involvement with fossils or paleontological resources during your career?

Marrs-Smith: Not until the Tule Springs Las Vegas project was the focus of our office.

Santucci: OK. So, the Harry Allen transmission project that you referenced. When did you become involved with that and what was your role?

Marrs-Smith: That was a proposal from NV Energy and they had a series of transmission lines to create more reliability and redundancy of the energy grid. So they had a series of them. They had Harry Allen to Crystal Substation, Harry Allen to Northwest Substation, and Harry Allen to Mead Substation. This was the second of the Harry Allen projects. It was around 1997 and I was still a botanist with the office. So, my job was to look at the site for rare plants. I worked with our archaeologist Stan Rolf. And he was very familiar with the Big Dig and with Tule Springs fossils. So, I accompanied him and some of the other surveyors out and that's really when I learned there was a big fossil bed out there.

Santucci: Very good. Let's see. Trying to think if there are any other foundational other questions. The fossil area itself – you being a botanist – do you recall any first early impressions of the botany of the Tule Springs area?

Marrs-Smith: Well, I would help with these field surveys out there. And it is a very badlands area out there. So, it looked like suitable habitat for the Las Vegas Bearpoppy as well as Las Vegas Buckwheat. I think at the time the Buckwheat was not considered a rare species. There was work being done on it across its whole range. So, it was a little after that scientists determined the Nile's Buckwheat was a unique subspecies. But, I didn't find poppies out there at that time. And as we know poppies kind of come and go. They're a boom or bust kind of species. But I was out there surveying for them and it certainly looked like habitat for bearpoppy.

7:17

Santucci: Very good. And referring to the pre-monument period of Tule Springs Fossil Beds – do you recall any of the work that was done by the paleontologist from the San Bernardino County Museum working at Tule Springs?

Marrs-Smith: Yes, Stan our archaeologist, district archaeologist, was very involved. He was very familiar with the research they were doing and the work they had been doing. He was very impressed with them. They had done work at Gypsum Cave east of Las Vegas in our Sunrise Management Area. NV Energy was funding the surveys that the Museum was conducting for Harry Allen. Stan had San Bernardino County Museum, Kathleen Springer, do the work to—I think they were coring areas where the poles would go, and assessing those cores for any kind of fossil information. And surveying for fossils along the line where NV Energy was proposing to build any roads or tower pads or whatnot. That's when I became familiar with the Museum.

Santucci: Did you ever have the opportunity to get out in the field with Kathleen Springer or any of the other paleontologists?

Marrs-Smith: Not at that time. I did later when the Environmental Impact Statement for the Las Vegas Disposal Boundary was being prepared. They did their work by themselves. But I did become personally familiar with their work when we had an Assistance Agreement with them to look more deeply at the stratigraphy of the Upper Las Vegas Wash.

9:22

Santucci: Ok great. So, that kind of ties in with the next questions. And that has to do with the Las Vegas disposal activities that were going on and the corresponding Environmental Impact Statement. Can you share any thoughts about that from your earliest recollection to the time of the Monument being established?

Marrs-Smith: To answer your question and subsequent questions I think it's important to place everything in the context of the BLM land use planning, the economic situation in the 1990's and early 2000's, and then the relevant legislation that followed. That really drove the decisions that BLM made; the planning processes that we undertook, and sometimes the decisions that we were able to make, and some we couldn't make. So, Las Vegas in the 1990's became the fastest growing city in the country. We had 5,000 people a month moving in and 90 percent of the land in Clark County is federally managed. Having developable land that was big enough to put the master-planned communities on was really at a premium. We had big developers – Olympia, Focus Group, Del Webb – that were just clamoring for large parcels where master-planned communities could be developed.

Marrs-Smith: It was 1998 when our Resource Management Plan was finalized. That is the overarching master plan that dictates how BLM manages land in an orderly way. At the same time there was this major piece of legislation called the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act that was passed by Congress. Senator Harry Reid was instrumental in getting this passed. That legislation was incorporated into our land use plan. In fact, any legislation about BLM automatically amends the land use plan. This legislation added 52,000 acres of BLM land into what we call a disposal boundary. Disposal doesn't mean the land is worthless or that there's no value to it. The term 'disposal lands' means that these lands are eligible for transfer out of federal ownership. And it's such a unique piece of legislation because all the money – the revenue generated – from the sale of these lands does not go, as it normally would, to the U.S. Treasury, but stays locally in Nevada for purchasing environmentally sensitive land or doing conservation and for capital improvements and the like. It was the most unique piece of legislation. I don't think there'll be anything like it ever again.

Marrs-Smith: But, relevant to the discussion is a provision in SNPLMA: it requires *joint selection* (BLM and the Cities) of parcels to be sold. That provision is very important. So, it's not just the cities that nominate parcels and BLM just has to rubber-stamp them for sale. Both parties have to agree with what parcels are being nominated. And SNPLMA doesn't exempt any sales from federal laws such as the Clean Water Act or the Endangered Species Act. The sales are still subject to these existing laws. So, 52,000 acres sounds like a lot of acres but the developers developed the largest parcels pretty quickly. And they were wanting more land to develop master-planned communities. Only two years later, Congress passed on November 6,

2002 what we call the Clark County Lands Act. It has a much longer name but it kind of shortened to the Clark County Lands Act. That piece of legislation added another 22,000 acres more of BLM land to the disposal boundary. Much of that land was in the southern part of the city, the City of Henderson. This gave them some more land for the big master planned communities that they wanted. And then the northern part of the city had a giant chunk of land added – split between the City of Las Vegas and the City of North Las Vegas. BLM had a great land use planner at that time. His name was Jeff Steinmetz and he said, “Now, wait a minute. We need to analyze the environmental impacts of adding all this land to the disposal boundary. What these impacts are really going to be.” A Disposal Boundary Environmental Impact Statement was needed.

14:40

Marrs-Smith: Because we had done Harry Allen a couple of years before, we knew that there were fossil resources up in the northern part of the valley, including the Upper Las Vegas Wash. So, starting in early 2003, we did all these surveys in support of the Environmental Impact Statement. We did rare plant surveys. We did fossil surveys. We did tortoise surveys. And other surveys to contribute to this effort. It was amazing how quickly this plan was completed. Surveys were done and the EIS was completed in record time. There was a Record of Decision signed December 23, 2004. So only two years! We had part of 2003 that we had to go through the contracting process to get the contractor and do the scope of work and all that stuff. The actual surveys were done during 2003 and 2004 and then the Record of Decision at the very end of 2004.

Marrs-Smith: The EIS had three alternatives. It had ‘Dispose of Everything’ per the legislation. It had a ‘Conservation Transfer Area’ alternative which identified 5,000 acres as a very rich fossil bed area to be protected before disposal. And then it had the ‘No Action’ alternative which meant sell nothing. BLM decided, because we had this great land use planner and we had some good support from our Senior Management, to select the Conservation Transfer Area alternative. It was analyzed in the Final EIS. And that alternative was selected over the preferred alternative which was to Dispose of Everything. The key thing about that 5,000-acre Conservation Transfer Area was that this area didn’t cover everything that was important out there. So, the Record of Decision stated that the 5,000-acre Conservation Transfer Area was to be adaptable to the needs and concerns of interested parties that participate in the development of conservation including community land use planning. So, ‘adaptable’ was the key word. The Conservation Transfer Area could be bigger, it could be smaller, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s going to be locked in at 5,000 acres. The Record of Decision went on to state the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act authorized BLM to transfer disposal lands out of federal ownership if it is not contrary to other laws, such as the Endangered Species Act or the Clean Water Act, or Clean Air Act, etc. Protecting fossil resources is part of BLM mandate. And so, we were consistent with the legislation. We were consistent with our own policies and regulations.

Marrs-Smith: We later found out that there was Las Vegas Bearpoppy populations in the Upper Las Vegas Wash. There was a National Historic Site and there were significant paleontological resources and tortoise habitat and a natural flood control system that were all worth protecting. Amazingly the cities did not litigate the decision to select the Conservation Transfer Area Alternative. They were really concerned about this because if you’re going to hold out 5,000 acres from development they stated, “we really have a concern with that.” They had kind of

considered BLM disposal lands as their land. It was still BLM land and we hadn't sold it, but they kind of considered that this land was where the cities were going to be developing in the future. We went from there. That was November 2004 when the document was signed and maybe Jill [DeStefano] knows this, maybe not, but the City of North Las Vegas had already nominated for sale all of the Eglington Preserve and the surrounding areas, about 3000 acres of land, a sale that was slated for February of 2005. When we found out in the fall of 2004 how much Bearpoppy populations were out there and how much buckwheat was out there, we went to the State Director, who was Bob Abbey, and we said, "What are we going to do? This land is slated for sale in February 2005 and we don't have a decision on the Las Vegas Disposal Boundary EIS yet." And he says, "Well, you have to work with them. We can't allow the sale to happen and you have to work with the planners and North Las Vegas. You've got to pull out the best of the best of the habitat." So, that's what we did. We started working with North Las Vegas in January 2005 and had a meeting every other week until June of 2005, until we carved out the Eglington Preserve boundary. That's a little factoid there.

20:13

Santucci: That was a very good discussion. Thank you for sharing that in such detail. During the EIS process at some point were there any sort of studies that were deemed to be important and were funded?

Marrs-Smith: Are you talking about the Disposal Boundary EIS?

Santucci: Yes.

Marrs-Smith: Well, I'm not sure if you would call them studies. But there were inventories. The inventories are what go into developing the alternatives and deciding what actions need to be taken. Are there protections or mitigation that need to happen? I guess you could call them a study but they were really more inventories. The San Bernadino County Museum did a pretty extensive surface inventory of the fossils. But they were only told to look for surface fossils. They weren't doing digs or anything like that. And they found 438 sites within the Upper Las Vegas Wash area and half of them were mammoth sites. So, that really went into determining that the Conservation Transfer Area alternative would be strongly considered because these were non-renewable resources and very important, very sensitive.

21:50

Santucci: Just for the record, you had mentioned SNPLMA. Can you explain what that is and give the full title of that legislation?

Marrs-Smith: It's called the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA). It was passed in 1998. There was a lot of discussions during the 1990's about creating this kind of development ring around the valley. Within this ring you would allow development, but outside the ring there was no development. I remember Dina Titus was in our State legislature at the time. She was not yet in Congress. She was a very strong advocate for this. It was really related to the quality of life in Las Vegas. Not having leap-frog development all over the place. And so, SNPLMA was designed to create this development boundary around Las Vegas. And within the boundary, we allow development. Outside the boundary, no development. As I said it was a very unique set of legislation actions because the revenues, instead of going to the Treasury, stayed

locally in a special reserve account. It was an interest bearing account. So, it was always collecting interest. And the revenues would stay locally. They would be spent on very particular, specific things. The cities could apply for Parks and Recreation funds. The federal agencies, including the [National] Park Service could apply for Conservation Initiatives which were to study sensitive resources. And also capital improvements on federal lands because more people were moving into the Las Vegas Valley. More people would be going onto the public lands and using the public lands. So, infrastructure for more public use could be proposed. They allowed nominations for purchasing or acquiring private lands that had high resource value. Those were called environmentally sensitive lands. For example, if there was an in-holding in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, some of those funds could be used to purchase that private in-holdings within this sensitive area. Like I said, it was a very, very innovative piece of legislation but it doesn't currently have a lot of support from Congress because these funds, rather than going into the Treasury, are staying local. And there are a lot of funds generated from them. The SNPLMA Special Reserve account is millions and millions of dollars.

24:55

Santucci: Thank you. In terms of the overall planning effort related to the disposal lands and EIS, Supplemental EIS—when public meetings would occur—did it appear that there were different voices that were expressing support or otherwise that were beginning to emerge?

Marrs-Smith: So, you're talking about the Supplemental EIS for the Upper Las Vegas Wash?

Santucci: Yes.

Marrs-Smith: As I said, we had these discussions about the Eglington Preserve boundary with the City of North Las Vegas only, so there weren't other voices for that effort. And that was because they had largely already nominated the parcel that included the Eglington Preserve for sale in February of 2005. And to North Las Vegas's credit, they withdrew that nomination so that the BLM and North Las Vegas could work together to come up with what, as I said before, the best of the best of the Bearpoppy and buckwheat habitat. Those discussions were very intense. I have to say that at the end of the process I was really disappointed in the outcome because if you are going to try to preserve an area you need as close to a circle as possible. You don't want angulations. We don't want holes within the area. It makes the area much harder to manage for sensitive resources. But, the high value of land at that time was so crazy. It was going for over \$100,000 an acre, and when that land was finally sold, minus the Eglington Preserve—2900 acres, something like that—it went for \$239 million dollars, purchased by the Olympia Group. And it just shows you that the early 2000's, land value was at the highest. It was the bubble. It was the height of the bubble before the economic decline for land that happened in about 2007 or so. But it is what it is. Land prices being what they were, we protected the best of the best habitat. We did the best we could. We added that little wash that went through the middle of Eglington. We protected the actual active wash, but now we have this hole in the middle of the Preserve where the Southern Nevada Water Authority has a station there. But, we did the best that we could. That was June of 2005.

Marrs-Smith: So we already had this decision on the Disposal Boundary EIS and of course the City of North Las Vegas said, "Hey, we'd like to continue this process of working together, just the cities and the BLM, to come up with a boundary for the Upper Las Vegas Wash desert area."

And I said, “No, we’re not going to do it that way. There’s going to be a larger process and we have to be more inclusive.” So, for the next eight months, I hired a professional facilitator and approximately once a month we had meetings. They were more listening sessions. I wouldn’t call them pre-NEPA or anything like that. The National Environmental Policy Act that requires that you are inclusive with the public meetings that you have, and that they are publicly announced.

Marrs-Smith: These meetings were more listening sessions with the Cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas. You have a list the participants. I think I gave that to the Park Service. I know we invited the Tribes as well. The Las Vegas Paiute Tribe particularly. And we just wanted to understand better what their vision was for the Upper Las Vegas Wash. How they saw that area being developed? What the Tribes concerns were? They were very concerned right away. They said we need to preserve the viewshed. “We need to preserve our golf course”, they stated. The viewshed around their golf course. They stated that the adjacent mountains are sacred. They talked about the Salt Song Trail which is an important spiritual trail. We got some very important information. So, 2005 took up most of those meetings.

Marrs-Smith: And Juan Palma, whose was the District Manager, was hired about June of 2005. He was there kind of at the end of the negotiations for the City of North Las Vegas for the Eglington Preserve. Somewhere in 2005 we had discussions, he and I, and I said, “I think we are going to be looking at something bigger than an EA [Environmental Assessment].” I think the Environmental Assessment, which is the smallest planning document and doesn’t require as much public input, will not be sufficient. I said, ‘I have just been thinking that this is bigger. This is much bigger. The effects are going to be bigger and we need to involve more people and we need more public input.’ And he agreed. And so, at one of our listening meetings, he announced that this was going to have to be a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, which wasn’t regarded as very exciting by the Cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas because it’s a longer planning process. It’s going to involve more detailed public meetings and alternatives. That’s the direction he decided to take. Once we made the decision that it was going to be a larger Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, it was tiered off the Disposal Boundary EIS decision and then we were in a much more rigid public process. It involved doing extensive outreach to the public.

31:56

Santucci: Very good. What I am going to do is see if Erin [Eichenberg] has any questions at the moment.

Eichenberg: I don’t have any questions right now. She is covering it pretty well.

Santucci: Jill, do you have any questions?

DeStefano: No, I’m good right now. No, I didn’t know much of that Gayle. I did want to say for the record: Gayle is now retired from the BLM.

Santucci: Yes, good point. Thank you. Gayle, just for clarification when you were involved with the Supplemental EIS what was your title or position at the time for the BLM?

Marrs-Smith: Well, that's a good question. Because going back to that experience with the Eglington Preserve that was collateral work for me. At the time I was the BLM liaison to Clark County for the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. That took up all my time but you have to carve out important work. So, after we agreed on the Eglington Preserve boundary I went to Juan Palma and I said, "It's really important that there's one point of contact for the Upper Las Vegas Wash. That they don't call anybody but this one contact. All information comes in. It all leads to or is set up through this position." And I asked him to transfer my duties to another employee and allow me to be the Project Manager solely for the next couple of years. And he agreed. He said, "I think you're right. I think we need one point of contact. My salary was of course paid by SNPLMA so I wasn't a drain on the office. I began as a Project Manager in 2005 and I remained the Project Manager until the Record of Decision which I think was much later, in 2010 or 2012.

34:37

Santucci: Through that process, you feel that was one of the more complicated undertakings as a federal employee? Or was it par for the course?

Marrs-Smith: Oh, it was challenging. It was different because I didn't have a background in fossils. I was a botanist. I dealt with tortoise, too, so really, I was a biologist. But sensitive resources are sensitive resources. It's not that far of a stretch, your decisions are going to be similar. It was just different. I wouldn't say it was harder or easier. It was just really different. Working with the cities, working with the community, and being that point of contact – everybody calls. It could be intense. But, it was very, very satisfying. I have to say it was a very satisfying position.

Santucci: Very good. Was there much political interest at the federal, state, or local level as you were involved in this Supplemental EIS?

Marrs-Smith: You know, that was a great time to do this project because amazingly there was not as much Washington [D.C.] office presence on that project. The State Director, Bob Abbey, the Nevada State Director at that time, just let us do our work. It was very satisfying not to have that upper management constantly calling. We had our Public Affairs Officer—I worked with her very closely—Hillierie Patton. We worked together. We worked very closely with Juan Palma and of course the cities worked with their planners. We were really able to keep things local which was really good. It was much better than having higher ups, especially Washington office, calling all the time. It was great.

Santucci: Mostly from a paleontology perspective were you contacted at all during that process by any interest groups or scientists—such as the Protectors of Tule Springs—that had their own focused interests on those lands?

Marrs-Smith: We had an Assistance Agreement in place with the San Bernardino County Museum. So Assistance Agreements are not like contracts. They involve scientific studies and they are a public benefit. The Museum also included a lot of public outreach. When we were going through the process of reviewing the applications, we had a couple of entities that were interested in doing the work. One was UNLV and the other was the San Bernardino County Museum, of course. We followed our protocol for evaluating the proposals. We had a very strong

committee that reviewed the proposals. We had Scott Foss from our BLM Washington Office. He's the BLM liaison for paleontology. He has extensive museum expertise. He came down and looked at the different capacities of each Museum. The Nevada State Museum and I met with Scott Foss on that capacity. He evaluated the San Bernardino County Museum and their capacity. We had a lot of information. It was a rigorous review and we selected the San Bernardino folks to do the work. They did a lot of public outreach when they found fossils that were pretty cool. They would let us know. And sometimes that involved getting the Protectors of Tule Springs out there. Sometimes it involved getting the media out there. Since I was the point of contact I took all the calls in and if it was something we could work together on, we would do it. I recall one time when there was a significant discovery in one area of the wash that was just off a very poor dirt road. I remember Lynn Davis with the National Parks Conservation Association. She was not strictly associated with Protectors of Tule Springs, but she was certainly within the conservation realm. She wanted to have a media visit and we had to say, "We have to defer it until we can really make this a safe visit." But, we worked really hard together. We actually did have a media visit out there. It was working together to see what we could do, and what we couldn't do sometimes.

41:00

Santucci: During this time period or shortly after Neil Kornze became the Director for the Bureau of Land Management. Given his close connections with Senator Harry Reid in Southern Nevada did that present any interesting opportunities or challenges having him so knowledgeable about this resource area?

Marrs-Smith: He was the BLM Director—can you give me the year that he was the BLM Director?

Santucci: I think it was just prior to the Monument being established. Maybe he was in for a year and a half or so.

Marrs-Smith: So, it was later—2010 or something or maybe 2012—because the Monument was passed in what year?

Santucci: 2014

Marrs-Smith: I think having Neil Kornze was a benefit because he was so knowledgeable. He understood what we had gone through before. Prior to being the BLM Director he was Senator Reid's chief aide in Washington [D.C.] He was just very knowledgeable. I don't think there was any downside to that.

42:45

Santucci: Very good. In terms of moving forward with the future of Tule Springs, when did you first hear about the interest or possibility of a National Monument being established to protect the fossil area?

Marrs-Smith: Well, I don't think it was very long after Jill formed her group [Protectors] and really got it going. Legislation was something that BLM can't be involved in in any way. So they [Protectors] were very assertive and very independent. And I think that was something that was

just on the table pretty quick. As I say, we're not involved in legislation. That's a different process and different conversations. I do know that senior managers like Juan Palma, I am sure were in discussions with Neal on just the concept of it. We knew that there was interest in having it designated a Monument.

Santucci: When you first heard about it was the thought that the Monument would be a BLM administered Monument at the forefront? Or was it open whether or not the [National] Park Service would manage?

Marrs-Smith: I don't remember the exact year of this but in the middle of our Supplemental EIS planning process, BLM was never discussed as a manager for a potential Monument. I can't pretend to personally think we couldn't manage a monument - like why couldn't BLM manage this? But it made sense pretty quickly because BLM has Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area to the west. We have Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area to the south. And so from the very beginning senior managers in any conversations I was privy to - it wasn't going to be BLM. We talked about the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. We talked about the Park Service. But, not BLM.

45:18

Santucci: It sounds like you did have communication with Lynn Davis with National Parks Conservation Association?

Marrs-Smith: Yes

Santucci: Since she is representing an organization that represents National Park Service properties largely, what was the communication about? Transitioning to a National Park or the kind of communication you were having with Lynn?

Marrs-Smith: Our communication was mostly involving getting the citizens to be interested in the area so that they would understand it and have a voice. My chief communications with Lynn Davis were: "we want to bring the media out and look at the site. We want to get with Kathleen Springer and look at fossils." It was more media. I didn't have too many communications with Lynn about what was going to happen with the Monument. As I say, BLM, and I in particular as the Project Manager, need to have that demarcation between the planning that we were doing and any kind of discussions about a legislative Monument. These actions had to be clearly separated.

Santucci: OK. Did you get a sense close to the Defense Authorization Act that the Monument was formally established as a National Monument/ Did you get a sense just before that legislation came forward that it was imminent?

Marrs-Smith: It's kind of a good change when legislation is introduced these days, as BLM review didn't happen during the Clark County Lands Act of 2002, but it happened in subsequent land management legislation. Now, we get a chance to review legislation after it has been introduced, and before it actually gets passed. It's important because sometimes there are things that can be problematic later. It's not as if we have the ability to change anything but we do have the ability to review it and say, "Hey, I just want to give you a heads-up here. There's this section that says this. This might be problematic later. Or just want to let you know if you want

some information about it.” So, we kind of knew what was going to be in it so we would have the ability to give our assessment of how this was going to roll out.

48:20

Santucci: Once the Monument was officially established in December 2014, do you recall public reaction in regards to that new Monument?

Marrs-Smith: I think it was excitement. I didn’t hear anything negative from where I sat. It was, “this is exciting”. I think everybody got something that they needed. Cities were like, “OK, we’re not getting the whole thing but having a Monument managed by the Park Service is going to do great things regarding the land values around the area”. Yeah, I didn’t hear anything negative, Vince.

Santucci: Were there any celebrations that you were involved in? I know that Jill and the Protectors and Kathleen Springer celebrated. I don’t know if you were involved in any of those post establishment of the Monument celebrations?

Marrs-Smith: There might have been one at the Las Vegas Paiute Golf Course area that I went to. There was another one that I think Clark County put on where people celebrated the Monument. Yeah, I think it was important for BLM to attend those because I think a lot of people had the notion that we were disappointed. Gee, that BLM did all that work and now we’re not going to manage it. It was really important to show that we supported this. We wanted to make the transition from BLM to Park as seamless as possible. That we were looking forward to working with the Park Service and sharing all of our information. I think that was really important to show the public that there was support. And there was.

50:44

Santucci: Great. Just a note that I wanted to make. I had the good fortune of coming on board in March 2015 as the Acting Superintendent with Tule Springs. A lot of things to do. So, I wanted to thank you for the generosity and kindness that you conveyed in helping to begin to transfer the BLM’s Tule Springs to the National Park Service. You shared lots of documents and insights and very valued perspectives that helped us in the early days to try to get that Monument stood up. Erin had the opportunity to participate in some of those as well. So, I wanted to thank you for that. Also, for the help of achieving something that we didn’t think we could have achieved. And we certainly couldn’t have done it without your help and that was to meet the public’s expectations to be able to get some fossils back from San Bernardino County Museum to Nevada, close to the Monument, where people could see them and researchers could access them. I think it was July 18 of 2015 that we had a public event where we announced the return of about 10,000 specimens to Nevada. Thank you for your help on that. That certainly was a wonderful day.

Marrs-Smith: Well, it was my pleasure.

Santucci: Erin, any other questions that you have?

Eichenberg: I can’t think of anything specifically right now.

Santucci: OK. And Jill, any questions from you?

DeStefano: Well, I was curious. Before I came into the valley in 2006 I know there were other groups involved with the first EIS and how that changed into a Supplemental EIS. Do you remember the voices at that time? And then when you started on the Supplemental EIS process, I know you have told me in the past how you were looking for the public to get involved. Could you speak to that a little bit more and how that happened?

Marrs-Smith: Yeah, that's a good question. As I said we were having these listening sessions with the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas and the Tribes. And after many of these meetings – the Tribes wanting to protect everything. The cities wanting to protect a minimal amount. And we made the decision to go forward with a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. I remember Juan calling me into his office and this was before we had announced, I think, we were doing a Supplemental EIS. But, we were getting ready to announce it. He said, "You know, I know you care very much about this area but that doesn't matter. If the public doesn't know or care much about the Upper Las Vegas Wash, it'll never be protected." And he said, "I need for you to go out to the public and educate them. Let them know that this resource is out here because they don't know. There are some specific groups like Archeo-Nevada [Society], Helen Mortenson, and UNLVs Dr. Rowland. They know about it but the general public doesn't really know much about it. You need to go and let them know." And so Hillerie and I—Hillerie Patton, she was our Public Affairs Officer—we just started calling Homeowner Associations in the northern part of the Las Vegas Valley. We had outreach with the Nevada State College, telling them about it. We went to Homeowner Association's south of the I-215 and five people showed up. Hillerie and I both looked at each other and went, "Well, this could be a little tough for us, getting information out to the public."

Marrs-Smith: But we made an appointment to go and meet with the Aliante Homeowner Association and I had a slide show that I was going to present about the Upper Las Vegas Wash and how we were going to do this effort to decide on a boundary for it. I got there just a little bit early I remember, and I was setting up my show, my Power Point presentation, and at the end the room was almost full of people. And I thought, 'Oh my gosh! OK, this is good.' Then more people started to show up, started to line up on the back of the room. And then more people showed up and they were standing out in the hallway. And I thought, 'We are kind of exceeding the capacity of this room for safety, I'll bet.' I gave my slide show, the Power Point, to this rapt audience and people were just amazed and astonished. Jill was in the audience, and she said, "I can't believe it. I didn't know this was out here. I don't even hardly believe you. I've got to go see it." That was what I call the 'nucleating agent' for all of the public participation that happened after that because the word got out. We had these field trips that we would set up. We would take groups of people and we would show them the "Big Dig" and we would show them other fossil sites. And they were all met with such enthusiasm as more people told other people about this area. The public participation started to grow its own legs and I get chills when I talk about this. Because it happened so quickly. It was because the people who live in this area are very active; active seniors, active people, and they were just so enthusiastic about the opportunity of working with the BLM and working to monitor out there and to help. That's why I said it wasn't very long after that a Friends Group—Jill put together a Friends Group. Didn't know anything about Friends Group but had it all figured out, right? Her can-do attitude and magnetic personality got everybody enthusiastic about it. So, like I say, it just kind of grew legs and was

independent of anything that BLM was doing. Sometimes the group didn't agree with what we were doing and they'd let us know they didn't agree with what we were doing. But often times we just worked together and got more people involved. So, by the time really the first meetings of the Supplemental EIS—because you have to go and have public meetings—there were a lot of people. There were a lot of people everywhere that were very, very interested. So, thank you Jill!

DeStefano: Well, thank you.

Santucci: Anything else Jill?

DeStefano: Oh, I am sure there are other things. I can't think of anything right now.

Santucci: So, I guess winding down thanks for sharing your personal perspectives and your emotional connection to the area. Do you have any dreams or wish list items that you would like to see happen with Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument in the future?

Marrs-Smith: Well, I know the area is a real challenge in many ways and I saw that question on the list of questions that Erin sent. And I thought, "Well, wouldn't it be nice to have a bicycle trail that circumnavigates on the upper bajada where you can see down into the wash and have that be available to the public." When I thought about how challenging that area is my first thought was fence, fence, fence, fence, fence. I've built those fences and in my early career as a botanist I built so many miles of fences, those post and cable fences. And actually, Vince, that design of post and cable fence which is one of the most indestructible fences you can build – with railroad ties and the 3/8th inch guy wire cable. I got that design from an engineer from Lake Mead – from the Park Service at Lake Mead [National Recreation Area]. I called him up in the 90's and I said, "Hey, I need a really, really strong fence in Rainbow Gardens because there is so much activity that it's destroying the soils and the poppies out there." And that was the design that he sent me was this 3/8th inch cable with the clamps and the railroad tie posts and I built so many fences out there. That is just so important to really restrict the ingress and egress out there. I call it 'stop the bleeding.' Get things so they're not getting worse. Then you can decide where you want the public to go in, getting a lot of signing. I know around Corn Creek—I don't know if there's still crazy shooting out there. That's the area that's going to take a lot of love to get it back to good condition. It takes a while. That fencing is expensive, but it's so well worth it.

Marrs-Smith: And Jill, you might know or not know, but when we were fencing the Eglington Preserve I initially fenced with horse fencing which is pretty sturdy and it wasn't maybe a week or two that it was cut, broken open, and people had gone in there. They went around and dumped trash. So, I said, "OK, I'm going back to my old mantra of post and cable," and we post and cabled the whole darn thing from one end to the other.

1:02:46

Marrs-Smith: I would also say, Vince and Erin, that in addition to fossils that eastern area and north of Grand Teton alignment, that is the last remaining population of Las Vegas Bearpoppy and Nile's Buckwheat in the entire Las Vegas Valley. Every other population has been destroyed by development. So, I would just really make you aware of that. Be cautious about putting trails through those areas or getting new trails. I know you have a temporary trail there. I looked on your website. But, bearpoppies are pollinated by a poppy bee that is a ground dwelling bee. You probably know this. It lives in the ground and any trampling of that soil could be destroying the

pollinator for the bearpoppy. It needs a lot of caution within any development within those rare plant populations.

Eichenberg: Gayle, did BLM ever do any insect inventories to get what species of different invertebrates that were at Tule Springs?

Marrs-Smith: No, we've never done one. We have done a seed bank study in Eglington. The one year that we did the inventory was like every bearpoppy got the memo. Because they all flowered at once. And so I had UNLV researcher do a seed bank study. I think you probably have that in that set of ponderous information that was sent. Even though they did random coring for seeds they never really could get a sense of where the seeds go after the bearpoppies flower. Whether ants take it away and cache it in their nests or what. We really ended up scratching our heads on that. So, no we have not done a pollinator study out there. The other pollinator studies that have been done has been in Rainbow Gardens by Terry Griswold [Research Entomologist at USDA]. He's out of Utah. That would be a study that would really be good to do.

Eichenberg: OK, because I was also curious about documents that the Center for Biological Diversity wrote. Also mentions the red-tailed blazing bee but I haven't been able to find information on that. It said it was found in the Upper Las Vegas Wash.

Marrs-Smith: I don't know. The Clark County Habitat Conservation Plan, Desert Conservation Plan, they have all the studies that were done out in Rainbow Gardens regarding the bees out there. And I don't know if they're different species. They probably shouldn't be but I think it would be a good study to do.

Eichenberg: Thank you.

1:06:30

Santucci: Jill or Erin any other questions?

DeStefano: I don't think so. My brain's tired.

Santucci: OK. Erin?

Eichenberg: I don't have any more right now. I'm sure I will be in touch with you though, Gayle.

Santucci: Gayle, just a final question. Was there anything we forgot to ask you that you think is important to share?

Marrs-Smith: No. I just really appreciate the opportunity to give you the history of the Upper Las Vegas Wash and Tule Springs. Glad I was able to share about the Eglington Preserve because that really fired me up to be the Project Manager for the larger area. Even though that boundary was disappointing in many ways it ended up being good for maybe the larger effort. I'm glad I got to talk about that. And I have to say working with the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, as challenging as they were, they were always pretty professional, really professional. Our meetings, they conveyed what they wanted but it was their job. They had their perspectives. BLM had its perspective. And even though they litigated the decision for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, which they dropped when Tule Springs actually – when the legislation actually passed, we maintained a pretty good working relationship and before I

retired, we were still working with some of the same people. Tom Perrigo [City of Las Vegas] was still there, working with him in a productive way.

Santucci: Well great. That was a little bit over an hour to capture your life story related to Tule Springs. I think we gained a lot of good information which will be useful to us and to others in the future. Congratulations on your retirement. Thank you for all the great things you have done for the BLM and for the National Park Service and wish you well.

Marrs-Smith: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

DeStefano: Thank you, Gayle.

Marrs-Smith: Thank you Jill and Erin.

Eichenberg: Thank you so much!

1:09:37

[END OF INTERVIEW]



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