



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

National Conservation Training Center

# USFWS History Committee

*2023 Annual Report*



# Message from the Chair

I am honored to be the new Chair of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) History Committee, and I am excited to present our 2023 annual report. The Committee had a very busy year—collecting audio and video oral history recordings from Service retirees and partners and helping ensure the proper care and preservation of the artifacts and documents of our conservation history.

This past year marked the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Endangered Species Act. Through the efforts of the History Committee and the Association

of Retired Fish and Wildlife Service Employees (Association), former Service and Interior Department leaders—who were there when Congress passed this groundbreaking law—participated in a panel discussion at NCTC). They created the implementing regulations that we still use today. We recorded this remarkably candid discussion; it is an important resource for conservation historians and a compelling listen for those of you who work with endangered species today (see the video [Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act](#)).

Page through this report and reflect on the conservation successes, challenges, and sometimes painful failures, of our past. What can we learn today from our predecessors? How can we become a more inclusive partner as we work with others to conserve our wildlife heritage? We have much to learn from our past, and I look forward to our work ahead.

—Steven Chase, *Director, National Conservation Training Center*

**Cover:** *The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Museum commissioned Penobscot artist Jason Pardilla to make this traditional enikahkwak (pronounced: enny gawk') (salmon spear). Mr. Pardilla's enikahkwak and the works of six other Indigenous artists are highlighted in the new exhibit, Welcome to Turtle Island, in the newly renovated Museum at NCTC.*  
Ryan Haggerty, USFWS

**Right:** *Panelists discussing the Endangered Species Act (ESA) from promulgating the first regulations to recounting experiences implementing the Act and reflecting on the future. From the left: former Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary Don Barry at the podium, Service Deputy Director and ESA Panel Moderator Gary Frazer, former DOI Solicitor Mike Young, and former Service Directors John Turner, Jamie Rappaport Clark, and Marshall Jones.*  
Cindy Uptegraft Barry



# 2023 in Review

In December, the History Committee met in person at NCTC, coinciding with the Association's retiree reunion where we honored our 2023 History Award winner. Our three subcommittees met regularly throughout the year, and we present their accomplishments.

## Oral History Program Accomplishments

*Preserving our heritage through the voices of our people*

The Oral History Subcommittee's 2023 accomplishments include the following.

- Conducted 29 oral history interviews, including 9 at the 25th annual law enforcement get together for retired FWS law enforcement folks in San Antonio, 6 during the fall Association reunion, 7 during a Service RAD (Resist-Accept-Direct) workshop—a contemporary climate change land management decision-making framework, and the first of several oral histories with FWS employees at refuges in Puerto Rico that focus on the relationship between the Service and the island.
- Drafted 30 retiree and partner transcripts and finalized 12 of them. The remainder are under review by interviewees.
- Continued capturing the history of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program via interviews and oral history transcriptions.
- Developed an oral history program rack card to promote the program at retiree reunions and Service meetings.
- Continued working with the Association to provide supplies to interviewers,

## *We Remember John Cornely*

In 2023, the world lost long-time History Committee member John Cornely. A member since 2004, John served as Oral History Subcommittee Chair since 2014.

John was a prolific interviewer and a strident advocate of the program. He always had his audio recorder present and would happily conduct an oral history anywhere there was a retired Service employee or partner willing to share their conservation story. He conducted nearly 130 oral history interviews. His final interviews were with former Secretaries of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and Bruce Babbitt.

John served as the Mountain-Prairie Region Migratory Bird Coordinator for 19 years. His interviews with biologists, pilots, managers, and administrators captured the essence of the Service's migratory bird conservation efforts. He was instrumental in preserving the history of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, obtained through individual and group interviews.

We appreciate John's dedication to the program, for mentoring new interviewers, and for his guidance and work. John's presence and spirit will be with us for many years.



*John Cornely with Libby Herland, the current Oral History Subcommittee Chair, in Larkspur, Colorado, 2021.*



*John Cornely interviewing Bill Hartwig for the oral history program. John Cornely*



*John Cornely interviewing Ron Lambertston for the oral history program. John Cornely*



**U.S.  
Fish & Wildlife  
Service**

**Oral  
History  
Program**



*Sharing  
Our History  
Through  
the Voices of  
Our People*



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service History Committee recognizes the rich history of the Service and the many contributions of employees, partners, and others to our mission. The Oral History Program seeks to record these stories for researchers and for future generations. Help us tell your stories!

reimburse interview-related expenses, and support a new contracted transcriptionist.

- Hosted a 6-hour Oral History Basics training for 18 History Committee members and retired and active-duty employees interested in conducting oral history interviews.
- Continued working with the USFWS National Digital Library to upload completed transcriptions in the Library's [Oral History Collection](#).

For more information about the Oral History Program, please visit the [USFWS Oral History page](#).



*Ms. James-Perry's textured white choker of Wampum beads on cordage of hand-spun two-ply milkweed plant fiber, created for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Museum. Courtesy of the artist.*

### **Communications Subcommittee Accomplishments** *Telling our stories*

The purpose of the Communications Subcommittee is to share Service history in transparent, ethical, and relevant ways that promote thoughtful discussion and cultivate an understanding of our agency's evolving mission to better meet contemporary challenges and opportunities.

To support this purpose, the Subcommittee piloted a series of history needs assessments with new Service employees attending training at NCTC. To better capture internal communications needs and to inform a scope of work, subcommittee members led an in-reach communication problem framing exercise with the full Committee during our December meeting. Members took a deep dive into internal communication issues while responding to a series of questions: what is the problem, who is facing the problem, when does the problem arise, when does the problem happen, and why is the problem worth solving? Next steps are to synthesize input into a problem statement to guide future work.

### **Artifacts Subcommittee Accomplishments**

*Every field station has its story,  
its heritage*

The Artifacts Subcommittee arranged developmental details at [D.C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery and Archives](#) and NCTC. Both D.C. Booth and the [USFWS National Wildlife Repository](#) worked on updating their collection management plans. The [USFWS Museum and Archives at NCTC](#) continued to update museum exhibits and began digitizing artifacts. Historic artifacts continued to be highlighted weekly on Service social media, "Museum Mondays." In addition, NCTC acquired three works by Indigenous artists commissioned for the *Welcome to Turtle Island* exhibition in the museum's renovated main gallery. The works include the following.

#### **Wampum Choker**

**Artist:** Elizabeth James-Perry, Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribe  
*Quahog shell, Milkweed fiber, natural dye*

"This is an example of wampum as adornment, a textured white choker. The bright white wampum beads have a substantial weight. The cordage is from milkweed plants that are grown on my property in Massachusetts, and the quahog are dug in saltwater shallows locally. Red is a significant color to many Tribal Nations signifying life, a connection to Mother Earth. The orange dye from local bloodroot has been used in Native art for countless centuries."

— Elizabeth James-Perry



Ms. Littlewarrior and the gourd that she created for the USFWS Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

**Gourd Art/Mixed Media**

**Artist:** Nadiya Littlewarrior, Citizen Potawatomi Nation  
*Basket Gourd, Leather, Abalone Shell, Birch Bark, Copper Tacks, Wood burned designs with leather dyes and inks*

“As a child I was fortunate that several members of my family were artists. They afforded me an environment which included the space to imagine and create on many levels. For all of them, I am grateful.

In 1997, I began studying the traditional ways and language of my Potawatomi Ancestors from my Uncle through the help of my Mother. Words can never express how this has influenced my life or my artwork and grateful is not a big enough explanation. In my language I say, kche migwech (big thank you), to both my Uncle and my Mother for this ongoing blessing.”

— Nadiya Littlewarrior

**Winnowing Basket and Storage Vessel**

**Artist:** Pat Kruse, Red Cliff Band of Superior Chippewa Indians  
*Birchbark, Red Willow*

“Birch trees are very important, and not just for my art. We use birchbark for building homes and boats; it also is a source of medicine. Our people tap birch trees for



Mr. Kruse’s Winnowing Basket and Storage Vessel. FWS

syrup and make tea from its bark. It has natural antifungal properties; that is why we store food in birchbark containers. The birch is the ‘Tree of Life.’”

— Pat Kruse

**2023 USFWS History Award Winner**

*John Cornely*



John Cornely retired in 2007 from the Service’s Mountain-Prairie Region (Region 6), working variously in Refuges and Wildlife and Migratory Birds after 34 years with the Service. His first Service job was Biologist for Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and recently he published a book on the Mammals of Malheur NWR, Oregon. He became a member of the Service’s History Committee in 2004. His primary projects involved oral history interviews and archiving copies of master’s theses and doctoral dissertations of retired

and current Service employees. A personal project he spearheaded was conducting oral histories of influential people in the history of waterfowl management and conducting interviews with biologists, then comparing notes with biologists responsible for the content and tone of the North American Waterfowl Plan, with emphasis on the Migratory Bird Program and National Wildlife Refuges.

For more than 9 years, John was the Chairperson of the Oral History Subcommittee. He was very active in conducting interviews and keeping things moving. He was also an Association member from 2014 to 2021. He worked to implement a type of ranking system to prioritize which recordings were transcribed or moved higher up on the “candidate list” to prioritize interviews with sick or elderly retirees.

John also served as a Board member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement from 2010 to 2011, the Executive Director for The Trumpeter Swan Society for 7 years and a member for 15 years, and the former Director of the National Wildlife Refuge Association from 2007 to 2014. John’s last volunteer job involved being an Emeritus Board of Director for the at National Wildlife Refuge Association, starting in 2020.

# On the Horizon for 2024



*History Committee Members at the December 1, 2023, meeting at NCTC. Front row, left to right: Maria Parisi, Deborah Holle, Alexandra Henry, Vicki Finn, Peggy Hobbs, Cindy Barry. Middle row: Libby Herland. Back row: Amber Zimmerman, Jim Kurth, Tom Worthington, Mark Madison, Steve Chase, Lynn Cartmell, Paul Tritaik, Steve Floray, Ernie Clarke. USFWS*

The History Committee will reconvene in May at the historic Murie Lodge in Jackson, Wyoming. The subcommittees continue their work.

## **Oral History Subcommittee**

We will continue to increase the diversity of interviewees, complete the Partners for Fish and Wildlife history special focus project, upload all oral history transcripts to the National Digital Library, update Paperwork Reduction Act protocols for data collection, and continue our excellent partnership with the Association, Service employees, and the Friends of NCTC.

## **Artifacts Subcommittee**

We will continue to work with all USFWS Museum and Archives and stations to preserve those objects that illustrate our agency's rich legacy.

## **Communications Subcommittee**

Our first task is to synthesize the communication problem-framing exercise data into a single problem statement and finalize that with the full Committee. From there, we will develop a scope of work and action plan for the year.

## **History Committee Members**

As chartered, members represent geographic regions and key positions, including active and retired staff. The Service's Director appoints the Chair, Regional Directors appoint their regional active-duty members, and the Association identifies their retiree representatives. We thank Charlie Wooley for serving as Committee Chair, and we wish him well in retirement.

## **Questions?**

Please contact your regional History Committee member, or contact the USFWS Historian, at [history@fws.gov](mailto:history@fws.gov) or 304.876.7276, for questions or to request copies of History Committee products. For additional information, see the [USFWS History page](#) and follow the "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service History" and "National Conservation Training Center" Facebook pages and @USFWSHistory on X.

 [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service History](#)

 [National Conservation Training Center](#)

 [@USFWS History](#)

Role/Region	2023 Committee Members	
Chair	Steve Chase, Director, National Conservation Training Center	
R1	Vicki Finn, Science Applications	Cindy Uptegraft Barry*
R2	Amber Zimmerman, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge	Deborah Holle*
R3	Lynn Cartmell, Visitor Services Chief	Tom Worthington*
R4	Ernie Clarke, Gulf Restoration Office	Paul Tritaik*
R5	Peggy Hobbs, Parker River National Wildlife Refuge	Libby Herland*
R6	Josh Homer, Leadville National Fish Hatchery	Vacant
R7	Debbie Steen, Visitor Services	Mike Boylan*
R8	Alexandra Pitts, Leadership and Employee Engagement	Mendel Stewart*
Headquarters	Mark Madison, USFWS Historian	Mamie Parker*
At Large Retiree	Vacant	
Ex-Officio	<i>National Conservation Training Center:</i> Nate Hawley, Manager, Creative Resources Division Maria Parisi, Partnerships Team Lead Steve Floray, Curator Adriana González Martínez, Partnerships Training Technician Alexandra Henry, Museum Archives Training Technician Jamie Stoner, Museum Archives Training Technician Randy Robinson, Instructional Systems Specialist	
	<i>Cultural Resources:</i> Eugene Marino, USFWS Federal Preservation Officer and National Curator Jasmine Heckman, National Curator and Headquarters NAGPRA Lead	
	<i>D.C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery and Archives:</i> Carlos Martinez, Director April Gregory, Curator	
	<i>National Wildlife Property Repository:</i> Elisa Dahlberg, Wildlife Repository Specialist	
	<i>Research Emeriti:</i> Dr. Richard Coon*	
	<i>Fish and Aquatic Conservation:</i> Dave Miko, Division Chief, Programs Holly Richards, Outreach Specialist Bennie Williams, Fish Biologist, Communications and Partnerships	
	<i>National Wildlife Refuge System:</i> John Schmerfeld, Acting Division Chief, Visitor Services & Communications	
Emeritus	Jim Kurth* Dale Hall* Rick Bennett* Patrick Leonard*	

\*Retirees

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service History Committee**

*<https://fws.gov/history-of-fws>*

**304/872 7276**

**May 2024**