

**Narrator: Jo Anna Jones**  
**Interviewer: Darcy Wilkons**  
**Transcriber: Joshua Coen**

**14<sup>th</sup> November, 2013**

**DARCY WILKONS:** My name is Darcy Wilkons and I'm interviewing Jo Anna Jones about her memories and experiences concerning the Louisiana coastal wetlands. The interview is being conducted at 11:45 AM on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The interview is being conducted at Bayou Terrebonne Water Life Museum in Houma. Do you understand that portions of this taped interview or pictures taken during the interview may be used in a publication?

**JO ANNA JONES:** [00:36] Yes.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Thank you for speaking with me today.

**JONES:** Mhm.

**WILKONS:** Now that we have gone over the consent forms, I would like to just get your basic info.

**JONES:** Sure.

**WILKONS:** So, would you please state your full name for the recording?

**JONES:** Uh, my full name is Joanna Lutz Jones.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Um, what's your birthdate and where were you born?

**JONES:** April 16, 1947. Elmira New York.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Um, how long did you live in New York? Did you live there you whole life?

**JONES:** [01:05] Most of my life. We traveled a bit in summers, so I was in various places but mostly I was in New York state. Um, and then I came down here in 1984.

**WILKONS:** Okay. What brought you down here?

**JONES:** A job. I was mainstreet manager in Houma, which was a program for revitalization. I met my husband who was the parish engineer probably in 1985 or 86. We got together in 86. Didn't marry till a while after that. He was the parish engineer and was also involved with designing what became the template project for Barrier Island restoration in this state. His name was Bob Jones. Robert Spary Jones. And that probably happened slightly before they did Last Island, about 30 acres of Last Island. Slightly before he and I got together. But, I was very aware of CWPPRA etc. because of that.

**WILKONS:** Wow, that's amazing.

**JONES:** [02:13] He was pretty amazing, yeah.

**WILKONS:** Okay so, you've lived in Houma for most of your adult life then.

**JONES:** Half of it, I would say. Well, half of my life, yeah. I've been here since, as I said, 84.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Um, so you don't have any childhood memories of Louisiana wetlands?

**JONES:** No I do not.

**WILKONS:** Do you have any, you know, favorite memories of being in the wetlands at all or any experiences?

**JONES:** I remember one time...my husband liked to fish. I didn't particularly. But he had a little boat and being in an area where he had a whole colony of pelicans. That's a very fond memory.

**WILKONS:** Pelicans are beautiful.

**JONES:** Yeah. Mhm.

**WILKONS:** Okay, so. You've been here since 1984. Have you seen the wetlands change since you've been here?

**JONES:** [03:05] Yes. There is less land. I am very aware of that. And I was very aware of that because of my experience with my husband. He was also involved with starting Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, so very very much dedicated to that experience. I also worked for FEMA after Katrina. I was on the Lafourche Parish team. The, uh, what was it called, long term community recovery. And I was the coastal environmental lead because of my experience with my husband, so that and then I became more and more aware of what's going on.

**WILKONS:** Mhm. Okay. Um...so, why are Louisiana's wetlands important to you and, you know, our nation as a whole.

**JONES:** We produce in this area. Port Fouchon is a troboat uh, what is it? 18% more or less of the oil and natural gas, what is it about maybe 20%? It depends on whats happening with the, um, with the shale play gass but certainly we're very important in that way. We are also, um, a major exporter of food projects etc. And, uh, it's a unique culture. It's an amazing unique culture that probably the rest of the country doesn't care maybe. None of us have that sense of caring so much about people in other parts of the world. All of those comments about after Katrina, people should move. My question is where do they move to? This is where they belong. This is...you know, the idea that they picked this place. They didn't pick it. They were born here, many of them. So, I think all of that makes it important.

**WILKONS:** I agree with you. Um, in your opinion, what do we stand to lose without coastal restoration projects if we were to not do anything.

**JONES:** [05:16] Oh, it's gone. Shay Penland, who was at UNO and who was a very good friend of Bobs and worked with him a lot, told me at the time –Bob died in 2004- and he told me at that time we had ten years. It's now nine years later. And so I don't think...I don't think we can save as much as we could have. We've never done a concerted "let's just get it done" type of approach. Money's been pulled away. Projects haven't happened. Um, various things. So, yeah. You know, we'll do what we can, but you know, we're gonna lose a great deal. There's just no way it won't happen that way.

**WILKONS:** Do you think we ever will get the recognition and the help that we need from other parts of the country?

**JONES:** It takes a long...you know, I've been down here, what, since 84 so that's almost 30 years. It takes a long time to understand another part of the country. And I don't think that other areas recognize what goes on here and I just...I don't know what's going to happen with people if they have to leave. They'll be totally displaced and dislocated and it'll be very difficult. I also work with the regional planning district now so I'm very aware of what's happening and I do a lot of work with Fouchon.

**WILKONS:** Mhm. Yeah. Okay, so if you could go back, what would you tell previous generations about wetlands?

**JONES:** [06:52] It took a long time for people to recognize...what was it? About in the 70's when Woody Gagliano first started saying "We're losing this" but it had been happening since the 30's. When you had the channelization you had the leveeing as opposed to doing spillways, you started losing land. And there's no way we're not, that's not...and that's continued. Then there's always that trade off. You know, you do it for human settlement and then you've got the tradeoff. And then it's not a natural environment anymore. It's a built environment. So we are somewhat...previous decisions have unforeseen consequences and we're kind of stuck with it and what do we do now and that remains to be seen, um, how much of the money...if you look at the Restore Act it basically is set up very similar to say Sea Up or CWPPRA where supposedly certain areas have a certain amount of money but in fact you've got to apply to this group which has more federal agencies, very similar to CWPPRA, than it does local and then...Florida gets some money. Now, I'm sorry, Florida...from, you know, the oil spill. Florida didn't have impact. We had impact. But it always happens that way. It's political. So we have to live with it and do what we can. But, you know, it's not going to do the job. And then you've got the problem of triaging. Certain areas can't be saved and that is, that's tough for people, say in South Plaquemines parish to realize, but it's a reality.

**WILKONS:** Okay, so you'll go back to, like, the 30's when they started channelizing, channeling this...

**JONES:** [08:27] Yeah, after the 26 or 27 floods, when they started doing that. I think that decisions were made and there were reasons why decisions were made and then you have...and now we've got the question of the flood insurance that is going to make a very big impact and their talking about delaying the higher premiums for four years but still eventually if they make people pay those higher premiums, that becomes very difficult. People will go without flood insurance. And then they'll end up being impacted if there's another storm. They won't be able to get help.

**WILKONS:** So, the reason...Okay, so can you explain a little bit about the flood insurance issue?

**JONES:** Okay, so the flood insurance, um, basically comes down to...they are going to sort of market rate it. It used to be sort of subsidized. And people who followed the old FEMA maps and you know elevated to a certain level, are still going to be impacted. It could be three or four times the premiums that they could pay now and it's just going to...and you know if you have to pay in one...at one time, you know, I guess they'll allow to pay on time but if you're paying \$25,000 a year and you're someone with limited resources that becomes impossible, so you don't have flood insurance.

**WILKONS:** Right. Okay. Well, this brings us to the last question so, do you just have a certain message that you would like our viewers to take away from our discussion today?

**JONES:** [10:04] I think that the message I would want to have is that when you're looking at this you can't look at it in a supposedly rational way because the fact is these are people's homes these are people's lives these are people's communities. And to say to them well, pick up and move somewhere else, you've got people with very limited resources in many cases. If you look at communities like in Southern Terrebonne Parish, Montague, where my husband and I lived, Chauvin, they don't have the resources to pick up and go. And where would they go? They have no relatives anywhere else. They have no reason to connect with somewhere else. It's very difficult. And I think that recognizing that and realizing if we can spend money, the kind of money we can spend on the military, why can't we spend the kind of money... you've got similar problems all over the country... you've got the great lakes have similar problems in terms of erosion, you've got the Sacramento river delta, you've got that red river thing up in Minnesota and Wisconsin that floods all the time. It's not like we're the only ones. Start spreading the pool. Do, you know, do multi-disaster insurance and then we'd have a bigger pool. Then they wouldn't have to do what they are doing with the flood insurance. And, and make sure the money goes in the right direction. If they're going to restore, make sure it's the right choices. You've got this whole question of diversions versus slurry pipeline, and that sort of thing. Where do you put the money? We should have dredges on barrier islands all of the time. As soon as the storm passes, they should be dredging again but they're not. And it's always money. And that's you know, its money and politics. So that's the message.

**WILKONS:** Well thank you so much. This has been very invaluable. On behalf of CWPPRA and the T. Harry Williams Center of Oral History I'd like to thank you for coming in today and for giving us such great information.



**JONES:** Good.

**WILKONS:** It was nice to meet you.

**JONES:** It was nice to meet you as well. Good to meet you both

**[Tape Ends 12:19]**