

1 Hellie, Robert

INTERVIEW WITH: Rob Hellie  
INTERVIEWER: Marsha Holland  
INTERVIEW NUMBER: One  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2012  
PLACE OF INTERVIEW: GSENM Visitor Station, Cannonville  
SUBJECT OF INTERVIEW: Monument History  
TRANSCRIBER: Rosa Lee White  
DATE: July 19, 2012

- MH: OK. So thank you for meeting with me, Rob Hellie. And what I'd like to do first is ask you to introduce yourself, your full name, then the date of your birth and place of birth please.
- RH: OK. My name is Robert Blair Hellie. Last name is H-E-L-L-I-E and I was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, May 28<sup>th</sup> 1950.
- MH: Can you tell me a little bit about the family you were born into; brothers, sisters, and maybe what your father and mother did for a living?
- RH: Yes. My mother and father at the time I was born-my mother had left the Navy and was just a full time housewife, but they were both in the Navy during the war and then married a little bit after that. My father was a naval aviator and he stayed in so hence I was born in Honolulu. Two years later I moved to California and then on to Minnesota and New York and back to California and so on. I bounced around for my childhood. I graduated from high school in Los Angeles, Rolling Hills Estates, a suburb out south west of Los Angeles. I went to college in Logan, Utah.
- MH: Did you have an inclination when you were in L.A. or finishing high school, of what you might be interested in studying or a field of interest?
- RH: [laughter] I just wanted to be someplace where there were mountains. I always tell the story of when I was... Well, people ask, "How did you choose Utah State University?" I wasn't LDS at the time. I am now. And I said, "Well, I was walking through my school library and somebody had left this college catalog out there which had this great picture of a school with these mountains behind it. And I said, "Whoa, that's where I want to go to school." I didn't apply anywhere else. That was the only place. Thankfully, they accepted me and I went on and studied there. Being in the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management or the Park Service wasn't really a goal. Actually, I started in political science and then because of my summer job switched over to the College of Forestry and graduated with a degree in Forest Recreation.
- MH: Let's talk about that a little bit, about your career path and then how it led you into affiliation with Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.
- RH: OK. Well, first I was married while I was at college to Charlotte Quail. And we both joined Peace Corp as soon as we got out of college and did a two year tour in the Philippines. We worked out of a little province called Pampanga, not too far from Manila. My first child was born there. And he goes by Dan now. We named him Jack.
- MH: [laughter].

2 Hellie, Robert

RH: We gave him the middle name of Daniel. He always reminds us how unfortunate that was, being named Jack Daniel so he decided Dan would be enough.

MH: OK [laughter]. Were you thinking about that when you named him?

RH: [laughter] Well, my wife was LDS and I said, "You know that's a pretty popular drink." But she said, "Oh, how many people would know of it?" I said, "Oh, just about everybody." But anyway, it's been a running joke for the rest of our lives.

I worked in the National Park System for the Philippines there. Which is what I asked to do and they had a job there and that's why we ended up in the Philippines. After two years there, I transferred to Honduras and did another, it wasn't quite a two years, stint. It was more like a one and a half year stint also working with their National Park System and came back and got out of Peace Corps and started looking for a job. One of the nice things about Peace Corps is it allows you to apply for federal employment without having to go through the, at that time, very arduous, very difficult, PACE exam which was heavily weighted towards veterans which I was not one. And I could compete on any job. And I got a summer job with the Park Service and had, I don't know, hundreds of applications out. Ended up going back to a place I had worked in the summer during college which was Shoshone, Idaho. I think that was the last job I had before I graduated from college and that's where I started working with the Bureau of Land Management. Oh, and by the way, added my second son while we were in Honduras.

MH: So working in National Park Service internationally gives you an interesting perspective.

RH: It did. But I have to say, one of the things that people were quite eager to do is attend international conferences. I work now in the Wilderness Program and have worked most of the time on the Wilderness Program in BLM and when I got back to Washington I never really felt like they did much except give you a chance to tour other countries which is great for the employee. Not so great for the thousands of dollars you spend to send people there. So I always was kind of against that... unless we were going to send somebody over to a country to work like we did in Peace Corp, I didn't see much benefit to having huge international involvement for like a week at a time or two weeks at a time.

MH: Yes, you really have to work there is what you're saying.

RH: But I will say that one- I would never trade the time that I spent in the Peace Corp. It was a wonderful time in both countries and really helped me. But it also did give me a perspective on the rest of the world and how incredibly fortunate we are to have a system of conservation going on that has been around for a while, is well institutionalized. I've been to places, you know, in Honduras, where we started the National Park System there. They didn't have one before that.

In the Philippines, they had one they started in the thirties but basically it had been forgotten. And so when we went, my big job there was going around and looking at all the park places that had been designated and determining which ones still ought to be in a park system.

MH: Right. They weren't managed.

RH: They weren't managed. Some of them had been turned into farms. And they weren't going to get managed. It was really a question of how easily could you manage without a lot of resources.

### 3 Hellie, Robert

MH: If you don't mind telling me, when you began working with the BLM what was your first position there? In what capacity were you working there? And what was the mandate then for the BLM?

RH: Well, I started working with the Bureau of Land Management after I came back in 1977 from Peace Corp and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) had just passed. I was hired specifically to be a recreation planner and a wilderness specialist. And they didn't really know what either one of those jobs were in my district. I had a really good boss, Rulon.

R-U-L-O-N. And he really gave me a lot of latitude but I'll never forget starting and he said, "Well, here's what we hired you to do." And he opened FLPMA to the section that talks about wilderness study areas and... not wilderness study areas but looking for areas of wilderness characteristics. He said, "I want you to do that." I said, "Oh, OK. Is there anything else?" "Nope, that's your guidance. Figure it out."

So, the first year or two actually I spent my time almost continuously in a pickup truck driving around and looking at all of these areas that might have potential, discovering where roads were and where they weren't and worked on a big power line, the midpoint to Medford power line. It's a 500 KV line that during that time they started it, FLPMA had gotten in the way with its wilderness characteristics. They couldn't continue... they wanted it cleared. So, they had pulled out all the stops there. They were flying us around in helicopters and everything else. And then I came back to the real world and had to continue driving around in my pickup truck.

This was Midpoint to Medford power line started in Midpoint, Idaho which is just south. It's actually not a town or anything it's just a connection point for transmission lines. It's just south of Shoshone, Idaho, which is where I worked.

MH: Interesting. Alright, 1977 and so did you find any resistance to this wilderness study part of it? How was it taken in Shoshone?

RH: [laughter] It was not taken well anywhere I went. First of all, there was just consternation that BLM would have anything that would qualify as wilderness. Not even a possibility as far as people were concerned. There are no mountains, there's no ice; you know, rocks and ice that's wilderness and nothing else, was the current feeling. The Forest Service was just wrapping up their inventory effort, something they started out calling Rare One and then Rare Two. It had created quite a bit of hostility towards the whole idea of wilderness. And in '77 the Wilderness Act wasn't that old. It was just created in 1964. A lot of people sort of felt like the Wilderness Act identified some areas of wilderness and that it was done. The idea that BLM would be looking at it wasn't even thought of in the original Wilderness Act. It didn't mention the Bureau of Land Management. It was only in 1976, with the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which we call FLPMA, that BLM was authorized to look at wilderness. So it was a brand new idea. And so much in the Bureau of Land Management at that time was primarily grazing and mining, primarily grazing in that part of the world. And the idea that somebody would come in and be a specialist in recreation was kind of absurd to a lot of people. We were getting new archeologists. There had been a wildlife biologist around, but all of those were eccentric luxuries as far as a lot of people were concerned. Now, my district manager and my own boss, kind of

4 Hellie, Robert

said, "Now, don't pay any attention to what people are saying. We know that you've got a profession that you're going to pursue and do a great job at." So, I got a lot of support there.

MH: Yes, don't mind those pipe bombs at your house.

RH: I didn't get any pipe bombs at my house, thankfully. There was a tremendous amount of public outreach and I did a lot of public meetings. I called it my "traveling medicine show" so I would load up a pickup truck and load up maps of things and I'd be asking for information from people. And for the most part, oh, you know, I would say people generally wanted to be friendly and nice. But there were always people there that were interested in taking a soap box or saying what a travesty this was. I was compared to the Nazi's. It was just Federal Government out of control kind of thing. So every BLM employee that was working in this job at this time was going through some hard things.

MH: So one last question about Shoshone, what kind of areas did you end up finding that would qualify for wilderness?

RH: Oh, we found a lot of areas. They were desert areas. They were large, undeveloped. They didn't have constructed roads in them and in Shoshone I was always teased by other BLM wilderness coordinators saying, "Well you've got the big, flat uglies." But, in fact, that's what we had was large, flat areas, relatively flat, that were undeveloped, big sagebrush plains. And I came to realize that that really was a wilderness. It did offer that. They were huge, you know, some of them hundreds of thousands of acres in size. And we also had a lot of recent lava flow that had covered many of them and made them very rugged and hard to get into. In one of the areas I went in with another fellow, we discovered a cave and inside the cave we discovered a fully articulated grizzly bear skeleton. Hadn't been grizzly bears there for now seventy, eighty years.

MH: Wow, so it had really been left alone.

RH: Right. It was wild country. And while it didn't fill a lot of peoples' perspective of what a wilderness should be, it definitely met the definition of the Wilderness Act. So we had some great areas. We had the City of Rocks. We had the area Craters of the Moon. A lot of that was BLM land. And some of it now is a national monument. So, it was beautiful country.

MH: That's neat. So that gives you some great background. And how did you end up getting connected up with the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument project as it was?

RH: Well, I'll fill you in on the rest of my career here [laughter]. In '84, I went back to Washington D.C. to do a detail on caves and cave management. They didn't really have any policies on that and I had been pushing to get a national policy. I went back and did a detail back there which was just a short-term assignment back in Washington D.C. At the time, there was a newly formed group that was managing wilderness back there. I let them know that I was interested in coming back and working on the wilderness staff. When I went back to my office, I applied. In August of '84 I got the job and moved out to Washington and started working on reviewing all of the wilderness study work that had been done in areas to make sure that law had been complied with and that the work was up to speed. I spent, I don't know, ten years doing that. About that time, the Clinton administration went in which changed things a little bit for the better. Just my perspective. [laughter] They were just more interested in those things. I was disappointed that they didn't really latch on to wilderness. Mostly what they focused on was grazing and mineral

reform and a lot of those things which, of course, is what Bureau of Land Management does but, we weren't really getting a lot of boost out of that from the wilderness program. And at one point, I was contacted by Matt Millinbach in March of 1996. And Matt Millinbach was the Deputy Director of the Bureau of Land Management. And he said, "Rob, I think I've got a project you'd be interested in." I said, "Oh, what is it?" He said, "Well, I can't really talk to you about it on the phone." And he said, "Come over to my office." So that got my interest up and I went over and he said, "Have you ever heard of the Antiquities Act?" And I said, "Well, I've heard of it but..." He says, "Well, pull it out and read it because here's what I'd like you to do. They want us to come up with a proposal for a national monument in Utah, Southern Utah. You ever been there?" I said, "No. I haven't been there. Been to Northern Utah. I've got a lot of family in Utah." But anyway he said, "Well, I don't want you to talk to anybody, the director's gone over Easter break and I want you just to use his office and sit down and write up a proclamation for a national monument." I said, "Well, I don't even know what that is." And so I pulled up the Antiquities Act, read a little bit of history and took a look at a proclamation or two and did some research. The reason they wanted me to do it was because I had been reviewing all of these plans. I knew what the wilderness values were out there.

And they saw the wilderness values in this part of the world being roughly analogous with what a national monument might be. None of that's actually correct though. But still, it was a place to start. And who you going to go to? I had had a pretty good idea of what the resources were and, oddly, I was in a situation where I was very loosely supervised so nobody was going to notice that I wasn't there.

MH: Whose office were you in?

RH: I was in... You mean, whose office was I working in? Mike Dombeck's. Dombeck was the director at that time so I was just using his office just because nobody was there and because it was private. Nobody would really notice me going in and out that much. But anyway, I wrote something up and turned it in. It did take all of that time. I remember it was Easter break and I had to tell my family, you know I don't think I'm going to be home for Easter break. I won't be taking any of that leave we planned, but I got it done and then turned it in and didn't hear anything. Nothing happened. Unbeknownst to me, I found out later, what had been going on was a number of people, I think somebody here in the park service, at the NRA, Glen Canyon, also showed me something that they had written up pretty much around the same time.

What was going on was that the Clinton Administration had been thinking about doing a national monument on Earth Day. It wasn't necessarily here. It was any number of places. They had a large array of places that they were thinking of and people were working on. And just as they looked at it, they looked at the products that were being produced. They thought, well, we really don't have anything. We can't go with anything on Earth Day. We're just not ready. We don't know what the consequences are going to be. They weren't really prepared. But the idea didn't die. It was still something that they were thinking about but they were going to take more time and see.

Later on, in June, I was working on a project with Jeff Webb. Jeff Webb was at that time, he had been working with the Bureau of Land Management which is where I met him but he'd moved on to the Congressional Affairs Office at the Department of Interior and was working with John

Leshy on a number of things. He called me in and asked if I would like to work on a team that would be working on the national monument thing because I had worked on the one before. And he said again it would be completely quiet. I had to have total discretion. He said, "Can you make up an excuse so you won't be missed?" I said, "I'm pretty sure I won't be missed [laughter]." Which was true.

I ended up at that time working on writing the proclamation for what would become the Monument. They had narrowed it down. They wanted just this area in Utah. And it didn't have a name at that point. It didn't have a boundary. They didn't really know what the area was. They had a couple of different concepts. One was maybe it would be a number of small areas. Maybe it would just be one area around the Kaiparowits because they were interested in covering the area that had the coal mine going on it. Maybe it would just be the area near Escalante. Anyway, I found myself assigned with determining a boundary. I worked with a fellow named Paul Smythe. I think Paul did most of the writing on the initial mock-up of the monument language. And I worked with him to try and give him some details on great natural features and that sort of thing and we met and discovered that one of the things we were going to have was objects. What are the objects that we're protecting? I mean, you don't just draw a boundary around something and call it a national monument. There needs to be a reason. So I asked for permission to involve a couple of people from my office and said, "Let's go through an inventory what the objects are in this area using all of our wilderness inventory information and any other information we could pull together."

Jeff Jarvis was one of the people that helped me. Gary Pavric was one of the people that helped me on that. And we put together an inventory of all these things. Jeff and Gary weren't on the main team so I would shuttle back to the main team and say here's what we found. They were having trouble getting their minds around paleontological resources and that sort of thing. It came down to, "Well, we're going to put green stickies on everything that is an object up on a map so we could get a few graphical ideas of where they are. At the same time, I was drawing a boundary. I drew a boundary for a fairly huge area, bigger than the Grand Staircase is now by a couple hundred thousand acres. And then putting all these dots on it, then we would have meetings. And we didn't just discuss these things. We discussed things like water rights. We discussed grazing and how do you write a proclamation to provide for those things. What should you say about those things in a proclamation? All aspects of that. John Leshy was the person who headed up the team. He was the Solicitor. But we also had a person, Tom Jensen, who was working from the White House and CEQ [Council on Environmental Quality]. He would come over every now and then. He wasn't really on the day to day stuff but he would come over. I think when he initially looked at some of the boundaries that we were thinking of he said, "Why don't you think a little bigger?" And so that's at the time we were looking at maybe a little one over here at Escalante and a little one over here. He said, "Think bigger." I thought well this is pretty interesting. I took that to heart and then drew the boundary that we...

MH: Did you ever work with Jane Belnap?

RH: Yes, I did. One of the things that we discovered was that we didn't have, because they kept us to such a small group that you're working with a couple of recreation planners here trying to discover what are all of these objects. And we just needed somebody who really was an expert on

this and could tell us what's biologically significant because that information just wasn't in the documents that I was looking at. And Jane, of course, was a wealth of knowledge. She told us about how significant this was biologically, about a huge array of biological interests in the area. And we also brought in a wildlife biologist from Utah State University, a scientist. And I can't remember his name, to kind of help us on the other side with the wildlife side of this. But what we discovered is that there were two things that were huge and one was the biological. And Jane put it all into perspective. It also fit very well over the whole area. It wasn't just, "Oh here's a biological interest and there's a biological interest." The whole area had biological values that had to be considered as a whole which fit very well with the requirements of the Antiquities Act. And the other thing that came about was the paleontological values that were outlined in a letter a scientist had written to the Bureau of Land Management when they were considering the Warm Springs Mine EIS and I got a hold of that and I said, "Well, this is gold. He's saying here there are paleontological resources unlike anything else in the world. Those are really strong words." I think in the end because of all the secrets and we couldn't reach out to this guy which is what we should have done. Jane was a federal employee and a known quantity. This fellow was outside and they were trying not to involve people on the outside in this so we couldn't reach him and I wish I could remember his name but I just haven't been able to find it.

MH: Yes, so he's the other guy that we're going to have to get his name. Can we get a copy of that letter now?

RH: I'll have to figure it out. He was never directly involved but two paragraphs from his letter are almost directly quoted in the proclamation in describing the significance of the paleontological resources are. And they have continued to drive a lot of what goes on in the monument. It's just been interesting to me that, when we started this nobody was thinking paleontology. We discovered this letter. We convinced people that it really needed to be in the proclamation and it has since driven a lot of the management for the monument.

MH: Now its world famous.

RH: Yes. That's just how those things evolved. And it was an interesting process.

MH: Right. So your main objectives then were to write a proclamation for this... oh, no, to discover the boundaries?

RH: My main job was the boundaries and lining up the objects and then participating in the writing of the proclamation in that I would listen to what people had written, make comments, do edits. But I wasn't really doing the main writing. In fact, since they wanted this to be a monumental proclamation, a big deal, they brought in Charles Wilkinson, who is an author. And they actually hired him temporarily so that he could work on this team. He was an associate, a friend of the solicitor.

MH: John Leshy.

RH: John Leshy. And so he actually came and worked with the group in crafting language that was lofty.

MH: Yes, it's a beautiful document.

RH: I think it is.

MH: I remember reading it thinking, “Really, is this a governmental document?” I mean, it was so engaging and rich, whereas other such documents I've read other before, and I think, oh, gosh, I need a cup of coffee. [laughter]

RH: Well, you can go back and look at other old proclamations. There aren't too many that have quite that poetry. However, since there have been quite a few. They've tried to emulate that in later proclamations. It did set a standard I think. And Charles Wilkerson was part of it. John Leshy was part of it. Both Josh Leshy and Charles looked at those two paragraphs on the paleontology and said, “You know, this is so dry. This does not belong in the proclamation. Can we write this in some other way that it would be more engaging?” And we tried and we tried. Ultimately we just said, “You aren't going to write it any better and still have what it says, have the content. So put it in the way that it was written and be satisfied. So they did. It's just one small part, but it's an idea of how that drafting went.

MH: And so what were some of the challenges you faced completing this work? Did you have a deadline?

RH: Well, we never really knew what the deadline was and we didn't know whether it would ever really happen. We had a fairly high-powered group of people working on it and expending time, but it was so political and people weren't sure about it. I think in August of '96, they released the condors at Vermillion Cliffs and it created a huge negative publicity. People were unhappy. They said, “You're going to establish a threatened and endangered species? We can't trust the federal government. We don't want the condors.” At that point, the Secretary said, “I don't think we can do this proclamation thing. It's just way too sensitive out there.” But it didn't die. It kept going anyways. I think they were looking at possibly going out in August and then they decided not to. Ultimately, they it did in September. It was leaked to the press purposely by somebody. I don't know who it was. I rushed to assure them that it wasn't me.

Within two weeks it was a monument. And Clinton had set it up in the Grand Canyon to do that, infamously, I guess, here in Utah forever. From a security perspective that was as close as he could get. It was a very inspiring place because the Grand Canyon was at first a national monument. That's how it started. Not too far out there but, the fact that it was in Arizona and this big monument was in Utah was not very popular. The main thing was just getting it done. I was not allowed to visit this place. I told them, I said, “I went to school in Northern Utah, but I was always focused on mountains. Mountains were the thing that really excited me.” I've read about this. I just have to see it. They said, “No. Somebody from BLM- Washington office is poking their nose around there it is going to be noticed.” And they finally relented on the week that is was going to be made a monument. I wasn't invited to attend the monument signing, but I was told, “OK, I want you to meet up with Jerry Meredith who will become the monument manager and take a tour. Let him take you around that area.” But I was told very specifically [laughter] don't tell them where the boundaries are. I went into the state office in Salt Lake and met Jerry and the state director and they both wanted to know so where... [are the boundaries?]. I said, “I can't tell you where the monument boundaries are.”

MH: Was Jerry Meredith assigned manager by then?

9 Hellie, Robert

RH: No, he was the Cedar City District Manager. He hadn't been involved in this until very late. And the whole time he wanted to see the map. He pestered me for the map. And I actually had a map with me and Tom Slater was along on that trip. He was another state office person then. On the day of the monument signing, when it was being done... when I thought it would be declared a monument, I did pulled out the map and showed them where the boundaries were so...

MH: What was his reaction? Do you remember?

RH: He was, he thought it was really big. He thought it was going to be hard for local folks to swallow, to deal with. He was kind of wondering what it was going to do to his district because his district encompassed that area. And of course, how was that going to be done. He wasn't monument manager. He was the Cedar City District Manager and trying to figure out how this would affect him. But I think he was generally enthusiastic. He could see it as a big deal and something that would not go away and he was pretty enthusiastic about it.

MH: Yes, he knew the values here for sure.

RH: Yes, he was a great choice for monument manager the first time around. And a lot of the success that we had later was because he was chosen for that.

MH: Well, he had bridges going before so...

RH: Well, that was his job. He was public affairs chief in Salt Lake before that and then came down, had just left Salt Lake and to become the Cedar City District Manager which was a big step. You know, it moved him into management and I think that he was very pleased with that. But in his job as public affairs chief and as a professional public affairs person, he really was a natural at knowing how to deal with people and how to get a grip on issues and how to handle the Washington folks and their paranoia, as well.

MH: He mentioned he spent some time going back and forth to Washington.

RH: A lot of time. Yes, I'm sure. After the monument was made I did sixteen trips out here in one year. And I'm sure he did almost as many coming back the other way.

MH: And it was like a liaison and checking on the progress of planning and interpretation of the proclamation. Was that what your goal was there?

RH: Yes. Because of my involvement on the proclamation team, I was all of a sudden a known quantity. There were not many BLMers involved. They knew who I was. They kind of had confidence in my ability to work with these issues and understand what their needs were and so they wanted me to fly out and meet with the state director and meet with Jerry. Jerry was chosen as the monument manager fairly soon afterwards. And then we began working together and working on hiring a staff to do the management plan which was the next big step. Jerry set up an office in Cedar City rather than out here which was probably a good move because it meant that he could pull more people in and also meant, I think, for Jerry that he could be there with his family and not move permanently away from Cedar City District. So he pulled that together. We worked a little bit on staffing. That was primarily his job but he would ask. We hired Barb Sharrow and Marietta Eaton and a number of other people who came in from all over. Mostly non-Utah folks which probably caused some problems but also meant that they were a little more free to work with ideas that might not be accepted locally. So they had a really good team. Then

10 Hellie, Robert

the reasons that I was coming back was that I was working with them on the monument plan. They wanted to know about the direction, how we're doing. If they had a problem, I would take it back to, at one point, it was Susan Rieff, who was the department person in charge after the monument was made.

MH: No one could remember her name.

RH: R-I-E-F-F. Actually, I have a list of names. Because I can't remember names and I spent all kinds of time, I actually had to call Marietta because I couldn't remember Jerry's name. Jerry Meredith, which is just, you know, a horrible...But those are some of the people that I ended up working with and I just wanted to, if their names came up, I wanted to be sure that I had them down there. Most of the time I know who the person is I'm talking about but I cannot get past my memory block to their actual name.

MH: This is a great list and I can tell you we have a few of these people that we've already been able to interview, but we'll continue and I'll take a look at that list or you can email it to me.

RH: Well, Susan Rieff is working in Austin, Texas at the Texas Wildflower Museum or something like that. I actually I didn't run into her. My brother lives there in Austin and I went to visit that place and I noticed that she was the director. So she's bounced around to a lot of jobs but that's where she was a couple of years ago.

MH: Alright, Jeff Webb.

RH: Jeff Webb was instrumental I would say. He was on this team and he kept a lot of things moving. He was the one that ran interference with the Bureau... after a while they did notice that I was gone. And Jeff kind of ran some interference and said, "No, you can't fire him. He's working with us."

MH: [laughter] That's amusing. So, major challenges? Well, there was one, some secrecy but any other challenges that you just felt like you had to work hard on to surmount?

RH: Well, let me see what you've got here because there was one question I wanted to... OK. Biggest challenge after you got the monument proclamation out, after it became law, was to explain to everybody in the Bureau of Land Management what it was and what it meant. There were questions of how would it be managed. Is it going to be managed as part of the local infrastructure? Was it going to have..., did we change something? And the answer that I wanted emphatically was yes. We were going to change it. It was going to be its own unit. It would report directly to the state director and not to a district manager or a lower-level manager. All of those things were kind of foreign to BLM, it just hadn't done this before.

There was a lot of consternation when you're talking about that. The other was money. You had taken this out of two field offices that were some of the least funded field offices in the entire BLM. They had been spending really no money on this. So there wasn't money there to begin with. And now we have this area and people were, you could read the Antiquities Act one way and say well, it doesn't really mean anything so we won't be changing anything. You read it another way and say there's absolute protections here. You're going to have to figure out how to do that. And explaining that was hard because there wasn't money. And without money you're basically taking it away from somebody and directing it there. All of a sudden people were

becoming very defensive. Oddly, and I had talked with this before it had ever come out, I had a long talk with Jeff Webb about if you just give this to BLM and say go forth and manage, you know, they'll fail because they don't have the resources. You have to dedicate some resources to that to make it work. And so I hoped that we would not do that. I don't know whether that was inspired or I'm sure they weren't dumb and they were thinking the same thing. But at any rate, we sat down and had some conversations, one of which I was sitting in on with Congressman Hansen and a couple of other folks from the House about how are we going to fund this... oh, Bob, your senator.

MH: Bennett.

RH: Bob Bennett, and I'd never sat in on meetings where real congressman were sitting in but I did. And I was kind of astounded, dumbfounded really, that all of their public posturing- that this is absolutely the worst possible thing that could ever have been done by a horrible person. When we got in and sat down there they wanted to make sure we had the money we needed to make this work and how much was that going to be and what were you going to do with it and all that sort of thing. But they were interested in, they said we want to be sure that we have a realistic amount coming to BLM to manage this so that it will work. And with all of that cooperation going on, and you have to remember at this point that Clinton had been elected to a second term. So it wasn't a question that he'd be going away soon. And I think of a lot of the feeling at that time was well, they're going to be around, we're going to have to figure out how to work with them. And so there was just much more interest in compromising and working across partisan lines to see that happen. All the posturing was still going on in public. But it wasn't so much behind the closed doors.

MH: That is an interesting thing too...

RH: It was huge because it ending up netting us five million dollars to manage the monument which is more than Utah was spending anywhere else. And in fact, it created quite a bit of envy in Utah among other offices because all of a sudden here were all of these resources. They hired a whole new staff of people. You know, hiring has always been difficult in the Bureau of Land Management, getting new people on, it's not an easy thing to do, especially new positions where no one existed before. And these offices in Kane County and Garfield County had been very, very lightly staffed so they really didn't have people. So there was a lot of disquiet among employees. You know, are we going to be displaced? Are we going to be fired? Are we going to be brought into the new monument? We'd rather not work in a monument and all of this sort of thing which Jerry Meredith handled masterfully and it didn't blow up, thankfully, into a big problem. But we did get the funds. We were able to get started on a real plan and about the time we got the funding and everything done, Susan Rieff left government and moved back out to Texas and handed it off. She had been the chief of staff to the deputy secretary. And this was just one of her jobs. And she got this started. And then Molly McUSIC came in. And Molly's job was not the same. She was a counselor, the Secretary of the Interior's lawyer so to speak. But she sort of took over overseeing this. And she became very much involved and very concerned about how this management plan was going. [She] Basically wanted almost weekly reports hence all the trips out and back. How was it going? What were the decisions that were being made? You know Jerry very jointly understood her need to know almost on a day to day basis what was going on.

12 Hellie, Robert

But after a while, she would fly out. She spent time with the planning team. And that's unusual for somebody at that level at the Department of Interior to have that much of a hands-on approach. But she did spend quite a bit of time figuring that out.

MH: It sounds like that kind of dedication to a project like this, it really meant a lot to people.

RH: Probably meant a lot if you're going to take somebody at that level and say expend this amount of your time on it, it meant that it was a major priority. So, what was good about that is that one, BLM knew that it had to make this work; the department was absolutely committed to it and would not let BLM forget that they had to make it work. So we weren't allowed to make decisions that would be detrimental. In a lot of cases, five million dollars hanging' out there on a place that people weren't really sure you needed five million dollars. There were a lot of places we would have liked to have spent that money on other things.

MH: Right.

RH: A lot of land use plans going on. A lot of oil and gas operations that needed funding in order to get going. Not the operations themselves but the planning that needed to be done. So BLM had a lot of other priorities is all that says. And the department kind of kept them focused on that. Mike Donbeck was the director at the time. He was an Acting Director and nominated by the president to be Director of the Bureau of Land Management. He was the BLM director during the time that the proclamation was written and then signed and immediately thereafter. But shortly after that, he determined that he was never going to get the nomination. And kind of as a reward for all, I mean because he had put in a lot of years, but he was never going to get confirmed by Congress. Congress, for whatever reason, I don't know what, they had some problem with Mike Donbeck. And so they moved him to the Forest Service where oddly the Chief of the Forest Service is not a political appointment and does not require congressional confirmation. So he moved over and a new person moved in as director of BLM named Tom Fry. And Tom moved in first as Acting. He had some of the same issues with trying to get a confirmation out of the Senate. But Tom Fry was the director then during that time period and also much more tied in with the Clinton Administration than even Mike Donbeck was and very supportive of Babbitt and the monument in trying to do this. I think both Bruce Babbitt and Tom Fry saw this, the monument as a transforming tool to refocus where and how BLM looked at conservation. And Bruce Babbitt has said this-it's true, that when the California Desert Protection Act which made a lot of wilderness in the California Desert and transferred huge blocks of BLM land to the National Park Service, that really stung the Bureau of Land Management. It was the usual way of doing business but it was clear that whenever we had something nice, it got transferred somewhere else. So I think Bruce Babbitt recognized that was really damaging and that wasn't the self-image that you wanted the BLM institution to have. And, in fact, that's not what FLPMA was written to say. I mean, FLPMA said something quite different about our responsibilities. You know, it wasn't just development. So they took a leap of faith and made this national monument for BLM. They said, "We'll try it with the Bureau of Land Management." Although, it wasn't clear that it would be the Bureau of Land Management, the monument even to the last day.

MH: Wow.

13 Hellie, Robert

- RH: I have a little brochure that the park service printed up for their budget presentation and on that, and it was a government publication, and on there they indicated for 1996 that the Grand Staircase was a National Park Service National Monument. They had to reprint that thing, but still. So, I've got one of the few existing copies [laughter]
- MH: I was going to say, send me a copy because we have an archive file that we're putting such documents in, so we're trying to collect documents, too. It's going to go to SUU, their archives.
- RH: Well, I would be happy to send you the original document because I don't want it just to get lost in my files. But all that's to say is nobody was sure that this would be BLM's until the very, very last minute.
- MH: Right.
- RH: And then it was. So, I backtracked a little bit.
- MH: That's OK. The biggest challenges; there's the idea of land use and extraction is BLM, that is the BLM. Although in Utah, here it is also about ranching and leased graze land and roads and it was one of the biggest challenges to the planning team to solve and it's still not solved.
- RH: Well, it isn't but in writing the proclamation, they were very clear that grazing was to go on.
- MH: Right.
- RH: The question is how does it go on? You had some additional problems with grazing here and that was that it probably hadn't been managed all that well. And so when you suddenly put a spotlight on it, even just bringing it up to the norms that you would have on public land anywhere else involve some changes here and those were very unpopular. And if you put the monument over the top of it you had something that everybody could then blame for those changes and that's what happened.
- MH: Right. And now still it's continuing because...
- RH: It's continuing.
- MH: It's continuing and there even is a proposal to take grazing completely out of the monument and have it managed by someone else.
- RH: Oh.
- MH: That's what's going on right now.
- RH: I haven't heard that.
- MH: But it seems like it would be impossible to have a separate BLM agency, the agency not the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument managing that separate entity outside the...
- RH: It's not going to happen. But they can make changes and adjustments to how, what the management structure is. Right now, you have a manager in the monument who reports directly to the state director. You could say, well, actually that monument manager will just report to the Cedar City district manager which dramatically lowers the profile of the management oomph that you have there.

And that's typically the way BLM would handle that. So it would be a hard thing to do though because there's a number of people now outside of BLM that are aware of the institutional strength that reporting to the state director for a monument manager has. So I think that it would be viewed as a huge step back and there would be some political repercussions from that.

MH: Yes, the Utah congressional group, they're the ones who are introducing that in Washington. They want to turn the land back over, de-monument it, and they're actually suing the government right now.

RH: Well, they have. They've been suing the government over a number of things. Most recently here in Utah what they've said is that actually the Federal Government doesn't own the land. The State of Utah owns the land. But that's the law and it says so. So people are trying to come to grips with that. Of course, you know the Federal Government says, "Not really. It's still ours."

MH: Yes.

RH: But it creates tension and problems. And it's, politically inside Utah, it's a winner to continually attack those things. Federal Government has so much land that they manage here. And it gets in the way of a lot of development that people would like to do that could be handled on a local level. But when you get involved at the national level, it brings in people from outside the state, a lot of other interest from other places and it's very hard to control.

MH: And a lot of rules, yes.

RH: So I understand what they're trying to do. It's kind of been nonstop. But I think that was going on even before. It was going on. And like I say, it's always been kind of a double-sided thing. I don't know if there's any more Bennetts and Hansens in the congressional delegation. Maybe not.

But they were working across partisan lines. They were working with what I would say was reality at the time. You know, maybe the climate has changed so that there really isn't a possibility to do that now. All you have is this partisan warfare. It's hard to say.

MH: And hopefully that will change. It's pretty unproductive.

RH: Well, it won't happen as long as there's a Democrat, as long as Obama is President. And I would imagine most democrats would veto legislation to do that unless there was some, unless they tied it to something that they really needed like, oh, government shutdown or something like that.

MH: Right [laughter] OK. So last couple questions here. So your success and results, how would you classify those?

RH: Well, one question on there was what do you think was your biggest success.

MH: Right.

RH: And we were very successful, we as a group were very successful with a lot of things. But here's one thing that I feel, that I will take credit for, is reorienting first, Susan Rieff and then Molly McUSIC and even to some extent Jerry Meredith, to not think of this as a major recreation area but to think of it as a major scientific area.

MH: Yes, very nice.

15 Hellie, Robert

RH: I point that out because immediately after the proclamation was made we had a proposal for a road that's was going to go from here to cut off, and go directly to Kanab.

MH: Cannonville.

RH: Yes, Cannonville or out just any number of places. And all of them proposed because it would increase recreational. Oh, and we had a boating marina at Hole in the Rock. That is what somebody wanted to do. And I sat down with Susan and others and said, "Listen, this is a...", remember this partly came about because I became so educated on what the Antiquities Act was during that process of helping them write it. I said, "There's nothing in the Antiquities Act about recreation. All of this emphasis on recreation doesn't support what we've been doing." I said, "We need to be focusing on the science side of this and trust me, recreation will never go away. It will always manage to survive because that's what people do out there. But science, if it isn't nurtured, isn't going to happen."

MH: Right, and it will go away.

RH: It would because it's just too expensive and too tenuous. But really the plan focused on the science side of things. And really, this has become known as a science national monument more so than many of the or all of the National Park Service ones which focus, I think, on the recreation side and some aspect of the scientific purpose but not that their purpose is science. Well, I think we talked about it being one of the main purposes if not the main purpose of this monument. And I feel like that was, we steered it that way early. And it was a conversation I felt that I had some part in as a low level staffer. I took some pride in the fact that we did get it going that way. A lot of people bought into it and a lot of people made it happen besides me but we got that conversation going and it's still going. So, I'm pleased with that.

MH: Which is excellent, yes, it's all about science here. And tell me what your current assignment is.

RH: Well, I have been reassigned to Wilderness. I work as a Wilderness staff person in helping to support the Wilderness lead in the Washington office and work on manuals and budget and policy and all those things. I used to, for about eight years, I was the lead for monuments and NCAs and then around 2008, they switched me over to Wilderness. And Doug Herriman now is the lead for monuments and NCAs and he's done a great job with focusing also on the Grand Staircase and figured out pretty quickly that this was certainly maybe the main piece in the crown jewels.

MH: Yes, it's a pretty neat spot. And so do you stay up with what's going on with the monument?

RH: Oh, yes.

MH: You have a special place in your heart for it still.

RH: Yes, I do. And I can't think of another place I would rather be. You know, I came out for the reunion but I've had three days here all on my own with a truck and nothing to do but drive around and visit.

MH: Great.

RH: And to me that's absolutely the best thing. In fact, when we were doing the project, some of my best memories of this whole process were when I would come out and work with Jerry and we'd

16 Hellie, Robert

have some two week stints where we would be working on the plan and, of course, everybody took the weekend off. And Jerry would give me the keys to a pickup truck and say, "Well, won't need this until Monday so, come on back Monday." I spent the whole time bouncing' around out here and exploring and, you know, looking at all the places where they had petrified wood. I didn't ever discover any dinosaurs but I was looking'.

MH: You were probably walking on them and didn't know.

RH: [laughter]

MH: How do you think they're progressing with their plan? Do you have an opinion about that?

RH: Well, they went through some rough times when the administration changed. Kate Cannon was the monument manager at that time and she really took the monument plan to heart because she had been the lead for the plan. After Pete Wilkins, she came in to do the... to finish up the monument planning. She was also the deputy for Jerry Meredith. When Jerry left, Jerry had made it clear that he would not move to Kanab, that he wanted to stay in Cedar City. So when the headquarters moved she became the monument manager and she pretty much insisted that they stick with the plan. You know, the plan was what they had made and all of their conversations were around that. I think probably the biggest thing that happened and this was after they had moved into the new administration, they had this blow up on Fifty Mile Mountain about the cattle. And we were in the middle of a drought and they wanted to remove the cattle and they impounded some that had not been removed and then they were stolen and it made the news.

MH: And they killed the ones that were left up there.

RH: Well, they did eventually because that was what the... if the owners wouldn't take 'em off there just wasn't any other thing to do. It was probably a kindness in some ways because they were starving to death anyways. There wasn't food there.

MH: Right.

RH: And they were damaging the area to do that. So anyway, they went through that. But is a lot of what did-in Kate, I think. Not her personally but the BLM director let it be known that he wanted her to leave and so she did. And they brought in another manager, Dave...

MH: Hunsaker.

RH: Hunsaker. Yes, he's a great guy. And Dave was old school BLM. I mean, he was brought in specifically to bring the monument back to BLM because there was a feeling that they had strayed from that. And one of the things that they did was to de-emphasize the monument plan and to try to do things the way everybody else was doing then in the BLM. And that caused a lot of the staff that had come on to leave. It kind of changed it. It also sort of derailed the, because of the Fifty Mile Mountain and how sensitive grazing was, the idea of finishing up a grazing EIS which had really been punted down the road. They didn't address it in the RMP in the resource, well, in the management plan for the monument. They said, we'll do this in a grazing management plan later, to be done three years after the management plan was finished. They never could get that off the ground because it was so politically sensitive which is probably why you're hearing some of the things you're hearing now. Because there's still that. It's clear they need to do that. They don't have a modern allotment management plan.

MH: Yes, and I've had this conversation with numerous people. You know, there's kind of a generational thing that happens too. The people who ranched here who are eighty or ninety, you know, they remember, some of them remember, the Taylor Grazing Act.

RH: Right.

MH: And then they kind of remember they've all along treated grazing a certain way here which, you mentioned, is a little bit different, maybe more relaxed.

RH: Right.

MH: But I talk to ranchers now and they don't see a lot of difference in how they range their cattle. They don't see it. Now these are reasonable people. They are not as old either.

RH: Right.

MH: And maybe third or fourth generation. And so we're talking about, oh, yes, the next generation if there are any who continue to do this because it's more of a hobby now. It's not a big money maker. In the next few generations they will understand grazing with the monument umbrella. It will be different. It just takes time.

RH: Well, they will have had to deal with it. I think there will always be a tension there. Because it's a business and there is a profit and some of the things that you're being asked to do cut directly into your pocket if you can't get as many cattle out there as you want. If you can't use motor vehicles in wilderness areas. Someday there'll be wilderness here. It's going to affect the bottom line which is, why it's primarily a hobby thing now, is that it's stopped being something that you can make a living at.

MH: There's a couple ranchers in the monument area and I talked to one recently who has thousands of head and he's got them in Nevada now.

RH: Is that right?

MH: Yes, and couple other places because there's no feed on the Monument to support his big herd.

RH: Well, that's maybe a function of the drought.

MH: Exactly. We had a really terrible winter last year. And then other ranchers, the old timers I've talked with they said, "Yeah, we would bring our cattle off that low country (now it's the monument land) and they'd just be poor, in poor shape." It's tough, tough terrain, tough feed. It's not ideal rangeland.

RH: It probably never was. But at one time it had a lot more vegetation on it. It was probably in a climate regime where we had a little bit more water.

MH: Right.

RH: And it did support, it could support thousands of them here. But when the feed was gone and the cattle didn't go, then it started to damage forage to the point where none of that vegetation came back or very little of it. And you started seeing shifting in the vegetation types. Juniper becoming dominant. At least I'm told that is what's happened. But I think that is probably related somewhat to overgrazing. But what to do about it? I think is still kind of a mystery.

18 Hellie, Robert

MH: Right, yes. Do we intervene again?

RH: Well, if you're in a climate warming phase, you know, this is a beginning of a long drought then maybe nothing that we've been doing is really going to be what it was.

MH: Yes, absolutely. Yes, talking with Jane, she has a great story, historic information about the ranges being destroyed by the turn of the century in the 1880's and 90's and in the turn of the century, Utah was a different place. That's when it happened, you know, when it was overgrazed. And then seeing all the landscape, in that central section of Utah, coming up in juniper and sage brush. And those "belly high to the animal" grasses have gone forever.

RH: Well, a distant memory at best now.

MH: Yes, that's right. Memories now. OK, well great. Any last comments? I so appreciate your time.

RH: Well, you mentioned Jane Belnap and I would say that one of the things she should be recognized for is her enthusiasm, it was infectious. And she sat in on a couple of those meetings with John Lesly and his group and just really pointed out to him what an incredibly spectacular place this is and how special from a biological perspective it was. There were a lot of skeptics in that group and she pretty much won them over.

MH: Yes, she's convincing.

RH: Yes, she is.

MH: Well, I'd like to thank you again, we'll end the interview now.

End of Interview Time 01:13:16