

**Narrator: Mel Landry**  
**Interviewer: Jennifer Abraham Cramer**  
**Transcriber: Joshua Coen**

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**JENNIFER ABRAHAM CRAMER:** So thank you for coming and sitting down with us. I'm Jennifer Abraham Cramer and I'm with the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral Histories with LSU Libraries and I'm also here with, uh, as a partner of CWPPRA. Susan just explained to you the project. So, we appreciate you coming and today is November 14<sup>th</sup>, the year 2013. So tell us a little bit about yourself: your full name and when and where you were born.

**MEL LANDRY:** My name is Melvin Raymond Landry III and I was born—well I grew up in Arabie, Louisiana—born in New Orleans.

**CRAMER:** Okay. And where do you live now?

**LANDRY:** [0:39] Now I live in Baton Rouge.

**CRAMER:** Okay, great. And what is your occupation?

**LANDRY:** I'm a marine habit resource specialist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

**CRAMER:** Okay, and can you tell us of a childhood memory that connects you to the wetlands?

**LANDRY:** My entire childhood connects me to the wetlands. I grew up in Arabie, not far from the coast. Um, but we had a camp...my family, my grandfather particularly...had a camp in Hopedale, Louisiana out in the marsh so I spent most of my childhood learning to fish and drive boats and make soft-shell crabs with my grandfather out there.

**CRAMER:** Okay, thank you. And how have you seen the wetlands change over time in your lifetime?

**LANDRY:** [1:17] Well, they're disappearing. That's for sure. It's amazing to see, in a lifetime, that you can see what really is geologic change. Um, even as a child, as we rode on the banks of the bayous, you could see the sloughing of the land into bayou. The breaks in the land, the bare soil. And at a young age, I became aware of the situation with coastal land loss in Louisiana and I guess, though I didn't realize it then, drove it to be my life's work. So being more aware now, certainly seeing more with my own eyes every day, having the resources to view the impacts so we can formulate solutions, makes it all the more real to all of us that work in this industry.

**CRAMER:** And if you had to explain to someone else why wetlands in Louisiana are important to not only Louisiana but to the rest of the country, what would you say to them?

**LANDRY:** [2:15] Wetlands everywhere are important, but I don't think there is anywhere else you'd find, especially in this country, where a culture is so intimately tied to the

natural resource. It's in our blood. Those of us who were born here don't live in houses or in cities, we live in our environment. If saving this culture is any interest, saving our wetlands is paramount to that.

**CRAMER:** And in your opinion, what do we stand to lose if are...if we...without coastal restoration projects?

**LANDRY:** We stand to lose everything. Coastal wetlands envelop all of our major cultural resources, our towns, our infrastructure, our communications conduits in south Louisiana. Without them, then you've just got a lot of infrastructure and open water, which isn't sustainable. We've already seen the loss of culture as people move inland and communities evaporate; they're diluted as people move to far off distant places and are no longer together. You saw that a lot after Katrina and you'll continue to see it if we don't restore and protect our wetlands.

**CRAMER:** [To Susan] Do you have a question?

**SUSAN TESTROET-BERGERON:** [3:25] Yeah, Mel, you've been instrumental in getting the message out to the public about restoration and you've taken a lot of people in the field. Why do you think it's important for people to see and get in the field and have those experiences?

**LANDRY:** It's important for different reasons to different people. I think the most amazing thing that people realize when we bring them out there is just...not just the scale of what is impacting, the loss, which is huge...but the scale of the restoration we do. I mean, we're not talking just planting some grass or putting up, you know a shoreline protection that's a few miles long. We're talking hundreds of acres barrier island restoration that we do. We're talking bulldozes and some of the largest dredges in the world, moving dirt with hard hats and heavy equipment and it's just amazing. So it really drives it home. Maybe you don't care. Maybe coastal restoration isn't the most important thing to you. Maybe jobs are the most important thing to you. But if jobs are important to you, then you see that we're putting people to work. We're not just restoring our ecology. We're really building an economic base for coastal Louisiana that could be built upon restoration.

**CRAMER:** And what would you...if you could give a piece of advice to the coming generations about coastal restoration and wetlands, what would you say to them?

**LANDRY:** [4:52] Don't give up! It can be a little disheartening. I mean, we are fighting what, right now, is still a losing battle. I think we have the potential with the funding streams and technology that we've been able to secure. As a group of agencies trying to do this, we have the potential to maybe turn that corner soon, but if you wake up every day thinking about how dire the situation is, it's a little hard to get through the day. But stay positive and don't give up.

**CRAMER:** And how did you get involved in coastal restoration?

**LANDRY:** Well, growing up in Louisiana, it was unavoidable; at least the knowledge of it. I went to school and ended up actually studying biology, specifically aquaculture oddly enough because it didn't require a foreign language. And from there I managed to get a job working for one of our resource agencies in the state, but really made it a mission to find myself in a position to where I could more directly influence the people and the understandings. I dug my way down into a little program in the bayou and was able to grow there and have now moved on to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration where I've got a few more resources but take with me what I learned from the people that I grew up with and the people that I shared experiences with down the bayou in that second job.

**CRAMER:** Why is CWPPRA important and why are CWPPRA projects important?

**LANDRY:** [6:23] All projects are important. CWPPRA is important because we can execute projects in a relatively expeditious manner. You've got almost all of the players at the table with a common goal, so that makes it incredible there. And we've got funding. You know, we were one of the first programs that had a substantial funding stream to be able to build which were then large scale projects. But I think one of the most important rules of CWPPRA today is as an incubator. Because of our public process and because we invite the public to participate, they can submit projects that we as just government resource managers may never come up with, especially the more removed we get from the wetlands. So by allowing that conduit from the public, we're able to build on concepts and ideas that other agencies can then pick up and construct when funding becomes available

**CRAMER:** [7:12] Alright, thank you. Did you have any questions Susan? Alright, thank you for your time. We appreciate it.

**LANDRY:** Thank you.

[Tape Ends 7:21]