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Interview no. 851

Joseph Carithers

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
ORAL HISTORY INSTITUTE

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 1994

INTERVIEWEE/ADDRESS: Joseph Carithers, 1706 North Sam Houston, Odessa, Tx., 79761.

INTERVIEW BY: John R. Moore

DATE: July 3, 1994

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 2 hours, 45 minutes/English

SUMMARY: Carithers was superintendent of Big Bend National Park from 1971-1977. He grew up at Tucson (Ariz.) Mountain Park, where his father was employed during the Great Depression. Carithers has been a life-long conservationist. He was a founder of the Arizona state park system and author of several National Park Service administrative policy statements on operation of national parks. He was a former assistant superintendent at Canyon Lands National Park and a planner in the NPS Western Regional Office in Santa Fe, N.M. He also served several stints with the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. He currently is retired from his position of Odessa, Tx., parks superintendent.

Carithers' extensive interview covers a myriad of topics, including detail on his personal history in conservation, his employment with state and national park systems, and his association with former Secretary of Interior Stuart Udall.

Concerning Big Bend National Park, he details the physical conditions of the park and employee morale when he became superintendent in 1971. He details the criminal conditions - smuggling, drug trafficking and dealing, undercover operations, and shootouts - he found present in Big Bend when he assumed the superintendency. He discusses his administrative conflicts with National Park Service authorities concerning his efforts to curtail the criminal element in the park, particularly some residents of Mexican communities bordering the park. He explains the dangers to park visitors created by criminal activity and details several specific incidents in which visitors were assaulted.

He explains the effects of isolation and remoteness on staff morale and discusses his efforts to improve staff living conditions and transfer policies. He details efforts to restore

the Hot Springs store and the murals in the adjacent cabins and to replace sub-standard "Dallas" huts in the Chisos Basin.

Carithers highlights several anecdotes involving Lady Bird Johnson and her administrative secretary, Liz Carpenter, concerning the accidental killing of antelope when they collided with Johnson's airplane at the Alpine airport. He also recalls some facets of Perry Brown's tenure as superintendent of Big Bend, as well as the terms of earlier superintendents.

He discusses at length the ecology of the park as he found it in the 1970s and gives his perspectives on overgrazing and ecological restoration. He offers insight to the power and responsibility assigned to the Big Bend superintendent, some of which is unique under law. He explains the creation of Big Bend wilderness areas and discusses relations between Mexican citizens and government officials.

He also discusses his perspective on Big Bend wildlife, including the Carmen whitetail deer, the rare Gambusai fish at Rio Grande Village and his personal opinions on National Park Service policy and management, both in the past and as he foresees it in the future.

Big Bend Oral History Project

Joseph Carithers, Odessa, Tx.
By John R. Moore

July 3, 1994

Big Bend National Park Oral History Project. Interview with Joseph Carithers, C-A-R-I-T-H-E-R-S, of Odessa, Tx. Interview by long-distance telephone by John Moore [graduate history student at the University of Texas, El Paso], July 3, 1994.

- M: Mr. Carithers, if you would, tell me about your personal background that led up to your being superintendent of Big Bend National Park.
- C: OK. I was, I grew up in Tucson, Ariz. And my dad was the superintendent of a park out west of Tucson - a 30,000-acre county park, which is quite large for a county park. And, uh, I tell people in a joking way that I was born in a park, but I wasn't. I moved there when I was in the third grade. But I spent most of my younger years living in that park. And it's now part of Saguaro National Monument, so, it was of national significance and, uh, Congress saw fit to, uh, make it a monument. Uh, went to the University of Arizona...
- M: May I interrupt here and ask what years you were, you moved there when you were in the third grade?
- C: Yeah, I moved there in 1932. My date of birth is May 29,

1926.

M: OK. And...

C: And moved to Tucson when I was about three years of age.

And, uh, that was during the depression. And, uh, it was - for a lot of people it wasn't a good time. It, it, for me, when I was a kid, and, and, I didn't know any better.

[Laughing] you know. If things were in short supply, I didn't miss it. And, uh, I had a good mom and dad, and they, they kept as much of that from me as they could. So, I still have strong feelings about Tucson. And, uh, that part of the country. Mainly because it's desert - I love deserts.

M: At that time, Mr. Carithers, national parks, er, er, the national park movement was somewhat in its infancy, and...

C: Yes, and, and I wanted to get into that. I, I, I knew this job that I had was, uh, was going to be a dead-end job. It was - I worked for the desert museum for a while when they were getting started out west of Tucson. It was located right in the middle of the park, just across the road, really, from where we lived. And, got married and, uh, we raised a couple of youngsters out there.

Uh, but I went When I was in high school - I went through all the elementary schools in Tucson, uh, some were little one-room school houses out in the country. Others were in, in town itself. And I got drafted in my last year of, uh, of high school. And went to Fort Riley, Kansas, and, uh...

M: That would have been during World War II?

C: During World War II - the big one [laughs], and back, went to the Philippines, and uh, then to Japan, and, uh, and back to Tucson, and took up residence there again. And, uh, but I, when I finally got this job, working to, doing the work that my dad had done, I knew the park as well as he did. I'd been all over it. Uh, I took it really, just because it - jobs were still scarce. This was right after World War II. And there were a lot of GIs, you know, getting out. The job situation wasn't the best. But the board of supervisors approached me and asked if I would be willing to do it, and, uh, I, I was glad to do it.

And, then I met the, uh, director of the desert museum, Bill Carr. And he's the fellow that pointed me in the direction of what we called "conservation" back in those days. Now it's, uh, environmental, environmental awareness or something like that. Uh, but the word "environment" was not used too much. You were a "conservationist," you know. And, then they began to see that they, just the preserving of great tracks of land was, was more to it than that. There was a, actually an ecosystem out there and they started talking in terms of, uh, of ecology. And, uh ...

M: Was this the time when Saguaro was still a, uh ...

C: It was still a county, still a county park.

M: Was it called, er...

C: It was called Tucson Mountain Park, and, uh, as I say, there

was a full 30,000 acres. And it had been developed, uh, all the roads and trails, buildings, picnic grounds, and so forth, had been, uh, built by the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. And we had one camp that was in the park, that was active. And, uh, I was, I was kind of a mascot for these CCC guys. And, uh, they built the building that's now being used by the desert museum. Uh, the corps building. I don't know if you've been there or not.

M: No, sir.

C: It's a wonderful institution. And, uh, but meeting Bill Carr, he was, uh, he had formerly been in charge of Bear Mountain Museum in New York. And had moved to Tucson for his health and opened up a little book store. Rare books. And Bill started giving me books to read, and, uh, books such as, uh "Sand County Almanac," er, Robert Story's book on "The Web of Life," a lot of different books - I can't name them all.

And, I'd always loved to read, anyway, and I, I don't like fiction. And, uh, these were great books. And I look back on my career now, and I know that it was at that point that, that a decision was made on my part to somehow get into environmental work, or conservation work, in a big way.

And I did what I could in Tucson. I, I formed, uh, a couple of organizations. I formed a state park association, and, uh, with the help of a lot of other people. And we finally got a state park system for the State of Arizona

before I left for California - and I'll get to that in a minute. And I also formed a, uh, Arizona conservation coordinating committee to try to get the ranchers and the sheep men and the, and the hunters and everybody together to talk about resources. [An El Paso Fire Department siren can be heard in the background of the telephone connection.] We were all squabbling - they're still doing it today. But we had regular meetings all over the state, and it brought, it did bring us closer together. We maybe didn't change our opinion, but we had a little more respect for the other person's opinion - because of these meetings.

Uh, then I, knowing this was a dead-end job - I love, I loved it, but it was just dead-end - I began looking around for ways to get out of that situation and better myself. So, I, uh, bought a typewriter and started writing letters, and I did it all through writing, er, different people in the conservation movement. I made, uh, a couple of trips to California to look at their state park system. And, uh, I was in touch with the, uh, National Parks Association, the Wilderness Society, all these people. I struck up a correspondence with them.

And, uh, then one day, the National Parks Association asked me if I would like to be their assistant western representative, which meant going national. [Noise in background from Carithers Odessa home.] And, the office was in Carmel, Calif. [Chuckles.] You can't, you can't turn that

down. So I took that, uh, job, moved to California with my wife and two children [coughs], and we lived in California for about two and a half years, and, uh, off and on. And I, I finally left the National Parks Association and moved to Washington, D.C., and worked for the "National Wildlands News," which was a, uh, a monthly newsletter, that went out on conservation matters.

And, uh, about that time - the 1960, the 1959 elections, [19]60 elections took place - and John Kennedy became president. And one of the fellows that helped him get elected president was Stuart Udall, the congressman from Arizona. He was Moe Udall's brother. And, uh, Stuart and I were, had been old friends - not close friends, but professional-type friendship. We would hike mountains together and, and we hiked a lot of the mountains around Tucson, and.... When he got appointed, he offered me a job in, in the Department of the Interior. And so I took it. And, uh, it was special assistant to him - for park service matters. And I did that for about a year, year and a half, and it became so political - uh, most high jobs like that are political. I, and my goal was to do, to get back into the field, and do park field work.

And, uh, so I managed to talk him into letting me do that. And I moved to Santa Fe, signed up with the National Park Service as a planner in the regional office and was there for, oh, about four years. Got some excellent

experience, and I worked for a gentleman by the name of Dan Beard. He is the son, was the son, of the, uh, Boy Scout Dan Beard, that founded the Boy Scout movement in this country.

Uh, anyway, uh, I then got a call from my direct, from the director in Washington, and he wanted me to come back to Washington to write some administrative policy booklets for him. I, I was, I had kind of specialized in writing, and I, I loved to do it. So I went back there - we were back there about a year. That's how long it took me to do these three administrative handbooks. And they were on natural areas, recreational areas, and, uh, cultural areas, or historical areas.

And, I got that finished, and, uh, told him, you know, I, I - Washington is getting to me again. Washington is a pressure cooker. And, uh, and then I wanted to get back to the field. So he made arrangements for me to become assistant superintendent at Canyonlands National Park, which was our newest national park.

And I had worked on that when I was, uh, both when I was in Santa Fe and when I was in, in the Interior office. So I knew the area pretty well, and, uh, it worked - got along fine with the superintendent. He was doing mostly PR work, and I did all the nuts and bolts work for the park, and it was, it was a lot of fun. And I learned the ropes. And we, I was there about a year. [Someone, probably Mrs. Carithers, says, "Three years."] Oh, I'm sorry, three years,

three years. It was the other that was one year. I was there for three years.

And then one day, uh, I got a call asking me if I would like to be superintendent of Big Bend.

M: That would have been in 1971?

C: That would have been 1971, correct. Uh, uh, August, I believe, was the, was the month. So I made an advance trip down there from Canyonlands, and.... I'd been there back in the late [19]50s, when Canyonlands was - I'm sorry - Big Bend was just being developed. Uh, it was made a national park in 1954, I believe ...

M: Er, [19]44

C: [19]44, I'm sorry. But it, it didn't have a lot of development. And, uh, it was starting to get, starting to get crowds. And, uh, you know, everything needed up, upgrading. So, I - in August of '71 - I, I moved there and, uh, spent the next two or three months just working on building up the staff. They had, had, they had, had a very bad morale problem at Big Bend. Uh, I won't get into it. It was, uh, the superintendent there at that time, uh, Luther Peterson, passed away - had a bad, bad heart. And, uh, and when I moved in, he moved out and went to Santa Fe so he could be near a doctor.

M: His name was Luther Peterson?

C: Luther Peterson. And Luther was a - well, Pete, we called him - was a, an engineer. And he had looked on the park as -

well engineers look for, look at sewage systems and building foundations, and [chuckles] roads [continues chuckling]. You know, they don't look at the natural resources the way most of us do. And, I'm not faulting them, it's - we have a lot of engineers that do good, good work. But, Pete was, was not well and needed to be near a doctor.

The nearest doctor, if you lived in the park at Panther Junction, uh, it was a hundred and ten miles away. And we had our own ambulance, uh, and, uh, med., you know, EMTs [Emergency Medical Technicians], but he, he, he, he moved to Alpine, I think, for a couple of months before, uh, I came down, just to be close to a doctor. And he finally, was transferred to the reg..., to the regional office in Santa Fe. And I, and I came on board, and [sighs]....

The staff was, uh, well the morale was low, and I, I can't blame all of that on Pete. There were little cliches, and, uh, it was just a mess. And I, I could see that was the first thing I was going to have to correct. So I began building the staff, and....

Big Bend is one of those areas, uh, and there are very few of them - Death Valley is another one - where after three years of service there, if you want out, you, you can, uh, you can ask for it, uh.... The regional office and your superintendent is supposed to, uh, make all the phone calls he can, try to find an opening, and I did this with several people. And, and you go to your new area.

M: Is this because, Mr. Carithers, of the isolation?

C: [Inaudible] The isolation, uh, John, was, was not - we didn't mind it, my wife and I because we had lived in isolation in other, other parks. And we had a good crew there after a while, and, you know, we had our own little neighborhood. Uh, and we had, uh, social events and things of this nature, in the park, and.... We didn't mind it. We would go to, Alpine, er, once a month or every two weeks to pick up supplies and groceries, and, and, uh - you just had to plan ahead on everything that you did. But, some, some of the people couldn't stand it.

I, I had one who, one ranger who had a wife and he lived in the Basin. Are you familiar with Big Bend?

M: Yes.

C: ... lived in the Basin, which is one of the nicest places to live if you have to, if you have to live there. And it was cool, and, but she got cabin fever. And by cabin fever I mean she just got restless and, she, she tended to be a little neurotic anyway. And, uh, she was giving everybody a rough time. And this was jeopardizing his job - he, he couldn't do his job. So I managed to transfer them out and brought in a new man to take his place - an old desert rat. And, and I had to do this several times. We finally ended up, after the first year, with, with a very good staff and, uh, and crew.

And while all this was going on there was all kinds of

other business to transact. We had wilderness hearings.

about a month, month and a half after I got to Big Bend, so I had to familiarize myself on that. And, uh, we had a big public meeting in, uh, Alpine...

M: Excuse me, Mr. Carithers, describe what was happening with "wilderness" quote, unquote at this time.

C: Yes, this, this goes back to the 1964 Wilderness Act, which said that the, uh, the agencies involved - this would be the [United States] Forest Service, the BLM [Bureau of Land Management], [U.S.] Fish and Wildlife [Service], and, uh, [National] Park Service, all [Department of] Interior agencies. And the forest service, which is, uh, [U.S. Department of] Agriculture. [They] were obligated to survey, uh, their entire park, pick out those areas where, uh, where wilderness exists - and there is a criteria that you have to follow, and you can't have any roads or mechanized equipment or, uh, you can't even be close to a road. You, it's to let the visitor go out into the, into the place and, and feel that he is away from all civilization.

M: These would be areas that would restrict access to, uh, foot or horse, perhaps.

C: Be no motorized equipment at all, uh, except in dire emergencies. If you had a, a hiker that, uh, that had broken both legs and there was an arroyo you could go up and get to him, uh.... [It] was the superintendent's decision to make. Technically he was disobeying the law, but, from an

humanitarian standpoint you could rationalize it and, uh, and get a Jeep in there, or some vehicle, and bring that poor soul out. And, uh, we did this on several occasions.

In fact, we had a lot of paleontology work going on when I was superintendent down there. Juan Langston, from the University of Texas, had a crew working in several places, and in one location he found a, uh, pterodactyl, uh, bone, wing bone, where it attaches to the shoulder. And it was the largest pterodactyl ever found - fifty-two foot wingspread. And, uh, I let them go in and take that out. If it had not been taken out, it would have, could have eroded and disappeared. Uh, but, you know, you have certain leeway. You have to use a little common sense.

But, the, uh, the wilderness was finally established. I had a lot of arguments from local people saying you're trying to keep us out, you know. The park should be for more than just young backpackers, and, uh, we had this argument, I think, almost every time we went in, [to] any park you'd go to that was having wilderness areas. This always came up.

M: Who would, uh, what type of local resident would be opposing this? Ranchers, business people...?

C: It would be the person who supplied, uh, gas to people from Alpine. It would be merchants who wanted people to come to the park, because they would have to go through Alpine. And, they just, they just felt we were going to be somehow limiting the use of that park. And, uh, we would, would not

limit itself, because what, what we were doing was setting aside.... It ended up it was kind of a patchwork.... All the roads were outside the wilderness area. All the trailheads were outside. But we had, ended up with, with, uh, I can't tell you how many pieces there were. I think there were seven or eight major, uh, land holding within there, within the park, that were, uh, designated, finally, as wilderness. We had hearings and Congress had to consider it, and there were impact statements that had to be written. Uh, that's one accomplishment that I'm, that I'm pretty proud of when I was down there.

And, as I said earlier, we had a smooth-working crew, we had all new people, uh, at the top. Uh, and we had a good crew - I call them grunts, uh, the, the guys that really get out and do the work - the maintenance men. You, you, you know, you don't pay much attention to them, because they're along side the road, digging out a culvert, or, or, whatever they're doing. And the public drives by and they don't even realize - these are just like rangers. They're doing an important job, too. They just don't have fancy uniforms, and they don't wear Smokey Bear hats.

But, uh, there was also a big push about the time that I got there to change out some of the buildings that were in the [Chisos] Basin. There were some buildings there - twenty-one of them. I, er, they were called Dallas huts, and they were pre-fab buildings you put together with screws.

Screw the sides up, and then screw the roof on. And they were fire-traps, and, uh, we started making plans to build a - some of our people were living in those, by the way. And the concession employees were living in them. And we wanted better housing. Now this process takes a long time. You've got to write an impact statement, uh, and you're - impact statements take forever to get approved. A lot of politics involved. And, unfortunately, uh, about that time the park service had an adversarial relationship with most of its concessionaires. I had a good working relationship. I, my feeling was, they're our partners in keeping the public - making, you know, the public able to see these places.

M: This would have been about the time, if I'm correct, that there were major concessionaire policy changes, uh...

C: That's correct.

M: ... coming out of, particularly, Yellowstone [National Park], I believe.

C: Yeah, and those of course were.... Some were specific to the area, but there were some broad ones that were, uh, covered the whole system. And, and all we were doing really was replacing some existing, uh, buildings, uh, and doing it in a, in a careful way so as not to screw up the, uh, environment of the Basin. And, uh, put in a new ranger station. We had a little small one there. It was a Dallas hut also, and, uh.... I was there for six and a half years. We started on that then. It didn't get - all that work

didn't get finished until I had left. [Laughs] That's always the way.

I've gone back several times, and, and it looks pretty nice. Everybody was really happy with the, uh, old building gone and the new ones to live in.

M: Had Panther Junction, at that time, been pretty well established? Uh, I believe that may have been under Perry Brown's administration.

C: It was Perry Brown.... [Ross] Maxwell [Big Bend's first superintendent] wasn't, uh, did not live at, uh, at Panther Junction. He was up in the Basin.

M: Ross Maxwell, you're referring to.

C: Ross. But Perry Brown, uh, gosh, uh,... I remember Lady Bird [Johnson, wife of then-Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson] and Perry Brown and Stuart Udall planting a tree. I think it was about 1962. It was before I ever went down there. But, uh, yeah, that was during Perry Brown's, uh, ad..., administration.

I had been there, though, in the late [19]50s when, when Stan Joseph was the superintendent. Do you have his name?

M: Uh, no sir, I'm not familiar with, with Mr. Joseph.

C: Stan was there, uh,... Most of the housing had been finished, uh, around Panther Junction. Uh, they were looking into the road networks, uh, various road, uh, routes for roads to follow, and, uh, the road to Castolon, uh, the road

to Rio Grande Village, and he did a lot of the work on that. He was an engineer, but he was a very sensitive engineer.

M: You mentioned...

C: Those roads were put in, uh, under his, under his direction. He was, he was superintendent at that time.

M: Referring to Mr. Brown, and, and Lady Bird Johnson, uh, in 1962, would have been the vice president's wife ...

C: Okay, that's correct.

M: Uh, or depending on what time in [19]62, I guess. Uh, he told me - I interviewed him a few months ago, and I might mention that he died just a few weeks ago.

C: Oh, no. Well I, I've asked myself several times, "I wonder where Perry is."

M: He had lived in Alpine for a number of years. Uh, and I interviewed him back in March [1994]. Uh, he told me the story [coughs] - excuse me - of, he didn't remember the exact year, but the visit of Lady Bird Johnson to Big Bend ...

C: That's right.

M: ... and Fort Davis.

C: Fort Davis, and there were some antelope [laughs] killed by an airplane. They were trying to land.... She wanted.... Liz Carpenter, who was her, uh, administrative secretary, I guess you'd call it ...

M: Right.

C: ... wanted to have deer and antelope out on, you know, near,

near the place where her plane would land. And, for some reason, the antelope spooked and ran right into this aircraft, and the, uh.... It would have been good promotion, you know, but it backfired on them.

M: Uh, the story he told me was that, uh, Lady Bird wanted to raft the river, uh, through Santa Elena. Uh, the river was down, and she...

C: That's the worst time to run it.

M: ...uh, he was given orders to instruct, uh, whoever, uh, up to Elephant Butte Dam, to release sufficient water to, uh, to make the river raftable.

C: Boy, that's what power does. [Chuckles]

M: Are you familiar with that story.

C: No, I, I know, I knew that she had floated the river. But, uh, and, uh, I know the room that she stayed in when she was in the, in the lodge [at Chisos Basin] - one of the stone, uh, the building right up above the stone cottages. Uh, what that called the old motel unit. Uh, but anyway, getting back to the chronology...

M: Excuse me, sir, but, but that would not be an unheard of type story, then, uh, would not have been unrealistic to, to get the Bureau of Reclamation, or whoever, uh, to release water in your experience...

C: No, in fact I, I could give you some experiences, uh, that I've had, dealing with, uh, politicians or pretty powerful people in Washington. And, uh, I guess all superintendents

are subject to this. And, uh, if, if the first lady or the vice president's lady wants something done, uh, she may not even know about it, you know. She personally did not ...

M: Not, not have a hand in it?

C: ... had somebody make a few phone calls. And, uh....

M: Were the, the antelope that were, uh, were killed, where they on park property, or was...

C: No, they, they were at the airport in Alpine. And I was, I was not superintendent there at the time. I was, uh, oh, I'm trying to think. I was, uh, I think I was in Santa Fe at that time.

M: Uh, were they rounded - the antelope and deer - were they rounded up by local ...

C: Yeah, there are deer and antelope all around the Davis Mountains ...

M: Right.

C: ... and the grasslands, and they just pushed a herd of antelope, uh, close to where the airstrip was. And, so you could see them. I mean, they weren't right up close. But, the, they panicked and tried to cross in front of the plane. And, uh, it, uh, I don't know how many were killed, but, then I did hear there was three or four.

M: Okay.

C: But, but the park was in, in pretty bad shape from a physical plant point of view. The, uh, the, the roads, uh.... Route 1, which is the road from, uh, Panther Junction

out to Persimmon Gap ...

M: Yes.

C: ... was in terrible shape. A lot of it is built on bentonite, which, uh, when it gets wet, it, it forces itself up and expands. And this puts a lot of bumps in the road. And, uh, during the time that I was there, we did all the survey work to improve that road, using the existing, uh, location. We did not change the location of the road except in one place. And that was near Persimmon Gap, where, er, there was a sharp curve, and we cut the corner of that curve to make it fit. And, uh, it was done in good taste, and, uh, you know, everybody enjoys it, but it was, uh, it was a terrible road to travel over if, uh....

You know we had a 45-mile-an-hour limit, uh, in the park on all, all roads. And, uh, occasionally we'd be going to town, and, uh, maybe we'd creep a little over that. But the road would bring us back [laughs] to about 45. It, it, it would almost throw a car off the road, it was so rough.

M: Mr. Carithers, let me pause and change sides of the tape for a moment, please.

END OF SIDE "A," TAPE 1 OF 3

BEGINNING OF SIDE "B," TAPE 1 OF 3

C: ... the reason that a, uh, a lot of this, is very, uh,

seems, or appears to be very fresh to me is that, uh, I'm writing a book, and, uh.... It's just a series of nostalgic pieces about where I've lived and what I've done. I'm writing it more for my kids than, than anything else. But the Big Bend chapter, uh, it made me think out what had gone on down there, just in the last year or two. I, I don't go to Big Bend that often. And, uh, we stay pretty close to home, my wife and I. I'm retired, and, uh....

M: You say, Mr. Carithers, that the park in the early 1970s was, was in a bad physical shape...

C: Yeah.

M: ... Uh, that being for access, uh...

C: Well, they had well problems, uh...

M: Water problems are always...

C: ... water problems and had to devise, uh, systems to, uh, to get water up to Panther Junction. We were having a terrible time with water at PJ, as we called it - Panther Junction. [Periodic noise in background apparently is Mrs. Carithers working in the kitchen.] We had a big water tank up on the hill, behind the maintenance area, and, uh, and, uh, that was coming from a well down at the, uh, K-Bar Ranch - yeah - the K-Bar Ranch which is just down the road toward Boquillas. There, it was a, the ranch building itself was used by scientists as a, as a headquarters when they were doing work in the park. And we had another one, another scientific building, located, uh, just across the river, on

the American side, at Boquillas, called the Barker, the Barker house. No, I'm sorry, it was the Barker house. Boy, I can't think of it.

M: Was there someone, uh, Green?

C: [Sighs] The Barker house was a, was named for a politician.

M: Yes...

C: And he, he had a house right down on the river.

M: On the hill, uh, up above Boquillas, uh, or above Rio Grande Village there.

C: Well, that big white one - there's a big white house there.

M: Yes.

C: And I don't know whether that, uh, was the Barker place. We use, used it as a research station. And, we'd have people come out and they would use it. And, uh, if they were students doing work that we were going to get some benefit from, we would let them use these buildings without, uh, without paying any rent. Because they were students; they weren't making a lot of money. And they were working mostly off of grants. Ross Maxwell even came down, and spent, off and on, about three or four months, uh, used my secretary, after hours to do his typing for him. And he wrote a book, uh, on Big Bend National Park. And I think its one of the best books that's ever been written.

M: Uh, that is the - a lot of photos?

C: A lot of photos, old brands, uh...

M: I'm familiar with that. [Ross Maxwell, Big Bend Country: A

History of Big Bend National Park, Big Bend National Park, Tx.: Big Bend Natural History Association, 1985.]

C: ...on, in the margins. But it's a very fine book. And Ron Tyler did a great book on...

M: Yes. [Ronnie C. Tyler, The Big Bend: A History of the Last Texas Frontier, Big Bend National Park, Tx.: Division of Publications, National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington, D.C., 1975.]

C: ...on Big Bend, and, uh.... And we had grand opening for Tyler's book in, uh, in Fort Worth. Uh, gosh, I'm trying to think of the date. He was the curator at the Amon Carter Museum [in Fort Worth], and he corrected a, uh, collected a lot of photographs, many of them made by Smithers. Does the name Smithers come up in your....

M: No sir, I'm not familiar with Smithers.

C: OK, Smithers was a photographer, uh, and I don't know where his negatives are. I do know that Ron Tyler, with the Amon Carter Museum, had a, what I think was a complete set. And, and they were eight by tens, blown up from smaller negatives, of course - of everything that was going on in that park, and there was some stuff around the park. Like the old planes that used to fly for the cavalry, observation aircraft ...

M: Yes.

C: ... with Santa Elena in the background. Here were these planes, and, uh, Smithers just had a great number -

thousands of photographs of the Big Bend Country. We use a lot of them, because, he would show areas that were obviously overgrazed.

It was during the time the park was being spoke of, spoken for, by the National Park Service, as a, as a national park - they dumped more cattle and sheep in there than you could believe, these, these stockmen. And they really - you could tell from the photographs - how much had been eaten down.

It took, it took it a while - a long time - to come back. Uh, it's back pretty close to normal now. There were no, no plant species that were wiped out or anything like that, but it just looked overgrazed and, and, uh, terrible. And, by the way, those people, uh, this, this was in, in the [19]40s - let's see, Big Bend was established in ...

M: Nineteen forty-four, but it had, uh...

C: Forty-four, forty-five...

M: ...begun as, begun as a state park as early as 1933.

C: That, that's right. And it consisted only of the [Chisos] Basin at first, and then, they, they made it national and it, it went up to the seven hundred-plus thousand acres that it is now. And then there's been, there was land added while I was there. Up near Persimmon Gap, and it's, it's eleven to twelve hundred square miles, now. Anyway, uh....

M: During your tenure there, Mr. Carithers, uh, you talk about overgrazing, uh, did you frequently, uh, uh, meet varying

opinions from locals about whether, uh, the former inhabitants had over, overgrazed or not?

C: No, I, I talked to some of the oldtimers, there. And, uh, and they wouldn't talk about it. And, uh, but I've got pictures of - some of Smithers' pictures - which show cattle, goats, etc., uh, [inaudible] ... areas that are now grown over, [chuckles] you know, grown new grass.

M: I have interviewed a few people that, that, uh, contest that argument, that it was overgrazing that hurt much of the park area.

C: I don't think it, it - it was a temporary thing. It didn't kill, as I say, didn't wipe out any, any species. Uh, it still had the same grasses. Uh, maybe there were some that were lost. Sheep have a tendency to pull it out by the roots, whereas a cow just snaps off the top of it. But, it took it a while to come back. It took it a while, and, uh, and of course down along the river, we, when I was there, we still had problems with cattle.

There's no fencing between the United States and Mexico. And on the, uh, other side - we called it the *otra lada*, which means "other side" in Spanish, on the other side of the river, there were *ejidos*. Is that a word you're familiar with?

M: Uh, familiarize me with it. I ...

C: Okay, it's spelled E-J-I-D-O-S, and what it was, was, uh, land that had been set aside by the government for

settlement, uh, by people who qualified. And, some of these villages would be full of people from the Juarez, Mexico, area. And, it, it was kind of like homesteading land. Only they called them *ejidos*. And they were up and down the river on the Mexican side. Uh, almost, uh, its full length, except, uh, except where it was going through mountains and canyons and things of that kind. But where it would support cattle, that was, that was where the *ejido* was built. And usually they were build around little camps that already existed, and the population just grew. But, uh....

M: These would be places like, uh, Boquillas and Santa Elena...?

C: Santa Elena, Solis, uh, Black Rock, uh, - yeah, all those places. But the problem was, as, as you, as we soon learned was that since there was no fence, and when the river is low, you can drive cattle right across into the park. And of course, the first thing they hit when they, they get out of the water, in, uh, in, on park property, first thing they hit are mesquite trees, or tamarisk, which is salt cedar. And, uh, and cane and things of this kind. And they would just wonder around and eat all this fresh grass and everything.

This got to be a real problem, and it was, it was a dangerous situation because they would get out on the road at night - on River Road for example - or the road into Solis, and then lie down. (Laughs)

M: Mr. Carrithers, where is Solis? I'm not familiar with it.

C: Solis is, is the takeout point for Mariscal Canyon. I can't think of the place.... Yeah, it's Mariscal, where you put in. Then you float through the canyon and you come out, uh, at a primitive campsite, really, called Solis.

M: Okay.

C: And if you've got one of those large maps...

M: Right, I do.

C: ...you can locate it.

M: Okay.

C: But these cattle were wandering down the roads at night, and, and my concern was, was liability. You know, if somebody gets killed, uh, the cows couldn't sue but the people in the car could. So, we would have regular roundups and we would call these people in and talk with them about, about this problem. They were doing this knowingly. The cat..., the cattle weren't just wandering across.

M: We're talking here about Mexican ranchers?

C: Mexican cattle. So we finally had to get tough. It, we could talk until we were blue in the face. But, uh, toward the end, whenever I left, the, uh, we talked to the Department of Agriculture people. And of course every cow that enters this country has to be inspected. And we fell back on that, on that law.

M: Particularly for hoof and mouth disease?

C: Well, hoof and mouth, and lumpjaw, and, and, uh, anthrax and

all kinds of other things that these cattle may carry. And some of it can be transferred to animals, like deer or to smaller critters like field mice and so forth. And then they'll pass it along to somebody else.

This, it got real hairy, and, uh, we had some long talks with Dr. Majors, who was the main honcho for the agriculture department down there. And he, he worked out of El Paso, but he would come down to, uh, Ojinaga [Mexico, across the Rio Grande from Presidio, Tx.], and, uh, check cattle coming through there.

So what we would do, is to quietly just, uh, pounce on the area, round up all the cows, put them on, on big trailers, uh, using, we would also use [U.S.] Customs airplanes and helicopters, and we'd round up maybe fifty or sixty head. We'd take, then we'd take them to Ojinaga, and the owner had to go up, all the way to Ojinaga and get his cow back and pay for the feed that that cow had used. It, it was, it was punitive, but it was the only way we could keep those cattle out of there. We'd drive them across [the Rio Grande, south], and next day they'd be back, back in the park.

M: I've heard one Big Bender comment, that, uh, uh, that transporting their cattle to Ojinaga was a cheap way to get them to market for the Mexican owners.

C: Well, they, they bitched about it. Once they got used to the routine, you know, the drill involved [chuckles], they

would, uh, they would go over in, in groups cause some of these cattle, I mean, some of these herds we would collect would be owned by four or five people. And they would pay their fine, but they felt it was worth it. They were going to be fed well while they were in Ojinaga. We weren't going to hurt them. And, uh, so they just had a trip, uh - about a 90 mile trip - to Ojinaga to pick up, uh, a cow and bring it back. Or they sell it right in Ojinaga.

Ojinaga was one of the ports of entry for cattle. There are only a few of them on the border. El Paso has a big, a big one - I, I worked in it, and it, it processes about twelve to fourteen thousands animals a day.

M: Mr. Carithers, were the Mexicans, uh, reluctant to follow the rules, both international, and park, and, and so forth. Or were they reacting, uh, uh, just ignoring the international boundary because of the hundreds-year-old, uh, tradition of them freely crossing.

C: And I want to, I want to say this, too. That, that border in this chapter that I'm writing on Big Bend - I call it a "fractious line." It had - smuggling has been going on - and other illegal activities - smuggling and other illegal activities, has been going on, uh, since historical times. Early historical times at Big Bend. At first, it was, uh, candelia wax. And you know what that is.

M: Yes.

C: All those camps where they made candelia.... Most of them

were along the river, on the Mexican side. But we know that they would go out at night and forage candelia in the park and take it back to their base camp where they would boil it and skim off the, the wax. And, uh, all we could do, if there were on the Mexican side, we could not touch them, because that was their property. But if we found any of them foraging on this side, we would, uh, we would confiscate....

And at one time that was a big deal. There was, uh, there was a twenty burro team taking candelia wax out one time. This may have been when Perry [Brown] was superintendent. And he had - whoever the superintendent was, it may have been [Ross] Maxwell, I'm not sure - he had had it up to here, you know. He'd, he'd try to keep these guys from crossing through the park - they were violating park laws - and he confiscated all the burros and the wax. Got a bulldozer, made a big pit and killed all the burros. It worked. It got their attention real quick.

Now, you couldn't get away with that today, so we had to use other tactics. We.... Customs, I, I finally got Customs to set up a Customs station, uh, within the park. And, uh, with radios and telephones and teletypes and all the things that that involved. And they had an impound area where they could impound, uh, vehicles that were bringing narcotics across - and I'll get into that in a minute. And, these Customs people would fly the border for use. They would tell us if they had seen something. They'd radio in.

You know: "We've got a bunch of cattle down here. There down in the mesquite, I can't tell how many, but I've seen about six or eight." That's the message we'd get. If we got the same message for two or three days, we realized that those cattle were there because they'd been driven across.

And we'd have a round up. And it started at eight in the morning and lasted till past midnight. And, we, it put a stop to it. We had a lot of local cowpunchers that wanted to be in on this, and, you know, get a chance to ride horseback and, and chauch some cows around like, like cowboys do. And, and we paid them a little bit. And, uh, agriculture paid them a little. And, uh, we furnished them with meals, food, water, and these roundups would just maybe last a day. And then we wouldn't have another one for maybe a month, depending on what was happening.

But the ecology along that river was extremely delicate. Extremely delicate. And we had researchers out there researching it, and here we would have herds of cattle just tramping everything down, and, you know.... So it was, it was an influence that we could do without.

M: Briefly, Mr. Carithers, tell me what you mean by delicate ecology along the river.

C: Okay, there were grasses, there were plants growing along that river at certain places that grew no place else. And, you know, there would be nice high grass growing down in some of those thickets, and it was beautiful down there. But

after the cows had gone through it, it was, all you has was mesquite left standing - and tamarisk. And it would take a year for the grass to start coming back.

M: And of course the mesquite and tamarisk is not native to that area.

C: The mesquite is; the tamarisk ...

M: Is not.

C: ... came from the Mediterranean. It was introduced, probably by some stockmen who own a ranch and thought they need some shade trees. And it can, it can stand unbearable heat, but it uses an awful lot of water.

M: And it kills out other plant life.

C: It kills out other plant, and, uh, we finally got into a program where we set out to destroy all the tamarisk trees along, uh, the river. We had one man, and that's all he did. He was our resource coordinator - I can't think of his name off hand. But we used a material called [sounds like] Cilvex, and what you would do is to, uh, just cut a notch out of the tree with a saw and place a little of this highly toxic material - it was systemic. Once it got into the system of the plant, it would, the plant would die. And it was selective; it would not kill anything else.

So we started that. We worked with the [U.S.] Forest Service out of, uh, I think it was Albuquerque, out of their regional office there. Uh, we had that happen, we had a lot of tamarisk around some of the ponds of water that you'll

still find in the park - like Croton Springs [uncertain on spelling].

M: Or at Dugout Wells?

C: Dugout Wells, well, at Dugout Wells.... Uh, yeah, there was water running on the ground there and there were cottonwoods.... The cottonwoods were probably placed there by the rancher who wanted, you know, a little shade. I don't know if they had that many tamarisks or not, but, uh....

M: At Hot Springs?

C: There are a few tamarisks.... There used to be a palm tree at.... (Chuckles.)

M: The palm tree is still there, uh, at the corner ...

C: Is it?

M: ... of the store and post office.

C: The old store, yeah. That ...

M: Yes.

C: ... that store, uh, it was terribly run down whenever I got there, and I got a crew together with some people from the regional office [of the National Park Service in Santa Fe] to get them started. And they, uh, they re-faced all the bricks - or the stones, rather - put new mortar in and filled up all the cracks. And, uh, then I had a fellow from, uh, Sul Ross - can't remember his name either; he was an artist - come down and repaint the little, uh, housing units. They were located just east of the store.

M: Right.

C: We called them motel units. And they all had little Mexican murals. And they had been poked at, and, uh, and just aged. They were falling off the wall. We had those restored, and, uh, it, its a pretty popular place.

M: Mr. Carithers, did, uh - that's pretty interesting you mention the murals. Uh, were you familiar with who painted the original murals?

C: I think it was Langston [probably referring to J.O. Langford, founder of the Hot Springs spa], uh, or his family. I don't know that. I really don't.

M: I interviewed a lady in Marathon named Maise Lee ...

C: Okay.

M: ... uh, who lived at Hot Springs in the late [19]40s] ...

C: I know her.

M: ... she painted those murals.

C: That's right.

M: She told me ...

C: That's right. And we wanted her to do it over again, and she wasn't, didn't feel she was up to it.

M: I see.

C: Yeah, that's, that's her name - Maise.

M: Yes, her husband was Guy Lee who was a river rider for the government.

C: Yeah, and, and, uh, they [river riders] had little camps up and down the river where they would stay overnight. Usually, they'd sleep outside if they could, but if it was raining or

something they would go into one of these cabins - little, uh, little, kind of a tarpaper shack. And, uh....

M: You don't recall who from Sul Ross restored those murals, however?

C: I think it was a fellow named, uh, Ron, no, it wasn't....
[Carithers turns from phone, apparently inquiring of someone else in the room about the artist.] His name was Ron Reynolds.

M: Reynolds, okay.

C: He did the mural that now hangs in the community center at Panther Junction.

M: Okay. You've talked, Mr. Carithers, about the, uh, physical state of the park and the state of the, uh, of the staff, uh, what was your assessment of, uh, of park users. Uh, and the park as it was fit for use by the public.

C: Okay. We, we had no problems along those lines. Uh, you know, we had those old beat up buildings in the Basin. And, uh, ...

M: Was the Chisos Lodge there at that time?

C: Yeah, the lodge and restaurant were there. And they had a little store, down below the lodge. That store is gone now and they built a larger one out between there and the window. It's ...

M: Right.

C: ... it's almost in the parking lot. And that's a combination - I think it's a combination store and ranger station.

M: Correct. There are two buildings there, actually.

C: Yeah, and I don't know if they got rid of the old gas station or not.

M: Uh, there is no gas station ...

C: I think that was in the plan. You know, you could always get gas at Panther Junction.

M: Right.

C: Or, Boquillas, or, uh, Castolon. Yeah, we had gas. And, uh.... Running a park like that is kind of like running a city. I, I've worked for the City of Odessa here for about ten or twelve years, and it, it's kind of like running a city. But, uh, here in a park situation, you have all the clout. You have to watch that, you know, that you, that you're constantly thinking of the park visitor.

M: As your first priority ...?

C: Well, the visitor and his safety - his or her safety. And, uh, in fact we had titles that people had. Uh, resource, resources and public safety. And public safety, as far as I was concerned, went to the top of the pile. It was a dangerous park. We had deaths. We had about, an average of one drowning a year. We did not encourage people to, uh, go swimming.

M: Er, drowning in the river obviously?

C: Yeah, they were drowning. They either had, you know, dumped out at Santa Elena, hit the Rock Slide [a precarious obstruction of boulders in Santa Elena Canyon that must be

negotiated carefully to proceed down river] and tipped over and hit their head or something, and they, you know, we'd find them a day or two later. Or they'd just drop into a sink-hole. There were plenty of those in, in the river, and maybe couldn't swim too well, and the current picked them up and.... But we had about one a year while I was there.

M: What other types of dangers, uh, heat, uh ...

C: Well, I wanted to get into that and that, that, this is, this is something that sort of makes my point for me. When I first, when it was first announced I was going to Big Bend, I, I talked to everybody in the regional office about the problems down there. And they mentioned the morale, and, uh....

You know, park people don't go to parks for a day off. [Laughs] They go to the big city. And, uh, you'd go to Alpine or El Paso, or Midland, Odessa. You wanted to get away from the park. Now the guy who lives in the city wants to go to the park. It's a strange relationship, but that's the way it worked. And, we would look forward to weekends. We would, a lot of times just do something in the park. You know, have a tennis tournament or have a dance on Friday or Saturday nights.

And, uh, a lot of our men, by the way, lived in, in Alpine and Marfa. Come down on Monday morning and, uh, live in one of the trailers we had at Panther Junction. They were maintenance men...

M: And their families lived in town?

C: Families lived in, in, uh, Alpine or Marfa, and they....
(pause) Not Marfa, I'm sorry, ...

M: Marathon?

C: ... Alpine or Marathon. And, you know, at 5:30 [p.m.], I'd be coming, maybe from Alpine, and I'd meet a stream of cars on Friday afternoon, after work, all heading home.

But, uh, rangers, you know you've got to have rangers on hand at all times and something that they didn't tell me about.... They told me about the, the employee morale problem, and, you know, it was solvable. I could do something about that. But one thing they didn't tell me about was the drugs that were coming across [from south of the Rio Grande].

And I later found out that, uh, they [park service authorities] simply didn't want to hear it. And this is going to be in, in the book too. It's quite a section on that. What would happen is people would go down to, uh, Solis, or Rooney's place and maybe, you know, drive in after dark, camp out, and wake up the next morning and, uh, go for a hike or something. Roll up their sleeping bags and leave all the stuff there. Uh, some of this stuff started to be missing. You'd have a camp stove and it would be gone. This had never happened before. But worst of all, you would unroll your bedroll at night and in that bedroll would be a little baggy of marijuana or a peyote button, which, which

does grow in the park and in Mexico to the south.

And after it got dark a man, or several men, would come into camp from the Mexican side, speaking very broken English, asking - they'd usually pick on young people - "Do you want some more of this marijuana? We'll sell it to you." Well, if they were young people and they were into marijuana, of course we never heard about it. But, I'd begin hearing stories of this happening from other campers, of how they were scared of these Mexicans that were crossing the river, coming in after dark.... And, you know, it was a little spooky.

So, I had two, uh, U.S. Park policemen, who were experts in narcotics in Washington - I had them come out and worked undercover. We got a camper, with a camper shell on the back, and they went fishing. And they just looked like ordinary Texas rednecks, you know. (chuckles) And, they, they would stay at Black Rock or Rooney's place or Solis or San Vicente, and they, they would be fishing.

M: Let me interrupt you and ask you to identify, Mr. Carithers, where Black Rock is and where Rooney's place is.

C: Okay, Rooney's place is beyond, it's upstream from the put-in point of, of Mariscal Canyon.

M: Between there and San Vicen..., no San Vicente is

C: I think, it's, that's, it's further upstream than San Vicente.

M: Okay.

C: Now, I may be wrong. I, I have - it's been twelve to fifteen years since I was down there. [chuckles] And, uh, but Black Rock - and some people call it Black Dike - it may be identified on certain.... It was a, it was a ridge of basalt that in prehistoric times had flowed across the river, and it was, you could see it on the bank and the rest of it was under water.

M: Mr. Carithers, let me change tapes before you go further.

END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1 OF 3

BEGINNING OF SIDE A, TAPE 2 OF 3

M: Okay, Mr. Carithers. You were identifying where Black Rock is located.

C: Yeah, Black Rock is located, uh, very close to Castolon, which is the eastern, I mean western-most ranger station that we have, and we have the store there. It's opposite Santa Elena.

M: And Black Rock would be downstream?

C: Black Rock is downstream, The, uh...

M: Would this be somewhere near a place called Johnson's Ranch?

C: It's in that general vicinity. And, and here again, I'm not going to try to out-guess my memory. It's, it draws a little blank on that one. But it was a favorite fishing spot for a lot of people.

Anyway, these fellows worked the river and they would, uh, come in after-hours and give us reports. And their

reports were not good. There was an awful lot of narcotics coming across from Mexico, across the river into the United States. And, uh, we'd suspected this for a long time. If you're going to smuggle something in, do it where there are a lot of strange people. No body knows anybody else in a national park.

M: People coming and going?

C: People coming and going. All the faces blend together. The smuggler wouldn't stand out, and, uh, we were worried. My first concern was that, these guys were going to run up against a Texas redneck who had a gun someplace - in his car or truck...

M: Despite the rules against it?

C: Despite the rules. We, we knew it was going on. You know, we could, we did not search vehicles.

M: Right.

C: But, in this part of Texas, a lot of people will carry guns, under the seat. Uh, it's not against the law in, in Texas, to carry one [a firearm] in you car. It is in a national park, but it was awkward. They'd [park visitors] have to come in and check it, you know?

M: Right.

C: And, and we just didn't want to get into that. If they had, if they had a rifle on a rifle rack in the back of their truck, one of our rangers would stop them, tell them, "Put that gun in its case or wrap it up in sheet, but it in the

back of your pickup." You, you know...

M: To not display it?

C: ... and then don't, don't have a magazine in it and don't have any shells in it. We tried to be reasonable about this. Uh, but what we were worried about was that someone was going to get hurt, and it finally happened. Somebody did get hurt. And, uh, there were several people hurt.

We had people upstream from the park, just a little beyond Lajitas, which is the, uh, western-most part of the park, uh, who were shot at as they were floating the river...

M: Yes.

C: ... and the man was, was killed. We had one man who was camping and it never gave the campsite location so I, I don't know where it was, but it was along the river somewhere. That's all the story said. And, uh, he and his daughter - or maybe it was his son, I'm not sure - were, were on a camping trip. And one of the rangers drove down the road and saw their vehicle. It, it was a burned vehicle. And inside they found the boy's body, and they found the man's body out in the river. He'd, uh, he'd been killed ...

M: Were these ...

C: ... but what the circumstance were, we don't know. I wasn't there at the time, so I'm not going to second guess what the, the superintendent found out.

M: This would have been after 1977 or before?

C: Yes, this was after I left.

M: Okay.

C: Now, I had Customs, as I said earlier, I had Customs' people come into the park. I was a little leery of letting Customs come in, because they had some procedures that didn't, didn't quite work the same way ours did. We were working under, uh, a code of federal regulations - Title 36. And, uh, when I entered the federal service I took an oath that I would uphold this, this law, this book full of laws.

And, uh, so what I did after these two undercover guys reported that there was a lot of drugs coming through the park, is I asked the regional director, whose name at that time was Frank [sounds like K-O-W-S-K-I]. You've probably had other superintendents mention ...

M: Right.

C: ... Frank's name. A very fine gentleman. And I told him, I kept him up to date on what I was doing, and he'd work with the U.S. Park Police and he, he suggested that we get so-and-so and so-and-so to come down, and, you know, act like civilians and see what they could come up with. So they did.

We got them an undercover car with, with a park radio in it. One of them had a little Volkswagen and, and it looked like a hippie.... And they hadn't landed in the park more than two hours - they got in in the middle of the afternoon - and one of them - Wayne Maliski, M-A-L-I-S-K-I, - he went out to sort of orientate himself. Ori, orientate,

what is it, orient - orientate himself - to the park. And he went down toward Boquillas, and just outside the, uh, tunnel that you go through ...

M: Right.

C: ... before you approach Boquillas, he saw a car parked. And he just drove up, and, uh, the man wasn't sitting behind the wheel. He was sitting in the passenger side. And something just did not look right, so this, Wayne went over, showed him his badge and said, "May I see your driver's license." This fellow got ready to open the front lockbox, glove compartment, and Maliski stuck a, stuck his gun in his ear, and he said, "I'll open that." And there was a gun in there.

And it turned out that this was a big drug dealer from Midland or Odessa that was down there waiting for some kind of action to take place. We arrested him. There were warrants out for his arrest.

This started happening all the time. We were, we were making arrests almost every day. And finally we, it got so bad, it got so really bad that we wanted to bring it to a head. We would, we would put the pressure on in the park and it was like a balloon - you squeeze it here and it pops up somewhere else. And we would get calls from, uh, Presidio and other places saying, "You guys must be putting the pressure on because they're coming through here" - Redford or some of those little towns down that way. But, uh,

M: So it had progressed, uh ...

C: It, it was ...

M: ... from, from Mexican dealers trying to sell small amounts to tourists who they might change upon to actual organized ...

C: It, it.... I'm not going to say it was organized crime, but it was, it was families.... Uh, in fact, one of the big honchos down there that was dealing in drugs used to work for our concession down there. He was a dishwasher or something. Spoke pretty good English and just decided to go in business selling marijuana.

M: People that had contacts on both sides of the border?

C: Yeah, and we had two young men from Houston come into the park, and, uh, they act kind of strangely. We, uh, we, we didn't have a profile of what a drug user looked like. But our rangers....

I had, I think it was five rangers - maybe it was six - that were trained in law enforcement. Some of them with the FBI. They were highly trained law officers and knew how to handle themselves, and knew the rules of the road as far as investigations are concerned. So, those people, working with the two park policemen, we started making cases. We had our own magistrate in the park - a gentleman named Charlie Shannon. And, uh, we could handle the cases right in the park at that level. They would have to make an appearance in the district or federal court somewhere, but Charlie would write out the papers and, and, you know, get that started.

The FBI would come down occasionally and help us out. So would the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration]. Uh, they used to have an office in Alpine and they closed it down right after, right after I got there - moved it to Midland. But anyway, we, we started putting the pressure on, and I talked to the regional director Kowski and I said, "Frank, I need about ten men, uh, for a detail that going to take about a week." So, he said, you know, he asked me what I was going to do. And I said I was going to put the pressure on; I don't want this to get out of hand. It's, it's dangerous. It is really dangerous. So he allowed me to call several parks, and I got ranchers with law enforcement training to all come down. And we ran round-the-clock patrols along the river. The park.... You couldn't find dope anywhere in the park [chuckles]. We shut it down.

And what precipitated this crackdown was a shoot-out that we had down at Boquillas. Uh, two brothers from Houston had come to Boquillas, and they had watched the Tom Snyder Show. I don't know whether you've ever watched Tom Snyder.

M: Yes, right. Uh, uh.

C: And he had a dope dealer on, back in [19]72 or whenever it was. And he said, if you wanted to get some marijuana right now, how would you get it. And this dope dealer, he, he said, "Well, you drive west, or east, from El Paso till you come to Alpine, head south, follow the signs that say Castolon, park in the parking lot at Castolon with your

lights aimed at the village across the way, blink your lights two or three times and wait." And when I heard this, going out on national television, I could not believe it. And this is exactly what was happening.

And that's how these youngsters got involved - I call them youngsters; they were young, young adults. And they were just, they bought marijuana just for personal use. We, we didn't mess around with personal use stuff, and, uh, yet on the other hand, you know, we had this - give them a slap on the wrist or something. Cause at that time the possession of any controlled substance was against the law. Now some cities have, uh, you know they're getting so much, they set a limit. It's got to be more than one ounce or more than one kilo, or, you know.

But we arrested this young men. It was a road stop and, and, uh, took them before the magistrate. He bound them over to district court, I, in, some place in Houston, where they were to make an appearance.

M: Had they obtained a quantity of marijuana?

C: Yes, yes, they had obtained two packages of about, about a pound a piece. And, uh, this was on a Friday. Saturday morning, I walked, went down to the office. I, I usually went down on Saturday morning and caught up on some work, or, wanted to see what was going on. And I ran into Wayne Maliski, the U.S. Park policeman, and I, he told me about these two boys, and I, I thought about it.

And I finally asked Wayne, I said, "Wayne, can we use these kids?" He said, "Let's find out." So we went in and we talked to both of them. They were two brothers. Talked to the older one and he said, "If, if you, if you'll release us we will, we'll do this." So a deal was struck. What the man was going to do, what the kid was going to do, was go back with the other undercover agent who was a young fellow named Parsons, wore tight Levis, looked like a hippie. And he was going to say, "This friend of mine wants some marijuana. Would you sell it to him?"

So, we started, we started the process. They went down ahead of us. And the chief ranger and Maliski and I went down and monitored the radio that Parsons had in his car, and sure enough, the same guy that had sold these two young men the marijuana came across. His name was Sergio Aranda, and he's the one I've been telling you about who'd been a concession employee at one time. And he asked, he said, "What, what do you want?" And this kid said, "Well, I ran into this friend of mine, and he, uh, he wants about 20 pounds."

I forget what that is in kilos - but he wants about 20 pounds. That would be enough to be a little awkward to handle, you know, you couldn't throw it in the river. And he said, "It'll take me about an hour to get that much together. Why don't you wait?" So we all waited. And it was about an hour, hour and a half, came across...

M: In the meantime, he's rowing back and forth across?

C: He's riding his horse.

M: Riding a horse?

C: Riding a horse, yeah. And, uh, Parsons had seen the picture of Sergio that we had - we had a good intelligence, uh, setup where we had pictures of as many people as we could get, of people on the other side, who were up to no good. It's kind of a rouge's gallery, and we knew Sergio had, uh, had been in trouble before with narcotics. And, uh, here he came with this, uh, big bag.

In those days, twenty pounds of marijuana was not a lot of money. And we had a flash roll prepared, with a couple of one hundred dollar bills on the top. And it looked like an awful lot of money, but it wasn't. And, uh, Parsons flashed the money and the kid took the dope, took out a knife that he had and opened it and looked at it and at that moment Parsons said, "I'm a federal officer. You're under arrest."

But Sergio, uh, hit his horse and the horse bumped into Parsons. Then Parsons emptied his gun at him, and went back to the car and got a shotgun and missed him. He was shooting downhill, which is.... And he was nervous. And he, Sergio just floated down the river somehow, and got away with horses running across the pasture. And, uh, that's when we called in DEA and FBI and, and all the others. A federal officer had been shot at. Luckily, Parsons escaped with his life. This guy was very close to him.

That caused us to speed up the, uh, interdiction down there. And we had it under control. We were, we were keeping it to a minimum, uh, we were getting pretty good at it because we could almost tell by looking at a vehicle where the vehicle was, whether it had any dope in it or not. And their favorite trick was to, uh, take an old vehicle or pickup truck and take it to a shop in Muzquiz [cq], which is about a hundred miles south of the park, near, uh, Monclova [cq], in Mexico. They'd take it to this body shop and they'd cut little holes where it had double paneling and drop sacks and sacks full of marijuana into all these holes.

M: Mr. Carithers, how would you spell Muzquiz?

C: M-U-S-Q-U-I-Z, Musquiz. [Actually, it is spelled M-U-Z-Q-U-I-Z, according to a National Geographic Society map of Mexico].

M: Okay.

C: And they would drop marijuana into all these, and then they would, uh, reweld it shut, sand it down, paint it, throw a little mud on it, you know, make it look dirty. And then they would drive up to Boquillas or San Vicente. Depends on whether the river was low or not. They'd drive across and if we saw a vehicle that looked like it had been in Mexico - if the wheels were wet - that was probable cause that they had been in, in the river.

And we have - I didn't realize this at the time - but they have, uh, a law known as the border search, and any law

enforcement officer can use it. If he has reason to believe there's drugs in a given vehicle, he doesn't, he doesn't have to see anything. If he just thinks, if there's something that leads him to believe that vehicle is coming back into this country from Mexico , he has a right to stop it.

Now this law was not written for, to catch drug dealers. It was meant to catch people from entering the country illegally. Just like you, if you leave the country, for example, from El Paso, and, uh, flew down to Mexico City, across the border, you would not be an American citizen, technically, anymore. You'd be subject to Mexican law. And you can not regain your citizenship - I'm oversimplifying this - but you can not regain your citizenship until you are checked by a Customs' man - that's the way the law reads. I couldn't believe it. It did not sound right to me, and I had, uh, some Border Patrol people explain it to me. And I read the law and that's what it says.

So, we had a whole new set of rules that we, if we had a feeling that this truck or this car or this camper had been in Mexico, we would have a right to stop them. We didn't have a right to search it, but - unless they gave us permission. And usually, these people were so confident that they were, they were going to get buy that they would give us their approval to search the vehicle.

And we, we captured, uh, one of the biggest loads that

had ever come out of there - six hundred and eight-three pounds of marijuana, I believe, uh, that had been loaded into a Camino, El Camino [Chevrolet] pickup. Every little nook and cranny of this thing - we, we got a blow torch and took it apart. And these were what they call "mules" that were driving it. They were not, they were in on the deal, of course, but they did not own the drugs. They were merely delivering it to somebody. In, uh, in some city. And they'd have road maps, and so forth. And, uh, ...

M: What about Sergio Aranda? Was he ever apprehended?

C: He was later. He had a drug network that was operating between the park and Liberal, KS. Liberal is where all the material went, and it was shipped out from there to various parts of the country.

And at that time, John, there were just, it was just marijuana. We would find a little cocaine, maybe in a glove compartment that was obviously, you know, their personal use. But in those days, even that counted. And, we just started making all kinds of cases.

I went down, I called a meeting of people in, in Boquillas, where this shootout had taken place. All the people from the village, the el presidente - corresponds to the major - and all the big people on the.... [hesitates] Did I say Boquillas?

M: Yes, you...

C: That should have been Santa Elena ...

M: Okay.

C: ... opposite Castolon. And we arranged a meeting, uh, didn't tell them where it was going to be. We just said, "Can you be at this meeting at two o'clock in the afternoon." The word came back that they would. We had a ranger down there, who knew these people very, very closely. And at Christmas he would act as Santa Claus, go down and hand out gifts and toys and candy and stuff. He, he got along fine with the people, but he was a very good ranger. And, uh, he was watching, he was watching things all the time.

Anyway, the meeting was held and we, we told them what we were going to do and we're going to lower the boom. And if you people don't want this to happen, get that trash out of your park, out of your town. We're not going to put up with it, and somebody is going to get hurt.

Well that seemed to, to drive them out. Uh, but then, this would only last for maybe a month or six weeks and they would, they would start it all over again. And I finally, working with the FBI, called a meeting in, uh, in El Paso with all the drug enforcement agencies from that area, along the Big Bend area, and the El Paso area, including the Texas Rangers and the Customs and Immigration, all, all, the sheriffs, the whole bit. And we worked out a little strategy.

Also, we had a, a U.S. District Attorney named Jamie Boyd ...

M: Yes.

C: Does his name ring a bell?

M: Yes.

C: Yeah, Jamie Boyd was, at that time I believe, was located in San Antonio.

M: Correct.

C: Uh, but Jamie knew what was going on. He was very sympathetic. He said, "This has been going on for years but the park service has shut its eyes to it." Obviously, they had. I was not told about it. And, uh, I resent that to this day that I was not told, cause I could, I could have gotten some people hurt. I had to learn it, all, all by myself, and when I would bring it up, when we would have a regional conference say, in, in Fort Worth or Santa Fe or somewhere, I would bring it up, and they would, the regional office people would jump me.

"Those people on the other side are nice people." I said, "Yeah, ninety percent of them are. Ninety-five percent. But there's a few rotten apples."

M: So, ...

C: There's always been smuggling on this border. It just happens that right now narcotics are more lucrative than rot-gut whisky and candelia wax, and they still wouldn't believe me. They kept telling me to back off, and I, I wouldn't.

M: So, it was not just the, your predecessors at Big Bend that

didn't inform you, it was the park service in general, the regional office, uh ...?

C: Well, in.... Kowski was the regional director at the time I transferred down there. And, and he, he didn't know that much about it, but once he found out what we were doing, that we were getting undercover people, uh.... See, this is all very strange for a park service person. It doesn't fit the park service image.

M: It's not in your mission statement exactly, I guess?

C: No. But, but at Big Bend something also that they, uh, forgot, and I had to live with it, was the type of jurisdiction we had. I had exclusive jurisdiction by law. Now most parks have, uh, what's the other form of jurisdiction? Concurrent jurisdiction? Which means they can work with any other law officers, but actually the local sheriff is responsible for what happens within the county.

At Big Bend, that wasn't the case. I had full jurisdiction. And, uh, because it was a border type park. And, uh, I was just doing my job, and, and we weren't letting anything else go. My God, maintenance and, and, uh, master planning and all the other stuff that goes with it was, was going on. But we felt we, uh, we had to give this some priority. This and the cattle grazing, which created a safety problem, or we'd be derelict in our responsibilities.

And I got chewed out, you know, several times, but people who would say, "You, you're going to have to stop

that [curtailing drug trafficking]." And I'd say, "Okay, put it in writing." Well, they couldn't do that, it was in the law.

M: Right.

C: And, I had my men wearing weapons. And, I got criticized for that. And I said, "Look, this is Texas." I had people come up to a ranger and say, "I'm sure glad to see you've got a gun on. Makes me feel more comfortable." I've been down there since, and they all wear guns, now.

M: This obviously was not happening at other national parks? Was this unique to Big Bend?

C: Sure, at Amistad, and, uh, uh, well there weren't any more. There aren't that many national parks on the border, Mexican border.

M: It was ...

C: You're probably right.

M: This was somewhat unique to Big Bend?

C: At Amistad [further downstream on the Rio Grande], I think there may have been.... See the lake formed the boundary line between the two [the U.S. and Mexico] and I'm sure there was, marijuana was carried out in a boat and given to another boat and, you know, there was some crossing.

M: But you had no other situation to call upon for, uh, experience elsewhere.

C: No, we were just, just following the book, and, and, uh, I had to rely heavily on these two, uh, national park police

who knew their narcotics, they knew them front and back.

And, uh, even the Washington office got into the act.

M: Why do you think the park service, regional and/or national was reluctant to, uh, pursue this with the vigor that you ...

C: John, I can't give you an, an answer on that. I think it was something new to them. They kept telling me, that's something for the local sheriff to take care of. And I said, "Look, I've got exclusive jurisdiction. I've got five rangers trained better than that sheriff, and the book says, we will uphold all the laws of the United States. And we can do it. We have been doing it." And they said, "Well, your rangers, somebody is going to get hurt." And, uh, I said, "My rangers have more sense than you think they do." And we never had anybody, anybody get hurt.

And it's still going on. This is what bothers me. I've been down, several times, and it's, it's now, it's cocaine, heroin, and, uh, we worked very closely with the Mexican government on the other side. I would have meeting at, uh....

I remember one meeting we had at La Linda, which is downriver ...

M: Right.

C: ... from the park. And we met, uh, in the old mine building. They had a big, uh, big room there with a big table in it. And all the military, the Federales and, uh, Rurales from

that part of Mexico came to this meeting. And, flew in, and we had about a four hour meeting discussing all of this. And, uh, they ...

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 2 OF 3

BEGINNING OF SIDE B, TAPE 2 OF 3

- M: [Mr. Carithers, you were telling about] ... working with Mexican law enforcement, uh ...
- C: Yes, we ...
- M: ... controlling the drug problem.
- C: We thought that, by meeting with them, and discussing these, uh, local problems - and by the way, Big Bend is one of, I think one, one of two national parks where the superintendent can meet directly with Mexican officials. I think Glacier's the same way. They can meet directly with Canadian officials. It doesn't have to go through the state department. And I could negotiate. It's written into the law.
- M: This was the enabling law creating the park?
- C: Yes.
- M: Okay. So that's a unique power that you had?
- C: It, it was, and I made several trips to Mexico to talk to attorneys, state attorneys, from Coahuila and Chihuahua, and, uh, regarding some incidents that had happened in the

park, and, uh, we talked about extradition of these people. We had pretty solid evidence of who it was, and it was very difficult. We, uh, Mexico doesn't, doesn't extradite people [chuckling] around. You know, they just kind of ignored us. But, uh,...

M: Mr. Carithers, uh, may I back up a moment?

C: Sure.

M: The two brothers from Houston, uh, do you recall their names.

C: I sure don't.

M: Okay. That would be in the records somewhere.

C: I've got it in the file, somewhere. We, we had to fill out a, I say we. Our rangers had to fill out an incident report any time there was anything happened that required their assistance. This were usually law enforcement or car stops or somebody lost their glasses, you know. And you had to write down the date, who they were. It was a pretty good system. It was a little painstaking. It took, it took some time. But I've got a stack of those about six inches high [chuckles], just for about a two-year period. Uh,...

M: Would, uh, would those still be on file at the park.

C: They probably would be. I know I kept a copy.... The superintendent kept, kept a copy in his desk. I had one in my desk. And I think that the ranger division kept one, and one was sent to Santa Fe, I believe.

But, while all this drug, un, interdiction was going

on, we had threats - telephone threats. We had people dropping word that they would like to bump us off. We had, I had a price on my head. That's just how bad it was, and I'm not saying that for dramatics, or anything. It's, we used, we used to laugh about because some of the Customs' men would also have a price on their head, but it would be as high as mine. [He and interviewer laugh] They'd make a joke of it.

And, uh, but they wanted us to stop, and I, and I said I'm not going to stop as long as it's working. And I had the regional office pulled some real fast ones. They sent me a letter that had been written by some guy, supposedly in Odessa - uh, or maybe it was Midland - saying that those people down there at Boquillas are nice people. This happened right after there had been a, a, uh, shootout at San Vicente.

M: Or Santa Elena?

C: No, San Vicente.

M: San Vicente. Another shootout?

C: Another shootout. Uh, my men were involved only in, uh, in backup on it. They blocked all the roads. Wouldn't let any traffic through. But we had a young student named Klinger [sounds like] from Sul Ross [State University] who wanted to do something for law enforcement. He was a law enforcement major. And he was working undercover with Customs, and, uh, and DEA, and he was buying his stuff at San Vicente. And he

finally reached the point where he was going to go into the big time and I think he wanted to get a hundred pounds, or something. And, uh, Customs went along with him on it.

They put their men, uh, very close to the scene. A pickup came across about midnight, parked in the parking lot at San Vicente, and, right up close to him, his with the headlights together, and they showed the cash and then they went around and looked at the dope. Then they went back around and they were going to exchange the cash when one of the dope dealers pulled out a gun and shot this young man. Killed him. People down river at Rio Grande camp grounds said it sounded like thunder. It was a firefight. It was god-awful.

And I, I was not directly involved with that. Customs did it. Uh, I knew about it. Uh, but it was good law enforcement work. We were trying to do, you know.... It just backfired. We had a lot of ripoff like that where the Mexicans would put up, put up dope and then they'd shot you. Keep the money and the dope. This went on all the time.

M: While all this was going on, if we can change gears slightly, what was happening policy-wise and activity-wise with the, with the intended purpose of the park?

C: Right.

M: Were there, for example, was river rafting in 1971 and later a, a major enterprise commercially or recreationally?

C: It's not, it was not the enterprise that it is today. There

were, there were several rafters who operated out of, uh, Lajitas and Terlingua. And, uh, they had to get permits from us, and we had to check their equipment and all that. And, uh, they would, they would usually go through Santa Elena, and, uh, it was, you know, about three-quarters of a day trip. They'd usually eat lunch just before they got to the Rock Slide, and then go on through. Uh, it wasn't that big a deal. It began to grow.

I had people from, who were running the Rio Grande [the Colorado River] come down and talk to me about, uh, running the Rio - I'm sorry, they were running the Colorado - and they wanted to run the Rio Grande when, during the slack season.

And we didn't allow anyone on the river when the water got below a certain level at Boquillas, the measuring station. And this was posted every morning, uh, on all bulletin boards all over the park. Because, as you know, when the river is down, those rocks are all exposed, and, uh, the river is slower, but you're going to be going through a lot of rocks. And the chances of you capsizing are greatly increased. So, I, I think that this, I think it was eight feet at the measuring station at Boquillas. I'm, I'm not sure.

M: Was the limit?

C: It was something like that. If it was eight feet, you'd get a permit. If it wasn't, you'd have to wait. Now most of the

water that was coming into the river, was coming in from, uh, Los Conchos, which was above Presidio.

M: From the Mexican side.

C: Mexican side. I'd say half the water, there wasn't much coming down from the U.S. side.

M: You mentioned your unique, uh, responsibilities of authority as superintendent to deal with Mexico. Uh, the international park idea that goes back to the 1930s ...

C: Right [chuckles].

M: ... uh, and still has yet to come to any fruition. Were you personally involved in any activities regarding that?

C: Yes, we, we had, uh, we had a continuing relationship with certain people in Mexico on this, uh, on this park idea. Uh, the people who build roads, for example, in Mexico wanted to put some kind of a bridge crossing at Boquillas. Thinking that would help, you know, traffic into Mexico. Uh, we didn't want this bridge to be built [laughs]. Cause it would create all kinds of problems. That never got off the ground.

But Big Bend is a unique area, because it is not on the way to some other place. It's not like Yellowstone or Yosemite or any of these other inland parks. You go to Big Bend to see Big Bend. You know?

M: Right.

C: And, well you can go up river and see Ojinaga and Presidio, and, but, ninety-nine point nine percent of the people were there to see that park. It meant they had to drive ninety

miles out of the way, off the main highway, in order to get there. So these....

Our attendance figures when I was there were not, they were going up, they were increasing. We had gas problems. Remember in [19]73, the rationing, not rationing, but long lines at gas stations. People with Winnebagos were in real trouble, because they couldn't buy enough, enough gas [chuckles] and the price was shooting sky-high. This was during the, uh, the embargo.

M: Right.

C: But our attendance was going up, and unlike a lot of parks, we, we counted our attendance two ways: one was how many entered the park and then how many days did each person stayed. And we, we kept talking about visitor days. And we had, we would have twice as many visitor days, for example, as Saguaro, near Tucson. Cause those people would go out to Saguaro, see it in one day and leave. But at Big Bend, they'd usually spend the night.

M: Get at least two for one.

C: And that meant another day, or possibly three or four. We had of lot of, uh, snowbirds who came down from the north, uh, when it started getting cold up there and would camp out at Rio Grande Village. And, uh, we, we had to limit that to fourteen days, and, uh, word got around. People knew they couldn't stay. It wasn't fair to have a waiting list, you know. And now, I guess they've got it on a reservation

system, and it, its working out. We were working on that whenever I left.

But, but the park was proceeding. We, we had a good interpretative program. We, uh, I haven't been to an interpretative program in the last fifteen - ten - years, so I don't know what, what they're doing now, but we had some really enthusiastic people then. I'm not saying they don't know, but we had some good, good interpretation. And, uh ...

M: They, they obviously are hoping to improve that, being the purpose of this interview and the others like it we're doing in this project, uh, is to help improve that interpretation. Broaden it and update it if necessary.

C: Well Big Bend has a little something for everybody. You know, if you're interested in just scenery, if you're interested in, in the American-Mexico history, uh, if you just like the desert. And then, you know, you can go up to the Basin and on up to, uh, the Chisos and get into the pines and the aspen and, uh, you go through about three or four life zones in a short period of time.

If you're a birder, it has more birds than the Everglades. Uh, at least it did at one time. Now maybe they, they've caught up with us. I don't know.

M: Before we conclude, Mr. Carithers, there are, I want to back up just a moment to the international park idea ...

C: Yeah, I ...

M: ... and ask if you could succinctly tell me what that

concept was and what your personal opinion was and/or is, uh, about the validity of such an idea.

C: That, that idea had been going around since the park was first established. I, I read the file on it when I was there, and, uh, in fact we had a meeting with their [Mexico's] minister of interior who came up to Big Bend and spent two or three days and we had a series of meeting with our regional and Washington office people. And we had maps, and then we made grand plans and, and.... Nothing ever comes of it.

We have a wild river down there, but it's only on our side of the boundary. Mexico does not recognize the wild river on their side. And that, that's kind of [chuckling] silly.

M: What do you mean by "wild river."

C; Well, the Rio Grande, uh, all the way through the park, except at certain places, such as Castolon and Boquillas, is considered a, a part of the wild river system of the country. And, uh, this, this is a concept that came out back in the [19]60s. Uh, a national....

M: It's a national designation?

C: We included seashores in that, at that time, national seashores. Uh, but the trouble with the, with the setting aside of a large area in Mexico as a companion park - and that's how we referred to it - it never got off the ground, because a lot of the land had tremendous resources on it.

Uh, the mountain range that ran into Mexico. Gosh, I can't think of the name of it now.

M: Uh, Carmen del Sierra, or ...

C: Carmen del ...

M: ... Sierra del Carmen?

C: Sierra del Carmen. Beautiful range of mountains. And if you come up on them from the east side you go through these magnificent ponderosa pine forests. It's a gradual slope, and then you get to the top and it drops right straight down. But that has commercial value. There are minerals that are located, uh, just across the border.

M: And, and that does not fit into the American concept of parklands are generally worthless for commercial ...

C: They would say that they would try to buy these people out or give them money in lieu of income or, you know, something so that it would allow them to establish it. But the, but the fly in the ointment was the bridge. I think they thought they could just put this bridge in and then people could drive easily into a Mexican park on the other side. And that never got off the ground.

M: So is it your opinion that the, the idea is probably infeasible?

C: [Pauses] I hate to say this, but I think yes. I think that's true. Uh, Mexico makes a lot of promises and I've been caught in the middle of some of their promises being reneged upon. When they won't follow up. And I think they would like

to see it happen, but they, they can't just wave a magic wand and have this national park established. You're going to have to develop it, and that involves a lot of bucks, or pesos.

M: And considering Mexico's traditional economic situation, it's not foreseeable that it would become an economic priority.

C: Now, now they wouldn't admit that. Uh, as I say, they had meetings, uh, they've had meetings since the [19]40s on this very subject. We had one when I was down there. And we had people in that conference who were in a position to make decisions but they couldn't. And, it, you know, we each went back to our individual parks and forgot about it. And I, I hope it happens, but I don't, I don't think it ever will. I, these *ejidos* which run up and down the river, these little villages?

M: Right.

C: They would have to do something with those, uh, you know, people living in them. They have to buy them out, maybe relocate them, or something, because they're grazing cattle and sheep and goats.

M: Mr. Carithers, if we were to fantasize for a moment, uh, ignoring reality of Mexico's economic and political situation, if an international park were to be established would it be something of great grandeur, considering the Mexican side?

C: I, I, I think they've got some property down there that is magnificent. And, uh, I didn't get into it when I was superintendent there, but the Sierra Del Carmen range, I've flown over it many times and it is.... Well, they have some wildlife in there that we, we didn't have in the park, like the bear for example - the black bear. [The noise of a passing train is heard in the background.] Now they've got black bears in Big Bend National Park. They came from the Sierra Del Carmen.

M: And migrated north.

C: And I, I keep thinking there might be wolves. The Mexican wolf might be found there, and, uh, they've got mines operating in there, however. They've got sawmills. They've got, uh, well not any other commercial activities, but they, they slash and burn.

And, well I don't know why we haven't gotten together on the wild river proposal. We established our side of the river as a wild river. That's from the middle up to our bank, is wild. You can't build anything on it. You can't put in docks or things of this kind. It's the same as a wilderness area. But Mexico has not.... Unfortunately, there's nothing going on that's going to damage that part of the river in Mexico. There was some mining that was taking ore out.

By the way, they were taking it through Boquillas and up through Panther Junction in big mining trucks. And that

was one of the first jobs that I had to do was to stop that cause they were tearing our roads to pieces. And, uh, I, I finally had some meetings with the people who were doing the hauling. He was hauling, uh, on a, on a mileage basis - being paid by the mile - up to Marathon where it was picked up by train and taken to various places. Uh, we got that stopped. And right away our roads began to get better [chuckles]. But he was tearing our roads to pieces. They were paying us a little, penny a mile, or something like that.

M: You mentioned wildlife briefly. Were they any particular management challenges within the park on wildlife.

C: You know, John, we had.... I was, I was, when I was superintendent there, I never saw a mountain lion and yet you hear these stories of these tame mountain lions that walk up to people when they're on the trails up in the Chisos and put their paw on their shoulder, and you know, do all kinds of weird things.

Uh, we had a young man there who was - I think he lived in Marathon - doing a study of the mountain lion in Big Bend. And there were a lot of them. He said that at any one time there may be up to seven mountain lions within the park. That's a pretty good number for.... Cause their range is great. I mean, it.... He tracked one from the park all the way to an area just south of Fort Stockton. He put collars on them. And, uh, we had a lot of lion sightings. I

never saw one.

Uh, I had one, uh, Christian Ministry fellow come out and his first night there he was driving up to the Basin and here this mountain lion crossed his path. The first, first two hours he'd been in the park. And I, and I had never seen one. [Both laugh.] But, uh...

M: In the 1970s, to my understanding, nationally there were a number of issues concerning national parks and wildlife, uh, the preservation versus use issues...

C: The Leopold Report...

M: ... Leopold Report, uh, I'm thinking of a book about Yellowstone - Playing God In Yellowstone - uh, that's somewhat, well ...

C: Trying to restore natural ...

M: Yes, and the issue of where you draw the line between restoration or preservation and still maintain use. Was that a policy concern of your, or if not policy, perhaps ...

C: No, for example, we had water all over the park and, uh, in little ponds and springs and the river itself, so we didn't have to put in any water sources, which I would have considered an intrusion. You know, to support, say a deer herd.

Uh, we had the little Carmen whitetail in the Basin which is a different subspecies. One of the whitetail.

M: It's called the Carmen whitetail?

C: Unh, unh.

M: As in C-A-R-M-E-N.

C: Like the mountain, yeah. And this is a very small, uh, colorful deer. It's a kind of a tan color, but they're a little bit smaller than the average whitetail. And they're, they're noticeable up there all the time. They're not afraid of people. They'll come right in your back yard. But, uh, no. We, we didn't have....

We had a good road system, and yet it was not overwhelming. You, you could get away from that road system very easily, and, uh, the wildlife did not.... The only problem we had with the wildlife involved the [chuckles] Gambusia fish, down at Rio Grande Village. I don't know if you're familiar with that.

M: No sir. [laughs] Could you spell that?

C: Gambusia. G-A-M-B-U-S-A-I, I think. Gambusia. [Actually, it's spelled G-A-M-B-U-S-I-A.]

M: Okay.

C: It's a pupfish. And it's about, a little over an inch long. It's found only - this particular kind - it, you know, they're found all over the country. They have them in Death Valley, and they have them in Arizona and other places. But this particular species, subspecies I think it is, is found only in Big Bend and it's in a pond down at Rio Grande Village. But the pond is artificial. It's overflow from our irrigation system, and this always bothered me. You know, I'm kind of a purist as far as nature is concerned. Here we

were supporting a population but doing it through unnatural means.

But one year, uh, we had a little pump that kept water flowing in, even in the winter time when we weren't irrigating, and that pump broke down, and, I don't know, there was some slippage and our maintenance man didn't catch it, and the pond dried up. And, oh, I got chewed out. I mean, I don't know if you know Dr. Carl Hubbs.

M: No sir.

C: He's a fish expert. And, oh, I had wiped out a rare and endangered species, and, he went on and on and on. And, uh, the regional office jumped all over me. So we got the pump fixed and filled the pond and in about a week we had about a couple of million fish. All they had done is gone in the mud.

M: Hibernated, or whatever the term is.

C: Estivation. They'd gone in and no one knew that they did this. I suspected it, because I had worked at Canyonlands National Park before, where we have, I called them transient ponds. You have a rain storm, fills up with water and then it dries out. But there's mud in the bottom. And it may look dry, but there are shrimp, little miniature shrimp, living in that, uh, baked soil. You can fill it full of water and two, three days later the shrimp will come out.

And I suspected this about the gambusia because they have some at Organ Pipe Cactus, a national monument in

Arizona. And, uh, the superintendent there - I can't think of his name - he, he told me that a times, the fish would disappear. You wouldn't see them, when the water was down, real low and, you know, everybody would get worried. Well, all they were doing was burrowing into the mud. It's, it's their way of perpetuating themselves.

M: [Chuckles] When you left there in 1977, uh, did you leave the park service or just that assignment.

C: No, what I did, uh, is, because of all the pressure that was being exerted by the regional office. It got to the point that it was, it was just really silly. Uh, they were, uh, this is going to be in the book that I'm writing, too, so I'm not telling any stories out of school. They began to harass me and wanted me to seek a transfer. And I, I told them, I said, "I don't want a transfer."

And they kept putting the pressure on me. They would send their safety engineer down, almost every week, and he'd find something that was wrong and I would have to correct it. And, most parks don't get a safety inspection except once or twice a year. And, it was just a whole series of situations.

So, they had a job opening in Santa Fe, and my wife and I - Hilde - Hilde, my wife, and I had lived in Santa Fe for quite some time, earlier, and we went up and did the usual house-hunting bit, located a house, packed up and left and went to Santa Fe. And, uh, what they put me to work on what

was just a, sort of a special task force, dealing with special problems that didn't, that weren't covered by somebody else. And I just, I just got kind of fed up with their philosophy.

They weren't supporting the field. I, I'm an oldtimer. I grew up where the superintendent was the captain of the ship. He was there, and he knew what was going on. I never did anything to embarrass the service, embarrass the public, embarrass the regional office or anyone else. It was a difference of opinion. It wasn't a difference in policy, because they had to follow the same policy I did. Except they were shutting their eyes to it.

And it really got, got very, very bad. So I, we, we, I decided to go up to Santa Fe and I went up there. It was in the middle of the winter. I got pneumonia, and, uh, was offered a job by the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute that works out of Alpine [Tx.] and it was tentative. It was not a.... We hadn't discussed it in great detail. But I just decided I would.... Hell, I was only fifty-two [laughs]. Or, whatever. I was invincible, you know. So I resigned from the National Park Service. Cause it was just going down hill. It was going down hill.

And, uh, people were getting, uh.... I was, I was a nut when it came to policy and doing things by the book, on uniforms, on law enforcement, on resource protection, and I, I tried to do everything right. And...

END OF SIDE B, TAPE 2 OF 3

BEGINNING OF SIDE A, TAPE 3 OF 3

- C: ...they, they wanted that adversarial relationship.
M: So you just really found yourself at loggerheads with ...
C: I did.
M: ... the NPS administration.
C: There were principles involved. I couldn't live with myself. So, I, I resigned. I had nothing by this Chihuahuan Desert thing, and I, I later found out what that expected me to do was to, uh, raise all my own salary - go out and raise money - and raise money for the institution. And I wasn't about to get locked into something like that. That was too nebulous.

So, I, uh, oh, I went to Utah and, uh, where I had worked before. Finally decided, my wife and I, that we'd come back to Texas. So we loaded a horse trailer up with our horse and dog and all our stuff, and came back to Texas. And the first place we went to, of course, was Odessa. I'd love to live close to Big Bend. But, uh, there's not many jobs in Alpine, or Marathon.

So we went to Odessa, and, uh, I had a job first day I was here. It was an oilfield type job. But I took it anyway, until I could find something else. And then about, uh, two months later - a month later - I, uh, went to city hall and found out they needed a planner. This was during the boom, and they were building houses, subdivisions, like crazy. I'd

always wanted to work for a municipality. I'd worked for counties, I'd worked on state parks, I'd worked for the feds, but I'd never worked a municipal system. So, I signed up.

I worked there for five years as a planner, and then the city took over all the county parks, the county had run up until that time. And I was put in for the job and was selected, and spent five years, uh, as their parks director here in Odessa.

M: And you're now retired from that?

C: Now I'm retired and, uh still living here. We may be going back to Arizona. There's some nice places there. And, uh, we're looking around the Payson area. We've got relatives there, and Arizona is still a nice state, although it's awfully crowded.

M: When you left Big Bend in 1977, Mr. Carithers, uh, were there, was there anything in particular that you left undone or, or felt, uh, like you wished you could have finished?

C: No, uh, I had done a lot of little things. For example, down at Rio Grande Village, we had a severe problem with all those cottonwoods trees. They're beautiful; you look at them and they're, they're beautiful. And it's a little oasis down there.

But these trees were dying off, and we finally got a hold of the for.... I got a hold of the forest service and we had a forester come down and, uh, he took some samples

back with him. And he found a, uh, a fungus was attacking these, these trees. And what we needed to do was grow a strain that was immune to this, uh, this fungus. Or, and as the trees died - and they were dying off two or three a year - and we would replace them with new trees.

So I set up a little, uh, tree farm. We sterile, we sterilized the soil and irrigated it down at Rio Grande Village. And this took, took a lot of my time. I, I was seeing these forest service people, but it was a resource that I thought should be protected. And I got some clean, uh, clean cuttings and planted about two or three hundred trees.

M: Had it been determined that the cottonwoods were native to the area?

C: They, they had been brought in from outside, uh, probably from the Del Rio area. And this fungus, we don't think the trees - there's anything wrong with the trees - they were just susceptible to being wiped out to the fungus.

M: What I'm referring to, I guess, is, uh, in the issue or the question of, uh, preservation and, and restoration, were cottonwoods a native park plant?

C: Yes, it was a native park plant.

M: Okay, so that would fit into the policy, even though you were planting new trees, that was preserving a natural resource.

C: Yes. If a tree went out, uh, it usually died from the top

down. We would remove it, and, uh, and plant one of these, this new stock that we had, we had, uh, raised. And fumigating the soil and all that, took a lot of time. And I went back a year later, and the superintendent didn't even know about that tree farm. I went down and looked for it - it was gone. They didn't follow up on it a bit. So they've still got a lot of diseased trees down there. They're going to have a problem, one of these days.

M: What is your best assessment of the status of Big Bend park today from whatever re ...

C: I can't really give you one, uh, because I haven't been down there enough. Uh, it's easy to go down and drive the roads and see things that are not, not right. You, you could do this at any park. Uh ...

M: Particularly from a qualified eye ...

C: I'm not going to criticize the superintendent, because that's - he may be under some pressure to do something else. You follow me?

M: Right.

C: He's the one that's on the ground and has to make the decisions. And the one that's there now is a fellow by the name of [Robert] Arnberger.

M: And he is now on his way, uh, to the superintendency at Grand Canyon.

C: I figured that [laughing]. They, uh, I got word he was building a new ho..., they were building a new

superintendent's residence for him. I read that somewhere. And I said, Rob will never live in it [both laugh]. So he's going, going to Grand Canyon?

M: Yes, if not already gone, it's very soon.

C: Rob was a, was a good man. I, I, he was one of those special people we called in when we needed all that law enforcement, uh, work going on in the park.

M: And for tape purposes, we're talking, referring about, or to, Robert Arnsberger.

C: Okay, there's Robert and there's - he goes by the name Rob ...

M: Yes. I believe his father also was in the park service.

C: His, his father was a good friend of mine. His name is Les.

M: Les Arnsberger?

C: Les Arnsberger. That's how I got acquainted with, with, uh, Rob. He came down, uh, to act as a law enforcement person, and, uh, he, he knew about the drug problem. But, uh, I'm sure that the region was putting pressure on him to play that down. Play it down! And, it's one of those things you, uh, you can play it down. You can just ignore it and nobody will know about it. But somebody's going to get hurt, and that, that was.... Especially when it was being advertised on national television [chuckles] that this is the place to get your dope. We had Winnebagos come through there just loaded to the gills with dope, stuck in every cabinet.

M: Other than the economic impact the drug trade had on the

area, what was your assessment in the 1970s and since then if you have any perspective on what the park has meant to the surrounding areas, uh, and communities, uh, in the entire Big Bend area?

C: Okay, uh, it's highly regarded. They, they realize it's a little jewel. And - not little, it's pretty good sized - but, uh, all the people in the towns of Marfa, Marathon and Alpine play it up, you know. Marfa's the "gateway" city to Big Bend National Park. Well, it depends on which gate you're going through [chuckling].

M: Right.

C: They're all gateway cities. But, uh, they play it up. They love the park. Uh, we always regretted that, that Alpine was so far away that we couldn't go into town and, uh, spend the night, or spend the evening with dinner with someone, and then drive home. It was, it.... You wouldn't get home until midnight - two or three o'clock in the morning. Unless you wanted to stay over, and, uh, which we did, we did a great deal.

And, uh, the superintendent was kind of looked up to. I know when we got into town, we went around to the various stores and, in due time, you know, shopping, and had accounts set up in our names at almost every store in town. They said, "No, you don't have to pay for that. We'll send you a bill."

M: So, they were very amiable to, uh, park personnel.

- C: That's very unusual in, in other parks that I've been in. And they had a great deal of, uh.... We had a big natural history association, which is a group that, that handles all the publications that the, uh, park sells. That's a separate entity from the park.
- M: Right.
- C: It's run by the ...
- M: The Southwestern Parks' Association?
- C: No, it wasn't. We had our own.
- M: The Big Bend ...?
- C: Big Bend Natural History Association. And, uh, Southwest - the one out of Globe [AZ.] - they covered a lot of, uh, of monuments. I think Jackson [?] used to be in charge of that. But we had our own natural history association, and, uh, if you've been down there lately you can see the number of books and, uh.... When I first went there, we just had one little book shelf where you could buy books. And it, it's now quite a collection of books, not just on the park, but on deserts all across the country - and historical books.
- M: Mr. Carithers, before we conclude at this moment, is there anything that we haven't addressed that you would like to preserve on tape - any further comment?
- C: Well, if we move to Arizona, we're going to miss Big Bend. It, uh.... The Sonoran Desert is, is exciting. I grew up in it. But the Chihuahuan Desert is every bit as exciting. And, uh, there is a lot of overlap. Deserts aren't all the same,

but there are certain things about them. And the Chihuahua Desert is far more complicated than the Sonoran. And, uh, it's isolation is the thing that has really saved it. I don't know what their attendance is, uh, at this date. Maybe you have that?

M: I, I'm, off the top of my head - three hundred and fifty thousand a year.

C: Yeah. We, were.... I think we had a hundred and seventy [thousand] the first year I got there - a hundred and seventy thousand. But, see there was a, uh, oil embargo. People just weren't traveling.

M: Right.

C: And we sold gas in the park for a few cents more than they did in the surrounding towns because of the distances of hauling it down there. And, uh, but we, we had our own safety program in place. We had, we had an excellent concession operation. We had two of them - one, with the Chisos Remuda, which runs the horses for trips up into the mountains. And, uh, the other is the Chisos Lodge, Chisos Mountain Lodge.

M: Mr. Carithers, after a very lengthy interview here, if there's nothing in particular, then I think we should conclude at this time.

C: Very well. I'm sure that after we've hung up, we'll [chuckles] think of... [inaudible].

[At this point, the tape machine was turned off, but Carithers kept talking. A moment later, the interview was resumed in mid-sentence.]

C: ... you should run your park. That's what you get paid for [chuckles]. And, we had a lot of construction going on, when I was there. You know, painting water tanks and, uh, and putting in sewer systems and We were putting a sewage system up in the Basin. We picked a spot. And the Basin, as you know, is quite small really. There's very little level ground. It had to be built kind of on the side of a hill. And, uh, this was to be a, aw, they have - it's a tertiary treatment plant - goes through three, three cycles and the water ends up in evaporating ponds down below. And, uh, it was state of the art type of plant. And we approved all the plans, you know, and we, we started building the thing.

And I, I was, I went on vacation and I told my chief of maintenance to kind of ride herd on it. When I got back, I, I went out to look at the site, because it was an expensive project. And I looked down in this big pit they had dug, and that's where the plant was going to go. And right in the bottom of that pit there was some gray-colored clay. And I got down in there and looked at it.

And I, I talked to the park service construction man, construction superintendent. See, when they're doing construction in a park they send down a construction superintendent from our Denver Service Center. He's an

expert on construction. And usually the superintendent doesn't get involved. But I did, I, I went down, I said, "What's that stuff down there?" He said, oh, it's just clay. And I went down and I looked at it and it was bentonite. And he said, "Well, so what? It's just bentonitic clay." And I said, "You're building a sewage treatment plant right on top of something that's going to, that's going to heave."

I had been, I had lived in Utah long enough where they really have a lot of bentonite, and you can dig out a road bed for a road twelve feet deep, put in boulders and resurface it and this stuff will still push those boulders up. And it expands - it has a differential expansion rate - it'll expand at different rates all over. Doesn't come up as one big mass.

And he, he didn't believe it. And I said, "Well, let's collect some samples and send it in to Sul Ross. In the meantime, stop the project." He said, "You can't do that." I said, "Well, I going to have to."

So we sent some samples in, and sure enough the report came back and it was, it was bentonitic clay. And, uh, he did, they did some tests on it, and it would of, it would have wrecked that plant if we'd have built it on top of that.

The region called me and chewed me out, just terribly. Said, "That's not your job." And I said I'm trying to save the taxpayers some money. I said, uh, it's not being done

right. "Well, smarty, how would, what would you do about it?" And I said, well, the only thing I can think now, is to put in a, a plastic membrane to keep the rain from hitting that clay and causing it to expand.

So, they did. They got a plastic membrane, but the plastic membrane had holes all in it. I didn't know this. I learned it later after the job. This treatment plant has got big cracks in it. It's being held together with - they're patching it every year. And it, it could have been done so nicely.

But, we don't have people in the service anymore who believe the captain of the ship philosophy. And I wrote the administrative policies handbook for the National Park Service and know exactly what a superintendent's job is. It's, it's everything in the park. Everything that's going on is his baby. And, uh, ...

M: Do you feel, Mr. Carithers, that the captain-of-the-ship mentality as you've described it in perspective, does that emanate from the beginning days of Stephen Mather and Horace Albright?

C: Yes. They felt that these were men who knew their area. In those days, there were no schools to go to to learn park administration, park or recreation administration. You were probably a cowboy-type, you know, out in the West. Maybe you were a hunter. Maybe you were a trapper. But if you were good at what you did and could handle yourself in the, in

the wild country, they would put you in uniform and gave you a horse and you were in business. And, uh, it was your job to run that show.

Now the rules were real limited them, like any, like any enterprise when you start out - the rules were very, very limited. But the big law enforcement problem was poaching. The park service can talk about poaching until it's blue in the face, and they really get excited about poaching. We don't have that much poaching going on any more [chuckles]. You know, it takes another form.

M: So, do you believe the, the NPS is, has lost it's, it's, the purpose, the goal, the objectives as Mather and other founding administrators ...?

C: I honestly do. I, I don't think that they give the, uh, the superintendent enough latitude. That's what the handbooks were for. Uh, they were very vague - not vague, they were very broad so that superintendent could act within that framework at Yellowstone, at Everglades or at Saguaro. And, he was doing it right. It had a lot legal ramifications, but most superintendents now are, are a little gun-shy of making decisions without checking the regional office.

M: Would it be fair to say that the service has become too bureaucratic and too administratively oriented in the sense of pushing paper as opposed to managing parks, uh, the resources? Or is that an unfair ...?

C: I think they have. Uh, I think it, well I could quote

something that [Bruce] Babbitt said, secretary of the interior: "They turned the lights out on the NPS in 1979." Now I don't know what happened in [19]79. I guess that was Bush's election. Anyway, it was a date.... And he said that publicly. You don't, nobody.... For example, whenever the park service was, was without a superintendent and they were looking for a superintendent, or, I'm sorry, a director, you heard all kinds of names - Tom Brokaw [NBC network television news anchor], ...

M: I had heard this ...

C: ... Robert Redford [actor]. These names popped up. And who do they get? He, he's the guy that ran the Smithsonian Institute. I'm not saying he's, he's not a good supervisor.

M : We're talking about the current director?

C: Right, current director, Roger Kennedy. But, you don't see him on television. He's in a lot of documentaries, which he did with the Smithsonian. Uh, ...

M: Do you think someone like Robert Redford, or Tom Brokaw would be more suitable for the job?

C: No, no. I, in fact, those names frighten me. And I'm not saying those are bad people. They simply.... I think it should be someone from within the ranks. It, it has been, it always has been.

Every time they go outside, they get into trouble. And, they did that during the Nixon administration - they brought in an outsider. The last director that we really had, a man

who really ran the park service the way a director ought to run it was George Hartzog [NPS director, 1964-1972. Seven other directors have succeeded him, as of 1994.] George lives in Washington, uh, he's a lawyer - an attorney. He got in trouble with the Nixon Administration for some of the stuff that he was doing in the Everglades that Tony - what was his name, Ruby Rebozo [actually, Beebe Rebozo] [chuckles]

M: Yes.

C: ... was involved in some of it. And he, he lost his job. But he was a, a director with, with a lot of vision - great vision. and he understood what the parks were all about cause he'd been a ranger himself. And, uh.... So, yeah, I work more.... Sometimes I worry more about the people in the parks that I do the parks themselves, if you understand what I mean. I, I think we've got people in the wrong place, running parks.

I, I've been into some of these parks, you drive in and everything is closed. You know, it's a little small area with maybe twenty-five people a day coming in to see it. But, uh, there's a note on the front door, you know, "Be back at four o'clock." Or something like that.

George Hartzog would never have allowed this to happen.

M: Uh, a frequent comment I hear from park personnel is that budgets and personnel are insufficient. Would you agree with that or is it a matter of management of existing resource?

C: I think it comes from the top. I think it's management, uh, of the resources. And, I think there's a lot of waste. We have service centers in Denver and, where else? San Francisco - there's four of them around the country. And, uh, I think we were doing better work before those were ever established. They did it at the regional level. And, uh, people are, are very, very important. But it seems now that all the people who are getting promotions and, are, are "yes" men. They don't get any tough guys. And by tough, I mean tough-minded people, who, you know, will say, "Hey, I'm here. I know what's going on. This is within the perimeters you've laid down. I'm going to do this. And if you want to come down and out-guess me, come on down."

M: Do you foresee from your background and experience that the park service must make some changes or can it proceed as it currently is and maintain the parks as they were intended, or have been intended for the last hundred and fifty years?

C: Okay, the.... Having served in Washington and, and directly in the secretary, or the director's office, I have some insights in to what is needed to bring the parks up to standards that are acceptable - especially you're historical or cultural parks. We've got, we've got building out there that are falling down. Uh, you know, there's a, there's a multi-billion dollars worth of work that needs to be done on these parks.

They're not doing anything. The service center does new

jobs, but they don't take care of what they've got. And sometimes this is only a question of.... What I did at Big Bend was to go around and re-mortar the rocks at Hot Springs and re-plaster the walls and duplicate the murals. And it didn't cost.... You know we just did within park operating.... We didn't have much money.

I only had a staff of about thirty people, for eleven hundred square miles. And, and three-fourths of those were maintenance. The maintenance are your unsung heroes in the park service. They are the ones that keep the park going, the physical plant, the lights work, you know, and everything [chuckles]. The water is there when you need it. People take all this for granted, but without a good maintenance operation....

And your, and your rangers. I, I, rangers are interpreters. Uh, the park service is interested in high-tech type interpretation. I, I've seen things that they're doing in the field of high-tech. I think that a good, well-informed young man or young lady standing up in front of an audience in front of a camp fire, that's properly trained, and can tell you a story about the mysterious lights in the Chisos Mountains is far better than a highly technical push-button type exhibit. It's personal. Very, very personal. That push-button thing is just another damn machine, like a automatic teller. And, I, I think the people are hungry for that. I think.... And another thing I'm worried about,

John - is your first name John?

M: Yes.

C: ... John, is there's going to come a day of reckoning. We know, you know, from reading the papers who's running the [U.S.] forest service now - it's [Secretary of Interior Bruce] Babbitt. He's, he's really acting like he's running both [Department of] Interior and the park service.

[NOTE: The National Park Service is administered under the Department of Interior. Carithers may have been trying to make the point that Babbitt is "running" both the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, which administers the U.S. Forest Service.]

You know, when the spotted owl thing came along? You didn't hear [Department of Agriculture] Secretary [Mike] Espy out there taking about it. It was Babbitt. I think what they're trying and what eventually is going to happen - and it will happen - is that the forest service and the park service are going to end up as one. It's going to be done for economy sake, uh, for role sake - in other words, their roles are similar. They really aren't, but, but they could be meshed together. And then the park service is going to have some real problems.

M: You, you see this, this wedding of the forest service and park service, even with their contrasting objectives, uh,

the multi-use facet of the forest service [versus the preservation perspective of the park service] ...

C: That's what bothers me. The, the multiple use, I think it'll flop over. I think the park service if it doesn't stay on its toes and cover its flank, fight the good, fight the good fight, it's, it's going to lose itself in this morass of environmental organizations.

And, uh, that's far down the road. It won't happen in my lifetime. Uh, it's gradually.... I see some things that are just not good signs, especially Babbitt speaking for the forest service. Now Babbitt is very articulate. Espy is, uh, is more agriculture than he is forest service, and, and maybe, maybe there's nothing in what they're doing. It's the logical way to do it. But this is the first time this has ever happened, that Interior has stuck its neck out for the forest service.

M: Mr. Carithers, let me change the tape one more time.

C: Okay. [chuckles]

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 3 OF 3

BEGINNING OF SIDE B, TAPE 3 OF 3

C: Okay.

M: Yes. With this, with what you foresee, do you think the

scope of national parks as we have known them may have to change? Even if the joining of the park service with the forest service and multiple use does not occur, would just the modernization of times, uh, the demands of urban dwellers, their perceptions and perceived uses of the parks ...?

C: I think it's already started happening. Uh, you know, and I call it adaptation, because we used to - did not see, for example, trailer parks in national parks. You know, hookups and all that goes with that. And when trailers, travel trailers and Winnebagos became, uh, a big thing, you know, they started putting these in.

And, uh, it, it bothered me to see something like is going on right now at, uh, at Manassas, with Disneyland wanting to come in there. Thank God we've got those people up in arms. I, I don't know what the answer is, because we can't, can't own, we can't put every acre of land under, under National Park Service jurisdiction.

And, and in planning parks - I've been a park planner a long, long time. I think we should be a little bolder in some of our planning and built in buffers. But usually we face the problem on congressional approval. We have to got to congress and get them to approve of this proposal. And one of the unique things about the way the parks are handled - new areas - is that the committee that considers the establishment of the park is not the committee that puts up

the money to take care of it. That's a separate committee. And, so, new parks are always getting short-shrift. They, they have to build up a, uh, a respect, I suppose you could call it.

M: Pay their dues to the system?

C: Yeah, and, you know, the [inaudible] parks are going to get the big bucks.

M: Are there parks in the system, uh, currently that you, your personal opinion would be, they don't deserve to be there? And conversely, are there areas still left in our country that, uh, warrant inclusion in the park system.

C: Well, ten years ago I would have said, "No." But, I think there are probably some areas - I can tell you one right here in the state of Texas. It's, it's Alibates. I don't know if you know where it's located?

M: No, sir.

C: It's located up on Lake Meredith Recreational Area.

M: Alibates. A-L-A...

C: Alibates. A-L-I-B-A-T-E-S, it's a flint quarry. [Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument, located on Lake Meredith National Recreation Area near Amarillo, Tx.] That's all it is. It's a hole in the ground where the Indians would take flint and it was distributed all over the Southwest. It should never have been a monument, a monument to start with. Or....

Yeah, they call it a national monument. It passed in

two days. That's unusual. I was working in planning when this happened. Usually, from beginning to end, it takes about four years to get a park, say, like Canyonlands, from proposal to final area establishment. This only took two days, and that's because they had some powerful men on the Interior of Insular Affairs - that's what they called it at that time, committee. And Alibates now exists. It's got a superintendent and a staff.

That could easily be a state park. That could easily be made a part of, uh, of Lake Meredith, and operated as, as one area.

Yes, I believe there are some areas, uh.... Every congressman wants to have a national park in his district.

M: Of course, that's how Big Bend came to be, as far as the - Texans decided they needed a national park.

C: It was the Texans that did it, and, uh, they did some funny things with Big Bend. For example, they, they said there would be no, no entrance fee to get it - it would be open to all Texans. I think that's what it reads. Somebody said, well, how can you keep out the other people if you let Texans in. And somebody said, well, let's let everybody in free. So, all the time I was down there, they had no fee to come in. Uh, after I left, they initiated a fee.

Also, the, uh, they passed a law, and I'm not sure which committee passed this - it could have been the appropriations committee - that gives the state, or the

County of Brewster, money in lieu of taxes. In other words, uh, if you owned Big Bend National Park, how much would you pay in taxes on that eleven hundred square miles? That's given to Brewster County once a year, a check. That's.... I don't know whether it's being done elsewhere or not, but I know it was done at Big Bend.

M: So that's unique?

C: And, uh, the in lieu of taxes thing has been mentioned with several proposals, and, and I was a planner at, when the, some of the decisions were made. And I played a part in some of these decisions of the lease-back arrangement where you, uh, you would have an area that you wanted to enter into the national park system, but you had a lot of people who didn't want to move. You know, they had houses, along a seashore, or someplace. When you give them a lease, you say you can lease this for the rest of your life. We'll give it to free, but you can't pass it on to your heirs. You'd be surprised how many people bought that.

And, uh, that was done, I think, in Indiana Dunes. It was done, several areas back East - Sleeping Bear, I think that was done there.

But, getting back to the question you asked earlier about the, the upkeep of the parks. My daughter just got back from a trip to Hawaii, and she went to, uh, City of Refuge. And Haleakala [Crater National Park], I think. And she said it was really, really maintained very poorly. And

she didn't see any park people around at all. Now I know, you know, times are hard and we're trying to cut back in government. And if that's the price we have to pay, we'll just have to pay it. But, I think we ought to go a little easy on establishing any new areas until we can take care of the ones we've got.

M: Mr. Carithers, with that pointed observation, I think we should conclude this at this time.

C: Thank you, John, ...

M: Thank you.

C: ... Appreciate being able ...

END OF INTERVIEW