

Narrator: Kevin Roy
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JENNIFER ABRAHAM CRAMER: Okay. Thank you so much for joining us today.

KEVIN ROY: [00:03] Thank you. Thank you for having me.

JENNIFER ABRAHAM CRAMER: I'm Jennifer Abraham Cramer with the LSU T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History and we are working with CWPPRA on this project that Susan just explained to you and I am here today interviewing Kevin Roy. It is November 14th, the year 2013 and we are at Connoco Phillips in Houma. So we'll start with a real easy one. When and where were you born?

KEVIN ROY: Uh, when. I was born in 1967 in Alexandria, Louisiana. So, born and raised in Louisiana. Been there all of my life.

CRAMER: Where do you live now?

ROY: [00:38] I live around Lafayette, Louisiana. So that's where I live now and I've been working there for the past 22 years.

CRAMER: And what is your occupation?

ROY: Um, I am a wildlife biologist with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

CRAMER: Thank you. And...can you tell...can you share with us a childhood memory that connects you to Louisiana wetlands? I mean, you grew up a little bit north but...

ROY: [01:05] Yeah, um, I did. But I guess even from an early age, you know, starting out, you know, fishing whether it be with my father or my grandfather...um, I guess I always tended to be drawn to the wetter areas. I mean a swamp, you know, or a wet bottom land hard wood. I just tended to like to be in those areas, say more than an upland setting. So I guess because of that I just tended to have more of an interest in wetlands; you know, hunting ducks and hunting other things that were in a wetland environment. That just seemed to be the area that I was drawn to.

CRAMER: Yeah I was going to ask you why you were drawn to the wetter areas but you mentioned hunting and...

ROY: Yeah. I think, you know, like I guess a lot of kids in growing up in south Louisiana...we...a lot of us grew up hunting and fishing and that's I guess really what sort of

formed the basis for my interest in going into this field. Um, but I guess I always had a particular interest in wetlands, as opposed to being in more of an upland setting. So I guess, I guess that's probably it.

CRAMER: So why are Louisiana wetlands important to the rest of the state and even the rest of the country?

ROY: [02:18] Why are they important? Um, I guess... I mean, I can give you sort of a textbook answer, you know, if that's what you'd like. But they're obviously important. I think, I mean for me and because of my background and because of the fish and wildlife habitat that they provide. Louisiana is you know probably, if not the, one of the most important states for wintering water fowl in the country. Um, a big part of the, I guess the water fowl habitat value in Louisiana is based in our coastal wetlands. And just having seen some of that loss first hand... um, you know, and I think that's really for me one of the most important things is just their value for fish and wildlife. I mean, there are obviously other important values: the storm surge protection, um, you know, there are also water quality benefits. I mean wetlands obviously serve to filter a lot of, you know, a lot of things out of the water. Um, but I guess for me the most important thing tends to be the fish and wildlife habit value of wetlands.

CRAMER: And you mentioned, um, what you've sort of alluded to what you've seen change but can you tell us a little bit more of what you've seen change in your lifetime about the wetlands in coastal Louisiana?

ROY: [03:39] Um, yeah. I mean I've certainly observed wetland loss. I mean, just having been in this arena now for, you know, twenty one, twenty two years. Being able to spend a lot of time in the field, I mean there are just so many areas that I've been in, you know, ten years ago that look so different now. And even on an annual basis, some of these areas change tremendously. Especially after the passage of, um, Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita following that. I mean just tremendous changes in wetlands. Just large expansions of marsh being lost. And, you know, I'm lucky I have the opportunity to see a lot of these areas first hand, so, when you're out in these areas, there are solid areas of marsh or areas with small ponds, um, surrounded by marsh. And you go out following some of these storms and the entire area is now open water. So, I guess I do get to experience a lot of that first hand with my job and I guess that's what I see, you know, happening on the ground.

SUSAN TESTROET-BERGERON: I have a question. This is Susan Testroet Bergeron, CWPPRA Outreach. Kevin, you have the most unusual job in CWPPRA of keeping track of the acres that we restore. So tell us a little bit about what it feels like to know how much we're actually restoring. I mean, you're sort of the keeper of our acreage so tell us about that.

ROY: [05:09] Yeah I guess, uh...I guess I am sort of the keeper of the benefits that we've assigned to these restoration projects through the CWPPRA program and um you know I guess sort of my take home message is that there is just so much more that needs to be done and when you look at the acres that would be restored by the CWPPRA program, if we would build everything that we would approve, its somewhere in the neighborhood of 100,000 acres. But then when you look at what we're losing on an annual basis, somewhere from 10 to 12 square miles a year, you just realize everyday what a daunting task this is and you know how huge the problem is that we're trying to overcome. Um so I guess that's a good and bad part of my job. I do get to see the difference that we're making and I think we are making a difference. But I also see how much more needs to be done because I guess I do see those numbers every day.

CRAMER: What do you think we would stand to lose without coastal restoration?

ROY: [06:12] Um, I mean, we stand to lose, I mean, a way of life for a lot of people in coastal Louisiana. I mean there are so many people in communities all along the coast that you know they are making their living you know from wetlands whether they be you know, um, you know a commercial shrimper or a crabber or other commercial fisherman. I mean, it is a way of life that these people have and then not to mention just the recreation aspect of our coast for a lot of people that like to hunt and fish. Um, you just remove that from someone's life and I mean it's huge. It's a huge impact. Um, you know, that's one of the biggest things I see. And of course, there's just the storm surge protection that our wetlands provide. You know, without

these wetlands, cities that are...you know and our view right now, they're probably not seen as being close to the coast, but a lot of these towns and cities, you know, Lake Charles, um, Lafayette, um, you know, New Iberia, you know, everyone's familiar with New Orleans. But, you know, Houma, Thibodeaux. I mean, it's incredible thinking of how easily those cities would be impacted by storms, even minor storms, if we continue to lose wetlands at the rate we are.

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

ROY: [07:34] Um, well I can tell you what really first got me interested in coastal restoration. I was in graduate school at LSU. Um, I decided to take a wetlands ecology course with Dr. Irv Mendelsohn and I would have to say that, of all of the courses I've ever taken in my college career in my life, that was the one course that really got me interested in coastal wetlands. I mean it really totally changed my, I guess, my thinking on what I wanted to do in my career was that course. So I owe that to Irv Mendelsohn. But um, after that course, I just remember having... You know, I just became really interested in wetlands and coastal restoration. Um, went to work, you know, for the government and basically since I started working twenty two years ago, I've been in the coastal restoration arena, um you know, ever since then. Um, so I really probably owe it to that class for really opening my eyes. Cause before that, I didn't really know that much about it, about coastal restoration, coastal land loss issues. That class opened my eyes and I've been involved in it ever since.

CRAMER: So what advice do you have to the next generation in regards to this issue?

ROY: [08:54] Um, I guess just to get involved in whatever way that you can. Spread the word. I mean, sort of like me before I took that course, I was someone who'd been living in Louisiana all of my life. I really wasn't that familiar with coastal land loss. Um, so for the next generation, get involved and inform other people and let them know what's at stake. You know, I think a lot of other people across even this state are probably like I was. They don't know anything about the problem. They don't know how significant it is. You know, spread the word. Spread the word if you can in the political arena. You know, contacting, you know, your representatives, your senators, whoever you can, and let them know how important this is. Um, it's something, you know, worth saving.

CRAMER: Do you have any other questions Susan?

BERGERON: No, that was excellent.

CRAMER: Do you have anything to add?

ROY: [09:48] Um, no, I think that's it.

CRAMER: Excellent. Thank you so much. We really appreciate it.

ROY: Okay. Sure, okay. Nice to meet all of y'all.

CRAMER: Nice to meet you.

[Tape Ends 10:03]