

Interviewee: Watson, Jimmy

Interview Date: June 16, 2009

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Jimmy Watson

Interviewed by: Reed Amadon
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Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: Park Service in Galveston, Texas

RA: Okay Jimmy, nice to meet you. I'm Reed Amadon from the Center for Public History and I'm here at the Park Service in Galveston and talking to one of the top maintenance at Texas Parks and Wildlife, Jimmy Watson. What is your title officially?

JW: Regional Maintenance Specialist.

RA: Okay Regional Maintenance Specialist so you're dealing with this whole gulf area?

JW: Yes sir, in Region IV.

RA: Alright. Thank you for seeing me and agreeing to be part of this project. It's really kind of fun and a lot of people find that they have a lot to say. As you said, there's no other questions you'd like to ask?

JW: Not right now.

RA: Okay. What got you working in the park service?

JW: For many years, I've been with the Parks Service for approximately three years before that, most of the time I was self employed, ran my own business. I did underground construction and general construction. We were pretty successful but I have family that worked for the park service and the opportunity came up and we felt that was the right thing to do.

RA: What were you doing for the park service before you got to this type of position?

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JW: I started out as a Ranger working in the parks. My goal was to be the Regional Maintenance Specialist within two years.

RA: Okay.

JW: I was right at it.

RA: Very good. What was the journey like to get to where you are? Tell me some more, in a little bit more detail?

JW: As far as working for the Park Service?

RA: Well you are now here working the maintenance part of the parks service, what got you...?

JW: What got me to this point?

RA: Yeah.

JW: Other than having my own business for approximately ten years; before that I was in management.

RA: Construction business?

JW: Yes sir. I was in management so I have a management background. Then, like I say, being fairly successful on the side it gave me a lot of knowledge as to how projects should be done and so they gave me the opportunity. Justin Rhodes, the Regional Director up here, I worked for him up in Region VIII and then he got promoted down here and then when I found the opening for the Regional Maintenance I applied for it and he gave me the opportunity.

RA: Very good. What was your education like?

JW: My education is some college but no degree. You know throughout the years I went and had taken many courses, because I do have a strong interest in it.

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Unfortunately, I have never pursued a degree. Which at this point, as far as Texas Parks and Wildlife, I am as high as I can go unless I go ahead and finish out my degree, which my boss is pushing me to do.

RA: What would your degree be in?

JW: Well what I would have to look for now would be more of a business degree with a background, whether it be in wildlife or whatever but mainly business would be what I would have to pursue now. Some of the topics that I have been interested in before were kinesiology and quite a bit of math. But kinesiology was really where I was headed at one time.

RA: That's like using your body...?

JW: Well yes sir but it was mainly because I was interested in going into a coaching career at the high school level.

RA: That makes sense.

JW: But having a large family it's difficult to go full time.

RA: Right, I understand.

JW: Because you've got to feed them.

RA: Yes if you don't do it early it's tough. What has it been like to work for the parks service?

JW: Completely different than the private sector. I have met some of the best people in the world. Anybody who knows me I'm pretty blunt and I'll tell them what I think. They are fantastic people. They are the most dedicated people and they have given me a lot of opportunity to learn a different structure. It is definitely learning because it is a much more, I don't want to say time consuming process to work through the state but we

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do have state laws, we do have state rules. Because we do have to be very proficient about how we use the tax payer money so I appreciate that, since some of that money happens to be mine too. But that's what it has been like to work for the park service. It is just re-evaluate and exactly how and when to spend the money and the proper channels and the people have been fantastic and given me a lot of opportunity obviously.

RA: What is the focus, how would you describe what most of your work is?

JW: What I look at one of my primary goals is to provide the ranger staffs out there with what they need. If we don't take care of the people on that front line and they take care of our customers and our visitors are our customers, if we don't provide them with what they need how can they do their job? I don't want to say that a lot of times they don't get what they need, but there are limitations. My job is just that to fight as hard as I can to make sure that they are organized, to make sure they have a good game plan, to make sure that they have the tools and the opportunity to be successful.

RA: What kind of things do they need?

JW: They obviously need equipment which we have a tremendous amounts.

RA: What do they do, what do these people do?

JW: The role of a ranger goes anywhere from sweeping outside the bathrooms to fixing a major electrical lift station problem. It is about as diverse as you can get. It is ultimately, plumbing, electrical, carpentry, painting, heating and air to some points. I've watched them install generators with transfer switches. There really is no limit to it. If you think of, if you look at it as if you were running your own hotel/RV every aspect and if we don't give them the tools and give them the support and the opportunity then it's hard to be successful.

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RA: So they are kind of multi-purpose maintenance?

JW: It is about as multi-purpose as you can get, yet as well as enforcement of the rules.

We look for voluntary compliance in enforcement of the rules. If it goes beyond voluntary compliance we have to call in our park police which are a different level.

RA: What is your what would be your greatest love in this field, what do you just really enjoy doing more than anything else?

JW: It's the people. It's getting out and watching what they do. Giving them, I guess I've been given the opportunity and been blessed to see a lot of different things happen, to give them different ideas and different ways of... We had to do some stuff here at Galveston that some of the guys were going, "How in the world are we going to do that?" and I said, "Here's how." They looked at me and their eyes lit up and they went out and performed the work flawlessly and very efficiently.

RA: What are some of the challenges?

JW: Well the challenges, let's look at some of the ones here, rebuilding this park. Let's talk about Galveston here for a minute and we can go to other parks if you want to.

RA: Pretty much if that's good.

JW: If we look at Galveston we came to a park that was flooded in sea water which is tremendously different than being flooded in regular water because everything has to be replaced. We gave them the challenge of within a three month period of resetting all the pedestals we had to bring in a new temporary headquarters, the CXT bathrooms that we just paid tremendous amounts of money for, we had to refurbish because the water came in and destroyed them. So we asked a lot of long hours and the challenges were that they had to perform and do, like I said, the electrical.

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RA: Is that the concrete buildings that split?

JW: Yes sir. Out of the ones that we had here and we had five, three of them we could not use and two of them we could. There was some vandalism to one of them so they had to re-plumb one of them. I had to sit back and watch the people that worked at this park previously, watch their park be tore down by bulldozers and then tell them, "Guys, let's rebuild." They did it. The challenge was watching their eyes as their home, it had been their home for years, got torn down by bulldozers. So it was pretty devastating for them.

RA: What parks do you work with?

JW: Right now all of Region IV.

RA: What is that, what area is that?

JW: We are looking at basically the southeastern portion of Texas. As far as Martin Dies and Village Creek over to Texana so it's a pretty good little bit. You know of course Brazos Bend, Galveston, San Jacinto the battleship the monument, Sheldon Lake.

RA: You have involvement with all of those?

JW: Yes sir and that is a neat part of my job, getting to go to each park. We had our first ever ranger conference in this region, bringing in all the rangers together. We've had Lead Ranger meetings which was a first for here and they thoroughly enjoyed that. Brining them together as a team, we asked for help out here at Galveston for a three week period and had I'm going to guess 40 members of staff throughout this region come down and help. It was tremendous. That was just making them a family and that is what we are becoming in IV.

RA: Well are there any of the parks that will not reopen?

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JW: None that will probably no reopen at all. Of course Sea Rim is our toughest challenge. That is right on the, almost on the... about Port Arthur, almost at Louisiana.

RA: What happened to that one?

JW: It took the hardest hit. Galveston got hit, Sea Rim got devastated. There are three or four options still on the table. That is still going through a lot of process. We do believe that it will become some type of park whether it will be day use or if they bring it all the way back. But right now not a lot is happening with it until we really feel which direction we want. Galveston we felt like we needed to get open because we had so many people. I had one couple call me up and say, "Please reopen it. We've been there every year for like 30 years" and they said, "We don't want to miss a year of camping." They've done it, so Galveston has a lot of special history to it. Sea Rim had been closed for really three years before this hurricane so unfortunately there wasn't a lot of push to reopen it but I do know that Justin looked at me a while back and said, "You about ready to start on Sea Rim yet?" I said, "You're the boss!"

RA: How did Ike (now this is sort of a redundant question but maybe go in a little bit more), I'm looking at how did Ike affect your area of responsibility and then we'll look at next what was the specific damage?

JW: Being that I first came into the region 12 days before it happened...

RA: Right.

JW: My thought process was, "Come down here and spend time in each and every park." Well when Ike happened it changed the whole world. We had to refocus immediately on basically our water and waste water plants and by way of our incident command, getting the people...

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RA: Incident command?

JW: Which came from Austin, we have a very good emergency program which is getting even better now. We have already met in Austin a couple of times and they are making it even more efficient. So we had to find out where our employees were. With telephone lines down and after a major hurricane, just locating them was tough. So that was our primary goals. Our primary was, are people okay? Second thing was we need to get our water and waste water because that is public health and we need to make sure because we have people who live in our parks, our managers and stuff. We've got to get them electricity. We immediately started locating generators. Both Region V and Region VIII and Austin were fantastic about helping us get generators and getting them power. We re-established a temporary regional headquarters within two days up at Sheldon Lake, hooking that up to a generator so that we had our point of attack. Justin and his family are safe. He didn't have power. My family was still up in northeast Texas and I was the only one here so we could just strictly focus on what needed to be done. So that's how it affected my responsibility. I went from trying to see what was going on in the region to...

RA: Holding the region together.

JW: That's it.

RA: What was the damage from Ike?

JW: In two of the parks, like I said total devastation.

RA: What did that mean?

JW: Sea Rim took everything from the housing to the headquarters. Everything was pretty much built on stilts down there to help survive it. It didn't survive. Out of the two

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residents, one of them was strictly there will pillars and then the other one had some sidewalls. Headquarters was devastated. The personal belongings of the people of our staff that lived there, the park manager went out there and found a coffee cup and that's all he had of pre-Ike life and post-Ike life was starting new. Did he ever go back and find more? I don't know but there wasn't much to find. But I can only imagine sitting on his mantle somewhere is that one cup. I have pictures of the other park staff member, the park police where his sons out there digging through the rubble looking for anything and there just wasn't anything. Trucks buried half way up. So Sea Rim like I say devastation. When you go out there and you see a ½ ton four wheel drive truck that normally sits way up and it is sunk because of the water currents. We have pictures of it sunk just half way up.

RA: Do you think that park will reopen I mean you were saying that it would in some way?

JW: I think it will. I think it needs to. I think it is important. There has been a small outcry because that is not a park such as Galveston. Galveston is an enjoyment park.

People come here to have fun. People go to Sea Rim because it has an atmosphere of wild life about it. They don't go there to go sunning on the beach. They go there to look at the alligators, to look at the birds. So we do need to build platforms.

RA; You never put the rest of that infrastructure back in probably?

JW: At this point I would definitely not say that was a "for sure." Would it happen later? I think as of it stands right now the initial is probably going to be get it maybe to like a day use park to where people can enjoy it and come out and see the life, you know, see what is going on out there and then the wild life management that is right there with it

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will probably help incorporate some of that. They will help us run it some. So we might end up having minimal staff but that is still undetermined.

RA: What about the other sections that were messed up?

JW: The Martin Dies.

RA: Now where is that exactly?

JW: Martin Dies is Jasper right there outside of Jasper. Your heart has to go out to Martin Dies because they were devastated in a hurricane a couple of years ago. So they worked, they are some of the hardest working guys that I have ever seen and we've got a lot of hard workers in this region but Martin Dies, when the hurricane hit I went out there and I looked at their eyes... I told them that and how it related to me was when I watched my wife have a baby, it was baby number 2 and she had a real rough time with the first one so she went through a lot of pain and when the first pain hit with the second kid I saw that look in her eyes, "I don't know if I can do this again."

RA: That's really good.

JW: I looked in their eyes and I saw that same look. At the same time they looked at me and said, "You know what? That's okay." They turned it around and Region V came down, Brad Hood out of Region V brought some guys and they were tremendous and they pulled that park together and they tore it up. Half their park was once again torn up with trees, you know, completely. The other half they just couldn't use. It took them a month to reopen but they did it and they did it in a month. They bragged about what they did. Actually I brag about what they did they don't really brag they just say, "Yeah we did it." But Livingston, same way Village Creek over there, very small park in staff, minimal staff but they got hit just as hard. They rolled up their sleeves and started chain

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sawing away. I'm very proud of that side. On our western side, they had some problems but it wasn't like the eastern side. The eastern side got devastated. But they got after it.

RA: What about here?

JW: Here in Galveston, once again, the main problems were the flooding because it just tore everything up with salt water. If you look over at our maintenance building and it's a pretty big maintenance building, it shifted it. The three houses we had over there, it floated them. So we are in trouble with our housing. Now we have been able to acquire a couple of FEMA trailers. We couldn't get them through regular FEMA because of we are a state agency and all that but they allowed us to purchase some of theirs here about two weeks ago at a very discounted rate. FEMA has been great. You hear a lot of bad things about FEMA. We have had some very good people out here with FEMA. I can't knock them. I appreciate what they have done.

RA: When I was here with Jeff we went over to this park that's down here and the visitors' center and all of the other things pretty much devastated. Is that all gone now?

JW: That's all gone. The only thing you will see is on the very northern... like you've got the road that runs east and west out there, the very northern part of the shelters, we kept twelve on each loop. We had to get rid over everything else but we wanted to keep them because that is what we are reopening up the park with. So we went from approximately 75 sites over there to 36.

RA: That's good though.

JW: Oh yeah that's better than nothing but yes all that building structure is gone.

RA: You don't have anything on High Island or out that way?

JW: No sir.

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RA: Okay that's a good thing. What do you think were your most special reconstruction challenges were or are?

JW: Working within the constraints of legally purchasing material and legally installing.

RA: That's an interesting way to say it.

JW: Well...

RA: Instead of scotch taping it together you had to do it the right way.

JW: We did in three months what should have taken two to three years.

RA: Wow, how did you get it done so fast? How did you get it approved?

JW: Because Infrastructure as well as Parks work very well together. From what I understand if you go back years ago there might have been some difficulties but now Infrastructure has really, every time I call up there, whether it be to Tony or Jeff or any of them they just ask me, "What do you need?" and "How can we help you get it?" When something needs to be looked at quick, they get one of the engineers to look at it really quick. We are not on the back burner.

RA: Where in the past that was...

JW: Well I don't want to say the back burner but we were always kept on an even keel so if another park that wasn't waiting to open needed something done first (and by rights a lot of times it should go in that order) but we fell into an emergency situation. Of course Dan and Walt both really threw their support behind this and of course Rich, they just all said...

RA: You have to... I don't know who these people are.

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JW: Oh Dan and Walt are our two leaders of Texas Parks and Wildlife. Our Deputy Director Dan Shalley and Walt Damney, our Director. Rich is the Director of Infrastructure.

RA: Okay.

JW: When you have those three guys look at you and say, "What do you need?" a lot of doors open up.

RA: That's cool.

JW: So that's our special challenges is being able to do this with a limited staff, limited funds and limited time frame.

RA: So what do you think is the underlying key to this work?

JW: Team work. Because I can take one piece out of the puzzle and it falls apart. If we take out the guys on the field, if we don't give them the material they need. We needed to get them a new tractor. We needed to get them a skid steer out there. We needed to get them some tools. When you call up Austin and say, "Look I need \$100,000 right now." A lot of times they are going to be like, "Yeah right!" Well instead we said, "Well let's see where we can get it." And we found it. It was a combination of them coming up with some of the funds and then we came up with some of the funds, because we did have Galveston's budget to work with. Obviously that wasn't enough to rebuild a whole park but it enabled us to do this.

RA: How long do you think the changes on the coast? Are there long term changes to the coast because of Ike?

JW: Now that is not my area of expertise but I am learning. Apparently we have some tremendous long terms effects from this hurricane. We did watch that we lost a couple

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hundred feet of beach. We have regained some of it. But my understanding also is that this island is constantly shrinking.

RA: It's never expanding?

JW: No. Now what happens over time we don't know because they have started reconstructing marsh lands and stuff back here. So naturally, if we just left it, we don't know what would happen but this is one big sand pit and sand in the water...

RA: Don't mix.

JW: Right. But Ike did come inside and it did a tremendous amount of devastation. It tore up the sand dunes that were there and it is my understanding that it is going to take years to rebuild. If another hurricane came in just like Ike this week or this year we would be in trouble. Because the dunes that were there protected some and no dunes and we'd be in trouble.

RA: How far above the water line is this part of the island?

JW: Right here we are probably 8 feet.

RA: It wouldn't take much.

JW: It doesn't take much. If we had been sitting here during the hurricane both our heads would be under water. It came in that much. Which we can thank the Friends Group for redoing this building.

RA: Very nice.

JW: They have done a fantastic job. This is the Friends Group for really getting after it. But yeah we would be under water.

RA: What was your personal experience with the hurricane? What happened to you during that time?

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JW: Well mine is a unique adventure like I said. I came throughout my life in northeast Texas. So when hurricanes going in we always sit up there and say, "Well I wonder if we'll get any rain out of this?" Well it's a whole lot different down here.

RA: When you say northeast Texas what do you mean?

JW: Well a little town called Ustis which is kind of near Athens; in between Dallas and Tyler, right in the middle of it.

RA: I got you. I just to live in Lufkin and I traveled that way a lot.

JW: So really one of the biggest things was we would see it on TV and it is nowhere near the same. You can't imagine it. It's not, if people watch it on TV and think, "Oh I feel bad for them." They have no earthly idea. Like I said we got out the very next morning. Of course Friday night it was coming in.

RA: Here in Galveston?

JW: Well actually I was in Sheldon which is...

RA: Oh geez!

JW: You know where Sheldon is?

RA: Yeah that's up near...

JW: That's where I was staying. I asked them, everybody that I was working with. "Hey guys, a hurricane is coming should I leave?" They looked at me and said, "No, no you'll be fine there in Sheldon." I looked at them and I said, "Okay so when I leave the room are you going to giggle and say, 'new guy'?" and they said, "No you'll be fine." So I stayed because I knew I needed to be here the next day. You know for the previous two days the mayor, the judge and all they were telling everybody to get. I don't understand why some people weren't getting but they did fantastic telling people to leave. Well

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anyway come Friday night I kind of seen it rolling in and we had already boarded up the windows so I just went inside. I went in, I thought I'll just watch a little TV until the antenna turned and then I went to sleep. My wife calls me. I had a cell phone still working at 1:00 in the morning. She calls me and wakes me up. "Are you okay?" I said, "I'm fine." She said, "Well it's right on top of you." I'm like, "Well thanks I could have slept through this." But like I said the next day when I got up and got a hold of Justin. He said, "Let's go see what went on with the monument. We want to make sure the battleship is okay." Driving over to his house I never ever thought about watching for power lines. I do now. If you see telephone poles leaning in towards the road you've got telephone lines down.

RA: Power lines?

JW: Yeah power lines sorry. So I watched what people were doing and I listened to what people were saying and it is amazing... like I said watching it on TV growing up, yeah it looks bad but when you see the lines. When you see the water trucks pulled up and you see the people come out. I will say this it was amazing the way people treated each other. There was no, "Get out of my way." It was like, "Let me get you what you need." Every time we went by there in one of our parks trucks, man they couldn't throw enough water in there for us so we could take it wherever we were going. Of course where we got to go was a little bit different then where a lot of people got to go. It was unique.

RA: How soon did you get down here?

JW: Down here? I was down here probably within a week. Now Hans and Ken, Hans being the police officer that works here now, Ken Regan is our Regional Law

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Enforcement. They came down here I believe the day after. It was interesting. Jeff, I believe came over here on his... from the other side I think he brought one of the jet skis and came in and tried to see. Like I said it's easy to sit up there and watch it but...

RA: I was at home when the 120 miles winds are beating my huge oak trees in my back yard and I'm going...

JW: "Uh Oh!"

RA: It was not a good night. I didn't sleep much that night.

JW: It was interesting. It is a big long tornado. The sustained winds like I said were about 120 right over us. But they were right I was okay in Sheldon.

RA: It was very wide, huge, very wide, one of the biggest.

JW: Some of the stories I heard, because you get to hear more stories when you are out here. I heard one lady say that her friend called her on the phone saying, "I think I messed up by staying." Because she was up in her attic and the water was up there with her and she died because she stayed.

RA: She was here?

JW: She was here. Don't stay. Your stuff isn't that important. You can come back to it. Now talking to the people afterwards, they say no if you don't stay you don't get back on the island and your stuff will be destroyed. Well you know we've got insurance. If you don't have insurance I guess we have FEMA but...

RA: Well you look at the people on High Island and all that kind of thing.

JW: I know it's just gone.

RA: Gone.

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JW: So to me, of course it's easy for me to say, this isn't my home. My home was up there. Would I leave my home? I think I'll take my family and go. That's just me.

Please don't stay. Anyway...

RA: What have you overseen in the rebuilding of the parks, everything?

JW: Yes sir, every aspect of it. If we are talking mainly here, now if we are talking Martin Dies and all them we had to help them of course get the chippers and the stump grinders and the equipment.

RA: They had massive damage in terms of trees?

JW: They had quite a bit. I will say that Austin did tremendous amounts in helping that obviously, Tony Bennis, fantastic. But we had arranged for a lot of their trees to be taken. Mainly theirs was clean up. Not so much devastation. Of course getting them electrical power, you know we had to get them generators and we had to make sure that we were hooked up safely. But that was pretty much the end of that. They were pretty self sufficient once we got them back on their feet, they did the work. Down here we had to arrange to get someone in here to clean up. Then when you are dealing with a FEMA time lines, if you are under a certain time line you get 100%, under another time line you get 75% and then it turns into 75% of 75%. We actually arranged and had ready a crew to come in here within a couple of weeks and start cleaning up. Then it got kind of halted because they had other plans. Anyway by the end when it was all said and done, Texas DOT actually came in and helped us do a lot by using the actual contractor which we had originally which was kind of neat. But we did have to initialize a lot of the clean up and then once the clean up was done we had to come back and start thinking of how we were

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going to rebuild. How were we going to get a new building out here for our temporary head quarters? We had already gotten some buildings over here for temporary housing.

RA: Where is your temporary head quarters now?

JW: It is back over here almost in front of where the old head quarters was.

RA: Oh okay.

JW: It's little. There's not much to it. Then of course we just start after everything is all cleaned up we started rebuilding and then over the last three months we've got it about 98%.

RA: What did you find out when you did a lot of the clean up what kind of things did you find?

JW: A lot of things that weren't from here. We probably had, I'm going to say we had about 10 hot tubs out there, countless water heaters and memorabilia from who knows where. They found a chest that was buried out here of personal belongings, just tremendous things; snakes of course.

RA: What came a shore a lot of animals?

JW: I didn't see a tremendous amount. There were some but I think we probably had more animals at Sea Rim devastated and a lot of the alligators because that is an alligator farm over there and there was lots of alligators. But there were some big snakes here, mainly snakes that were here. But like I said most of the things that we found were from not here.

RA: Well by not here you mean?

JW: From houses.

RA: From down the coast.

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JW: Yeah from wherever they came from. Hot tubs, we saw full decks come in. Just everything that could have floated out of someone's yard...

RA: It did.

JW: It did.

RA: After Ike what do you think the prognosis is for the future of the park and the wild life areas on the Gulf?

JW: I think from what I've seen it's going to be like "You can hit us and you might knock us down, but you're not going to stop us." It's been very much we are coming back. For the people out there that want to come visit us again, don't give up because it's coming back. There are some things that will be built different obviously. We have some of the best engineers probably in the world that are working on it. We have design build companies that are building for us. We are doing a lot of homework before this next one is built. You never know but I bet you come back in five or six years you'll see one of the premier parks at this location in the world.

RA: Right well the park that was over there was built many, many years ago? It has sort of a modern look to it but it was... and that looked pretty much, they thought it was pretty permanent right?

JW: Right. When you put up concrete that a bulldozer has a hard time running through (and we found that out) you think you've got it pretty strong but we don't come close.

RA: The ocean was stronger?

JW: Right. Now granted this was a storm in essence of when you look at the over all picture of 100 years, you know did it come in... it came in at a 3 "Yippee ki, eye aye!"

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but when it comes in as a 3 and it's about the size of a fist, you know like George Foreman, that's what happens.

RA: What are the plans now for the parks?

JW: It's to, like I said we have already reopened every park but Sea Rim and Galveston and we are in the process of Galveston. So we are back. We are back on our feet. Everything is 100%. What we are looking at now though is doing much more emergency preparedness. Like I said one of the biggest things was how do we get back up and running safely, efficiently afterwards so that we don't provide for your vacationing customer but you can provide for your evacuation customer? To do that is to get our electrical grids more efficient.

RA; So you actually may be taking care of people that have to evacuate?

JW: Absolutely.

RA: Oh very interesting.

JW: And we did that, quite a bit of that this year. We've done that with everyone. When New Orleans got hit bad, we filled up all our parks with evacuees. We did it this time. There is tremendous numbers that came in. A lot of them had to go up north but Brazos Bend opened up fairly quick. Like I said, Lake Texana was taking them, Stephen F. Austin. So what our plans are is to get better at that, to make sure that we have more generators in place. Can we hook them up efficiently? Will our water and waste water plants continue to function?

RA: Do you think you can actually build structures that will be able to sustain?

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JW: What happened six months ago I think, our arrogance would be way too much to say that we can compete with that. I would hope that we wouldn't become that arrogant. Can we make it more survivable? Absolutely. Can we get smarter? Absolutely.

RA: Is this building, in terms of, this has been fixed up but has it been strengthened or changed any way?

JW: No.

RA: This was basically flooded though right?

JW: This was flooded. We came in here and everything was just turned over. Of course all the sheet rock had to be redone but no it is... it stood strong.

RA: When you are trying to rebuild what kind of obstacles did you run into?

JW: Obviously you are always going to run into that financial aspect. I mean there is no way of getting around that. I mean we've got to be smart. You don't want to throw good money after bad. So when we do something we want to make sure that we are getting our full dollar. So that's going to be a big obstacle.

RA: Have you had the money to do the work you've needed to do up to this point?

JW: Yes. They have done very good with us.

RA: That's the state?

JW: That's the state, yes. Like I said a lot of it came out of the operating budget but if we didn't have the support of Austin we would have just had to shut the doors.

RA: That's kind of like when I was down here with another employee, he was saying that he really at that point didn't know how they were going to reopen some of these, some of them would never reopen he thought. Of course he didn't want that.

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JW: Oh no, no one wants it. We don't want to see Sea Rim stay closed. We don't ever want to shut down parks. That's our life this is what we... we believe in this. We want to see us grow.

RA: What is your long term prediction for parks and wilderness areas in the future?

JW: From everything I've seen we are going to stay on a slow constant growth. Land acquisition is a hot topic right now. Of course once again you are battling your financial versus feasibility but there are several land acquisitions that are going on, that are in the works. So I do see a slow steady growth.

RA: What kind of parks do you think that they would look into?

JW: Now strictly opinion but I see a lot more going towards natural. Yes we do need vacation spots but there's lot of vacation spots. What we want to do is preserve and maintain.

RA: Very good.

JW: That's the direction we are headed in. We are headed in to of course the "Leave no trace" we have a very strong program teaching families how to camp. You know that we actually go out and set up in a state park, have people come in. We've got tents, we've got everything. We teach them how to camp because it's a lost art and as time goes on, people want to go camping but you'll talk to a lot of families and they will be like, "We don't have a clue. We go down to Wal-Mart, we go to the sporting goods" and go, "Oh my." That is another big push that Parks and Wildlife is doing, is the outreach to bring camping back to them.

RA: Very interesting.

JW: So I think natural, I think you'll see a lot more natural coming out.

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RA: What is the importance of parks to you?

JW: That's it. If we lose our natural whether it be state or national if we give it up, if you look out that window right now, if we give that up and that becomes houses then that's what you have. You have houses. You don't have it to where people can go out there and go kayaking. You don't have free or public access to places. Once you live in that condo, you're in that condo. Of course it has a great effect on wild life every time you shut one down. Then we have people like Andy Sipits and stuff like that that work for our agency that fight hard to make sure that don't happen. Andy has come over there and sit in my little old office looked at me and said, "Jimmy you're not doing that." He will tell me why and I say, "We're not doing that." Because we do have things like sea turtles that come here and if we go out there and one of the things was we were doing the demolition we had time constraints, we had to make sure that we were done with certain portions. Sea turtles...

RA: Don't go by your clock.

JW: No they don't. Then at the end we had to end up putting even a barrier fence up because even though we were out of their area they wanted to make sure that they would never climb all the way up because we no longer knew their area because we no longer had the dunes that they previously had. So we had very good people letting people like me know things. So if we lose that, if we lose the sea turtle and we lose the little bird called the sand piper or something like that I forget exactly what it is...

RA: _____ (inaudible 44:21)

JW: Right and he said if we lose that and he said we can't. We had to stop progress because of a migratory bird even though it was just a simple old barn crow, you know

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there are 10 million of them, it doesn't matter they are migratory and they have an impact on everything that they touch. So you know he's right we do have to be careful about what we protect. I mean that's in our mission statement that we are here to protect it.

RA: Is there pressure are there forces out there that want to put condos on the park lands?

JW: Oh there is always going to be that.

RA: Somebody wants to make a profit?

JW: Absolutely. You know I mean yes you know that. There is a company right now that they have tried to come in on this back side because they want that bayside property. I can't blame them. They want to make it but at some point there's got to be a happy medium. I'm not saying that we've got to save everything but we need to save something.

RA: Right. You look in Houston and you see all that greenery gone. They are building these little rows and rows of houses, you are losing everything.

JW: Right. I mean we live in the southeastern part of Texas is very special about the types of woods it has, the type of vegetation it has. Like I say there is no way we could possibly save it all. We are here. We are supposed to be here. We need a place to live and yes we need to be comfortable here. But we also need to be smart.

RA: Would you go into this field if you could start over?

JW: Absolutely. One thing that obviously I would tell anybody, I tell my children and I tell anybody is don't do like me. Get a degree. You definitely need a degree no matter what field you go in. But would I work for Parks again? In a million years! I mean I do

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it every day. I feel very blessed. I love going to work. I don't have to go to work; I get to go to work. I get to work for one of the best agencies in the world and I love that.

RA: What more needs to be done that is not being done today?

JW: You know there's lots of ways that we can benefit. You know sure I'd love to see more parks. That's easy for me to say because like I say there is always a... anything is possible but is it financially feasible and we've got to be smart. While we've got starving families out there we can't build a million parks we know that. But I do like that we are trying to bring the core of cities out and I think that's what we need to continue to do.

RA: Like what, like Sheldon Park?

JW: Well or like what we are doing, teaching people how to camp, if we can go into the cities and pull these people out. I grew up in the country. I mean I've got land up there. My father in law has a couple hundred acres so my kids grew up down there in the creek camping, coming home with a snake in their hand. But the condo kids have no earthly idea and that's not right. We need to be wise with our money but I think it is very wise if we do support it. I mean that's what I think. We just need to continue to reach to the people that don't naturally have it.

RA: Interesting approach instead of making it kind of an elite sort of thing make it something that is populist to support the people, very good. If it were up to you what would you want the coastal parks to look like? Give me your idea.

JW: Condos! No! Condos! I build things. (laughter) No just to bring it back to nature but incorporate... I do sometimes when people say, "Well we shouldn't have any impact." We have impact. We are here.

RA: Absolutely.

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JW: We should have an impact but I think our impact should be in such a way that we enjoy what God has created for us instead of us going to create something different. I mean we have theme parks and I think they are great. But as a state agency we need to do exactly as our mission statement says, bring it back to nature and incorporate us into it so that people can come out and see what's there and that we save the sea turtles and the little piper clover (that's it) and stuff like that.

RA: What about, they talk about parks like Yellowstone which have gotten so heavily used that it's really kind of, it's really burdened the park and burdened the environment.

How do you protect against that sort of thing?

JW: The only way is... I can think of one way and it is rotate your pastures. I don't know exactly and there's going to be people a lot smarter than me but we do it with cattle. We rotate our pastures. To me that would be one way of doing that I would think. Is that we would have areas that we only allow at certain times. Because there are certain areas that if you walk on the moss it is dead and it doesn't grow back. There are places in Colorado that we love to go camping up in Colorado but you know what where we go camping if 100,000 people went there we wouldn't go there anymore because it wouldn't be what we wanted. I think that's the important thing. How do we incorporate us into the nature?

RA: Was there anything, any key bits of wisdom, any other thoughts anything we haven't really covered that you'd like to cover? It sounds like there's something percolating there.

JW: I'm sure that we are going to walk away from here and then in 20 minutes I'll go, "Hey that was a good one." No I think, I think over all this whole process, we can always

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look back and we can nit pick the dog out of it but to me that's always aggravated me.

Let's not go back and beat it up, let's learn from what we've done. We know some of the mistakes we've made, please let's don't make them anymore. We've already tried to tell people get out but we need to make sure that they are getting out. We need to make sure...

RA: You are talking about hurricanes?

JW: Yeah. We just need to get smarter on that.

RA: Was there some hesitance about leaving Galveston?

JW: Not as far as the park but people in general. Like I said that was the biggest thing was watching the people. Like I said you can see it on TV all day long but they will have an impact on you.

RA: The misery of the aftermath.

JW: That's it. Just like I've always told people if you ever want to be humbled, and I recommended this to people, go down to Children's Hospital which was up in Dallas up there but I'm sure they have one here. Go to Children's Hospital and volunteer for a week. Walk away from there and you'll be so thankful for what you have. I think that is what we need to look at is, yes we do want to continue to grow and I'm going to fight every day to bring every good thing we can into this region but I am so thankful for the people and the things that we have here that I will never not be truly humbled for this opportunity because it is a fantastic place to work, so most definitely.

RA: Good well very interesting picture and really great talking with you.

JW: Thank you.

End of Interview.