

Interview with Brent Manning

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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- DePue: Today is Thursday, February 18, 2010. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today it's my honor to be with Brent Manning. Good afternoon, Brent.
- Manning: Hi, Mark. How are you?
- DePue: Pretty good. Why don't you tell us, Brent, where we are?
- Manning: Right now we're sitting in DuPage County at the headquarters of the Forest Preserve District, where I'm very fortunate to be employed.
- DePue: The reason we're talking to Brent this afternoon is because of his involvement for the entire Edgar administration as first, the Director of the Department of Conservation, and then the newly created Department of Natural Resources.
- Manning: That's correct, yes.
- DePue: Director? Was that the correct title?
- Manning: It is the correct title for both.
- DePue: I got lucky then. But we always start with getting the background and how it was that you came to that important position and to have that important role in

a major reorganization of government. So let's start at the beginning. Where were you born and when were you born?

Manning: I was born in 1953, actually on Saint Patrick's Day.

DePue: Which is kind of fitting, isn't it?

Manning: It is fitting, in that I was born at St. John's [Hospital] in Springfield on Saint Paddy's Day, and my mother's maiden name was Murphy. The nuns were a little bit aggravated they didn't name me Patrick. I don't know, maybe I'm lucky they didn't name me Patrick, maybe I'm not. But that's what they wanted to do.

DePue: Manning doesn't sound very Irish, though.

Manning: It's Scotch and English. But I did find it interesting. I was looking up the coat of arms from various nations; there's a Manning coat of arms both in Scotland and in Ireland. So apparently someone, somehow, some way incorporated the name in both places.

DePue: Any idea how the family on both sides had ended up in the Springfield area?

Manning: All I know is what is brought down by family lore. Apparently the early Manning settlers settled in eastern Kentucky and eastern Tennessee. The folks down there say that our ancestors came through the Cumberland Gap with Daniel Boone. Now whether or not that's true, I don't know. But that's what the family lore says.

DePue: That works rather well in terms of what your future career is going to be.

Manning: Yes it does. My father tells me that my great-grandfather actually came to Illinois from the eastern Kentucky/eastern Tennessee area on the back of a mule. My grandfather at that time was probably five or six years old. They settled in the Pawnee area just south of Springfield and farmed. They were involved in real estate and livestock and I guess whatever they could do to make a living.

DePue: So you grew up in Pawnee, not Springfield?

Manning: I did. I grew up in Pawnee.

DePue: What did your father do for a living?

Manning: He actually was employed for more than thirty years—I think thirty-seven years—at the State of Illinois. He was a soil scientist in their laboratory, working on highways.

DePue: Was that his job when you were growing up? Were you impressed by what your dad did?

Manning: Somewhat. I was impressed with the science that was involved. I never did understand fully the engineering principles behind what he did: the plasticity of the soils, and one soil could be used for one thing, one soil could be used for another. I suppose I was glad that there were people who were good enough to be able to do that. That way we don't have bridges falling in. It was interesting, but it wasn't something I had an interest in doing.

DePue: But you mentioned the ancestors came to that area primarily to farm. Was there anybody in the family who still farmed?

Manning: I had a great-uncle who retained a farm. He farmed, up until his death, just outside of Pawnee, between Pawnee and Chatham, and found it to be a very good lifestyle. I still remember going and seeing him frequently and spending time with him.

DePue: Did either set of grandparents farm as well?

Manning: My grandfather on my father's side was involved in livestock and real estate. My grandfather on my mother's side actually did have a small farm, an eighty-acre farm, north of Pawnee and south of Springfield on the Pawnee Road. He had back problems later in life. He converted a small building on the front of his property to an early version of a 7-Eleven. You would go in there, and there were sandwiches and soda pop and small amounts of groceries, and he sold gasoline out front. I really think it was a wonderful retreat for him and all of his friends, because I can remember sitting over there for hours upon hours listening to stories. It was a great place for a kid to grow up or spend time.

DePue: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Manning: I do. I have a brother who is two years younger than I am. He's a computer specialist. I am so foreign to computers I can't even explain what he does. I have a sister who's five years younger than I am, who's by trade and training a nurse, but she is raising her sixteen-year-old daughter. She and her husband have an older daughter as well. But the younger one is sixteen, and my sister thinks it's better for her to be at home and make sure she takes care of her family.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about what it was like for you and the rest of the family growing up in Pawnee, Illinois, in the fifties and sixties. We have this notion of romanticizing or making that into an idyllic situation.

Manning: It was Mayberry. You knew everyone. The town was so small. I've heard this said often down there: "The town was so small you had to take turns being the village idiot." (DePue laughs) And it happened frequently. There were a

number of them. It honestly was a great place to grow up. Because of the community and the tightness of the community, it wasn't as things are today in that children can't go outside and play. I remember times in the summer where I'd probably leave home shortly after a bowl of cereal and not return until that evening's meal. Of course in between there would be exploring, there'd be time in tree houses, there'd be dirt-clod wars or whatever else we would decide to do. We lived on a relatively large lot, so there was always a late afternoon baseball game. It was a great place to grow up, a great time to grow up.

DePue: Did you spend any time on any of your relatives' farms?

Manning: Oh yeah. On my grandfather's farm. It was interesting. When he gave up farming and started this little store, my next-door neighbors and I. There were two sons that were close to my age. One was a year older than I am. We spent a world of time together. We would weed beans, and we'd get \$1.25 an hour, which was really big money at that point in time, cutting corn out of beans or the weeds out of beans.

Their father was a barber in Springfield; he had to be at his barbershop at seven o'clock in the morning. Very often during the summer, when we could get ourselves out of bed in time, he would put us in his pickup truck, the three of us, and drop us off at my grandfather's store at about 6:30 in the morning. We had four or five ponds within two miles of that store that we would hike to and fish—generally fish all day, catch frogs, look at snakes. I don't know what else we did, but probably much of it was wrong. But it was a great way of growing up, and it provided me a lifetime interest. That, and my father's great intrigue with the outdoors, provided me with a lifetime interest in the outdoors. I will always remember those times as very, very good times.

DePue: We're already picking up some pretty powerful themes here in your life that you're going to follow. How about schools? What were the schools like?

Manning: Pawnee High School and grade school. I'm happy to say eight years in grade school and four years in high school. So there wasn't a prolonged stay at either. Typical student—I probably didn't focus or concentrate enough in high school. I played basketball and football and went to Eastern Illinois University after I graduated from high school at Pawnee. In 1975 I finished my undergraduate degree in zoology, and the spring of '76, finished my master's degree in zoology at Eastern. Also I earned a degree in environmental biology from Eastern; shouldn't forget that.

DePue: Why don't we go back and hit up a couple things when you're still in Pawnee, if you will. Parents had a religious background? Was religion important to the family?

Manning: Absolutely important. They both were Christian. Very good. Our upbringing was such that we had to make sure that we did things right, in the appropriate fashion. And we did. We attended the Lutheran church when we were young, and it was a very important part. Summer Bible school for all the kids was a must, as well as swimming lessons.

DePue: You mentioned football and basketball. You talked about all these other things that were of interest to you. When you were finishing up in high school, did you know what you wanted to do with your life? You said you were going to Eastern, but did you have a career in mind?

Manning: I did, in that wildlife and fisheries had always been a great interest. I went to Eastern and enrolled in what was then called a preconservation program. They didn't have a degree in environmental biology at that time. So I enrolled in preconservation. It was originally on a quarter system. After my first couple of quarters there, they started talking about this environmental biology degree. By the time I was ready to complete my preconservation degree, I found that all of my courses were applicable to their environmental biology degree. So I stayed on at Eastern and completed both my zoology and environmental biology degrees there.

I knew they had a wonderful fisheries program there, through a professor by the name of Dr. Leonard Durham, who was really an icon in fisheries, known throughout the United States. He had great connections with the Illinois Natural History Survey. The more I got into the program, the more I learned how respected Eastern was, and decided to stay there.

DePue: You and I are about the same age. The late sixties was an interesting time. There was a lot going on. Part of what was going on was this emerging environmental movement. I'm wondering if you remember the first Earth Day and perhaps what Pawnee did on that day.

Manning: I don't remember what Pawnee did. If my memory serves me correctly—gosh. What was the year of the first Earth Day?

DePue: I think it was 1970. I could be wrong, but in that neighborhood.¹

Manning: I'm thinking that it was in April, in—was it 1970? Or '71?

DePue: We can find that out and make sure it's in the transcript.

Manning: The only thing that I really remember about that time period was my fascination with all the things that people were saying were wrong with our environment and that we had to correct. When I say fascination, of course growing up with relatives who were farmers and in a farming community, I saw a lot of chemicals being used, and understood that our rivers and streams

¹ The first Earth Day in the U.S. was held April 22, 1970.

were very quickly being ruined by virtue of the sedimentation that was accumulating, and wondered how and what we could do. I remember the utilization—my grandfather did it—of moldboard plows and how you could watch, after a spring rain, the soil simply run off into the ditch from the moldboard plowing activity that had taken place either the previous fall or earlier in that spring. It would turn the streams to a chocolate color. I knew that it couldn't be good for the environment or good for the fish. That was probably secondary in most people's minds to the chemical runoff and to the intrusion by the pesticides and herbicides. But I always thought it was a travesty, a terrible travesty, to see that happen with rivers and streams.

In fact, my father tells me stories. I did not know my grandfather on my father's side; he died before I was born. But my father tells me stories of him talking about Horse Creek, which is the creek that runs north and south through of Pawnee, being five to seven feet deep and having a sand and gravel bottom. While I was growing up, a deep place was two feet deep, and it was all sediment that had filled it in from farming activities. My grandparents on my mother's side lived in the country nine miles north—of where we did in Pawnee. Horse Creek that far north was in places even worse than it was right next to the community. It was just so shallow and in such bad condition because of all the sedimentation, that it was deplorable. I hated seeing that.

One of the ponds that we fished when we were kids, which was just a mile south of my grandparents' home, was owned by a fellow by the name of Southwick. Mr. Southwick, at the time that we were children—ten, eleven, twelve years old—was in his mid eighties. I always enjoyed going and sitting and listening to him, and talking to him, when we would go there fishing. He never turned us down. We'd always knock on the door and ask for permission. He'd say, "Why, sure." Then he'd come out and generally walk around the pond with us as we'd fish for bass, and talk to us. He was a great gentleman. But one of the things that he told me was that his family had lived there for a very long time, and his grandfather was aware that Abraham Lincoln had hunted and fished up and down the creek bed in that particular area, and he did it with part of Mr. Southwick's family. Whether that's true or not I don't know. But I thought it was a fascinating story.

DePue: In that neck of Illinois, practically anybody who's been there for a long time has some connection they want to draw to Abraham Lincoln.

Manning: Yes, yes, unquestionably.

DePue: That wasn't just the environmental movement that was going on in the late sixties and early seventies. There was the Vietnam War. Apparently you did not go into the military.

Manning: I did not. In fact, I tore a meniscus playing football in high school. I really didn't think I had enough money to go on to college at that point in time, so I

tried enlisting in the National Guard. They wouldn't take me because of my knee being all torn up from football.

My next-door neighbor, one of the kids that I went hunting and fishing with all the time—his father owned the barbershop in Springfield—he did enlist and was killed in Vietnam in 1972, which was a tragedy. Many small towns in the area experienced similar tragedies. I played football against a kid from Girard. I remember him being a great athlete and a very, very good, hard-nosed football player. He was killed in Vietnam as well. So we all experienced similar tragedies.

DePue: Certainly the Vietnam War, by the time you were coming of age, was increasingly unpopular. You had the civil rights movement that had begun in the late fifties. You had the students' rights movement. You had women's rights going on at the same time. All of these things oftentimes made our generation much more politically conscious, with definite views on things. How would you describe your views on things? Obviously you had strong interest in the environment, but how about some of this other stuff?

Manning: I grew up in an environment where there were no black children in our area. In Pawnee, my interface was only through sports, and very infrequently. When I was a youngster playing baseball, we'd go to Springfield, very infrequently. When I went to college in the summer of '71, I can remember playing pickup basketball games with black kids. I didn't think it was any different than playing in the neighborhood, in my neighborhood. I never looked at it any differently. I had a hard time, until I started reading and understanding what discrimination meant to those kids. I understand it. I understand it more and more. I have understood it more and more since that time. It's been a fascinating and interesting learning process. I've had great, great friends, and still do, who are black. That time period was an educational period for me. I tried to get to a point where I understood what the societal woes were all about.

DePue: Did you have strong views about the war or some of these other issues?

Manning: I had particularly strong views about the war when my friend was killed. Up to that point in time, it was on the other side of the world. It was distanced. It really didn't come home. In that same time period there was a kid who was four years older than I was, who was in Vietnam. He was killed as well. When those two tragedies happened, it really came home. And the more that I read, the more that I read about the Bay of Tonkin, the more that I understood about the political involvement and why we were there, the more disgusted I became with it.

DePue: You're at the cusp, though. This whole idea of environmental science, and majoring in something like environmental [science] when you go to college, was pretty darn new at the time, I would think.

Manning: It was.

DePue: Was that one of the attractions to you? And did you realize, This is going to not necessarily be popular among some circles?

Manning: Certainly. I think anybody in the environmental field for the most part realizes you're not going to become rich and famous. That what you're doing has a higher cause. Of course you hope you can scratch out a good living for yourself and your family—but I think we have focused and looked at for years is what we can leave that next generation, and in what condition can we leave it to the next generation.

I firmly believe—I've got a number of friends that I know could have done far better financially—brilliant people, in other fields. They've stayed in this field because they firmly believe they can do something that's going to enhance the lives of people in the future. I feel that's really and truly what the environmental movement is all about.

DePue: You mentioned already that when you got to Eastern, your undergraduate major was in what area again?

Manning: I earned an undergraduate degree in environmental biology and one in zoology.

DePue: Any particular mentors you remember? You already talked about Dr. Durham. Anybody else?

Manning: Dr. Durham, of course. There was a fellow there by the name of Mr. Frank Frambs, who was an entomologist that I thought was an excellent, excellent teacher. He was very good. Dr. Darding: his specialty was plant physiology; I still remember, as much as I hate plant physiology, I loved his course. He was just a brilliant instructor. He was very, very good. He'll laugh if he ever hears me say that, I'm sure. There was a fellow, a wildlife professor, by the name of Dr. Richard Andrews, Doc Andrews again, fantastic, open-minded, very knowledgeable in his field. Hank Neilsen, who was also at Eastern, was excellent. It's fascinating, but through those contacts I grew to know people, who would later mentor me in life, who are some of the most renowned wildlife and fisheries scientists in the world.

DePue: When we met earlier, you mentioned Dr. Larry Hunt as well.

Manning: Oh, yes. Dr. Hunt, ornithologist. He was my adviser for my undergraduate years. Dr. Hunt just passed away recently. I think it's since we've met. Dr. Hunt was great.

Through those contacts, I met and became associated with Dr. Frank Bellrose, who was probably the most renowned waterfowl biologist in the world. I spent a great deal of time with Frank over the years. He was a

wonderful person. He has since passed. Dr. Larimore offered me my graduate work through the Illinois Natural History Survey, located at the University of Illinois.

DePue: What did you think you wanted to do with all this training?

Manning: I really wasn't sure. I knew that I wanted to work in the environmental field someplace. I wanted, as I said earlier, to try to make a difference. I loved fisheries as I loved wildlife. But I also knew that they were all interrelated, they were connected. Truly I'm not a fisheries biologist, nor am I a wildlife biologist. I'm more of an ecologist. It's a mix of the two that makes a difference. I shouldn't say the two; there are many sciences that are involved in ecology. But the appropriate mix, the appropriate components in the right number and to the right degree, is what's important.

DePue: You're growing up, and you're into the environmental sciences, into ecology. You had lots of connections with farms and farmers in your own family. What was the response you got from some of the older folks in the family who were more closely tied to the farms?

Manning: Actually, I think it was an enlightening period for them as well. It wasn't so much a response to me as "You know, what you guys are working at and doing is bad." It was more of, "We don't fully understand this. Explain to us what you're talking about in regard to the sedimentation caused by moldboard plows." Eventually many of them went to soil savers. So they realized it as well. They understood that there was a problem, and at the same time, they're trying to feed a family and they're trying to make ends meet in the farming community. It was never an easy life. Farm life is hard work and a lot of effort that's put forth to be able to do what they do.

DePue: But no friction or resistance that you felt from farmers in general?

Manning: Really, no. Not until I was with IDNR [Illinois Department of Natural Resources]. And then of course, I had some run-ins with the Farm Bureau. But that was...

DePue: We'll get to that.

Manning: Yeah, that's later in the story.

DePue: What did you end up doing then? Did you go for master's work as well?

Manning: Yes. I completed my undergraduate degrees in '75 and my master's degree in '76. I spent one more year at Eastern and finished my master's. Did my work through the Illinois Natural History Survey, which had done the sample collections; I did the analysis, and stayed at Eastern.

DePue: What was the master's emphasis?

- Manning: It was feeding selectivity of young-of-the-year smallmouth bass, looking at rearing ponds and seeing what the little critters ate and what type of mechanism they used to feed.
- DePue: On a commercial basis or just in the wild?
- Manning: Actually, from a fisheries perspective it's valuable knowledge to know what their foodstuffs are—because in a rearing pond you can provide more of what they need—and what mechanism triggers them to feed. I think what we finally determined by looking at it was probably a facilitative method, where one would start to feed by virtue of opportunities and it was almost like competition—the others had to jump in. That was an interesting deal.
- DePue: The discipline, then, was environmental science?
- Manning: Zoology was my master's. Technically, zoology. Eastern is an interesting place. They don't have a wildlife degree or a fisheries degree, but you have as many courses there as you do in many universities that have wildlife and fisheries degree. I took as many as I could of both.
- DePue: So for somebody like myself who's a history major, give me a clearer definition of zoology and how you fit into that.
- Manning: Zoology is the study of animals. Whether it's their environment, animal behavior—there are many components. There's ornithology, there's herpetology, there's physiology, et cetera. All those are components of zoological studies.
- DePue: Did you find work then, after you got your graduate degree?
- Manning: I did. In fact, I was interviewed before I graduated. Contingent upon graduation, I had been interviewed by IC Industries and went to work as a regional environmental analyst.
- DePue: And that stands for?
- Manning: Illinois Central. They owned Illinois Central Gulf Railroad, which was my primary responsibility. At the same time, they owned Kentucky Fried Chicken, Country Time Lemonade, Midas Muffler.
- DePue: The national franchises for all of these?
- Manning: Yeah. It was a huge conglomerate.
- DePue: What exactly did you do for IC Industries?
- Manning: When they ran the train off the track, it was my responsibility to help provide for cleanup.

DePue: Certainly they didn't do that.

Manning: Everyone has an accident from time to time. Also, we instituted a fueling station system where we would collect waste fuel oil. In other words, when you go to fuel a locomotive there's always some loss or some waste. Through their engineering department they developed some aprons that the locomotive would pull up on, and it would then collect that waste fuel. Then we would go; we'd analyze the components. When the tanks would fill up, we would sell it to people that used fuel oil.

DePue: You were analyzing it for what?

Manning: Water content, basically. We'd make sure that we didn't pump a tank when it was 80 percent water and 20 percent fuel. As fuel would accumulate, it would displace the water, of course. So we also had several treatment ponds that would collect waste from—and when I say several, it was fifteen or sixteen in the state of Illinois—the normal activities that took place in a train yard. We had belt skimmers on those treatment ponds, which would remove the oils and skim the oils off the surface of the water. Then we would sometimes use tertiary treatment on the water to clean it up. They all had NPDES—National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System—permits that were administered by the EPA. Those permits prescribed certain criteria, whether it was biological oxygen demand, whether it was oil content—whatever it was that they required specifically at each of those treatment facilities for us to look for.

DePue: All of this was a good match for your training and your career goals?

Manning: It was an interesting match because it gave me an idea of how industry worked, and I was fascinated by it. Very often the perception in the sixties and seventies was that industry was this mega Satan that was out there destroying the environment, polluting the environment. Actually, with IC Industries in the time that I spent there, I found that not to be true. They were very conscientious. They were trying their best to accommodate, not only the laws, but even go beyond that. And I think they did a good job of that.

DePue: Were some of the things that you were working on—in communicating the things that you wanted to see happen—were those also cost-saving measures perhaps?

Manning: We know now cutting down our carbon footprint is very valuable to the environment. But any time that we could salvage waste oil, any time that we cleaned up the water as it exited our property—those were cost-saving measures on a global scale. From IC Industries' perspective, when you collected the oil and resold the oil, sure, that was a significant advantage to them. The clean water? It saved them money from the perspective of not having to pay fines. But it also cleaned up the environment downstream,

where historically not only IC Industries but I would say all railroads probably dumped that waste material directly into the local watershed.

DePue: Was part of your job, then, to help with their public image?

Manning: No. They had people who did that, who were specialists in that regard. We enhanced public image, obviously, by what we did. But I didn't deal directly with the media at that point in time.

DePue: Let's go to your personal life here a little bit. Did you get married somewhere in this process?

Manning: I certainly did. My wife and I were married and—

DePue: Her name?

Manning: Cathy, with a C.

DePue: And what was her maiden name?

Manning: Merriman, M-e-r-r-i-m-a-n.

DePue: When were you married?

Manning: We were married in 1980. She had a daughter prior to our marriage, who became my daughter shortly thereafter, who was born in 1978. Then our second daughter was born in 1985. They're now grown up, and I feel very old because of it.

DePue: Are you a grandpa?

Manning: I am. We just celebrated my granddaughter's first birthday. It's absolutely wonderful; I love it.

DePue: You'd recommend it for others.

Manning: I would absolutely recommend it. It is the best.

DePue: Where were you living at the time?

Manning: Actually, Cathy and I lived in a small home in the country, about a mile from Lake Shelbyville, west of Mattoon, Illinois. My headquarters at IC was in Mattoon. It was about a twenty-five-minute commute, but it was worth it. It was a beautiful area around Lake Shelbyville.

DePue: How long did you work for IC Industries?

Manning: Nine years.

DePue: And then what?

Manning: I had become involved with a local Ducks Unlimited chapter. I also was very heavily involved with a local waterfowling organization on Lake Shelbyville.

DePue: When you say you became involved, does that mean you were a member?

Manning: Not only was I a member, but I was a volunteer. I would help them do their banquets on an annual basis and participate with all their activities. I became very close to—at that time the gentleman was a regional director; his name was Dave Kennedy.² David actually became a mentor of mine, a wonderful fellow.

DePue: He was with Ducks Unlimited?

Manning: Yes, Ducks Unlimited. He asked me, if an opening ever became available would I be interested in going to work for DU. I of course said yes. After looking at the organization, him describing to me a little bit of what went on, there was an opening that came available in northern Illinois. He set up an interview for me. I went in and was fortunate enough to achieve the position. So I became regional director for Ducks Unlimited in northern Illinois.

DePue: You're working for a major industry in the state. Now you're going to a nonprofit. Was there a reduction in your salary?

Manning: No, the salaries were pretty equivalent at that point in time. DU was, at that time, and they still are, a very progressive organization. It was a very good time for me in that it trained me to be a better person in dealing with a number of different personality types. It was very good.

DePue: Did you find that the move was more compatible with what you wanted to be doing in your life, in terms of a career?

Manning: Yes. It was more focused on wildlife, definitely. The previous job with IC Industries was very focused on the industrial side of things, the condition of the water. Even though we did use some wetland treatment as tertiary treatment, it wasn't as focused on wildlife or fisheries as what I would have desired. This DU position... Being a regional director is a very, very difficult job. In northern Illinois at the time, I think I had roughly sixty-some-odd committees, seventy depending on the year, and then upwards of 125, 130 events a year. So it kept me very busy in preparation for all those events. Most of them were fundraising events.

² Prior to joining Ducks Unlimited in 1976, David D. Kennedy had an eleven-year career with the Illinois Department of Conservation. From 1965-1971, he was a wildlife refuge supervisor; from 1971-1975, he was a staff waterfowl biologist; and from 1975-1976, he served as associate director of natural resources. Stephen P. Havera, *Waterfowl of Illinois: Status and Management* (Illinois Natural History Survey, 1992), 27, http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/10376/inhscwev01991i00000_opt.pdf?sequence=2.

- DePue: I guess I'm laboring under some misconceptions here. I'd ask you to describe first the mission of Ducks Unlimited, and then its organization. I think that will clear up some things for me.
- Manning: Sure. At the time that I went, their motto was "Leader in Wetlands Conservation," and they certainly were. Ducks Unlimited, with the money they raised, put back, salvaged, enhanced, and provided stewardship for thousands, hundreds of thousands, of acres of wetlands in Canada. After I got there, they started working in five states in the United States. They were Montana, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Minnesota.
- DePue: Would it be correct to say that at least the roots of the organization were avid duck hunters who realized that they're losing all the wetlands and losing all their ability to hunt ducks?
- Manning: That is absolutely where the roots of the organization came from. Ding Darling, who was the person responsible for the first duck stamp, and a number of other people in the 1930s got together and said, "We've got to do something."³ That was the essence or beginning of DU. I was a member of about ninety field staff nationwide.
- DePue: Ninety full-time employees.
- Manning: Ninety full-time employees. The other forty-five thousand to fifty thousand were all volunteers that worked on behalf of Ducks Unlimited to raise money to provide for the Canadian prairie pothole country, basically, and those five states that I talked about.
- DePue: So the volunteers are primarily out there as fundraisers?
- Manning: Yes. The volunteers do 99.9 percent of the fundraising for DU.
- DePue: The money then is used to do what?
- Manning: The money that they raise, at the time that I was there, was actually forwarded to Ducks Unlimited Canada, which was our sister organization in Canada, who put it on the ground. It was a very streamlined and efficient organization. When I say put it on the ground, it could be water control structures that would enhance wetlands. It could be upland treatments for areas around wetlands where 90 percent of the waterfowl do their breeding and nesting. It

³ Jay Norwood Darling was an important political cartoonist for many years at the *Des Moines Register and Leader*, as well as a noted conservationist. In 1934, Franklin Roosevelt appointed him chief of the Biological Survey, the forerunner of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, where he designed the first duck stamp as part of the implementation of the new Duck Stamp Act. In 1936, he founded the National Wildlife Federation, serving as its first president. "Biographical Note," Papers of Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/MSC/ToMsc200/MsC170/MsC170_DarlingDing.html.

was all sorts of waterfowl enhancement and wetland enhancement that they did.

DePue: How much of it had to do with finding the same kind of locations in the continental United States? You can find places like Illinois and Iowa where highway to highway is nothing but fields. There is no marsh. It was all drained a hundred years ago.

Manning: DU at that time was led by a fellow, whom I have a world of respect for, by the name of Dale Whitesell. Dale Whitesell, I think, was chief of wildlife in Ohio before he became the executive director of Ducks Unlimited. Dale's philosophy was we had to go to the low-hanging fruit first. That low-hanging fruit was mostly located in the prairie potholes of Canada. We knew that 80 percent of our migratory waterfowl production came from that prairie pothole region. For us to go outside of that region and try to replicate what we could get dollar per dollar was virtually impossible. There was no way for us to come to Illinois, and take the same money that we would be providing for a prairie pothole area in Saskatchewan or Manitoba, and make the difference that we could make working there versus working in Illinois. It's just virtually impossible to do.

DePue: In other words, to do that in Illinois would be purchasing land that was used for farming or other purposes.

Manning: Right. And then converting it. While we still had wetlands that were present and could be enhanced in Canada, we didn't have that here.

DePue: One of the things I'm curious about here is what the corporate climate was. I guess what I'm getting at here is, I've got two competing things going on in my head. You've got hunters who are identified generally as gun owners; therefore they're these cultural conservatives. Then you've got people who are very much concerned about preserving the environment. Can you help me sort that out, Brent?

Manning: Sure. I'd be happy to. One of the things that we started looking at—and this was later, when I actually moved into DU's headquarters—to give you an example, one of the most important people at Ducks Unlimited was a fellow by the name of Dr. David Wesley. David actually—by trade and training did his Ph.D. in antelope biology, but biology is biology. If you can apply population principles to one species, you can do it to other species. He and I talked, and have talked, at great length about the value of DU. When we look at it from a hunter's versus an environmentalist's perspective, sure, those marshes that the hunters are supporting are producing migratory waterfowl. They love to see those migratory waterfowl over the end of a gun barrel. I do as well. But for every marsh that is present, there are over ten thousand indigenous species that enjoy that marsh habitat.

So when you create or restore a marsh and work with it in proper fashion, not only do you enhance the habitat for migratory waterfowl, but you also enhance the habitat for fishes, for salamanders, for skinks, for other upland nesting birds, for waterbirds. It's an incredible plethora of wildlife and plant diversity that's affected by any wetland that you put on the ground. For DU, their first activities outside of the five states that I talked about were in the south Mississippi area, down the coastal regions. In those areas, when you talked about ten thousand indigenous species in Canada, because of the diversity and enhancement of diversity the closer to the equator you get, there were probably thirty thousand indigenous species per wetland; that DU made a difference in their lives in one fashion or another. It goes all the way from annelids or earthworms to eagles and everything in between.

So Ducks Unlimited, their motto being "Leader in Wetlands Conservation"—and this is going to sound strange—if an environmentalist had a dollar to give, he would be far better giving it to an organization like DU, which was going to put an activity on the ground, than putting it to someone who was going to lobby a politician to make a profound speech on the environment. (DePue laughs) I guess it's a philosophy that I've become rather used to.

DePue: Tell me again your title when you first joined Ducks Unlimited.

Manning: When I first joined DU I was regional director for northern Illinois.

DePue: And that meant what exactly?

Manning: That I worked with volunteers, and as I said earlier, sixty to seventy committees—maybe I got up to seventy-five at one point in time, in northern Illinois, essentially everything north of I-80—to fundraise. Then from time to time I'd have the great fortune once or twice a year—I'd wind up going to Canada with some of our donors or volunteers to look at the projects. It was an eye-opening experience.

DePue: And hunt while you were at it?

Manning: No. Actually, most of the time when we would go it was springtime show-me tours. So we got the opportunity to see the birds in full plumage and on their nesting grounds.

DePue: Was the fundraising primarily through direct donations or fundraising campaigns or a combination?

Manning: No. Most of it was grassroots fundraising. Events. Ducks Unlimited banquets. I did have the good fortune of working with a couple of people that had the wherewithal to make some very large gifts, which was marvelous at the time. But most of it was grassroots fundraising. I think in northern Illinois, we

averaged probably 1.2 million to 1.4 million dollars a year through grassroots fundraising.

DePue: That includes the Chicago area?

Manning: Yes. From Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River, Wisconsin border down to I-80 was my territory.

DePue: How long did you stay in this role?

Manning: I guess I was in there probably two years, two and a half years or so. After that time, Dale Whitesell retired as DU's executive vice president or CEO. Then they had a fellow by the name of Matt Connolly who came as the exec. They invited me into national headquarters as assistant director of field operations. At that time there was no director of field operations, so I was involved with about one hundred fundraising staff nationwide. After about six months they promoted me to director of field operations, which meant that I dealt with all of our fundraising staff in all states here in the United States. I had a great, great support staff, wonderful people: eight field operations supervisors, which were essentially those folks who were the bosses of the regional directors in certain areas or certain regions of the country.

DePue: Where were you living at that time?

Manning: At that time I had moved to Johnsburg, Illinois, which is right up on the Wisconsin border, and not far from Long Grove, where DU's national headquarters was. I lived in Paw Paw when I was regional director, which is north central Illinois, about fifty miles west of DuPage County, right on 39.

DePue: So Illinois is the heart of the Ducks Unlimited organization.

Manning: At one point its national headquarters was in Long Grove. Shortly after I left they moved their national headquarters to Memphis, Tennessee.

DePue: Interesting move.

Manning: Yeah. I think the airline connections, the costs of housing, et cetera; there were a lot of reasons to go.

DePue: I was going to say it sounds like the position you had would require an awful lot of travel.

Manning: It did require a lot of traveling. And I was on the road a whole lot. I had two small children. That's one of the reasons, when the opportunity in Springfield came around, that I gave it sincere consideration.

DePue: We're getting pretty close to discussing that. Were you involved at all with any legislative initiatives that DU was working on?

Manning: No. I was not involved with any. DU pretty much at that time kept out of the political arena entirely. I had been involved in some initiatives in the state of Illinois when I was a volunteer for DU and for the waterfowling organization, one of which was to lobby for full police powers for the conservation police officers here in the state. They didn't have those prior to that time. Sometimes I would lobby on behalf of the old Department of Conservation's budget, which was bedraggled.

DePue: So as a Ducks Unlimited representative, saying it would be a good thing if the DOC was getting better funding?

Manning: No. Actually, DU stayed totally apolitical. This was before I worked for DU. I went as a representative of the Lake Shelbyville waterfowling organization. I was president of that organization at the time. I would do it in that fashion. DU had to protect their 501(c)(3) status, which was an apolitical [tax exempt] status.

DePue: How would you describe your politics at that time?

Manning: Moderately conservative. I guess that's the best description I can come up with.

DePue: Were you involved at all in any political organizations or activities?

Manning: For all intents and purposes no, I was not.

DePue: Just weren't interested in that?

Manning: I found it... How do I want to say this? It's like a saying I used to hear around my hometown when I was young. There's a whole lot of chopping going on but not very many chips flying. (DePue laughs) It seemed like politicians spent a lot of time spinning their wheels. I was more interested in seeing something that could be done and changed and moved forward.

DePue: In this position as the director of field operations for DU, did you see yourself, Okay, this is a job I can stay in for a long time? Or did you have other aspirations?

Manning: I honestly, when I got into that position, loved it. I loved the people I was working for. Loved the people I was working with. I thought, Gosh, what a great place to retire.

DePue: You were still a young man at the time.

Manning: I was a very young man. But I enjoyed it tremendously. Absolutely tremendously.

DePue: Are you free to mention the kind of money that you were raising at the national level?

Manning: Sure. At that point in time—and it was no secret—our goal from field operations, and I was director of field operations, was about fifty million dollars a year from grassroots fundraising. I'm happy to say that we achieved our goal most of the time that I was there. It was a most enjoyable position. A big reason for that enjoyment was the interface and the working with volunteers, because to be a volunteer and a fundraiser, you have to be dedicated to the cause. For me to pick up the phone and talk to any of those people, dedication just poured out of the phone when you talked to them. It was wonderful. Great group of people to work with.

DePue: It strikes me that your job, a lot of it, was being a master salesman.

Manning: There's no doubt that sales and marketing were a big part of it. I was fortunate in that I had enough of a biological background to be able to explain the need that Ducks Unlimited was fulfilling. There was no other organization doing it. Nobody else could do it at the time. There was no other organization that had a sister organization in Canada that could put a dollar on the ground, and put it on the ground in a meaningful way. The biologists of DU Canada were some of the best wetland waterfowl biologists in the world. So for them to be able to move the entire structure and goal forward was significant.

DePue: In that position did you have opportunities to work with either state or federal agencies?

Manning: Yes. On many occasions I would interface with state directors, some Fish and Wildlife Service people, and even folks from the Canadian Wildlife Service up on the prairies. When I say interface, much of it was social, at an International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies meeting or a North American meeting. But those social contacts grew very valuable when we did need something or when we needed to move an effort forward: working in a particular area in Canada, working in a particular area in North or South Dakota, Minnesota, or Montana. It was very important to us.

DePue: How about for the state of Illinois? Department of Conservation? Fish and Wildlife, you mentioned.

Manning: There was only limited connection with the Illinois Department of Conservation. The director at that time was a fellow by the name of Mark Frech. Mark was an avid waterfowler and a very strong DU supporter. I did have a number of good conversations with Mark, and actually met him a couple of times on the prairies of Saskatchewan or Manitoba to show him some of the projects that the Illinois money was funding. We have some very, very good Illinois projects. Illinois projects are funded through the Illinois duck stamp. In other words to help migratory waterfowl in the state of Illinois

you had to buy a federal and state duck stamp. Well, a portion of the state duck stamp money goes to an organization that can put that money on the ground in Canada. Of course, the only one that could do that efficiently was Ducks Unlimited. So Mark would come up, as he should, and look at the projects from time to time.

DePue: Did you have any direct dealings either with the federal or the state level department of agriculture?

Manning: At that time, no.

DePue: I would think that some farmers certainly would see what you guys are trying to do as taking prime farmland out of production.

Manning: Unquestionably. I'm sure that was probably more prevalent in Canada because that's where we did most of our work. I know that DU Canada probably dealt with it. But my position at that time, I didn't do that.

DePue: That gets us up to about 1989, 1990 and Edgar's gubernatorial campaign, after a long run of Governor Thompson's fourteen years that he was wrapping up. Were you paying attention to that campaign?

Manning: Only superficially. When I say superficially, I knew that Jim Edgar had a very, very good reputation. That's what I had seen through the media and that's what I had had friends tell me. He was a very honest guy.

DePue: A reputation not necessarily connected with your line of business.

Manning: Correct. Just from a political perspective—an honest guy. Of course, that always stimulates my interest when you see someone that was honest and straightforward and hardworking. That was a reputation that I had heard verbalized on a number of occasions. So yeah, I started picking up an interest in watching that and thought it was fascinating.

DePue: Were you somebody who voted in primaries?

Manning: At that point in time I actually had a personnel situation that I had to take care of on the West Coast. I flew on the Wednesday, I think it was, prior to the primary, knowing that I would be back easily later that weekend once I had taken care of the personnel situation on the West Coast with DU. So I flew out there, and I actually couldn't find the guy that I was supposed to talk to. I think now he hid from me for several days until I did find him and took the necessary actions. That put me flying back after the primary. So I did not vote in the primary on that particular occasion. I would have. I had planned on it. I know my wife did.

DePue: In the past you had voted in the primary?

Manning: I'm sure that I had—the Republican primary.

DePue: Republican. And that's obviously where I'm leading. Obviously in the state of Illinois, that's where political operatives can find out what your leanings are: how you vote in the primary.

Manning: Sure. Absolutely, yeah.

DePue: But as far as the political operatives were concerned, was Brent Manning a total unknown to them generally?

Manning: I'm sure of it.

DePue: Let's get up to November of 1990. Edgar has just won the election. Obviously we're getting to the point where you're going to become the director of the Department of Conservation. How did that come about, then?

Manning: It was fascinating. I had a number of people that I had interfaced with throughout the state of Illinois, who encouraged me to get to know Jim Edgar. I had no reason—

DePue: Before this time, even?

Manning: Kind of going on at the same time that the campaign was going on. Really there was no interface. There was no juncture that I could have or that I should have.

Immediately after the election, I watched with interest as the rumors started circulating and several candidates for the Department of Conservation surfaced. I thought that Mark Frech would have been a very good person to maintain that slot. I liked, and still like, Mark a whole lot.

DePue: Were there some other names out there?

Manning: Yeah. I'd heard other names throughout the state. Different people. "Well, he's got a political in." I didn't hear any ladies' names. As most of those things are, they were mostly rumors. But I kept getting this encouragement from people who were involved in the waterfowling community throughout the state, saying, "Man, you ought to pay some attention to this. Edgar would love you."

DePue: Were these people encouraging you, and they see, We can get one of ours on the inside?

Manning: It may have been some of that. And admittedly lots of them were DU people here in the state. "It'd be great to have somebody." I said, "You won't get a more dedicated waterfowler than Mark Frech." "Well, we know that." It was an interesting time. I had, during that time period, a meeting or two with

Mark. And we were talking. First of all, Ducks Unlimited was preparing a move to Memphis, as I'd mentioned earlier, or at least thinking about it. Mark was an advocate of them staying in the state of Illinois. I know that we'd met and talked about that on a couple of occasions. This was probably after November and before the end of January, first of February. And we'd met a couple of times. At both of those meetings, in a couple of situations, he said to me, "You really ought to throw your name in the hat." And I said, "You're going to be retained. It would be crazy." And he said, "Well... You really should give this some real strong consideration."

DePue: Did you have the impression he was ready to step down? He wanted to step down?

Manning: Not so much that he was ready, but I think he probably knew it was going to happen. I don't know why. I don't know.

DePue: You hadn't heard any discussions about—certainly part of the campaign was that Edgar was trying to distance himself from Thompson and the Thompson administration.

Manning: Correct. I had heard that. I'd also heard that he had made a promise to the constituents, that he would fill that position with a professional, with somebody who had a background in fish and wildlife or a background in natural resources. Mark alluded to that in one of our conversations. I can't remember exactly what he said. But it was something to the effect of "Consider this." So as things progressed, I had heard of several people that had had interviews that they weren't too satisfied with. And finally I—

DePue: "They," being who? Who was doing the interviews?

Manning: The governor's office is what I'd heard. It was Al Grosboll and George Fleischli doing the interviews. Finally I talked to my wife. She said, "I don't want to encourage you to do something that you don't want to do, but you ought to at least think about it. We're getting all these phone calls, and all these people are suggesting that you look at it. The other thing—your daughters are growing up, as much as you're traveling, without you being around." I said, "Maybe you're right."

DePue: You almost sound like you were surprised that she might be encouraging in that.

Manning: I was somewhat. So I gave it a lot of thought and prayer. I actually wrote a handwritten note just expressing an interest. About a week later I got a phone call at home. Said, "Would you be interested in coming down and talking"—and I didn't know them at the time, didn't know them at all; I'd seen their names—"to George Fleischli and Al Grosboll about Department of Conservation?" "Okay."

DePue: Question here. This handwritten note—had you mailed that in?

Manning: Yeah, I mailed it. Actually, I asked Mark Frech where to send it, who to send it to. He gave me the name and address, and I mailed that in. So I went down and I talked to Al and to George at the same time. And that was one of the most fascinating discussions I have ever been in, in my life. George would talk to me about hunting, about recreational opportunities, about fishing, and his questions would be in that direction. Immediately following, Al would talk to me about bike trails. So it was really a neat conversation because it involved both the environmental perspective from Al and the sportsman's perspective from George. I enjoyed both of those guys immensely. That was a great conversation.⁴

So I had that meeting. I drove back up and I thought, There probably won't be anything come of this. The following week I got another phone call asking if I wanted to come down and meet with the governor. "Sure, I'll do that." All the way down... It's one of those things where I was thinking, I don't know that I really want to do this; I have a wonderful position with an organization that I hold a world of respect for; they're the best in the world at what they do, and I'm part of that organization; I'm young, I can do other things with the organization if I wanted to, but right now I'm very happy doing what I'm doing; do I really want to make this move? All the way down I was thinking of reasons that I shouldn't do it. So I get in and I have the opportunity to speak to the governor.

DePue: First time ever meeting him?

Manning: First time ever meeting him. There was something about him... It was a situation where immediately upon meeting him I had great confidence in him. That's the only way that I can describe it. So we sat down. We started talking about various things. One of my biggest issues was I didn't want to become involved in a political organization or a politically run agency that wouldn't make the right decisions. I didn't even have the chance to say that. One of the very first things he said was, "I want a professionally run organization. I'll take care of the politics. I want somebody to take care of the professional management of that organization." There's my big argument defused. Then he went on to say, "There'll probably be people that will come see you on a political basis wanting jobs, et cetera. Again, I have an office to handle that. I want you to handle the professional end of the agency." Uhh! Argument number two down the tubes. So by the end of the conversation I was convinced that I would like to work for this guy, because he was articulate, you could tell he was very, very bright, he was extremely forthcoming in the

⁴ For some of the political calculations behind Manning's selection, see George Fleischli, interview by Mark DePue, January 27, 2010, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL, 25. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project.

way that he addressed issues—he was a leader. I like being around people like that.

So I drove home. I remember it was probably in mid-March. Heck of a snowstorm. And I was living up near the Wisconsin border at the time. I got home and I opened the door. My wife looked at me and said, “Don’t tell me you took a job for less money and you will probably spend more hours at it in a political environment.” I looked at her and grinned. She said, “Yeah, I figured you would.”

DePue: But she’d been encouraging you to do that.

Manning: Yeah, I know. I know. But it was a very good experience. A wonderful experience.

DePue: Did you have any feeling at the time of how Edgar personally felt about conservation and about that department?

Manning: Yes I did. That was something that particularly attracted me to that position. You could tell that he wanted change, from the perspective of professionalism. Again, I have to reiterate, I thought Mark Frech was a great guy, and he did a very admirable job, so I’m not denigrating Mark by any stretch of the imagination. But the governor was very clear. “I want this to happen. I want it to be a professionally recognized organization. I want you to do whatever is necessary to make that happen. And I will support you.” So I couldn’t argue that.

DePue: When did you start?

Manning: I actually started on Tax Day, April 15, 1991.

DePue: Had you already been approved by the legislature?

Manning: No. Immediately after that, he made the announcement. I had to go through the process of confirmation.

DePue: Any memories about the confirmation process?

Manning: It’s interesting, but once the governor made the announcement, let’s see. Bob Churchill, who was the representative in my area that I lived up near the Wisconsin border—and I’m trying to think of my senator’s name; he’s a wonderful guy—they met me one day for lunch and said basically, “We don’t know where you come from or how you did this, but we’re sure happy you did.” It was really a good meeting; they were great fellows. I went through the confirmation process. Senator Davidson was my sponsor. He was the senator

for the Springfield area at the time. And [I] began with the Department of Conservation.⁵

DePue: This is an appropriate moment, then, for you to explain to us exactly what the Department of Conservation was at that time.

Manning: Department of Conservation was fish and wildlife, of course. It had the hunting programs, the fishing programs. It had a Division of Natural Heritage, which was a wonderful division headed by a brilliant young man by the name of Carl Becker. Wildlife was headed by Jeff Ver Steeg, who is now in Colorado as one of their deputy directors of the agency out there. Carl and Jeff were—Jeff still is—two of the most brilliant gentlemen I have ever worked with. Carl has since passed away. He had a heart problem and several years ago passed. I had parks of course, state parks; fish and wildlife areas were part of the program.

DePue: Forestry?

Manning: Forestry was part of it. Conservation law enforcement. Natural heritage. We were adjunct to the Endangered Species Protection Board; they worked very closely with us. The Nature Preserves Commission. It was a diverse agency, and it was absolutely full of very, very good professionals.

DePue: How many employees?

Manning: I'm thinking at that time we probably had around 1,500 employees.

DePue: I would have guessed more. So there are other departments in the state that are much larger.

Manning: Oh yes. In fact, the Department of Conservation at that time was less than a rounding error of the entire annual budget for DCFS or some of the larger—

DePue: One of the curiosities about Illinois government is the number of police forces we have. I notice that you had your own. What did the conservation law enforcement—

Manning: Conservation law enforcement... (laughs) It depends on who you talk to. If you've been arrested by them, they're a terrible group of Nazis. (DePue laughs) If you're like me, I have a world of respect for them. They are some of the best law enforcement people in the entire United States. At the time I was there, conservation law enforcement was headed by a fellow by the name of Larry Closson. Larry was a Vietnam vet, Special Forces, and a very talented individual. He professionalized that organization, and he did it in a fashion that I was proud of. He selected people to sit on a board that would actually make the hiring decisions. Most of those people were associated with or ex-

⁵ John A. Davidson (R-Springfield).

law enforcement themselves. So they did get professionals or people that would make good professionals in the field. They were called “rabbit sheriffs.” They were a very good group. You had to maintain a very good sense of humor to be in a job like that, sometimes spending hours and hours and hours by yourself in a very lonesome environment.

DePue: But the people who would check to see if you had your fishing or your hunting license and your duck stamp.

Manning: Absolutely. Check all things. Make sure. And with the state parks, in some of the locations—we had one obviously up here at Illinois Beach, which is in an urban area; we had one in the East Saint Louis area, again an urban area—you run into all the social ills that a county or a municipal policeman would. You would see the drug problems, you would see all the problems that you would in any of those other environments or situations. So not only did they have to be well versed in wildlife laws and fisheries laws, they had to be also very well versed in state laws, drug laws, all of the above.

DePue: What was their jurisdiction? Did it extend beyond state land?

Manning: They had full police powers. They had the same jurisdiction as state police, plus they were federally deputized to handle migratory waterfowl situations, which actually gave them more police powers than state police.

DePue: I want to go back and have you spend a little bit of time talking about reorganizing and professionalizing the agency and what that actually meant. You smile.

Manning: I do smile, because quite frankly I’ve said this for years: All the mistakes that were made in the Department of Conservation or Natural Resources during my tenure, I own. All the successes were the successes of staff. I had a wonderfully, wonderfully talented staff. Many times I feel as if I was a gatekeeper. Being a gatekeeper, swinging that gate open and telling the professionals, “Yes, I will support you in doing what you want to do or what should be done,” was the most important role I could play.

I had a fellow who was a twenty-some-odd-year veteran of the state park system, who had actually started as a park maintenance part-timer, that I moved into the position in charge of all of our state parks and fish and wildlife areas. He did a fabulous job. His name was Jerry Beverlin. He ultimately retired in that position. He was great at what he did. I had one of the best budget managers in the state, a guy by the name of Roy Miller. He knew where every penny resided in the Department of Conservation’s budget and could tell you sometimes how to make two pennies out of one, which I very much appreciated in those austere times. My office director of fish and wildlife was a fellow by the name of John Tranquilli, a Ph.D. in aquatic ecology. He was a tremendous talent as well. Of course, all these people had

division managers or smaller unit managers that reported to them in one fashion or another.

DePue: These are the people. What you haven't addressed is what you did to professionalize this organization. It sounds like you inherited these folks.

Manning: I did inherit them. One of the things that I did... I moved Mr. Beverlin into that position, which I felt very comfortable with. Professionalizing from that point forward, one of the things that I wanted to do was establish a strategic position or strategic plan with the agency. When I first came in, I asked, "Can I see your strategic plan?" They all kind of looked at one another and said, "Oh, we don't have any."

DePue: Was that one of the things that Edgar was referring to when he charged you to do this?

Manning: I don't know that he referred to that directly, but it was a very important part of what needed to be done. When I say it was an important part of what needed to be done, from a professional standpoint, from a professional fish and wildlife agency standpoint, we need to know where we're going to go to be able to get there. To be able to know what our destination is, we have to have a strategic plan that points that out, points in that direction. You plan for natural resource enhancements—stewardship, acquisitions—fifty and one hundred years in advance. You don't do it two weeks in advance. You also have common goals that are shared across the agency. I had heard, and actually had politicians tell me, horror stories of some agency personnel standing around the rail at the Capitol lobbying for their own unit of the old Department of Conservation.⁶ I told the agency, "The first time I catch somebody doing that, they are going to be gone immediately."

DePue: Is that perhaps what Edgar was talking about?

Manning: Perhaps. I don't know. But he said professionalize, and from my perspective professionalizing was having a goal, having an understanding, and going in that direction. So we put together our first strategic plan. I asked a fellow, who was at that time in charge of the Nature Preserves Commission, to head it up for me or participate in heading it up. Dr. Brian Anderson. Brian is now with the Illinois Natural History Survey as their director. Brian did a great job in starting to formulate and put this together. We started talking about needs through that; habitat being one of the most significant needs in the state of Illinois; a fundraising arm for the agency being another need for the state of Illinois.

DePue: Fundraising, as in...?

⁶ "Standing around the rail" refers to the third-floor rail in the Illinois State Capitol rotunda, outside the House and Senate chambers, where much lobbying traditionally has been done.

Manning: A professional fundraiser. To be able to accommodate those goals that we could not achieve through the state budget.

DePue: So a foundation?

Manning: Yes, it was. It wound up being a foundation. Absolutely. The Illinois Conservation Foundation. But a number of those things emanated from the strategic plan. A singular building. We were separated in eight different buildings throughout the city of Springfield. All of those things filtered and came through the strategic planning process as identified needs for the agency. Being able to biologically decide what a piece of property is going to look like versus politically deciding. There were some groups in the state that had so much power and control over members of the legislature, who had power and control over individuals in the agency; that said, "Well, we realize that should be a prairie, but we're not going to have it as a prairie any longer. It'll be a field trial area."

DePue: A what?

Manning: A field trial area. A horseback field trial area. So we started making those decisions that were professionally based and scientifically based versus being politically based. I was the guy that offered myself up to go over and talk to the politicians, saying, "This is where we're going, this is what we're going to do."

After my confirmation hearing I was called into a very small room. As a matter of fact, it's probably ten-by-ten there in the Capitol. I had to have ten to fifteen legislators in that room. They were senators, both sides of the aisle. They were House members, both sides of the aisle. They said, "Listen. We don't want you to feel as though this is your fault, but we're going to take the deer program away from you." (DePue laughs) "Wait," I said. "Why would you do that?" They said, "Oh, there's too many deer. The permits aren't being issued in the proper fashion. We're getting beat up by the Farm Bureau," et cetera.

DePue: Blindsided on this one?

Manning: Yeah. They said, "So don't take this personally. But we're going to take it away." A couple of these guys later on just became wonderful, wonderful friends. And they were wonderful people. I said, "Guys, I can't help but take it personally. Give me six months to come up with at least a plan to try to address your problems or concerns, because I haven't even been in my office yet." (laughs) And they started laughing and said, "Three months?" I said, "Okay, I'll have a plan to you in three months. But implementation may take six months to be able to get this stuff on board."

DePue: Now this problem hadn't just appeared out of nowhere. Did any of this discussion come up in the confirmation hearing?

Manning: No. We hadn't talked about it, absolutely had not talked about it in the confirmation hearing. You're right. It hadn't appeared out of nowhere, because they had the room reserved. (laughs) There's no doubt. They all hauled me down there. I look back at that and I laugh at it now. But it was a very revealing conversation as to how things used to be. That's how things used to work.

DePue: Was there some entrenched bureaucracy that you had to work around or root out?

Manning: Absolutely. Let's say break up. And there were entrenched bureaucracies. There were people that thought they should be able to manage in the way they'd managed historically and go and lobby for their budget regardless of what the rest of the agency did. I said, "One budget, one lobbyist, one direction." That's what we had to do.

DePue: Did you have any resignations or personnel issues that grew out of any of that?

Manning: I think there were some raised eyebrows and some surprise, but no resignations. It was "Okay, we will if we have to." Would you excuse me? I need to get something to drink here for a minute.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We took a very short break. I thought you had found a document here that highlighted the specific members for the organization.

Manning: Yes. As a matter of fact, Mark, I wasn't too far off in my guess before of 1,500 employees. When I started with the Department of Conservation in 1991, their authorized headcount was 1,587. I would imagine at any given point in time we probably ran forty to fifty vacancies. So it was pretty close.

DePue: Let's get into another aspect. You're trying to reorganize. You're trying to develop the strategic vision, the long-range plan, at the same time that Governor Edgar walks in and finds out, Oh, I knew we had a hole, but it's a lot bigger than I thought. He was facing right at a billion-dollar hole and had to make some very tough choices at the beginning.

Manning: He certainly did have to make some tough choices. My memory of that time is one of very complete honesty. Governor Edgar didn't have time to spend hours and hours with each one of his directors and say, "This is what I want you to do." So basically I worked through George Fleischli. George said, "We need to cut your budget by this amount of money." So when I went back to the agency and said, "Here's what we have to do," they said, "Where do we have to cut it?" I said, "We're going to make that decision, and then we're going to make our recommendations to the governor's office."

DePue: Did you have a percentage of a cut to work with?

Manning: I think what we had was a dollar figure. I can't remember now whether it was two million or three million, but it was a significant number. It made a big difference.

DePue: Do you remember the mood in the room at the time when you announced that?

Manning: Yeah. It was at an executive staff meeting. The mood was very professional. I remember one fellow speaking up and saying, "We'll just cut it in places where we know the general assembly is going to put it back." I said, "That doesn't work. We're going to work toward the governor's budget. These have to be real. These cuts have to be in a fashion that we can sustain ourselves. This is a professional agency and we're going to handle these cuts as a professional agency would."

DePue: Now I'm curious. I assume that's one of your male employees who said that. What would have been, in their mind, the things that the legislature would have restored?

Manning: Obviously a state park. You cut a state park in a leader's area, "You're not going to cut that state park, here's the money for it." We talked about that. I said, "That's not going to happen. These are real cuts. This is a budget we have to live with. This is an honest, straightforward budget brought forth by Joan Walters in the governor's office."⁷ So we went through an exercise. We basically sequestered ourselves for two to three days. By virtue of whatever the number was that we had, we put it to a percentage. Then I went through each office, and we delineated what we would have to cut at that percentage. We also went beyond that. If in fact things were worse than what we thought they were, where would we go for another 5 percent, how would we get there? And we had it laid out.

DePue: The initial was 5 percent?

Manning: No, I'm sorry. I don't remember what the percentage was. I think it was a number, and I'm sorry; I don't remember what that number was. But I knew it was something that we had to live to.

DePue: From the beginning were you looking at staff cuts as well?

Manning: Some staff cuts. Some programmatic cuts. Some cuts that honestly would hurt as we did them. We knew it would. Some consolidation of particular activities within the agency. We went through all of it, but everyone was involved. All the office directors, all the managers were involved in doing this. It wasn't something where I gave them a number and said, "We're going to cut three or

⁷ For the process behind Edgar's budget cuts, see Joan Walters, interview by Mark DePue, July 29, 2009, 15-19.

four of your state parks because we know general assembly will put those back.” This was real. We knew we had to do it.

DePue: Do you recall if any state parks were closed?

Manning: I recall that one of them that had a very low attendance, we were looking at closing it. It would have been in the second tier of cuts had we gotten that far. But we didn't have to go there. We were very fortunate. So it was not closed. It had an attendance of less than five thousand or six thousand people per year. Even though it's an important area ecologically, it would have been very difficult to justify keeping that open.

DePue: One of the things that sometimes complicates trying to make adjustments is making changes in staffing and in pay positions. Now maybe this was a decision you didn't have to deal with at your level. But I'm curious whether there was a union or unions that you were dealing with within the agency.

Manning: We dealt with AFSCME.⁸ We also dealt with the Conservation Police Officers' Association. But one of the things that I can say about dealing with both of those organizations: during my tenure there, it was pretty straightforward. I don't feel as though we had a significant problem. Even when we looked at the cuts that we had to do early on, I think it was pretty much understood. You said it earlier. We were such a small agency by virtue of comparison to some of the other agencies. I think that's where they spent most of their time, focusing on the other agencies.

DePue: Does sound, though, that there were some staff cuts that had to be made.

Manning: Minimal. But some, yes.

DePue: Permanent positions that were lost?

Manning: Yeah. I'm trying to think of the number of permanent positions.

DePue: How many of them were just a matter of people were going to retire and weren't going to be replaced?

Manning: There was some attrition. We used attrition to the best of our ability. When we saw there was a retirement that was coming up, and let's say the retirement was in a particular field or discipline, then we would look towards somebody to replace that person who was within that shop someplace, who had the experience and had the knowledge and understanding to be able to do it. Then worked down the system where we would not backfill a lower-level position that didn't require as much expertise. We tried to achieve that each time we did it.

⁸ American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

- DePue: What was the morale like in the organization during the first year?
- Manning: I may be the wrong one to ask that question of, but I think it was pretty darn strong. The professionals that I dealt with responded very, very well to knowing that there was a direction, knowing there was a goal, knowing that there were some things that we were going to achieve. You're either in the boat or you're out of the boat, and they liked being in the boat.
- DePue: Rowing in the same direction.
- Manning: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, in my office—you'll get a kick out of it—they gave me after my first year there a little mechanical gee whiz that sits on your desk. It's ten or twelve guys rowing: you move it to one side, they all move in unison. They said, "We thought you'd like this." They were right. I did.
- DePue: They stumbled onto that one.
- Manning: Yeah.
- DePue: Let's talk a little bit about your relations with various people and organizations and institutions while you were there. We'll start at the top. Governor Edgar himself. How often did you deal directly with the governor?
- Manning: During those early years, very infrequently. I dealt mostly with George Fleischli. I truly felt like—and it proved to be true—that George spoke for the governor.⁹ He was with the governor daily. Generally when I would talk to George, it was, "Keep up doing what you're doing. We like it." That was basically my marching orders. It was: "Do what's right; never embarrass yourself or the governor or the state of Illinois in any way, shape or form." Those are pretty good orders to march to. Pretty understandable. I enjoyed working with George. He was a good guy.
- DePue: What was his position?
- Manning: Executive assistant to the governor.
- DePue: And did he have yours and other...
- Manning: I think he had several other agencies, the Department of Agriculture being one. I don't know who else for sure that he had. But it was Department of Conservation and Ag for sure; he maybe had one or two others.
- DePue: As we move through these, I'd like to have you give us a little snapshot of their personalities and their leadership or management styles. So we'll start with George.

⁹ Manning's perception of Fleischli's role lines up with Fleischli's own assessment; see Fleischli, 22-25.

Manning: George Fleischli. Straightforward. Drill sergeant, football coach. Probably one of if not the best person I've ever worked for and worked with. He absolutely meant what he said and would not flower anything up. I really like that. Plus he had the ear of the governor. I knew that if George said it, he'd already talked to the governor about it, and it was a good thing.

DePue: Another one that you've already mentioned here several times, Al Grosboll.

Manning: Yes. I love Al to pieces. Al has a tendency to be able to ask thirty-two questions about any topic that you may bring forward. His mind is so inquisitive, and he moves in nineteen different directions at once. He can become very focused. He's a very good person, a very good manager. Now, I didn't have as much interface with Al as I did with George.

DePue: Was he another one of the executive assistants?

Manning: He was another one of the executive assistants. I believe Al had the responsibility of EPA, and probably the Pollution Control Board and some other environmental organizations.¹⁰ So Al wasn't a direct interface, even though I did see him on a number of occasions. I thought the world of him.

DePue: We skipped a little bit over Edgar. You said you didn't deal with him directly. When you did, how would you describe him, using some adjectives?

Manning: Businesslike. Straightforward. Thoughtful. Quiet. He would approach things in a very strategic fashion. Very significant leadership qualities. Trustworthy.

DePue: Could you tell when he wasn't satisfied with the way things were going?

Manning: A raising of the eyebrow or a very stern, quizzical look, yes. You knew that something was amiss. Fortunately, I didn't have that very often. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Not a screamer though.

Manning: No. No. That was not ever my experience with the governor. In fact, one of my worst experiences with the governor... He and I had flown someplace together for a dedication. I'm a little bit hard of hearing—not too hard of hearing—but we had gone in the Sikorsky, in the large helicopter. We had one of his aides—a great guy, Tom Livingston—sitting between us. As we'd fly, the governor would ask me a question, and I couldn't hear him. Tom would have to repeat to me every question that the governor asked. Then of course I could answer it, once I knew what he was asking. But I was miserable, absolutely miserable. The governor is going to think I'm a nut because I have to turn to Tom and ask him everything that he says. The governor didn't have a loud voice, and particularly in that setting it was terrible to try to understand.

¹⁰ Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, July 23, 2009. 25-26.

- DePue: Chief of staff during those early years was Kirk Dillard. Did you deal much with Kirk?
- Manning: On occasion I dealt with Kirk and found him to be engaging, intelligent—very affable. He was the type of person that I enjoyed working with. A very good Chief of Staff.
- DePue: Of course as we sit here today, the entire state of Illinois is wondering whether it's going to be Brady or Dillard who's going to be on the Republican ticket for governor.
- Manning: I know both of them. Both of them are fine people. Very, very fine people. I think the world of each of them.
- DePue: We won't go any further than that, then.
- Manning: That's fine.
- DePue: Mike Lawrence.
- Manning: Mike Lawrence. Great, great talent. Wonderful personality. Always very, very serious. Always had an issue that he was dealing with on a day-to-day basis.
- DePue: We should mention he was communications director—press secretary, basically.
- Manning: Yes. Correct. Press secretary. Whenever we received any good press, always complimentary about receiving the good press. Fortunately, during that time period we received very little bad press. So Mike was great to work with.
- DePue: Could you tell that he and the governor had a different kind of relationship?
- Manning: I think that Mike had the type of relationship with the governor that George Fleischli had. That was an “Always reserve the right to tell you I told you so” relationship. They would give him advice. But any time the governor said it was going to be this way or that way, they were both very, very good at carrying it through.
- DePue: Joan Walters is the next on my list, the budget director. Kind of an unenviable position given that you got a billion-dollar hole to fill to begin with.
- Manning: Obviously an unenviable position, but a very intelligent and capable person.
- DePue: Did you deal directly with her or through George?
- Manning: Yes, I dealt directly with Joan. Joan was very good. When she told you something, you could take it to the bank. Now of course, agency directors would all call her Dr. No. We all knew that we had a budget shortfall. Most of

us knew better than to go whining to Joan about not having enough money, because we knew what the answer was going to be. But those that did, I think, got a rather rude awakening that “No, you’re not getting any more money.” She was good to work with.

DePue: Mark Boozell?

Manning: Very little interface.

DePue: Mark being the legislative liaison.

Manning: Right.

DePue: Does that mean that you dealt directly with the legislature, or you just didn’t have that many opportunities?

Manning: My legislative liaison dealt with Mark frequently.

DePue: Who would that be?

Manning: Back in those days it was Rick Tate. He was my first legislative liaison. His assistant was Diane Hendren. I know the two of them dealt with Mark on our issues. Basically, it was to get approval to make sure that we weren’t doing anything contrary to the direction of the administration, which we weren’t. Then we would go and deal with those issues with the general assembly on our own.

DePue: Were there many times, then, that you had to appear before the legislature?

Manning: I appeared before the legislature on a number of issues, mostly concerning budget. We also sat before the Ag and Conservation Committee and talked about programs. So yeah, there was a number of times.

DePue: I’m going to go through those names here in a little bit, but I have a couple more on this list. Well, I guess the only other one I would ask you about would be Janis Cellini.

Manning: Janis Cellini.

DePue: His patronage chief. That was the term she had unofficially.

Manning: Janis Cellini was one of the most enjoyable people and funny people I have ever worked with. I got to know her relatively quickly. Janis, with her wonderful sense of humor, would call me up and say, “Manning, I have my mope of the week for you,” which was always a political referral. She said, “Before you say no, let me tell you about them.” Then I’d say no, and she’d say okay. That would be it. Janis was great.

DePue: But she was okay with hearing No?

Manning: Yeah. There were times when we had positions later on. Early on, with us laying off people, there wasn't anything we could do. But there were times when we had positions that weren't professional in nature, unlike a fisheries biologist or a natural heritage biologist or a scientist, where she would have someone. For instance, a park superintendent position would be open. She'd say, "Is there a possibility?" She'd never tell me to hire a person. What she'd say is, "Can this person get an interview?" "Well, yeah." That's a pretty good system. As long as they've got their paperwork filled out and everything is legal and straightforward according to CMS, we have no problems.¹¹

DePue: Did you have the sense, when she called with a name for you, that she was speaking for the governor?

Manning: No, I really didn't. When I say no, I really didn't. I knew that Janis had a very tough job to do by virtue of taking care of all the patronage issues and all the personnel issues, et cetera.

DePue: Sorry to interrupt, but in the state of Illinois, the assumption was, That's where all the corruption comes in.

Manning: Right. No. With Janis, I always felt that with me it was more of a fishing expedition: "Do you have anything that would be appropriate or fit with this person's background?" She was always very good. If I said no, she wouldn't beat me over the head with it, which I appreciated. The governor had told me, "Professionalize the agency," when I went in for that first interview. "Find the people you need to find and make sure the slots are filled appropriately."

DePue: Who else on the governor's immediate staff haven't I mentioned here that you'd like to point out?

Manning: One of the most brilliant people in state government who I interfaced with on a number of occasions, and I feel was probably a confidant of the governor's—I don't know this personally—was a guy that was in charge of CMS at that time. His name was Steve Schnorf. Steve, from my perspective, was an absolute genius. The things that he did and the way that he accomplished those things and his personal compassion for the people he dealt with and the situations he dealt with. Now, Steve later became director of the Bureau of the Budget.¹² In all situations he was phenomenal to deal with. Very good, well studied person.

¹¹ Central Management Services.

¹² Like Edgar, Stephen Schnorf was raised in Charleston, Illinois, and attended college at Eastern Illinois University. Schnorf initially joined Edgar's governing team in 1981, when he served in various capacities under then-Secretary of State Edgar. Schnorf served as CMS director from 1991 until 1994, when he became Edgar's policy director. In 1997, Edgar named him his budget director, and Schnorf held this position through Governor Ryan's administration. [Cite Schnorf interview when available]

DePue: We talked a little bit before that you did have several occasions where you were called up to appear before the legislature. Before we get any particular names, in the kind of issues you dealt with, did you normally find a friendlier response from the Republican or the Democratic side of the legislature?

Manning: It all depended on the individual. Both sides were extremely supportive of my issues and the things I brought forward.

DePue: But again we're talking about a time, at least for the first two or three years, where there were severe budgetary constraints.

Manning: Yes.

DePue: They couldn't possibly make all of their constituents happy.

Manning: No, and they realized that. I dealt with Pate Philip and Phil Rock. Phil was at that time the president of the Senate. Pate was obviously the minority in the Senate during those early years. I found them both to be very reasonable. They were extremely sensitive to the issues that I dealt with and the issues that their constituents would bring forward. I have no complaints on either side of the aisle with the people that I worked with.

Now I will say that there were some that were less than ethical. I remember going into one of my appropriations hearings. I mentioned earlier I had a mentor by the name of Dave Kennedy. When I was contemplating putting in for this job, Kennedy was very strongly supportive—he was with me at Ducks Unlimited, he was actually the person that asked if I ever had an interest in working for DU, and he arranged for my first interview. Kennedy had told me that when he was assistant director of the Department of Conservation years and years ago, he had done all this preparation for the budget of the DOC—I don't remember what it was, one hundred million dollars or so—and he had everything memorized line by line. He could answer any question that any of the general assembly members would want to ask him.

So as he got ready to go into one of his budget hearings—in most situations there were two doors: one where the general assembly members would enter, and then there's one where those giving testimony would enter—and as David got ready to go into his door, he looked down the hallway. One of the general assembly members was motioning him to come down and talk to him. So David thought, This is great; I want to be able to answer his question out here in the hallway; I'm going to amaze him with everything that I know about the agency's budget. So as he walked down toward him, he was thinking, Now what will this guy be asking me; he lives in such and such area, here's what the issues are.

He got down there and the fellow looked at him and said, "David, I'm afraid we've got real problems." And David said, "What's that?" He said,

“My brother-in-law didn’t get his deer permit last year.” 100 million dollars on the table. At that time deer permits were five dollars each, and he was worried about the five-dollar deer permit.

Kennedy told me, “You will have that experience when you go there.” He was absolutely right. One of my first budget hearings in the House I was motioned down (laughs) in the hallway, and the guy asked me about a deer permit. Not for his brother-in-law, it was for his own personal use. But he said, “I need a deer permit. I didn’t get one last year.” I said, “I have talked to other people about that, and we’re going to see if we can’t solve some of those problems.”

DePue: How did a person get a deer permit? Begging the question here.

Manning: Actually, deer permits are done on a lottery basis.

DePue: So it’s a matter of chance.

Manning: It’s a matter of chance. Exactly. At that time when David was there, the deer population was still growing in the state of Illinois and the permits were limited. They were trying to protect the source to some degree. So they weren’t as available as they are now.

DePue: Certainly the director has a stash of deer permits that he can hand out as favors to people.

Manning: That’s one of the worst things a director can do. As the Director of the Department of Conservation and Director of the Department of Natural Resources, there were permits that could be issued on a professional basis. When I say on a professional basis, visiting biologists from other states; people doing public relations work, for instance, shooting a television show or something like that. I think during my tenure of twelve years, I probably issued less than twenty-five. The year after I left they issued more than 180. So I’m not a strong advocate of that program.

DePue: I was being facetious, but it does reveal something.

Manning: It does reveal something; that’s exactly right.

DePue: There’s a couple names you haven’t mentioned yet. That’s on the House side of the legislature. Mike Madigan. When you first got there the Democrats had control of both houses.

Manning: Correct.

DePue: Mike Madigan, then as now, considered to be the most powerful legislator in the state.

Manning: Yes. One of the things I learned about Mr. Madigan was that you could take to the bank whatever he said. I had very, very, very, limited interface with him in my early years in Springfield. I probably only talked to him maybe once or twice. Any communications between his office and mine were generally done by his staff. Anything they said, they did, whatever the issue was. So I didn't know and still don't know Speaker Madigan all that well. But I do know that everything that he told me—and in later years I had more opportunities to work with him—was always true. I'd never questioned that.

DePue: Lee Daniels would be the Republican leader in the House.

Manning: I knew Lee and worked with him on several occasions. I found him to be the same way. Of course, being in the minority he couldn't do the things with the budget or programmatic things that Madigan had the power to do. But I still worked with him, kept him informed of all the things that we were doing and all the things that we were trying to make happen—or not make happen—and change.

DePue: Going back to the politics of the state, it wasn't perhaps nearly as polarized then as it is today, but Republicans had a philosophy of governance, and the Democrats had their different philosophy of governance. Did either of those seem to mesh better with what you and your department were doing?

Manning: No. That's a really fascinating conversation. The reason I say that is I've talked to many people about that. When you take all the ornaments off the tree, it all boils down to natural resources as an issue. Natural resources, the environment, is not a partisan issue. It's a quality of life issue. Both Republicans and Democrats, the ones that I have the greatest respect for, understand and realize that. I had a great working relationship with both sides of the aisle because I firmly believed that, and I would express that to them: "It's not a partisan issue, never has been, and never should be. In other words, we shouldn't close a state park because it's in a Democrat's district. Nor should we open one that is of little consequence or little value in a Republican district. You have to take into consideration the value of the natural resources and how it relates to what you're spending your money on." All of them agreed with that. They were very good to work with.

Now I had some detractors that were aggravated. Again it was along the lines of the deer permit issue. "I have a friend that got a ticket." I had one individual in the general assembly that held our budget up because some poor old man in his town was caught selling fish off his back porch. Well, the poor old man had been commercially marketing game fish, which is a **very** significant violation. We shut him down and we took his license away from him. And this guy was mad as hell. But he was also a very unethical legislator in all regards, and he held our budget up. I said, "Fine, go ahead and hold our budget up." And I don't think I ever talked to Governor Edgar about this, I think it was George. I said, "Go ahead and hold our budget up. And then when

the papers ask me why our budget isn't moving forward I'll make sure I mention your name and explain it."

DePue: Are you willing to mention the name here?

Manning: It's probably best for me not to. But I'm sure if the individual ever hears that, he'll know perfectly well who the heck he was.

DePue: I wonder if you can talk a little bit about your relations with some of the other agencies. Let me start with Department of Agriculture.

Manning: Becky Doyle. Probably the first woman director of the Department of Ag. She was a great gal to work with. She supported her constituents in a very meaningful and straightforward fashion. She had a certain direction to go, I had a certain direction to go. From time to time they didn't always coincide.

DePue: What would you say was her direction to go? She's representing one of the most important industries, if you will, in Illinois. We're sitting in some of the best farmland in the world.

Manning: You bet. Her direction was to promote and increase agriculture at every opportunity she had. I think she did that very well. My direction was to preserve the natural resources. From time to time they'd clash. If you're going to farm everything right up to the stream bank, by golly, I'm going to be aggravated with it. She might see that as an increase in production, and we'd argue about that, but we were great friends.

DePue: How about some of the things like mega hog operations or cattle operations?

Manning: Obviously I had grave concerns with mega hog operations. But so did the public. I think the public concerns over those issues had significant impacts. Becky heard and paid attention to those issues.

DePue: Would you say in that equation—maybe you don't want to characterize it this way—that you won most of those battles, as far as constructing new hog operations in the state?

Manning: Honestly, that wasn't our battle. It was something that we watched. So it wasn't something that we either won or lost. It was what we observed and heard.

DePue: So that was much more in her lane, then.

Manning: That was much more in her lane, exactly. Exactly.

DePue: How about Mines and Minerals? There's another one where you could see some obvious points of contention between the two.

Manning: We developed over the years and through Governor Edgar's—and when I say Governor Edgar's, it was his and George Fleischli's wisdom—we developed some very good relationships with Mines and Minerals. Obviously strip mining has gone on and is going on throughout the state of Illinois. There are several levels of reclamation that can be attained, whether you take those back to farm production or agricultural production, or whether you take those to recreational use. We worked with Mines and Minerals for the purpose of turning some of those areas into recreational areas.

DePue: So in other words, a possible point of contention could end up being a win-win situation?

Manning: Exactly. That's what the governor's desire was, and we made that happen. As a matter of fact, the world's largest shooting complex is sitting down there on top of old strip mines.

DePue: Where is that?

Manning: Sparta, Illinois.

DePue: Any other examples you can think of?

Manning: One that I'm sure the agency isn't done with yet is right outside of McLeansboro. It's an area that will eventually be a wonderful recreation area for the people of the state of Illinois. But it's because of the governor's wisdom of us working together and making that a win-win situation instead of an antagonistic situation.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about the relationships you had with federal agencies.

Manning: My relationship with federal agencies.

DePue: See? Now you're smiling again. (laughs)

Manning: I am. It was a love-hate relationship. Love, from the perspective that a couple of the guys I worked with on the federal side were larger than life. They were great guys. The regional director from Region 3 out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, when I first started was a guy by the name of Jim Gritman. Jim was probably six-four and wore a white-sided flattop with a very straightforward attitude. Ex-military, you could tell. I found Jim to be a very intelligent, understanding person when it came to working on issues within the state, whether it was migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, et cetera. He was a great regional director and a wonderful guy to work with.¹³

¹³ Jim Gritman, interview by Dorothe Norton, August 18, 2003, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Digital Library, <http://www.fws.gov/digitalmedia/cgi-bin/showfile.exe?CISOROOT=/natdiglib&CISOPTR=9294&filename=9295.pdf>.

He was replaced by a guy by the name of Bill Hartwig. Bill was ex-Green Beret,¹⁴ and again, you couldn't find a better person to work with. Bill tried and tried to convince me to go to work in Washington, DC for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Bill was the type of person—again, he was straightforward. He was very dedicated to the resource. He liked to see things happen where we worked together. Some of the programs that we worked on, Illinois Rivers 2020 being one of them, were because of Bill's encouragement to bring federal and state agencies together for a common purpose and common cause. He played a big role in making that happen.

DePue: But you smiled when I first asked the question, because maybe not all of the relationships were that rosy.

Manning: That's right. They weren't all that rosy. I was on my way, going on vacation. I was going out to New Mexico to archery hunt for elk. I hit the Kansas border about seven o'clock in the morning and my cell phone went off. I was carrying a bag phone at that time, one of these great big numbers. It was my chief of law enforcement, Larry Clausen. He said, "Brent, they just closed down three hundred waterfowl sites on the Illinois River."

DePue: They?

Manning: Federal government. That was my question. I said, "They? Who the hell is they?" He said, "Federal government. They tell us they're baited." I said, "What are you talking about, Larry?" He said, "Mowing the retrieval areas in front of the blind—the feds are claiming that is scattering seed source and artificially baiting an area." I said, "You're telling me that we're not carrying any additional seed source in; all we're doing is mowing some of the native or natural vegetation, and they're considering that baiting?" He said, "Yep. That's what they're saying. They got us closed down." Teal season was right around the corner. I said, "Holy cow!" I got on the phone and talked to Bill Hartwig—and I don't know whether you've ever driven across Kansas or not—from one side of Kansas to the other side of Kansas.

DePue: That's a long conversation.

Manning: That's a long conversation. We argued and we fought. The bottom line was Bill said, "You know, Brent, this has got to be changed, because the way the federal law is written in 50 CFR"—which is the Federal Register—"the law states that these federal wardens can do that. It's the only law on the books where a person is guilty until proven innocent. You're accused of it, you're guilty of it."

Oh, boy, I was so ticked off I couldn't see. Ducks Unlimited heard of my anger—they probably heard me from Kansas—but they'd heard of my irate position on this. So they asked me to speak the following year at the

¹⁴ Army special forces.

International Waterfowl Symposium, down in Memphis, Tennessee, on the issue. So I did, and explained to them my very grave concerns that we're cutting the bottom out of those people that support us the most with their dollars, their time, and being volunteers on wetlands and on waterfowl issues, by telling them they're baiting.

And then the horror stories started to pop up. There were people who had been arrested because their dog swam through weeds and dislodged seed heads. Wardens picked up the seed heads and said, "See? You're baiting."

DePue: Federal wardens.

Manning: Federal wardens. And when that happens, when you receive a baiting ticket, they don't give you a ticket right there on the spot. You get a notification in the mail. Say it's a thousand-dollar ticket. You either pay it, or, if you want to challenge this in court, you run the risk of spending ten years in jail and a ten thousand-dollar fine. So most people plead guilty and pay the ticket.

To my way of thinking, that was un-American. So we started the battle royal with that particular issue. My remarks I guess hit a nerve of some of the other directors in the U.S., because they'd all experienced similar problems. Bud Grant, who you probably recognize the name of, from Minnesota, had been arrested in a similar situation. I started receiving cards and letters. The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies asked me to chair a committee to rewrite that law. And I did. I chaired that committee. It took us about eighteen months to come to a language that state scientists, biologists, waterfowl managers, and our conservation police officers were satisfied with.

The federal conservation police officers just absolutely tore me apart on their website, which was fine by me. I personally considered it somewhat of a badge of honor, because they had other conservation police officers, federal wardens, who were feeding me information behind the scenes, saying, "This is wrong. It's only the lazy officers that are griping and complaining about this because they basically are now not going to be able to write tickets where they would have written tickets in the past."

DePue: Where was that money going?

Manning: The money was going into the federal coffers. But of course, you probably look better writing ten tickets a year than writing one ticket a year. One of the guys that was retired, a federal warden, testified with me in front of Congress. He basically was the guy that broke the camel's back. He said, "He's absolutely right. These guys that are whining and complaining about this are people that really don't know their business and can't do it right."

DePue: What was the nature of the criticism directed at you on the website?

Manning: It was basically that I was harboring poachers and, one way or another, trying to get people to poach, which was not the case. I mentioned before that one of my best friends and mentors was Dr. Frank Bellrose, a waterfowl ecologist. One of the things that he had worked on throughout his life was trying to see that we got wetlands and wetland areas converted back to natural and native food sources. The difference being, if you plant corn, which all waterfowlers know and recognize how to do, and you flood that corn up to ear level, waterfowl will come in, they'll eat it, et cetera. It's like feeding them Twinkies. They don't get the nutritional value they do with the smartweeds, the chufa, the pigweeds—all the native vegetation that they have evolved on over the past hundred thousand years. It's the difference between eating at a smorgasbord and a McDonald's.

So we had been encouraging that for years. Now we have all these guys that have converted their wetlands to a native vegetative structure throwing up their hands and saying, "Man, we're going to get arrested because our dog walked through our vegetation? Because we mowed a retrieval area? That's crazy. We're going to go back to corn." That's the worst thing that could happen for the waterfowl populations.

DePue: Correct me if I'm wrong here. I'm getting the impression that part of the resistance at the federal level was basically an anti-hunting agenda, if you will.

Manning: I'm not so sure it was an anti-hunting agenda. Maybe that was part of it. I think it was more of an agenda of laziness. "It's much easier to write them a ticket if we've got these laws that are enforceable in this fashion. If they change the laws it's going to be tougher for us to prove our case." The guy who testified with me said, "You can prove the case, and here's how you do it." He had more waterfowl-baiting violations than anyone else, and none of them were cases of people walking through and dislodging seed head. They were all true baiting cases. I admire the officers that get those types of cases.

Long story short, I worked through the process for eighteen months. It involved United States congressmen; it involved congressmen from Texas, congressmen from the East Coast, the West Coast, senators from New Hampshire. We worked with a myriad of people, and they changed the law. Then we had to modify the migratory waterfowl treaty with Canada. President Clinton was kind enough to send me a copy of the bill I've got in my office that he signed, which modified that particular language. But it was a rather interesting and arduous task.

DePue: It sounds like you were in the perfect position. Here, a guy who'd spent a big chunk of his life in Ducks Unlimited fighting for the rights of duck hunters and preserving wetlands at the same time. Now you're in a position at the state level, a great position to carry that issue forward to the federal government.

Manning: Good Lord shines from time to time on fools and children. I'm sure not a child.

DePue: (laughs) We'll leave it at that. Any other incidents that you especially remember?

Manning: I know that through the efforts of working with the federal government on several huge issues, we were rolling down the road of getting some things done through the cooperation of federal and state agencies that had never been done before. I met several times with the under secretary of the army, who had the Army Corps of Engineers under his purview. We discussed the silliness of spending all the capital dollars in the Illinois and Mississippi River Basins, versus taking care of the watersheds that contributed to sediment, as we talked earlier, in those water bodies. Through that, the Illinois 2020 program was born.

The Illinois 2020 program just rolls off my lips as though that was a singular state program. It was a program that involved federal and state initiatives that had not been done before. It's not because of me. It's because of the wonderful people who worked for me and with me that we managed to involve CRP, which is Conservation Reserve Program; the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, CREP; EPA 319 monies; Army Corps of Engineers; Water Resources Development Act monies, WRDA monies. All of them rolled into a singular purpose.¹⁵

DePue: I'm still not sure I know what the Illinois Rivers 2020 program is.

Manning: That was a program that actually was taken over by the lieutenant governor's office. It was the consortium. It was the amalgamation of all these programs for a specific purpose and specific cause with a specific end.

DePue: Of?

Manning: Watershed management. It was treating the uplands so you wouldn't have the contributory sediments getting into the river. It was making sure the river itself was handled in an appropriate manner. There are ninety municipalities up and down the Illinois River that draw their potable water out of the Illinois River. If you don't manage the watersheds, you run into overall problems.¹⁶

¹⁵ CRP and CREP are administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency; the U.S. EPA administers grants awarded under section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act; the Army Corps of Engineers administers most of the provisions of the Water Resources Development Act, which actually refers to several acts passed by Congress between 1974 and 2007.

¹⁶ Illinois Rivers 2020 was the name given to the collective plan of the Illinois River Coordinating Council, IDNR, Illinois Department of Agriculture, and IEPA to coordinate federal monies available through the USDA, EPA, and Army Corps of Engineers. The plan was focused on the Illinois River and its tributaries. Lt. Gov. Corinne Wood chaired the Illinois River Coordinating Council. Illinois Government News Network, "DNR Press Release," April 25, 2000, <http://>

DePue: The issue that we're dealing with today—maybe this is a tangent—is Asian carp, and preventing them from getting into Lake Michigan.

Manning: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DePue: Did all of this come to a head after the flood of 1993?

Manning: We were working on it at that time. We knew that there were significant problems even prior to the flood of '93.

DePue: We started long ago with growing up, when you first got interested in environmental issues and ecology, and you realized, Oh my gosh, some of these streams around my neighborhood are silting over. Moldboard plowing was one big problem. But there'd been something of a minor revolution in farming practices as well, from that time to the early nineties. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Manning: Many of the farmers had gone—because they saw the loss of their soils on family farms—to soil saver equipment, which enhanced the ability to maintain soils on their properties in a very significant fashion. Our efforts were to take it to the next step. When I say take it to the next step, it was to make sure the buffers in certain areas that were highly erodible were maintained. Setting those areas that were highly erodible back or aside, to make sure that over the long term in perpetuity they didn't erode and become a portion of the river bottom. Instrumental in this effort was Congressman LaHood. He was an unbelievable champion of the effort of putting these programs together. But in that time period we saw the marked difference that the different equipment had made in the erosion.

DePue: So this wasn't necessarily a tough sell for the farming community.

Manning: No, it really wasn't. As a matter of fact, when I went and talked to the secretary of agriculture the first time to see if she would provide an authorization for the CREP, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, she said, "That program hasn't been used for a very long time, and I think that we're about to suggest to Congress that it be eliminated. But we'll give you ten thousand acres of authorization. If you manage to fill that up in a year, maybe we'll reconsider." We had the ten thousand acres signed up in a month.

DePue: So you're talking about an Illinois initiative, not a federal initiative.

Manning: No, this is a federal initiative, for Illinois. It was an Illinois authorization for this federal initiative. We had the CREP, that initial authorization, filled up in a month. We started going back. They were just amazed how it was being received by Illinois farmers.

Now the thing that we did is, we provided a state match of that CREP money. Within that state match, we would use that match to convert a thirty-year easement to a permanent easement; or if it was a shorter-period easement, take it to a longer-period easement. But the bottom line was, by the time we were done, I think we secured nearly five hundred thousand acres of watershed.

DePue: Five hundred thousand?

Manning: Yeah. Along the Illinois River. When I say along the Illinois River, I'm talking about the tributaries, all the watershed. In other words, those areas that were highly erodible and would be contributing to the sediment. I'm sure it was near that number by the time we left. I don't know where it is now. I do know it seemed to me profound ignorance, when you had a federal program that would provide ten dollars for every one dollar you provided, that Blagojevich eliminated that one dollar.

DePue: Driving through Illinois myself, I'm always amazed when you get close to the Illinois River and you've got this incredible floodplain. It's got to be some of the richest farmland in the world sitting in that floodplain. But I suspect that's not necessarily the kind of land you're talking about here.

Manning: No. As a matter of fact, when I first started dealing with this issue, I asked the Illinois Water Survey, out of Champaign, how much sediment got into the Illinois River on a day-to-day basis. At that time they came back to me with the response of X number of metric tons. "That's pretty interesting, but I don't have any idea of what you're talking about. Give me something I can relate to." And a guy whose name was Dr. Nani Bhowmik—I can remember Nani laughing at me—said, "Okay." So the next day or so he sent me a note and said, "I think I've got this figured right. What this equates to is really filling up Busch Stadium every two days with the amount of sediment that goes into the Illinois River." I said, "Nani, that's still a pretty doggone big amount. It's out of my imagination. Give me another figure." He said, "How's fifty-four thousand two-ton truckloads of sediment going into the Illinois River daily." That's a bunch of sediment. I said, "I can imagine that."

He said, "Well, what you've got to consider is that every tributary, every rivulet, every stream in the state contributes to that amount of sediment going into the river." The only way to address that is by appropriate treatment of the uplands. The root systems, in other words: the forests, the prairies that hold the sediment in place. When you look at it from that perspective, those same forests and prairies, wet meadows—they support our threatened and endangered species, they support wildlife, they are the fish nurseries, they are the wetlands of significance. Those are what we need to concentrate and focus on. Through this Illinois Rivers 2020 we had a coordinated effort. We had a program that did just that.

DePue: How important were new initiatives like low-till or no-till farming practices to that equation?

Manning: Very important. The low-till, no-till, soil saver equipment—all those things helped us successfully mitigate, at that time, the sediment loads.

DePue: That gets us to the point of—I mentioned earlier—the flood of 1993. All of this has got to be playing a factor in the flood of '93. What was the role of your organization during the flood?

Manning: It was fascinating. I talked to my office directors and my staff, and we determined that it was important from a human standpoint to go over and do what we could. There was really nothing at that point in time, while the flood was going on, that we could do from a programmatic standpoint or from a mitigation standpoint. People were in need of help. So we loaded up some buses. We headed to the Illinois River, and we sandbagged. We did that on several occasions.

DePue: But was part of the problem the sediment levels in both the Illinois and the Mississippi Rivers?

Manning: Actually, the sediment did not play much of a role in that. The only role that sediment probably played in that is because of the sediment depths in the water reservoirs and in the rivers, the capacity to hold those floodwaters was significantly reduced. Had that sediment not been there, there probably would have been more freeboard and more water absorption. But I don't think anything would have prevented the flooding that took place, with the one exception of all the levees being taken down; the floodwater would probably have been drastically reduced had there been no levees, because everyone would have absorbed a portion. But that didn't happen.

DePue: So your agency became just one of many in the state that lent a helping hand to fight the flood.

Manning: Exactly. To fight the flood.

DePue: And how did that play out?

Manning: Wonderfully. We asked for volunteers. Of course, there were some people in the agency who, because of health reasons, couldn't participate. We didn't expect them to. But we loaded up some buses and headed over to the Illinois River. I remember my wife and my youngest daughter actually went with us. We got over there and we started the sandbagging process. I think it was about two o'clock in the afternoon when we saw a military helicopter fly over. It was the adjutant general. He knew I was there and he flew in and picked me up. We took a flight down the Illinois River. He said, "I got to show you what you're fighting."

DePue: Was that Don Lynn at the time?

Manning: It was Don. That's right. We flew down the levees. He pointed out a couple, what they call sand boils, which were areas where you knew the levee was going to breach. They were shooting thirty and forty feet out behind the levee. The areas that we were working on were going to be good, and they were stabilized. But you could see there were more problems coming. It was an amazing perspective when we got up there. Also was an amazing perspective when you looked at the bluffs the good Lord had provided versus the little levees that we provided. (DePue laughs) That water wasn't going to get outside those bluffs, but it was going to get over our levees. There was no doubt.

DePue: Most of your attention was on the Illinois River Basin, then?

Manning: Yeah, it was. It certainly was. But that was an incredible time.

DePue: But your description sounds like the Department of Conservation was a minor player in fighting this flood.

Manning: We were. By all consideration we were a minor player. But we also—when I say minor player—we put a lot of hands on the sandbags. People were dedicated to do that. They went over; they volunteered on their own time to do it as well. So I was extremely proud of staff during that. I had one funny story when we did that. George Fleischli came down to visit us on the river and see what in the world we were doing. He got on the phone and called the governor; he said, “You ought to come down and see this.”

So I guess the governor was en route, flying over. Had a conservation police officer that was there, had his boat there, and he was going to take George and I from one side of the river to the other. The river was almost at a standstill: because of all the water backing up, hitting the Mississippi, there wasn't any down current. It was just at a standstill. He [the police officer] said, “I'll come pick you up.” So this CPO came, picked George and me up.

We get halfway across the river and his motor quits. We're sitting there. We see the governor fly over. George is waving. And the poor conservation police officer —George and I both understood. We've dealt with motors. We know there's nothing guaranteed. But the poor conservation police officer almost died. He was so upset that he couldn't get his motor going; the governor flying around us, and us waving at him.¹⁷

DePue: The governor probably thought you were just kind of hotdogging. (laughter)

Manning: Yeah, I don't know what he thought. But it was a fun situation.

¹⁷ Fleischli, 43.

DePue: Let's get into 1994, an election year for the governor. You're now one of the key players in the administration. Was there some expectation the governor or the governor's staff had in terms of the role that you would play in the reelection?

Manning: I have never been more impressed with a politician in my life in that there wasn't any pressure. George told me—and I felt very comfortable in this role—“If you want to talk on behalf of the governor, don't exaggerate. Don't provide any expectations that may not happen. Just be honest.” I said, “I'm happy to do that at any opportunity I get, because we've got some very good programs that have been initiated and started, and we're going in the right direction with them.” But I felt no pressure whatsoever to become involved politically. Now, I did speak and was happy to do so at several events, where people called me and invited me to come and talk on behalf of the administration and what had been going on, particularly in my field of conservation.

DePue: Were you on the government clock at the time?

Manning: No. Those are decisions that we made as employees of the agency. Now of course you can say that the director is on 24/7. Basically they are. But for instance, I can remember going over to Greene County and talking to their Lincoln Day dinner. I made arrangements to make sure that I did it after normal working hours and took my own car.

When I went and I talked to them, they wanted to hear about Governor Edgar's programs and the directions that he was taking conservation, et cetera. That's stuff I'm very comfortable talking about. I couldn't go in and talk to them about what they were doing in DCFS or any of the other agencies. But talking about conservation issues, I'm fine with that. I was very supportive of the governor's activities in doing that.

When I was asked to go for a noon meeting, Rotarians, et cetera, then my conversation couldn't be political. I realized that. I could go, and I could sure talk about our programs and stuff, but I wasn't going to say, “You should elect or you should reelect our governor.” I may have felt that way, but I was only there on a professional basis, and I kept it that way. I felt very comfortable being able to divide the two.

DePue: In the middle of that campaign, July 1994, they're still waiting for the budget. It seems like it always took a long time for Illinois to get a budget, even though the fiscal year started July first. But July 1994, suddenly the governor finds himself in the hospital with some pretty serious heart problems. Do you recall that?¹⁸

¹⁸ On July 7-8, 1994, Governor Edgar, then 47, had emergency quadruple-bypass surgery at Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, Illinois. *Chicago Tribune*, July 8, 1994. See Edgar interview; Mike Lawrence,

Manning: Oh, vividly, absolutely vividly. I got a call late at night at my home. It was from George, and he said, “Brent, I just want you to know the governor has had to undergo heart surgery.” “Oh my gosh.” He said, “Everything’s fine. But instead of hearing it on the news, I wanted to make sure”— I don’t remember what night it was—“I wanted to make sure you knew, and make sure your staff is aware, he’s doing okay.” So I can still remember the word got out when he was flying back in to the hospital there in Springfield, in his chopper. A number of us went over and waved and smiled at him and Brenda as they got off of the helicopter. All of us felt compelled to do so.

I still remember his first staff meeting after he’d had the heart procedure. It was being held at the library. We went in the cabinet meeting, and everybody was in pretty good cheer. It was the first time the governor was back. We were socializing for a few minutes, then the governor called us all to attention, and we all took our seats. The governor said, “George”—he was looking out at George Fleischli—“George, what was the first thing you did when you heard about my heart procedure?” George looked up and said, “I called Kustra. I wanted to make sure I still had a slot.” (laughter) True story.

DePue: He obviously was asking to get some kind of a response.

Manning: Yeah, he was. There was no doubt. He had a very, very subtle sense of humor. But he knew that he’d get some response out of Fleischli like that, and that’s why he went that direction, I’m sure. It was a great quote, great comment.

DePue: Bob Kustra, his lieutenant governor, was a person I failed to ask you about before. This is shortly after the time that Kustra had actually toyed with the idea of becoming a radio announcer.

Manning: Absolutely. Bob Kustra and I fish together. I am a great advocate and fan of Bob Kustra’s. He was a genuinely good-hearted, good person. I have no idea what WLS or anyone else offered him to leave the position as lieutenant governor, but I almost guarantee you they probably offered him a whole lot more money than what he was making there. But he decided to stay out of loyalty. I have great respect for him for doing that. Plus his continual support of the governor programmatically. He was out beating the bushes at all times. He was just a great guy. All the way around, a great guy.

DePue: One other person. We’re about at the point where I think we might want to close up for today. But let’s finish with asking your opinion about Brenda [Edgar]. Did you have many dealings with Brenda?

Manning: Not many. And when I would see her, many times it was on a social basis. She and the governor were maybe visiting Conservation World out at the State Fairgrounds, or maybe a Christmas party at the mansion. She was always just

extremely polite and very kind. The governor was always business. “We’re going to focus on business; we’re going to get this done,” et cetera. But she always seemed to have a way of putting him at ease and everybody around him at ease. Just a delightful person.

DePue: Was the governor a different person around Brenda?

Manning: I don’t think so. I don’t think he was. Now privately, everybody’s different around their wife. But publicly, the governor retained that very strong business persona and attitude. His leadership never left him. Let me put it that way; his leadership never left him.

DePue: Would you describe him as being aloof sometimes in that respect?

Manning: I didn’t ever perceive him as being aloof. I have worked for some people in my past with Ducks Unlimited that were perceived as being aloof. But they were Oxford-educated and spoke several different languages fluently and were pretty... They could easily be perceived as aloof. But I used to kid with them and tease with them just like anyone else would. With the governor, it was more business rather than aloofness. I never felt, when I was around him, that he felt or portrayed himself as better than anyone else. It was always “We’ve got to take care of this next issue,” or “We’ve got to focus and concentrate on...” whatever the issue du jour was. I never felt he was aloof at all.

DePue: We’ve had a fascinating discussion up to this point. So I’m bringing back all these memories for you. It’s great history. It’s important for us to understand the way the government works on the inside. I think that’s what Governor Edgar wanted to accomplish in these anyway. But we’ve got a lot more turf to cover. We’ve got a reorganization of the agency; I’m sure you’re going to talk a lot about that. Several significant purchases and procurement of land. And some other issues that I think we’d be better served to pick up tomorrow, if you would agree to that.

Manning: I would, Mark. You just made a very important statement, and that is, how government works. One of the things that I found with Jim Edgar—government did work. It wasn’t something that was an esoteric idea or notion. It was made to work, and it was because of his leadership. For me, I was in a wonderful position. I couldn’t lose. I had great leadership from the top, and I had people that worked with me at the agency who were very, very talented.

DePue: Governor Edgar has the reputation today of being a very astute politician. How would you sort out, in his case, politician versus chief executive?

Manning: I feel as though he was wonderful as a chief executive. And I think part of that was because he was a very honest politician. He didn’t have to remember lies, because I don’t think he told any. You can tell some of these guys are searching or trying to remember what they said last week. He didn’t have to

do that, because I think he was very consistent in what he said and how he handled himself. I appreciated that. In regard to his professional etiquette, I think he respected the people that he had working for him. One of the things that I've always heard about great leaders is they draw to them people that they respect and that they trust, and who won't always say, "Yes, you're right," to the leader. One of those people, I think, was George Fleischli. I think another one was Steve Schnorf. Kirk Dillard—probably a third. They always reserved the right to say, "I told you so," or "That isn't exactly right." Mike Lawrence was that way all the time with him.

I think that garnered a lot of respect from me for the governor, because he wasn't looking to be a king. He was looking to be a chief executive, someone that could make sure things happened in the right fashion.

DePue: I think that's a great note to finish on today, Brent. Part two comes tomorrow.

Manning: Very good. I can't wait.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Manning: You bet.

(end of interview #1 – interview #2 continues)

Interview with Brent Manning

ISG-A-L-2010-006.02

Interview # 2: February 19, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Good morning. This is February 19, 2010. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. We're privileged to have our second session with Brent Manning. Good morning, Brent.

Manning: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: We had quite a conversation yesterday. We still have a lot of territory to cover, don't we?

Manning: We certainly do.

DePue: We got through 1994. I think maybe the last thing we talked about was the governor's heart problems. Obviously, he won that election in November 1994 rather handily against worthy opponent Dawn Clark Netsch.¹⁹ The other significant thing that was going on about that time—your first three years with the agency were one significant budget challenge after another, weren't they?

Manning: We did have a number of significant budget challenges, unquestionably.

DePue: You got to that second administration, and things were definitely looking up as far as the economy was concerned. I know we're going to talk about it later on, because there were some initiatives that you and Edgar were able to take. But I want to start today with the reorganization of Department of Conservation and some other agencies into the Department of Natural Resources. Can you talk about the origin of that, to start with?

¹⁹ Edgar defeated Dawn Clark Netsch 1,984,318-1,069,850, a margin of 914,468 votes. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Election, November 8, 1994*.

Manning: It's really interesting. The origin, if my memory serves me correctly, probably was the idea first mentioned to me by Al Grosboll saying, "How would you feel if we did this massive reorganization?" My comment to Al was, "Those are very logical moves. They are moves that would certainly make all of our lives much easier. We know that the disciplines involved were very much interrelated. In working with those disciplines, we could make some things happen that haven't happened before." As I said earlier in our discussion yesterday, we talked about the establishment of goals, the establishment of moving things forward with a strategic plan. This simply broadened that opportunity of moving the natural resources in the state of Illinois forward in a logical, sequential fashion.

DePue: What were the agencies that they were looking at bringing together at the start?

Manning: It was fascinating in that the agencies that came together and that they looked at originally, pretty much were the same. There wasn't a lot of divergence from the original plan. The logical ones, if you think about them in this fashion, were directly related, or indirectly in some cases, to natural resources and its core mission. The Water Resources Division that came out of the Department of Transportation, for instance. Being able to work with Don Vonahm, who to this day is probably one of the best water engineer/scientists in the continental United States, was fabulous. He probably has forgotten more than most people in the field currently know. So Don was an excellent addition to the team. He could tell us the stages of the Illinois River virtually at any given time and what would impact and affect them. So Don's group was a wonderful addition.

You looked at the surveys that are now associated with the University of Illinois—the Illinois Natural History Survey, the Water Survey, Geological Survey, and the waste recycling center over there, the research center over there. All of those have a very, very integral tie to natural resources.

DePue: And they were formerly where?

Manning: They were formerly with the—I'm trying to think what the agency was called—the agency was called Natural Resources and Conservation. Pardon me; it's terrible that I can't remember exactly what the agency was formally called. But it was an agency that was kind of hung out on its own. It didn't have the direct tie that these brought.²⁰ The agency had those components in it

²⁰ The surveys and state museum were initially housed under the Department of Professional Regulation, before being moved to Environment and Natural Resources. The reorganization that created the Department of Natural Resources eliminated ENR, bringing the surveys and museum under DNR. For these moves, and the benefit benign neglect the surveys received while under Professional Regulation, see Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, October 22, 2009, Jim Edgar Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL, 54-56. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Jim Edgar Oral History Project.

that now are associated with the University of Illinois. But what it gave us the ability to do was tie, in a very direct fashion, either water research or natural resources research in the form of entomology, mammalogy—any of the disciplines that were involved at the University of Illinois—with our direct management, with our prairie restorations, with our forestry restorations, with all the things that we did in Conservation as it became Natural Resources. Perfect tie.

I've got to give Governor Edgar credit for seeing the value in this. It was something that was probably long overdue. I don't know whether Al mentioned it to him firsthand, but it was very interesting. The Illinois State Museum, their natural resource research portion, is one of the best natural resource research entities in the whole United States. I think there's a biblical phrase that talks about a prophet not being recognized in his own town. That's true with both the Natural History Survey and with the Illinois State Museum. Both of them are tremendous research entities. You talk to people in Illinois: "Yeah, we might have heard of them." You talk to people in other states: "Oh, yeah, they're the very best." So incorporating those with actual on-the-ground management made sense.

DePue: Certainly you heard that people would have raised eyebrows. "Is it the State Museum? Department of Natural Resources? I don't get it."

Manning: Sure. Right. We heard a lot of that. But when you look at the Illinois State Museum—I think when I was there, there was roughly thirty-five thousand to forty-thousand square feet of exhibit space—they had over one hundred thousand square feet of curation space. Within that were absolute jewels that were related to natural resources and the natural history of this continental United States. So it was a great tie.

DePue: Department of Energy and Natural Resources would also seem to be a natural.

Manning: Energy and Natural Resources is where the surveys came from. Thank you very much. I had a blank there. But it was Energy and Natural Resources.

DePue: Here's one, though, that was rife with some possible contention and conflicting agendas. You probably know exactly where I'm going: Department of Mines and Minerals.

Manning: That was my first reaction when I heard "We may include Mines and Minerals." So I started digging into it a little bit and realized that Mines and Minerals was also in charge of long-term restoration.²¹ When you look at the long-term restoration of the mining activities that go on, strip mining in particular, there was a lot of property that became available through this very

²¹ The Division of Land Reclamation was created under the Department of Mines and Minerals in 1962. For the relationship between Mines and Minerals and the state's Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Council, see Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, May 20, 2009, 2-9.

insightful move by the governor. A lot of that property became available for recreationalists here in the state of Illinois. Not the least of which—and I think I mentioned this yesterday—is the area near Sparta which is now the World Shooting Center. That was a former strip-mine area that was added to an additional holding. It became one of the state's largest acquisitions ever.

DePue: But the purpose of the Department of Mines and Minerals was—I suspect they would say before this incorporation into Department of Natural Resources—was to promote Illinois' mining industry, and especially the coal industry, which had always been the heart of the economy for southern Illinois.

Manning: Absolutely. But when you look at this from an overall perspective, if you're extracting any mineral from the Earth—oil, whatever it may be—part of the responsibility of government is making sure that reclamation is done in an environmentally friendly and very strategic fashion. With the Department of Natural Resources involved, we were absolutely sure it was going to go in that direction.

Now, folks may say, "Well, isn't there some conflict there?" No. We knew, from an economic standpoint, that southern Illinois' economy at one point in time was very dependent upon mining. And it was going to take place. You can't argue that. It was there. It was something that they depended on. Regardless of the sulfur content, it was going to take place. If it is going to take place, and we could be involved in the reclamation of those areas in a fashion which would provide a quality of life enhancement for not only the people there, but all the citizens of Illinois, then we should do it. So really it was a very interesting greening initiative. It took me a while to think through it and come to the conclusion that this was a very, very good idea.

DePue: Were there advocates within the mining lobby and the mining industry who didn't think it was a good idea?

Manning: I think they kind of went through the same process that I did. When I say that—at first I didn't hear it directly, but I heard there was some resistance, there was some grumbling. But by the time I got to talk to some of the people that were involved, it was very, very positive. It was, "Yeah, we understand what the thought process is now, and we're for it, because we can see that..." In other words, an industry that would have historically been considered an industry that would have caused ablight on the surface of the Earth is now looked at as "Maybe this can be a greening opportunity." So yeah, Mines and Minerals was an absolutely fascinating addition to this group.

DePue: Before we go on, because I'm fascinated by the possibility of friction between the two, when you get married. That industry in particular had been suffering badly for many, many years, but especially in the nineties. You mentioned already that one of the problems was the high sulfur content in most Illinois coal.

Manning: Yes.

DePue: And these people were thinking, We're losing jobs. Especially in the early nineties, when the economy was really tough, that's money going out of the state of Illinois. "We're losing lots of good, high paying, mostly unionized jobs down in central southern Illinois," where the economy wasn't great in any timeframe.

Manning: Correct.

DePue: And again, you're painting a scenario where there really wasn't that much tension at the point of bringing the two together?

Manning: There really wasn't that much tension. I think the people in the mining industry knew that we weren't the ones, that the Illinois Department of Natural Resources wasn't going to slow their process or procedures. There were other issues at play that would prevent them from mining—the utilization of high-sulfur coal, for instance. We wanted them to promote those areas, and to do as best they could. But once they were done with the strip-mined areas, the goose refuges that they supplied, the ability for reclamation into areas where we could have upland-nesting species—in other words, prairie, shortgrass prairie, et cetera—was tremendous. It was a great boon to the recreational opportunities of the people of Illinois. So we weren't thwarting them in any fashion. In fact, we were trying to work with them once their jobs were done in regard to the mining industry.

DePue: Was longwall mining one of the issues that you dealt with?

Manning: Sure. Longwall mining was. And the resulting subsidence of longwall mining.

DePue: Why don't you explain that quickly for those who aren't familiar with it?

Manning: Basically it's a mining process in which most panels—and this is done underground—are about a mile long. It's a process in which they plan for those panels to subside—in other words, drop.

DePue: The alternative is to do lots of shoring up with timber, and not mine everything?

Manning: Yes. The alternative is called room-and-pillar mining. What they do with room-and-pillar mining, from my understanding, is basically go into an area and create a room that they will mine. They do it under very safe standards. They go to the next one, and they mine that room. And the next one, the next one, the next one. Longwall mining, from what I've been told, is by far more efficient. It does cause planned subsidence. However, even with room-and-pillar you're never guaranteed that you don't have a subsidence. So it's a mining technique. They own the property. The bottom line for the Department

of Natural Resources is, once they were finished, if we could play a role in converting that to a valuable natural resource for the state, that's what we did.

DePue: On top of most of this area would be prime farmland. I'm sure you got some resistance from the Department of Agriculture.

Manning: In far southern Illinois it wasn't prime farmland. If we moved into the upper two-thirds of the state where there was somewhat less strip-mining, there was prime farmland involved. In that area in southern Illinois, the bottom third of the state, there was some farmland, but not all of it was farmland. There was a mixture of prairie and forest and wetland that they would mine under. For us to be able to move in a direction of natural resource restoration was fabulous for us.

DePue: Sorry to get bogged down on that one.

Manning: No, that's a very good question. Excellent question.

DePue: Here's one that didn't become part of the new Department of Natural Resources—there's curiosity in that as well—the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Manning: Every day as I was doing this, I was thanking the good Lord for the governor's wisdom. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, when I was at the state of Illinois, was headed by a person by the name of Mary Gade, who was a fabulous director. She's an environmental attorney by trade and training. She did a wonderful job with the EPA. But the Department of Natural Resources overall was an advocacy agency. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency was a policing agency. It's very hard to be a policeman and at the same time be an advocate. So in our job advocating the good things that we could do through natural resources, we worked very closely with Mary and her EPA on a number of issues when we'd find a problem. We also worked with the attorney general's office. There was a young man over there, who was chief of their environmental division, by the name of Matt Dunn. Matt was and is—he's still there—an incredible resource in taking care of the environment and helping it move in the right direction.

So there was a great synergy between the agencies, all three of them: the AG's office, Department of Natural Resources, and EPA. But EPA is best as it is: a stand-alone agency that has to take those tough actions from time to time. The DNR needs to continue in its role of advocacy.

DePue: Was there any thought about incorporating the Department of Agriculture?

Manning: No, not when I was there. There was no discussion about that. Quite frankly, understandably so. Agriculture is an industry that has a different purpose and goal. Our purpose and goal is as we talked about with Mines and Minerals and the Abandoned Mined Lands Reclamation Council. We could see at the end of

that process, or the end of that tube, an opportunity for advocacy in regard to providing more open space, trails, forests, and prairies for the constituents in the state of Illinois. Agriculture was going to continue to be agriculture. We worked with them, particularly in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and other USDA programs, and programs that we fostered through our agency. But it stayed where it should stay. I firmly believe that.

DePue: We've now got the basic concept of joining some of these different entities together into a new Department of Natural Resources. Can you walk us through the process where you were actually able to establish that new directorate?

Manning: I started out as seven-foot-six-inches tall, and I wound up as four-foot-three-inches tall in the process. (laughs) No. It was a process where obviously a number of state statutes had to be modified. In that modification process, I had to have people that were extremely trustworthy to work with, to make sure that we didn't leave any gaping holes. We dotted all the I's and we crossed all the Ts. During that period of time, there were many, many, many sixteen-hour days in which we stayed in the office. We pored over those statutes.

Now, one godsend in that process was Steve Schnorff. He sent a couple of his very best people. There were two young ladies, in fact. I think one was an attorney by the name of Lori Skinner. I can't think of the other young lady's name. But both of them were capable. They were very, very good at what they did. And they made the process much easier; it could have been an absolute mess. They had the knowledge of how the state statutes were written, what needed to be modified, and how it needed to be changed. So we had a great advantage when we had those two working with us. I had a person who was at that time an assistant legislative liaison. Her name was Diane Hendren. Diane Hendren was also absolutely paramount in making the process work. She would dig out all the problems or problem areas and work through it in a very good fashion.

DePue: Was one of the goals for this reorganization to find natural efficiencies, which probably would relate to staff cuts or reductions?

Manning: As far as efficiencies, yes. But let me say it in this fashion. There are programmatic efficiencies that need to be found in all areas of government. There are still a number of areas of government, and we all hear about them daily, where those programmatic efficiencies need to be found. One arm doesn't know what the other arm is doing, in other words. Through this effort we found programmatic efficiencies. We increased the overall synergy and output of the agency, versus cutting staff. In other words, those staff that came had more to do because they were involved in more programs, procedures and policies. Did we cut some? Yes, but it was minimal. There were probably some managers who didn't make the transition because we had other managers who were working in that field, who handled that particular effort.

Were there staff efficiencies or some cuts? Yes. Minimal. Were there programmatic efficiencies? Absolutely. And they were huge.

DePue: Eventually you've got to take this all up to the legislature. Were there pockets of support and pockets of resistance in the legislature?

Manning: What I found, much to my pleasure, was that there were far more pockets of support. In fact I would say, in general, the entire legislature was very supportive. The questions that we got, when we actually took this before the legislature in a hearing, were very good questions. They weren't this partisan nonsense that we hear about now. They were questions of, "I don't understand how you'll make this function. What direction will you go? Because you have water resources now as part of the agency, will that impact where people can duck hunt?" The answer, obviously, was no. "How did you decide that your wetlands group would fit in, in this particular area?" All in all, they were very, very good and well-thought questions, and they came from both sides of the aisle. Because it was fresh in my mind at that time, I can remember going through all the machinations of, "How is this going to fit and how is that going to fit and how are we going to make this happen?"

When I say that it was a very good experience, I think the reason for that is that the governor's staff had been telling the general assembly, "This is going to work and this is a good thing. We're happy to answer any questions. Our books are open. Come look at it." I felt as though that's the way that it went. It was a very positive experience. Other than the sixty hours a week that we put in on a number of occasions, it was very worthwhile.

DePue: Were there some legislators from southern Illinois who were resisting it or looking hard at the mining mineral piece?

Manning: I'm not so sure I would say resisting. Looking hard, maybe. I can remember Sen. Larry Woolard, Democrat from southern Illinois. He had some questions, but they were positive questions. They were good questions. The notion of bringing programmatic efficiency to government, they applauded.

DePue: Let's move to some other areas, unless you've got some more things to say about that, because we've covered that quite well, I think. Conservation 2000.

Manning: Yes.

DePue: What is Conservation 2000? I think that's another 1995 initiative, isn't it?

Manning: It was. Conservation 2000 was an effort through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to actually put resources—meaning money, effort, time, and expertise—on the ground in the effort of stewardship of all of our natural resources. Well, what does that really mean? It means looking throughout government, Illinois government initially, and determining what programs are available—either for municipalities, for townships, for county governments—

to make differences. We established through Conservation 2000 a number of partnerships with local entities, volunteers throughout the state. Those still exist to this day. Those partnerships would help determine what their highest natural resource priorities were in a particular area.

Let's say it was—well, as an example, the West Branch of the DuPage River, a watershed. There was a partnership that would form around that watershed. Within that watershed, they would look at—the Conservation Reserve Program, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the forestry programs, the programs for fisheries to enhance the river itself—we would bring all those forces to bear in a focused effort, dependent upon their local priority.

We would also look for grant monies that would help in participating. Conservation 2000 also had some money to give to those particular efforts. But we had to be sure from a professional perspective that those efforts were absolutely worthwhile, and they were the direction that we would go. So we had coordinators that would work with the various watershed groups, or the various groups, in Conservation 2000. Quite frankly, it still exists; they may call it something else, but the program as a program still exists. It's a wonderful program. It's something that should have been done long ago.

DePue: Where did this idea come from?

Manning: Myself and executive staff. When I say executive staff, we know in government that it takes a long time to get things done. How do you expedite getting anything done? Part of the process of expediting opportunity is working with people who don't have the governmental barriers, the red tape, that many times we find ourselves in. That morass, we need to set aside, and we need to think outside of the box and do some things that are different.²² So basically, it was a compilation of staff and myself sitting down and seeing how we could implement some programmatic change and get some things on the ground that needed to happen.

DePue: But things that would in many cases require money, significantly more money than the agency would normally be budgeted.

Manning: Correct. Absolutely. Conservation 2000 itself had funds attached with it.

DePue: What I saw in *Meeting the Challenge*, which is the book that the Edgar folks put together at the end of his administration—we're not talking about a small

²² For another take on “thinking outside the box” as a managerial metaphor, see Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 22, 2009, 80.

amount of money. It said, "For six years projected to spend one hundred million dollars."²³

Manning: Yes.

DePue: We're talking about a state that had just barely been able to balance its books in '94, or was in the process of getting to that end.

Manning: Yes.

DePue: A hundred million dollars.

Manning: A hundred million dollars is a pretty fair amount of change. One of the things that we did with the hundred million dollars is, at every opportunity, we found federal match monies to match that hundred million dollars. I don't remember exactly what the expenditure was. A hundred million dollars from the administration: we provided multiples of that by looking for federal match, by finding people on the ground who would help us do those efforts. Again, tremendous, tremendous opportunities.

DePue: You said the basic concept of Conservation 2000 was coming from you and your executive staff.

Manning: My executive staff, yes.

DePue: Obviously, you had to present that to Fleischli and Grosboll and the governor.

Manning: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember that meeting?

Manning: I remember first taking it to George. George Fleischli is a very, very well-studied person. He's very intelligent. And him kind of looking at me over his glasses and saying, "This isn't a bad idea." I thought, (laughs) That's a very good thing. So actually, it was George that then took it to the governor. I know he probably had to take it to Al as well. In talking to them, I feel as though they had enough faith in me to move it forward.

DePue: How much of the whole concept, and having the audacity, if you will, to come up with this project in the first place, had to do with understanding what the governor's own philosophy was towards natural resources?

Manning: A lot of it had to do with my first conversation with him, where he told me to do the right things and professionalize the agency. This was one of those issues that fit right into that category. It wouldn't have happened without him,

²³ Tom Schafer, *Meeting the Challenge: the Edgar Administration, 1991-1999* (Springfield, IL: State of Illinois, Office of the Governor), 1998.

without his encouragement. Once we presented the idea, then he was extremely supportive. At that time, I think the general assembly knew and trusted him, and if he was supportive of it, it was going to be a good program.

DePue: Did the concept of Conservation Congress come out of this initiative?

Manning: No it didn't. When we had our first strategic planning session with the Illinois Department of Conservation, one of the issues that was brought forth by a number of staff was, "Constituents are saying they have no voice." Our conversation went to, "Well, how do we provide them a voice? And how do we provide them a voice in a fashion different than what's happened in the past?"

You may ask, "Well, what was that?" It was, "Ye who yelled the loudest got the most attention." That's no way to run a railroad. We have to decide what is best from a scientific perspective, what's best from a managerial perspective, what's best from a budgetary perspective. How do we get there? One of the people on my staff said, "Well, we have to establish priorities." Absolutely. How do we establish priorities? We get people together, and they have to determine what their highest priorities are. That's a pretty unique concept, because they'll be choking one another before we get out of the room. (DePue laughs)

There were absolutely diverse interests. I said, "Maybe not. Let's try." So that was essentially the genesis of the first Conservation Congress. It was wonderful. We brought people from absolute environmentalist to folks that were involved in nothing but field trials or biking or hiking or hunting or fishing, and even the different disciplines within those areas of interest. Deer hunters had far different interests than the pheasant hunters. They had far different interests than the quail hunters. They had much different interests than the people who just enjoyed rabbit hunting, for instance. And fishing. There were salmon fishermen on Lake Michigan. There were people who only cared about fishing for bass. There were people who only concentrated on the Illinois River, and at that time would fish for channel cat.

So all these diverse interests, all these organizations—Ducks Unlimited, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pheasants Forever, Quail Unlimited; TROD, the Trail Riders of DuPage, were involved; the horseback riders of Illinois, and I can't remember their association; the field trial association of the state of Illinois—all of them came together. Migratory Waterfowl Hunters, out of East Alton, Illinois, who were a phenomenal group in that regard, because they saw the value of looking at things from thirty thousand feet and determining what is the highest priority.

Because if all of us can get behind the highest priority, then we're unstoppable. There's an opportunity for us to move mountains. That, in essence, is what happened at that first Conservation Congress. Many of them

sitting in the room, that had been at each other's throat for years, realized that they had more in common than they did what was separating them.

DePue: Do you recall where it was, when it was, and who was leading or trying to guide the direction of the discussion?

Manning: What we did was we had a number of breakout groups or breakout sessions.

DePue: Where was this?

Manning: I'm sorry. It was in Springfield. We got permission from Speaker Madigan to use the House, so the first Conservation Congress was held in the House chambers. They sat in the seats and did the voting just as our Illinois General Assembly does. The breakout rooms were all in the rooms that surrounded the House chamber. We had facilitators from the agency that would go to each of the breakout rooms, and those breakout groups were required to establish their priorities.

They were divided into certain disciplines from the perspective of "Here is your issue; we want you to address that." Those groups would go in and focus and concentrate on those issues, whatever they were. Then they would bring forth a priority list and they would recommend that to the body. That was the last day of the congress. The body would debate it; they would vote on it; they would sometimes manipulate the list. "This shouldn't be the highest priority, number three should be the highest priority." They'd move it up. Which was fine.

I stayed out of it from the perspective of priorities. I only gave the welcome address. We asked, as a favor, a fellow by the name of Ed Webb, who was a very, very well-renowned attorney in the Chicagoland area, to come and be the facilitator—the speaker if you will—for the congress itself, once they convened in the chamber. Ed did a magnificent job. We then put together a list of items of interest. The facilitator's orders were basically, "Don't influence. This has to be heard from our constituency and from our base as to what directions we need to go and what are the top priorities."

Now they also, prior to that first congress, met for almost a year in their locations and areas—we divided the state up into regions—and they would work on issues that they were going to bring forward. Their group—let's say it was northeastern Illinois, for instance—would bring their issues to focus. They would send a representative and take that to the congress itself. Those issues would be some that we provided in the overall perspective. So it worked.

DePue: What happened with all these initiatives, recommendations, and priorities?

Manning: We moved them to the top of the list in our strategic plan, and we accomplished many of them. Conservation Foundation—fundraising arm for

the agency. Illinois State Habitat Stamp. Oh, gosh. Those are just two. I'm trying to think of some of the others. But the bottom line was, they recognized our effort in moving them forward.

DePue: So you had champions out there in the local communities who were supportive of what your agenda was as well.

Manning: Absolutely. You had to have those. That's where our essence resides.

DePue: I know you wanted to take a little time to talk a little bit more about your executive staff. All of this doesn't happen without the executive staff.

Manning: It certainly doesn't. I think I mentioned this yesterday. I was blessed; I had wonderful people above me in the administration, and I had one of the best staffs in the continental United States. I say that with a certain degree of knowledge and authority. Because of their efforts, I was elected as the president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. It was because the other states recognized what Illinois was doing, and where we had come from and where we were going.

Initially, in Fish and Wildlife, I had a fellow by the name of John Tranquilli. I think after Governor Edgar's first four years, John took a position, an opening in southern Illinois, and was one of our regional managers there. He did a fabulous job. I backfilled his position with a fellow by the name of Kirby Cottrell. We never missed a beat. Kirby was fabulous. I mentioned Jerry Beverlin as my office director of lands and conservation education. Conservation education was another extremely, extremely important initiative brought forth by the Conservation Congress, and it was harbored in Jerry's shop. Through that effort, we became the leaders in conservation education in the entire United States.

DePue: What was the official name of the program?

Manning: We had several involved. One was ENTICE, the Environment and Nature Training Institute for Conservation Education, but conservation education was what it was called in Jerry's shop. It was fabulous.

I had a legislative liaison that was second to none. Actually, my first liaison went on to a higher-paying job, which I fully understand. He was followed by a fellow by the name of Ferd Sugent, who did an excellent job for me. But the legislative liaison that I ended up with, who helped me move many of these issues through, was a person by the name of Diane Hendren, Carter Hendren's wife. Diane was spectacular in working with the general assembly. She had great experience and did a wonderful job for us.

DePue: In reorganizing various agencies and bringing them under the new Department of Natural Resources, were there some egos that you had to deal with? You

had people who were directors of their own organization, and suddenly they had to be subordinate to somebody.

Manning: Not so much. Ego situation? I didn't feel we ever had much of a problem with that. Many folks wanted to be part of a successful team. I had two deputy directors initially. Bruce Clay, who wound up being the highest-ranking minority in any fish and wildlife agency in the United States. And John Comerio, who was a seasoned professional; he was a veteran of thirty years at the agency. Both of those guys helped make those paths very smooth. The egos were not a problem. They dealt with everyone in a very good manner. At the time, John and Bruce were the best Deputy Directors in state government.

DePue: Let's turn our attention to land acquisition. We had talked a little bit before about Conservation 2000. The Edgar administration, because of the work you guys were doing, had made a commitment there. It was a dollar commitment as well as a lot of effort. But land acquisition sometimes costs money, and there was a lot of that going on during the last few years of the Edgar administration.

Manning: There was a lot of it that went on. One of the things that I particularly appreciated about Governor Edgar was he listened very carefully when we would bring a priority. There were many times we didn't have the money. We knew we didn't have the money. Site M was a perfect example. We probably mentioned Site M two to four years prior to our being able to obtain it.

DePue: That was the first one I wanted to discuss. So why don't you go into the background and launch into Site M?

Manning: As I said, we probably mentioned it two to four years—two years at least—prior to our attempted acquisition. The governor just simply said, "We don't have the money to do it at this time," which I perfectly understood. But I think it planted a seed.

DePue: Where was Site M? Why was it available to be purchased?

Manning: Site M was an area in central Illinois, a little west of center, which originally was a portion of thirty-thousand-plus acres that had been purchased by Commonwealth Edison to be a site for a power plant. Half of it was farmland. Half of it was a combination of farmland and very, very unique natural resources—meaning bluff prairies, hill prairies, wetlands, a stream system that ran through it, some forests. It was almost two worlds. But we knew that some of those very sensitive areas, if it was sold off, would probably not be maintained.

DePue: Some of it sits on the Illinois River?

Manning: No, it is away from the Illinois River. It's actually in-between Springfield and the Illinois River. Halfway.

DePue: I know it's fairly close to Beardstown and Virginia.

Manning: Virginia. Ashland. Those communities are closest to it. So anyway I was in Southern Illinois speaking, about two to three years after we had made this first approach to the governor, I was speaking to the Southern Illinois Quota Zone Alliance on goose populations and what they were doing. While I was down there—I'd finished my speaking engagement and I'd started back to Springfield—and I got a call from George Fleischli. I still vividly remember this. It was on my speakerphone in my truck. George said, "Brent, where are you?" And I said, "I'm in southern Illinois. I just got done talking to SIQWA." He said, "Get up here." I said, "I'm on my way. What's going on?" He said, "I think the boss may be convinced into looking at Site M again." So I did everything I could to get there just as quickly as I could.

DePue: I should mention in the interest of full disclosure here that when I was working in the state headquarters of the Illinois National Guard—this would have been '89, '90, '91 timeframe—the National Guard was making a determined push to acquire the same property for a training center for the state National Guard. They ran into some significant resistance from a group of farmers who were basically tenant-farming on some of this land.

Manning: Sure. Well, with the Department of Natural Resources, there's some of that property that is still tenant-farmed. And I'm sure that over the years they will probably maintain a certain amount of farming.

One of the things that we did once we purchased it, however, was make sure that the buffers were right and appropriate. We used warm-season grasses, and we went through the prairie restoration that needed to happen. But the rest of the story, which I still am enamored with, is that once I got back to Springfield, I went in and met with the governor. And he said, "Do you think we can make this happen?" "Yes, I think we can." So we started the negotiation process. Quite frankly, it's my belief that George Fleischli was responsible for selling the concept to the governor and saying, "This is really a good thing," and the governor embraced it.

The governor, again, in his original discussion with me—"Do the right thing. Never embarrass us. Professionalize the agency." He knew the value this would bring to the state and to the people of Illinois. So we managed to talk to Commonwealth Edison and make the purchase.²⁴ We had a number of public meetings. I had a number of meetings with general assembly members. Some of the GA members opposed it and some favored it.

One of my favorite parts of this entire story is our first fly-around to introduce the governor to the area. I had a fellow, who was my office director of planning and development, by the name of Bruce Clark. I said, "Bruce,

²⁴ For more detail on the administration's negotiation with Commonwealth Edison over Site M, see Grosboll, October 22, 2009, 71-75.

we're going to have to meet the governor. He's bringing the Sikorsky over. He wants to fly Site M and get a hands-on feel as to what the area looks like. You've got to have some maps and charts ready for us. Can you do that?" "Yes, I can do that." So Bruce and I drove over to a place just outside of Site M where the governor was going to have the helicopter land, and we were going to join him. Well, we got on the helicopter, and we got up in the air. Bruce was madly pointing in one direction and another direction, and pointing at the map, et cetera. Then I noticed he was sweating profusely. We flew around probably for forty-five minutes. There was, of course, a cameraman who was taking pictures of the area.

We landed, the governor thanked us, and off we go. I got back in the car with Bruce. I said, "Bruce, you didn't have any idea where the hell you were at, did you?" He said, "After the first five minutes I was lost." So we're not sure whose property Bruce showed the governor. But it convinced him anyway. I'm sure most of it was above Site M in one fashion or another. But he got turned around in the chopper, so it was a very good and very exciting time.

DePue: One of the unique aspects of Site M—it's now known as Jim Edgar Panther Creek [State Fish and Wildlife Area].

Manning: It is known as Jim Edgar Panther Creek. When you think about the economic drought that we came out of, with his leadership, it took a great deal of personal fortitude to step out and say, "We're going to buy this. We're going to do this."

DePue: Again, one of the attributes it has is the horse-riding trail.²⁵

Manning: Absolutely. I rode with the governor when we did our ground reconnaissance on horseback through Site M. I think that was probably something that he enjoyed very much, and he got to see the property, see the value of the property for the natural resource basis, firsthand.

DePue: Was it about this time that you recognized that it wasn't just good governance, and in this case he had a real passion for the subject?

Manning: That's interesting you ask that. I think that the longer I was with IDNR and IDOC and interfacing with the governor, the more I realized that his interest was there. And I think it grew. I really think that he had this very profound belief that this was an area in which he could improve Illinois. He was set on doing that and he did that. He encouraged many things.

²⁵ Edgar's lifelong fascination with horses started with his childhood trips to visit relatives in Oklahoma. Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, May 21, 2009, 65-66. Also see, Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, April 1, 2009, 52; Kirk Dillard, interview by Mark DePue, November 9, 2009, 44; Brown, 117; Grosboll, October 22, 2009, 75.

The Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, for instance. Obviously that's with the U.S. Forest Service, which is fine. But he was behind the scenes all along, encouraging that we move that forward, and we did. We got that done. The largest refuge on the Mississippi River is over at the old Savanna Army Depot, and it's owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Again, it was because of IDNR's involvement and his encouragement behind us that we made that happen.

DePue: In the case of Midewin and in the case of Savanna Army Depot, why were those pieces of land becoming available?

Manning: Actually the army depot at Savanna was decommissioned. Through that decommissioning process—if my memory serves me correctly—there's actually a litany of entities that they have to offer property for sale to. One of the first on the list is other federal agencies that have a use. For instance, having a huge wetland complex associated with it, it was obvious the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would have an interest there. Of course, we jumped in with Bill Hartwig and said, "Bill, this is something that is necessary for the public, the people of the state of Illinois."

DePue: I'm trying to remember the acronym that the military was using in looking at all the different parcels of land they had across the country.²⁶ Then having this, they took it out of Congress so that they could depoliticize the decision-making process.

Manning: Right.

DePue: And Savanna and Joliet were both aspects of that.

Manning: Yes, they were both aspects of that. I cannot remember the name of that acronym either.

DePue: I should.

Manning: I should as well. (laughs) This getting old stuff is not for sissies. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Savanna was thirteen thousand acres. These are no small tracts of land.

Manning: That's correct. Savanna was thirteen thousand, yes.

DePue: And Joliet is nineteen thousand acres.

Manning: Right.

²⁶ Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC). Congress created this process in 1988.

DePue: Both of them are former army depots. Ammunition locations. That means cleanup issues as well.

Manning: It does. I can still (laughs) remember my first tour or investigation of the Savanna Army Depot. The diversity back there is incredible. The wetland diversity is amazing. It's a beautiful, beautiful site.

DePue: At Joliet?

Manning: At Savanna. We'd come into that wetland complex on the Mississippi River. We got in the backwaters, and we were motoring around back there by virtue of a trolling motor. The areas were broad enough, wide enough. I said, "Why are we using trolling motors instead of our main motors?"

The fellow who was in charge of our boat said, "There may be some unexploded ordnance. With the trolling motor, we don't think it will set them off. But if we used our main motor, you would never know what hit you."

I said, "I understand. Use the trolling motor." (DePue laughs) But obviously they did a sweep and found that there wasn't any ordnance that we had concerns or problems with.

With the Savanna Army Depot and with Joliet, we knew that those agencies wouldn't be in charge of the long-term cleanups. Quite frankly, I know that there are probably still some that are ongoing. But they're accomplishing it and turning that tall grass prairie—here at Joliet, for instance—into something that would have only been seen by the earliest settlers. I think it's an amazing accomplishment.

DePue: Does the EPA have to work pretty closely with them?

Manning: Yes. I'm sure that both state and federal EPA have worked with both of the entities. To what degree, I'm not sure. I don't know where the cleanup now stands.

DePue: Midewin—is that the largest tract of native prairie grass that's been preserved in the Midwest?

Manning: To my knowledge it is definitely the largest tract east of the Mississippi. There are probably some tracts west, in Nebraska or Kansas, that may be larger, but I'm not sure of that. I think this is a very, significant tract.

DePue: Other land acquisitions.

Manning: Oh my.

DePue: Let's start with Cache River State Natural Area.

- Manning: For those that haven't been to the Cache River, it is actually a step back into prehistoric times. It is a gorgeous, gorgeous marsh complex. I was actually with Ducks Unlimited when I first heard of the Cache River and the Cache River wetland complex.
- DePue: Where is this?
- Manning: Cache River is in deep, deep southern Illinois. It's a vast wetland complex that is, again, prehistoric in nature. It is spectacular. The governor recognized its intrinsic value from the perspective of not having anything else like it in the state. We started working on it, and we managed to accomplish it. Now, the Cache River was interesting because we worked with the Nature Conservancy, we worked with Ducks Unlimited—we worked with a number of constituent groups to make that happen. But again, we had to have that spark. I had to know in doing those things that I had support from the top. That was invaluable.
- DePue: And obviously successful, in that case.
- Manning: Yes.
- DePue: I know Sparta was another southern Illinois acquisition.
- Manning: Yes. I think Sparta probably happened either right at the end of Governor Edgar's tenure or just in the beginning of Governor Ryan's tenure. But Governor Edgar had provided the roadmap to get there. In other words, he helped put everything in motion to make it happen. As you're probably aware, it is the largest holding by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources—the Sparta complex down there. It's home to the World Shooting Complex, plus it has a lot of other resource amenities. It's home to field trials. It's home to some great fishing ponds that were provided through the strip-mining procedures.
- DePue: Is that why the land became available?
- Manning: Yes, at least a portion of it became available. The Sparta complex became a portion of an existing state park complex. So it was a natural addition to the entire area.
- DePue: So it was already adjacent to...
- Manning: Immediately adjacent to Pyramid State Park. A natural addition. These areas brought a lot more recreational opportunity and were fabulous. As an aside, Governor Blagojevich tried to sell it. Which... I shouldn't even speak to that.
- DePue: I was going to give you an opportunity towards the end of this to speak to that. Anything else?

Manning: Oh, there were some significant tracts purchased. Yes. Lowden-Miller, in north central Illinois. The governor and I also rode horses on that to look at it for the first time. I think it was in the realm of two thousand acres. That was a very good tract. Peabody River King State Fish and Wildlife Area was the area that I was talking about that was immediately adjacent to the Sparta area. Sangchris Lake, in Sangamon and Christian Counties, south of Springfield. He roughly doubled the size of that holding. I think we bought 1,200 or 1,300 acres there. Apple River Canyon State Park, which is in far north central Illinois. Huge, gorgeous natural area up there. We bought an additional 1,200 acres or so there.

One of his favorites, which is also one of mine for a number of reasons, is the area in Vermilion County that we bought. It was dedicated to Babe Woodyard. Babe Woodyard was a senator that I had known actually prior to going in as director of the Department of Conservation.²⁷ Babe loved natural resources and loved the outdoors. So when we had the opportunity to buy this tract in eastern Illinois, in Babe's district, the governor dedicated it to Babe and named it for him after he had passed. It was a great acquisition and great tract.

DePue: I have read that one of these acquisitions had, I believe, a virgin white pine tract.

Manning: That may have been the Lowden-Miller tract in north central Illinois.

DePue: I knew it was in the northern part of the state.

Manning: Right.

DePue: That's quite a bit.

Manning: It was quite a bit. The interesting thing is, I think during Governor Edgar's tenure we probably put back thirty-five thousand to forty thousand acres for the people of the state of Illinois. But that was state-only property. It didn't include Midewin, nor did it include the federal acquisition on the Mississippi River owned by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

DePue: Did you run into any resistance in any of these initiatives with farmers or—

Manning: Always.

DePue: —mining groups or other people who had other designs for the land?

²⁷ A former farmer, Harry "Babe" Woodyard (R-Chrisman) began his political career at the age of 48, when he was appointed in 1979 to the House seat Edgar had vacated to become Governor Thompson's legislative liaison. He served in the House until 1986, when he won election to the Senate; he remained a state senator until his death in 1997. *Chicago Tribune*, February 1, 1997; *Illinois Issues* (March 1997), 41.

Manning: Oh. We ran into very little opposition with the mining groups. I heard very little from mining entities when we would go to buy something. In some cases the minerals had either already been extracted or the mineral rights were owned. So the actual transfer of the land though ran into very little opposition with the mining groups. The Farm Bureau, on the other hand, absolutely hated it when we would buy anything in the state of Illinois. It was simply against their belief. Didn't feel that the government should own land. Okay, that's fine if that's the way they feel. I feel differently.

DePue: Well, we're talking about the Illinois Farm Bureau, which is the most powerful farm lobby organization in the state.

Manning: That's correct.

DePue: They have no small amount of clout in the legislature. They have quite a bit of clout there.

Manning: That's correct. That's correct. One of the reasons the Farm Bureau probably to this day doesn't like me very much is that I didn't care where the clout came from. If it was the right thing to do, it was the right thing to do.

DePue: Why was it the right thing to do, in your mind?

Manning: At the time that I became director of the Department of Natural Resources, we ranked forty-eighth in the fifty states, in the amount of open space or public land that we had per person in the state. That's a pretty low ranking.²⁸ We have three million visitors annually that go to Illinois Beach State Park, two million visitors annually that go to Starved Rock State Park. That's at the time that I was there. Then there's a myriad of other parks, fish and wildlife areas, and state forests that people go to and enjoy. To me, it's a quality of life issue. For my children and my children's children not to be able to enjoy a spring in which you wake up and hear turkeys gobble and songbirds sing, that's not right. So the right thing to do is to put these places aside and have them for our next generations.

DePue: I'm sure part of the argument you got from the Illinois Farm Bureau and from farmers themselves is, "Well, that might be, but we're also sitting on some of the very best, richest farmland in the entire world. You take that swath of land from east of the Champaign area and run it through northeast, into central Iowa, there's no better farmland in the world than some of that land."

Manning: Absolutely true. There's always going to be a dynamic tension. But for years the Illinois Department of Conservation and the Illinois Department of Natural

²⁸ George Fleischli and Al Grosboll also cite this figure as a key motive behind the administration's drive to acquire public land. Fleischli, 38; Grosboll, October 22, 2009, 60-61. By 2000, Illinois ranked forty-fourth in publicly accessible lands held by state and federal government. Natural Resources Council of Maine, "Public Land Ownership by State" (2000), Augusta, ME, <http://www.nrcm.org/documents/publiclandownership.pdf>.

Resources had no clout in their ability to address that dynamic tension and the need. We talked early on about the very, very poor condition of our rivers and streams. Much of that poor condition is due to the sediment that's lost through farming. The areas of huge concrete in northeastern Illinois also contribute—because of the speed of the runoff—dramatically to that sedimentation. But you have to address all those issues. You have to look at it. We have squandered in these United States billions if not trillions of dollars on agricultural programs that go away. They're here for two years, they're here for four years, they're here for ten years—then they go away. We still see a significant decline in a very precious natural resource, which is the topsoil in the state of Illinois. We need to have a collective strategy to be able to attend to that issue. So that made me somewhat unpopular—expressing those beliefs. But they have to be expressed.

DePue: Let's talk about some of the other significant challenges that your agency had to deal with. I don't know if this was the toughest, but zebra mussels ten or fifteen years ago got a lot of discussion. Still a big problem.

Manning: I remember one of my first trips onto Lake Michigan as the director of the Department of Conservation. We did what was called a Secchi disk measurement. It's a visual measurement where you take a black-and-white disk that's eighteen inches or so in diameter and has a pin in the center of it. You actually lower that disk down and you record how far down from the surface of the water you can see it. It's an indication of the productivity of the water. In other words, if you can't see it very far down, and there's not a lot of productivity in that particular water body, you know that the phytoplankton and zooplankton—there's huge numbers of them. So I can remember dropping that disk—

DePue: Which is a good or a bad thing?

Manning: It depends on the water body. Sometimes it's used in areas that are polluted, because that speaks to the amount of surfactants or other water pollutants coming into an area, productivity causes blooms. But on Lake Michigan, it is truly a measure of the productivity of the water.

We were off shore probably two miles. The guys, knowing that I had a fisheries background, said, "Here. Let's do a Secchi disk measurement." It was time to do it anyway, so they dropped it down. I think we could see six or eight feet, see the Secchi disk at that distance. They marked that. With the advent of the zebra mussel, I can remember going back there ten years later, doing the same measurement, and you could see it twenty-five feet down. So that's how much difference the zebra mussel alone had made in Lake Michigan.

Now you can say, "Why is that a problem? Because it's clearer water." It's clearer water. It's also sterile water. It prevents the bottom of the food

chain from being available to those species that feed on phyto- and zooplankters. Those species that feed on phyto- and zooplankton are being fed upon by Lake Michigan perch, yellow perch; being fed upon by salmon; being fed upon by all the other creatures in the food chain. So it's a very fragile environment.

With the advent of the zebra mussel; this little cladoceran, which is a water flea, that has come from oceangoing vessels; the round goby; and a number of other exotic species, Lake Michigan is in a world of hurt. If the Asian or black or other carp that aren't already there—meaning the German carp, which we know is already there—make it into Lake Michigan, we run the risk of ruining a one-billion-dollar-a-year annual fishery. It's a horrid situation.

DePue: How do you fight the zebra mussels?

Manning: I don't know. We don't know. As scientists, it's a very, very... In Lake Michigan, I don't think you can. A very difficult issue. On a small body of water, say, a three-hundred-acre lake, you can fight zebra mussels with—I think potassium permanganate is the chemical that's used. I think the cost of like a three-hundred-acre lake is probably upwards of 250,000 dollars. So take an area the size of Lake Michigan, try to flush it with the same chemical, and you can see the cost is huge. It's huge to be able to do it. So I'm not sure. It's going to require good science, and a lot of it, to get rid of them.

DePue: This is beyond your timeframe, but you mentioned Asian carp. There was already concern back then. It is very much in discussion right now.

Manning: Asian carp has a storied history. The Asian carp was actually introduced in Arkansas, in some of their fish-rearing ponds. It was fought at that time—this has been almost twenty years ago—by the people in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It was fought by professional scientists in Arkansas. They said, "Escapement is going to be a problem." And it was a political issue. There were a couple of congressmen who said, "Oh, it'll never happen. They'll never get out." I'm not sure, but I think it was during President Clinton's tenure as governor in Arkansas. He, I believe, allowed it to move forward, allowed the utilization of those fish to control vegetation in those fish rearing ponds in Arkansas.

DePue: Why is Asian carp different from your average strain of carp?

Manning: Their feeding patterns are much different. They're a very voracious feeder. Their fecundity rate is huge. They produce huge numbers of offspring. One female can produce three hundred thousand, four hundred thousand offspring in a given breeding season.

We knew in the area that the ponds were located that when the river overtopped, those carp would escape. That's exactly what they did. They

moved into the river system in Arkansas. They moved up the Mississippi River. Now we're dealing with them. It's something; it's frightening to me. Eighty-five to 90 percent of the biomass now in the Illinois River is one of these four forms of carp. Those four carp. The other 10 percent that remains—probably 80 percent of that 10 percent is German carp. So we're down, if you can imagine, to less than 2 percent of the species in the Illinois River being indigenous species, which is an absolutely horrid situation.

DePue: So how do you ultimately prevent the Asian carp and these other carp species from getting into Lake Michigan?

Manning: My first attempt at it was working with the Corps of Engineers in supporting this electrical barrier. It was during my tenure that we established that. Now, we knew at that time that was going to be a temporary solution. We had plans that were retarded by Blagojevich—or should I say Blagojevich was retarded and didn't move them forward—of a second barrier. That didn't come to be, for one reason or another. The Asian carp is a species that will cause the decimation of the commercial fishery on Lake Michigan, and it will also get into other Great Lakes and cause similar problems and decimation.

DePue: If I recall, there are other states or other entities that are actually suing to prevent.

Manning: Yeah. Michigan was just denied a suit before the Supreme Court, which would have required Illinois to shut the locks and not allow the commerce transportation through the locks and down the Illinois River.

DePue: So the ultimate answer would be—if you're focusing on preventing Asian carp—to basically close off that source.

Manning: Yeah. Right now, the ultimate answer and the only real and guaranteed answer is closing it off.

DePue: It's worth mentioning here that the Illinois River doesn't naturally flow into Lake Michigan.

Manning: No. That is correct; it doesn't naturally flow into Lake Michigan. It was turned around after the turn of the century. I don't remember exactly when. But I kind of diverge from some of my fellow fishery scientists in my belief. I think research needs to take us to a point where we can use pheromone attractants. In other words, pheromones are used by fish for location purposes. Pheromone attractants during breeding season will attract catfish, they'll attract salmon—all fish species. I think that we need to learn what the pheromone attractants are with the Asian carp, and attract them to certain areas and kill them. That's the only way we'll ultimately get rid of them. And we have to do that. That's going to require some very significant research.

DePue: Another one that you had mentioned—problems with the deer population.

Manning: Oh yes. I mentioned that early on in our conversation. The deer population in Illinois is a wonderful blessing. It's also seen by some as a curse. The Farm Bureau—since I was there, probably before I was there, and I'm guessing still—is of the opinion that we should be issuing permits unregulated to the farmers and allowing them to shoot as many as they want, any time they want. Quite frankly, it is a wonderful recreational resource that the constituents and the people of the state of Illinois use and use very, very heavily. With proper management it can be the best deer herd in the whole United States. They have everything they need.

DePue: But there are some health problems with the deer population here, we think.

Manning: We've seen a couple of problems recently. One is epizootic hemorrhagic disease or EHD, which is commonly called bluetongue. That's been in deer populations for years. Another that we're hearing some about is Lyme disease; the deer is an intermediate host for this Lyme tick, generally what's called a deer tick, which is a very, very tiny creature, much smaller than the wood tick. And then there's a third. The third causes me the most concern. It's called chronic wasting disease. Chronic wasting disease is a prionic disease. It's one of four in a family that have a very significant history: There's what's known as scrapie, which has been in sheep since biblical times. Second is mad cow disease; we've heard a lot about that in Europe and now in the United States, to a certain degree. A third is known as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease; it's present in human beings. The fourth, of course, is chronic wasting disease. No one really understands, in total, the biology behind these diseases.

We know that a prion is a piece of a non-obligate protein. By virtue of what it is, it's very difficult to kill. It requires 1,600 degrees to kill it. It can be resistant in the environment for an untold number of years. We think the method of transmission through cervids is direct. We know this because it does contain some genetic material that is capable of mutation. The biggest problem, the biggest fear that we have is that if mutation is possible and if mutation does happen, then will it produce a variant form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob when people ingest deer meat and be killing hunters. You can imagine what would happen to the deer population if nobody would hunt any longer. It's a very, very severe and very significant problem.

Now to the positive side of this, there's been no interspecific transfer of chronic wasting disease to this juncture or to this point. There have been people who have died of Creutzfeldt-Jakob, of course. And folks have said, "It's because of deer meat they've eaten." Thus far, it's not proven to be true. Of the four prionic diseases, each has very different stain characteristics that they use to identify it. So far, there's not been any of this transference between the species that are included, the cervid species, including deer, elk, and moose. Various varieties of deer have all shown Creutzfeldt-Jakob to be present. But it is a very, very significant problem.

- DePue: Is there something that can be done at the time the deer is harvested and taken to a butcher shop perhaps, identifying that they might have some of these diseases?
- Manning: Even with a limited budget—for the budget they have—the Illinois Department of Natural Resources right now is doing a wonderful job in testing those areas where we know that it's present. That's primarily in north central Illinois along the Wisconsin border. When they test, they usually harvest the deer, and then essentially take its tonsils—as the lymph glands that are most easily accessible—and run their analysis with those. Sometimes they do brainstem analysis as well. But IDNR, again, is underfunded and undermanned, and they do a whale of a good job.
- DePue: In this case, you'd need a lot of cooperation from the hunters themselves, once they're actually hunting the animal.
- Manning: Yeah. They can tell by virtue of their sampling with white-tailed deer; they run random samples throughout the state on deer. But once they are in an area, the animals become very noticeable once they get to a point of being clinical. In other words, they become emaciated. They are not drinking well. They walk into cities, et cetera.
- DePue: Is this particular to chronic wasting disease, or Lyme disease as well?
- Manning: Chronic wasting disease only. Lyme disease is going to be here. It's a bacterium, the Lyme bacterium, obviously. Deer is an intermediate host. It's carried by birds.
- DePue: Not an issue if you're consuming deer meat?
- Manning: Not consuming. But Lyme disease is a terrible disease if you get it. Consumption—as long as it's well cooked, you're fine.
- DePue: How about some issues that impact forestry?
- Manning: Forestry in Illinois has evolved, and it's changed. Those areas that are actively forested now are done through selective harvest, which is fine. That's very good utilization.

When I have reviewed and read some journals on the state of Illinois, the state of Illinois is really a fascinating transitional area. Historically it's said that a squirrel could leave the East Coast and wind up on the western shores of Lake Michigan, and never get out of a tree. That was before the advent of our Anglo-Saxon people from Asia. [Do you mean people from Asia over the land bridge, before arrival of Anglo-Saxons??] The journals talk about the vastness of the prairies once they hit Illinois. There was one account that I read where there was a lightning strike just north of Peoria, with a strong southwesterly wind. It was like ten o'clock in the morning. By dark that

evening—and this was in the fall sometime—the people in the settlement of Rockford could see the glow of the fire approaching. So if you think about the continuous prairie that had to be present at that point in time, it was amazing. Instead of having farms with just a little bit of prairie remnant that's left in-between, you had prairie, with just a few little postage-stamp-size farms. Of course, there were prairie chickens. There were all kinds of other indigenous species. So it was a different environment. Being able to preserve those and put them back is incredible.

It's also said about the forests of Illinois that people who were moving westward found it easier to travel through the forests than they did through prairies. The reason being was the mature size of the trees. They drove their wagons between the trees, which was clear. I hadn't thought about this before, but the canopy was so huge and so dense that there was virtually no undergrowth. They could drive. What we think of right now as forest is actually a very low successional state that's filled with brush; it's filled with all sorts of species that are light-loving species. There were no light—when they would see a forest in the distance, they would head toward it because they knew they could easily navigate through that versus navigating through the tall grass of the prairies, which is a rather phenomenal thought.

DePue: I think I've got this right. One of the concerns, though, today would be Japanese beetles.

Manning: Oh my gosh.

DePue: Was that an issue that you dealt with?

Manning: No, it certainly was not. Right now my wife is dealing with them every opportunity she gets, and not in a pleasant fashion. But there are huge, huge numbers of them. They were brought in—my understanding—to control aphids by the agricultural community, and they're out of control.

DePue: It's dangerous to try to tinker with Mother Nature?

Manning: You can't fool Mother Nature. That's exactly right.

DePue: We're covering an awful lot of issues. This has been great. I want to make sure I'm covering all the bases as we go through this. I certainly think we need to be talking about some of the other initiatives you had as well. We've touched on quite a few of them. But let me just pause here real quick to reorient. Illinois Habitat Stamp.

Manning: Yes. The one common denominator for all species in the state of Illinois or any state in the continental United States or any area in the world, for that matter, is habitat: the appropriate habitat for the appropriate species that we're dealing with. I took this before our constituent groups before we moved it to the general assembly. Made sure that we had the support of the governor to

move it forward. Our constituent groups embraced it. They loved the idea and notion of them. This is a very important concept, because hunters and fishermen have always been this way. But this group obviously was the hunters.

This was another tax they imposed upon themselves. I told them I wouldn't move it forward unless I had their support. They said, "Move it forward, as long as we have guarantees that the money will be spent on habitat for habitat purposes." I tried as hard as I could to codify that in the legislation that we moved forward. Of course, our good friend Rod Blagojevich—that was one of the funds that he stripped from the Department of Natural Resources. But I understand that Governor Quinn and Mr. Miller aren't going to allow that to happen, which I applaud them for.

DePue: So to protect or preserve those funds that are collected through the habitat stamp that go directly to the Department of Natural Resources?

Manning: They go directly to the Department of Natural Resources. Anybody that hunts upland birds—they hunt deer, they hunt turkeys—whatever it may be, has to have a habitat stamp in possession. So when they buy that habitat stamp, which is five bucks per person, that money goes directly to the Department of Natural Resources. It contributes to the Habitat Stamp Fund. I set it up where there was a group of constituents that overlooks that Habitat Stamp Fund. It consists of Pheasants Forever members, Quail Unlimited, turkey hunters, deer hunters, et cetera. They determine how the money is going to be spent.

It can be spent for direct acquisition of additional properties. It can be spent for enhancement of existing properties. It can be spent on private land programs to enhance critical habitat or properties. They make that determination. I think at this juncture, it's been responsible for about twenty million dollars of additional habitat in the state of Illinois.

DePue: Doesn't that allow, though, either the legislature or the governor's budget office to reduce by the same amount the general operating funds for DNR?

Manning: We've heard that argument for years. It depends on the ethics and the quality of the person in charge. With Governor Edgar, I didn't have to worry about that. Obviously, we've seen the dark side with what Blagojevich has done.

DePue: You're no novice to Illinois politics. Some would say that Governor Edgar was something of an anomaly from the norm in Illinois politics, in that respect.

Manning: If you consider the norm of Illinois politics—

DePue: We've had four governors who have been indicted or been in jail.

Manning: Yes. And I never worried about that with Governor Edgar. It was government as it should be. Government worked with him. I think him being a historian and being interested in how things worked made it much easier for us that worked for him.

DePue: The nature of my question though, is that when you're doing things like establishing the habitat stamp—and you said it yourself—you're basically imposing a tax on the users.

Manning: Absolutely.

DePue: There's a certain amount of faith that future legislatures and future governors are going to honor that as well.

Manning: You're absolutely right. It's a matter of principle, and it's a matter of ethics. I am a firm believer, and I have been a firm believer for years, that the Department of Natural Resources should have a dedicated fund. It should be out of the hands of partisan politics to determine whether or not a state park is going to be opened. That determination needs to be based upon the scientists that are involved in management. Whether a hunting season takes place should be involved based on science that the good scientists bring and management of whatever species you're talking about.

So those dedicated funds make that possible. Now, a dedicated fund isn't something that is guaranteed on a year-to-year basis. Of course it's based on the national economy or the state economy, like everything else. You have to have good managers who will manage the peaks and the valleys and do it in a fashion that works well. We've seen that work in Missouri and Arkansas and a number of other states throughout the nation. But Illinois hasn't gotten that far yet. I would have loved for Governor Edgar to have another term, because I would have sure talked to him about that.

DePue: Another issue in terms of fundraising, I would think, is "E" plates.

Manning: Yes. E plates. Again, that idea actually came out of our strategic planning session. We managed to have a couple of folks visit that, who were involved in Conservation Congress; they took it to the floor and made it one of their top priorities. E plates were there to fund the state—

DePue: An E plate is?

Manning: An E plate is the plate that you see running down the road with the picture of the cardinal on it, and it has a piece of prairie grass on there, as well. I think it costs an extra twenty-five dollars to buy. It was at one time the most popular optional plate in the state of Illinois. I think the state has raised over thirty million dollars with it, up to this point in time, for state parks in the state park system. When I was still in Springfield, Rep. Terry Deering, a representative from southeastern Illinois, and a very, very good person—a Democrat who

was extremely supportive of the Department of Natural Resources—came to me and said, “We need to make this a plate for the entire state.” I was in agreement with him, and he said, “We’re not going to charge an extra twenty-five dollars for it. Maybe we’ll make it an extra five dollars, all that dedicated to the Department of Natural Resources.” There’s a dedicated funding source that would have been significant. I don’t believe Mr. Madigan would let him take that forward. But it was, I think, a whale of a good idea, just a great idea.

DePue: This is one you’ve mentioned several times before, but I don’t know if we’ve talked about it in as much detail as it deserves—the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

Manning: The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. I will reiterate this: I was blessed by a tremendous staff. One of those staff members was a fellow by the name of Kirby Cottrell, who was my office director of natural resources and conservation. Kirby came to me and said, “Brent, there is a federal program housed in the Department of Agriculture that’s being sorely underutilized. It’s a program that can help us in the state of Illinois achieve some of the goals and some of the objectives that we’ve set forth in regard to reducing sedimentation and increasing habitat.” I said, “What is it?” He described it to me. It was the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. I said, “What do we need to do?” He said, “Obviously, we’re going to have to get an authorization through Congress to move this forward.”

DePue: Through Congress.

Manning: Through Congress, yes. Through the United States Congress. My best connection in regard to these riverine problems was Congressman LaHood, who was always, always very attentive to any issues or suggestions that we made in working with or on the Illinois River. So I made an appointment to go see Congressman LaHood and talked with Ray. He thought the idea was a very good idea and something we needed to move forward.

So he arranged a meeting between myself and President Clinton’s secretary of agriculture. I went in; I met with the secretary. I asked for a one-million-dollar authorization and in essence got a one-hundred-thousand-dollar authorization. Basically, the secretary told me, “If in fact you can fulfill that authorization within a year, come back, and we may see if we can increase your authorization.” I said, “What is the determining factor?” “The determining factor is the desire of the agricultural participants.” “Okay.”

I didn’t reveal all of my cards at that time, because we’d worked looking for a little bit of state match to go along with that federal CREP match, to move those programs from either a long-term easement into an easement in perpetuity, or a short-term easement into a long-term easement. So we had a state side of the match, as well. I came back to Illinois and talked to the governor’s office about it. “Yes, this is a good idea. Let’s move this

forward.” The first sign-up in the state of Illinois—we had our authorization, which they thought would take a year, we had it fulfilled within a month. So I’m back to see the secretary. And again they increased our authorization.

These are agricultural dollars; before, I mentioned that they’d been squandered in a number of situations. What was fabulous about the program was these were agricultural dollars that actually made a difference and went to a farmer that had been farming areas that maybe should not have ever been farmed. The Department of Ag in Illinois was extremely supportive of the program. They went with me; Becky Doyle at one time went to help me with the authorization, as did Joe Hampton, who was her successor in the Department of Ag. All three of us at one point in time or another, worked with the USDA in making this a reality. But what thrilled me about it is we were always oversubscribed. For every dollar the state put in, the feds put in ten dollars. Every time we went for an authorization, we opened up the authorization—NRCS actually were the ones that opened up the authorization—every time they did it we had a list that far outnumbered the amount of dollars that we had to fulfill it.²⁹

DePue: In a very practical sense then, so somebody, a layman like myself, can understand what’s actually happening on the ground. You talked about long-term easements and permanent easements. What does that mean?

Manning: We know that the sediment that’s choking our rivers, our streams, our rivulets doesn’t originate in the river or stream. We know that it’s on the uplands in those highly erodible areas. Many of those highly erodible areas—or sometimes highly erodible areas are actually wetland areas that are farmed in the basins or the low watershed areas. We know there’s significant concern with farming those areas, because they wash away. You run a plow through there, and you get rain a day later, and you’ve got some real significant problems.

So these easements prescribed vegetative types that could be used to hold that soil. It depended on soil types. In some areas it was forest species. It was river bottom white oaks. Any number of tree species. In other areas it could have been prairie. Dependent again upon soil type and where it was located. What we normally did was try to go back to indigenous plant species for those areas. So if we put an area back with these USDA funds in perpetuity and paid the farmer the amount of dollars that was required for this easement—they signed up for it, it was a volunteer program only—we knew that it was going to be there from now on.

²⁹ Natural Resources Conservation Service, an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This was not the only creative use of federal funds by the Edgar administration; see Arnie Kanter, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 29, 2009, 34-38, for discussion of his work creating Illinois’ Hospital Assessment Program.

DePue: So the farmer is taking that land out of production for the purpose of making sure you don't have all the silt and sediment problems.

Manning: Correct.

DePue: Who actually owns the land?

Manning: The farmer does. The farmer still retains all ingress rights. He can use the land. Only thing he can't do is put it to the plow again once the easement has been established.

DePue: But they're getting yearly payments.

Manning: Some of them are structured on a twenty-year basis. Some of them were structured on a thirty-year basis. It was dependent upon the type of easement, the structure, how it was set up.

I visited a fellow up in—gosh, I think it was northern Schuyler County—that had put about 1,500 acres of his family farm in CREP. This was a farm that had been passed through his family from generation to generation to generation. He ultimately owned it. He said that, typically, he got one crop out of every five years on this particular area that he put in CREP. And he said, "I try to farm it every year. I have to, to make ends meet." With that program, he said he put it back to what it should be. He still continued to farm the uplands around the area. But his was a tremendous success story. He said, "Now I get to enjoy this for what it should be." We probably walked four or five miles that one particular day, looking at all of the wetland structures that were involved, all the plants that were involved. It was a very, very rewarding trip.

But it's my understanding that since the inception of that program we have someplace between 450,000 to 500,000 acres that's in the CREP program in Illinois, which is a very, very significant accomplishment. Again, it's one of those things that the Edgar administration, the governor, supported. But it was kind of behind the scenes. It didn't have all the fanfare that a number of other things had. It's his dedication and commitment to natural resources that enabled us to do these things.

DePue: You had mentioned also the World Shooting Complex.

Manning: Yes.

DePue: What exactly is that?

Manning: For the last, I want to say, fifty years in Ohio, they have held the Grand National Trapshoot, where people from all over the world come and shoot trap. They don't shoot skeet there, but they shoot trap. This was in Vandalia, Ohio. We learned through my association with the Association of Fish and

Wildlife Agencies that the Grand National was going to have to move because of an airport that was coming into the area. The advent of firearms too close and a number of other issues—I don't know what all of them were—but they were looking for a new home. I knew that Arizona had thrown their hat in the ring, as had California. I thought this would be a pretty doggone good opportunity for Illinois, especially with southern Illinois and the diminishing coal industry down there. Why not try to bring something like this to the state of Illinois, on state property?

That procedure and process was initiated under Governor Edgar's tenure. We looked at this property near Sparta as the appropriate place to do it. Again, negotiating with Peabody Coal, who owned it at that point in time. It was purchased during Governor Ryan's tenure. But ultimately the process had been started under Governor Edgar's tenure and consummated during Governor Ryan's tenure. We managed to convince the folks at Vandalia, Ohio, that that was the place to bring this international trapshoot, and they did.

To that end, when I was there we had plans for a skeet complex, an archery complex, a rifle and pistol range—just an entire World Shooting Complex. (sighs) Unfortunately, I'm not sure Governor Blagojevich knew what he had when he put his cowboy hat and his spurs on and went down there. So it's a very, very good complex that will mean a lot to southern Illinois over the years.

DePue: The next area that I want to get into is in part a function of the substantial reorganization that you and the Edgar administration did in 1995 to create this new Department of Natural Resources. You probably already had the Department of Conservation spread around various buildings around Springfield. Now you've got some other buildings around Springfield. So I'm obviously talking about the construction of a new building, the headquarters for DNR.

Manning: It was an amazing time. Early on, again two to four years before I actually got the nod, I had talked to the governor with George Fleischli, saying, "Governor, we're in eight different buildings"—this was the old Department of Conservation—"We're in eight different buildings in Springfield. We're paying all sorts of rent. I need a new building. I need a building we can all combine in."

At that time, which was absolutely true, we didn't have the money. The state didn't have the money. Well, we became the Department of Natural Resources, and the eight buildings that we were in actually grew. I can't remember now whether it was sixteen, or however many buildings it was, but it was a bunch of different buildings. I went to the governor again. It was fascinating because this time Steve Schnorf was in the room with us. I was describing the issue and the amount of rent that we were paying, saying, "We need roughly two hundred thousand square feet to put all these folks together

to make it an efficient operation; where you can get up and walk down the hall, and I can talk to Water Resources or I can talk to Mines and Minerals or I can talk to wildlife or fisheries or whomever, and they can do the same—interface between the different components of the agency. I need a building to put them in.”

I can still remember Steve. He rocked back in his chair, and as he normally did, he closed his eyes, and he clasped his hands together. That was his thought stance. Steve opened his eyes and looked at the governor, and he said, “He’s right. It makes a lot of sense. And I think we could do it financially.” I had my meager facts and figures, which Steve looked at and basically validated, which showed that over the course of twenty-five years, if we built a thirty-five- to forty-million-dollar building, the state of Illinois would save twenty-five million dollars above current lease rates. That didn’t include any increases in cost of leases during that period of time. Steve looked at it. He jotted some numbers down. He said, “If you can build it for”—X number of dollars and square feet—“Brent is exactly right. We can do that.” That’s when I felt very comfortable. I remember the governor not saying anything. Looking and staring at the numbers and looking at Steve.

Pretty soon he looked at me and said, “I need to know more.” At that point in time I felt wonderful. When he said, “I need to know more,” he didn’t say no. From that point forward, in working with Steve Schnorf—Steve, as I said, was one of the smartest people I have ever worked with—him providing me advice and counsel, making sure that we stayed in budget and on track, it worked out very, very well. We wound up with a building. I think our overall budget for the building was close to forty million dollars. We came in at thirty-five million. We had 225,000 square feet of designed office space in the building. We had the location already at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Conservation World. That’s where we built it.

DePue: How did that come about?

Manning: Conservation World has existed on the Illinois State Fairgrounds for years. What we did was look at a site out there that would have been appropriate, without causing problems or ruining what we had at Conservation World. We were still in the process of building the building as Governor Edgar was departing and Governor Ryan was coming in. I can still remember Governor Edgar coming to visit the building after it was completed. He was no longer governor. We walked through, and it was a wonderful experience. He was responsible for the whole thing, and he knew that. The people coming out of their offices and looking and smiling and waving—they all knew that he was responsible as well. So it was a pretty good experience.

DePue: I know for the State Museum, I’m sure you didn’t think, Okay, we need to move the State Museum there. But you had already talked about their

collection center, with this huge collection of priceless artifacts. Was there some thought about including that in the design?

Manning: Not in the building. The reason for that is with the metro complex in downtown Springfield, I would love to see a new building for the Illinois State Museum. But I really think it should be housed in the area or in the proximity of where it is right now, so everyone that comes to visit the Capitol will also have that opportunity. Instead of having forty thousand feet of exhibit space, they need one hundred thousand feet of exhibit space. Again, it's a virtually unknown attribute that we have in the state that needs to be capitalized on.

DePue: I wanted to touch a little bit on the architecture of the building and how that came about. I suspect you've heard some comments about, "This is great architecturally, and it's got some challenges as far as the engineering or the construction of it."

Manning: One of the things that I was most concerned about was cost. We had to reach our goal of keeping this below what we were budgeted for. So from that point forward I turned it over to professionals. I said, "We have to come in under cost. If in fact you think this is the architectural design, fine."

DePue: Does that mean that you're leaving the boundaries of DNR? Is it the Capital Development Board's responsibility then to...

Manning: Oh yeah. Yeah. Capital Development Board. Yes, I'm sorry. I didn't understand your question fully. They were very much involved. Again, my concern was cost and making sure our people were housed, and housed in a center that was good and worthwhile and where collectively they could work together. That's ultimately what we wound up with. I don't know whether you noticed the roof or not, but the roof is a fly caster's roof. [Brent, Is this the same thing as a fly roof??] Have you heard that?

DePue: Yes.

Manning: Which is actually rather profound and interesting when you consider it.

DePue: So where did the decision rest with selecting an architect and selecting a firm to build?

Manning: We had a charette in Springfield. My director of planning and development, Bruce Clark, worked with CDB to determine who would be used and how we would accomplish what we'd set out to do. Again, I'm a manager that strongly believes in the professionalism of the people that I have working for me. I told Bruce that if he screwed it up, I'd chase him until he died.

DePue: So you have this fly caster's dream of a building. Is it functional as well, do you think?

Manning: When I was there it was very functional. Why I say “when I was there”—I understand that there’s been other people who have moved into the building. It’s a little bit disjointed at this juncture. But at the time that it was the DNR building, it was extremely functional. There were various meeting rooms where people would be able to assimilate. The disciplines were close enough together they could talk to one another. A lot of communication is body language. A lot of communication is face to face. The problem we had before is everything had to be done over the phone. Programmatically, it made a lot of sense, and it helped us dramatically.

DePue: One of the comments you made makes me think that DNR is not the only tenant in the building now.

Manning: It’s my understanding that CMS [Central Management Services] has a portion of it at this juncture. Again, a Blagojevich move.

DePue: Let’s go to the transition between the Edgar administration and the Ryan administration. Nineteen ninety-seven, ’98 timeframe is when Edgar has to make that decision. Were you involved at all with discussions with people in the senior leadership circle about whether or not he should take a look at a third term?³⁰

Manning: Anybody I talked to that would listen to me, I told him they should take a look at a third term. It was really an interesting time. At that time, George Fleischli had left the governor’s office. Al was still there. Howard Peters had kind of taken over looking over a number of agencies as one of the governor’s executive assistants. I talked to Howard from time to time. But at that point in time it was fascinating. After George left, the governor and I talked. He said, “Brent, if there is anything that you need from a professional basis, or any significant issues, call me directly.”

He is a person where his time was so extremely valuable that I didn’t have to call him very often. There was probably once or twice, when this was happening or that was happening, that I did call. But for all intents and purposes he allowed professionals to work, which I certainly appreciated. If there was something coming down the road that was of significance that he should know about or that I had a concern with, I’d make sure I would let his office know. But I didn’t need to call him personally and say, Oh my gosh, this may happen or that may happen. It was a matter of, Here’s what we’re dealing with. Here’s how we’re dealing with it. If you have any concerns let me know. That was basically the mode of operation.

I was at the governor’s mansion when he made the announcement that he would not seek reelection. I obviously had hoped that he would, because

³⁰ For other perspectives on Edgar’s thinking about his course of action after his second term, see Al Grosboll, interview by Mark DePue, November 6, 2009, 44-46; Joan Walters, interview by Mark DePue, August 13, 2009, 31-32; and Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, July 3, 2009, 2-12.

we got so far down the road that there were other things that needed to be done that I knew he could facilitate and make happen.

DePue: This is roughly a year to go in his administration.

Manning: Yes.

DePue: Did you give any thought to saying, I need to start looking for my next job, and it might be outside of government?

Manning: Yeah, I did. As a matter of fact, I had some very nice offers at that time. But the fact is, there was unfinished business. There were things to do. I took a cut in pay to leave Ducks Unlimited to go to state government as a director, initially. So I guess I convinced myself—and have believed this for a long time—that money isn't the only reward in this world. There are other things that are tremendously valuable. As I mentioned, the Sparta deal wasn't done. It wasn't consummated yet. We'd just moved into the new building. The interactions between the office directors were just starting to solidify in the fashion they should. The Illinois Conservation Foundation had only been in existence about four years at that time; we were right at the precipice where that was going to either make it or not make it. I'm happy to report that it did make it. In eight years of its existence we raised sixteen million dollars of external funds that came to the state agency.

So there were a lot of things that were going on, and they were going on in a very positive manner. I felt as if I could stay, I could carry forth some of the initiatives that Governor Edgar had put forth, some of the things that I had participated in. Quite frankly, George Ryan not only allowed me to do that, he encouraged me to do that.

DePue: But it was going to be some time, obviously, if you knew for a fact that Ryan was going to be the guy. I guess my next question would be, did you have conversations with Ryan while he was in the midst of his campaign?

Manning: Absolutely. From time to time I can still remember he and Lura Lynn visiting Conservation World when he was running. An interesting guy. He had all kinds of questions to ask as we walked through Conservation World. "How does forestry operate? How do they set the seasons in the hunting seasons? Do you stock fish? Where's the hatchery?" All those types of questions that were germane to our disciplines. It was a very interesting conversation. So I did talk to him several times. I don't want to say I talked to him a lot. I certainly wasn't a confidant or in the inner circle. But any time he had a question in regard to natural resources or how we used the money from the E plates. Because he was asked those types of questions on the campaign trail, I'm sure.

DePue: In the midst of the campaign did he offer you a position?

Manning: No. As he said during the course of his campaign—he said this I think, and it was probably the right statement to make—“It’s too early to make any decisions. I’m not elected governor yet.” Once he was elected governor and he called me and offered me the position, I was happy to stay. I understand where he was at. If I had detractors—which I’m sure that I did—and he would come out and say initially, it would probably cost him votes. I think I had enough supporters that would have been on the positive side, but nonetheless, I understood exactly where he was coming from.

DePue: What was your assessment at that time of George Ryan the man and the politician?

Manning: I’ll be honest with you. I did not know the politician other than what I saw on the television, just like everybody else. The man: he was a very, very compassionate and caring individual. I have related the story on a number of occasions, but my father—I think it was his second or third year in office—my father had a terrible, terrible stroke. We thought he was going to die. I had been in the hospital with him from eleven o’clock at night, and at four o’clock in the morning I needed to go home and shower because we had a meeting with the doctor, who was the neurologist who was going to make the decision as to whether or not to do surgery. We had to determine whether it was something that we wanted to do. He said if he didn’t have the surgery he would probably pass before noon, but if he did have the surgery there was no guarantee as to what it would be like once he came out of it.

I was on my way back to the hospital at about five o’clock in the morning, and the phone rang. I have no idea to this day how Governor Ryan knew. But he simply said, “Brent, this is George. Is there anything we can do?” His administration was permeated with stories like that. That was the type of person that he was. He said, “If there’s anything we can do, let Lura Lynn and I know.” I’ve talked to a number of other people in the administration that had had similar experiences with him. So maybe he watched the hospital rosters at night. I have no idea. But that was basically my experience with Governor Ryan. It was that type.

In regard to his involvement in natural resources, it was very little other than he supported very strongly the Open Lands Trust, which was a land acquisition effort that was pushed through his administration and that I was happy to be part of. Properties that were bought, he asked us to do and to look over it. He did that in a very good fashion. But the day-to-day operations, the things that we did, he basically stayed out of. One thing that I’ll remember is at the end of every cabinet meeting that he had—and every meeting that I had with him if it was in regard to an issue—he always ended the meetings in saying, “Do what’s right,” and that was it. So from my experience in dealing with him, he was basically hands-off. But he was still quite supportive if you would take things to him.

DePue: Who was your go-to guy in the administration, then?

Manning: Actually, it was a lady by the name of Renee Cipriano. She eventually became director of the Environmental Protection Agency in Illinois. Renee was fabulous. It was the type of situation where I'd call her and tell her, "These are the issues that are on the docket. Here are the things that we're dealing with," and she was just extremely supportive.

So with his administration it was different from the Edgar administration in that I knew that Governor Edgar was actively involved in the process of looking over the things that we did. Whether it was the habitat stamp or the new building or the purchase of property in deep southern Illinois or Site M, he had a role in it. He was asking questions all the time. Al Grosboll would find me and ask me thirty-two questions. Al was great at that. But Governor Ryan was somewhat different. He would say, "Is this a good thing?" and I'd say yes, and that was it. That was the end of the conversation basically. So a different type.

DePue: Even before his first election, during that first campaign, there were rumors floating around about allegations of what was going on back in his secretary of state days, and selling licenses and the cronyism and things like that. Was that a concern when he first asked you?

Manning: From a personal perspective it wasn't a concern, because I had never been asked to do any of those things. Governor Ryan never asked me to do any of those things, and when he was elected governor he said, "There will be no fundraising or buying tickets in any of my administration by any of the people." So I thought, If I had any questions, that's all gone away, because he wouldn't allow any of us to participate in fundraising or any of those activities. That seemed to solve it for me. Obviously, there were other things that were going on or had gone on that we were totally unaware of. You always hear rumors and innuendo about somebody doing something wrong. But I pretty much take people at face value, and he had never shown me or indicated in any way, shape or form any bad activity.

DePue: The legal decision that came down from the U.S. Supreme Court before the Edgar administration began, which was the *Rutan* decision, basically forced the state to make decisions about exempt positions, where politics could play a role in selecting the individual, and then the vast majority of the rest of the positions have to go through the merit process.

Manning: Right.

DePue: There's been talk about Ryan having a different opinion than Governor Edgar did about how to apply those decisions and go through the hiring process.

Manning: The people that I was sent from Governor Ryan were always those that were in the exempt positions. Now, I wasn't told to hire anyone that, for instance, wasn't qualified for a certain job or a certain position.

DePue: Who did patronage for Ryan?

Manning: I'm trying to think. (pause) I don't know. That's a good question. I remember Janis because of her great sense of humor and all of her comments. But I don't remember. Governor Ryan, for instance, supported a fellow that became my deputy director by the name of Jim Garner. But the interesting thing about Jim—Jim was a graduate biologist and had had twenty-five years of experience with DNR and would have been my choice anyway. He was a great guy, great biologist. So that was the type of experience I had with him. The *Rutan* decision—obviously, people all thought about that.

But my experience with Governor Edgar—we had a totally exempt managerial position, a high position, my office director of natural resources. When John Tranquilli left to go to southern Illinois, I backfilled that with a fellow by the name of Kirby Cottrell—someone that had twenty-five years of experience in managing natural resources from the state of Illinois—and didn't think twice about it. Because I knew that's what the governor wanted me to do, support that professionalism that you found in the agency.

Janis kidded me about it later. She said, "That really provided me heartburn. You gave away a job that I could have influenced." I said, "Yes, but Janis, the boss said we need to do it in the right fashion." So it was a good experience. Honestly, on both ends it was a good experience. I never felt as if either governor asked me to do anything that was inappropriate, unethical, or against the law. Maybe they knew that I wouldn't. But I knew Jim Edgar would never do that. Governor Ryan never asked me to do anything.

DePue: Did you feel any more pressure during the Ryan administration to accept some of the people that were offered up to fill these exempt positions?

Manning: There were several people that came to me in exempt positions from the Ryan administration; it wasn't so much pressure as, "Can you or would you please find a place?" We had an opening for a photographer and we needed someone with X number of years' experience, showing they could do it. When the word got out and the posting got out, I got a call from the governor's office: "We've got a person for you who's really interested in doing it." I was thinking, Oh, man, is this somebody that has their own Instamatic or Kodak camera? Well, it was a young lady they sent over to us that had twenty-some-odd years as a professional photographer. She was fabulous. The stuff that she did, from a photography standpoint, was amazing. The people that interviewed her said, "You better get her while you can." So I didn't feel bad about that. That was a good hire, a good person.

DePue: 9/11 happened during Ryan's administration. Did that have any impact on DNR?

Manning: Yeah. It had an impact, I guess, on all of us. When you get the call that you need to evacuate all state buildings and make sure that everyone is gone regardless of the circumstance. I have to say that the Ryan administration responded to that in a very, very good manner. Of course that first day, that initial day, was horrible. It was horrible for everyone. I can still remember walking through our building in Lincoln Tower, where we were still at, and going out on North Grand, which were our two largest buildings, and making sure everybody was gone. I met with a couple of my office directors out there. They said, "Yeah, we got everybody out."

But after that, his effort in putting together a team that would respond to emergency issues in the state of Illinois was ab-so-lutely excellent. There was a lot of forethought that went in it. Of course, I had 160 sworn officers that worked for me in the Department of Natural Resources. What would our role be? How would we react? How would we respond? What is our area of expertise? A biological contaminant, for instance. Biological warfare. That's playing kind of in our ballpark. We probably have a better handle on that than a lot of folks. Where are the moon suits located? Nearest access where we could have them available for us? Dispatch an officer in a certain situation? That was a very, very well thought out program. Mike Chamness, who was his Emergency Management Agency director, did a very good job. I still remember Governor Ryan attending a couple of those meetings, telling us, encouraging us, to make sure that we had our I's dotted and our Ts crossed because it was important.

DePue: Toward the end of his administration, federal prosecutors were clearly honing in on George Ryan. It was things that had been going on since his secretary of state days and continuing forward from that. Pretty obvious that they had quite a case, especially when Scott Fawell was indicted. His trial was going on while Ryan was still in office. What were your thoughts at the time about serving with a governor who had all these problems that he was facing?

Manning: First and foremost, I had a great deal of compassion for his wife Lura Lynn, who is by nature a very kind and giving person. Honestly, I had probably more conversations with her than I did with the governor, because any time that she would see any member of the cabinet, she would seek them out and ask, "How's your wife? How's your children?" She was always that way. I also knew their son Homer. Homer was a great, great person.

But when all that was going on, it was demoralizing. I think it was demoralizing to all state employees. It wasn't so much that, "We're working for a guy that's being accused of all these things." It was, "What's wrong with all government? Why? This isn't a good thing." Then when Blagojevich

started his rantings, it was almost as if Governor Ryan had become the devil incarnate.

DePue: You're talking about during the campaign?

Manning: During his campaign, yes. Even though Governor Ryan had said he wasn't going to run again. Then Blagojevich started his campaign. His allegations and the things that he said about Governor Ryan publicly. I just didn't think it was good form. It wasn't appropriate. The man had not been tried at that point in time. Nor convicted. Yet all these allegations of impropriety were being made. Whether or not they are true, I was never in the rooms, I don't know. I do know from a personal perspective that I didn't see any of that.

DePue: For that last year or so, then, was it much harder to get to Ryan or get his attention, or the senior leadership?

Manning: No. I have to say that it did not affect us in that fashion. It was operations as normal. Still, we'd go to a cabinet meeting. Final words were, "Do what's right." That was a common comment.

DePue: This one had very little, nothing really, to do with the Department of Natural Resources. But it was the other thing that garnered a lot of attention and press for Governor Ryan towards the end of his administration. That was the death penalty decision. Any comments on that?

Manning: Yeah. In knowing his son and talking to him, and knowing Mrs. Ryan and seeing her at various social events, the topic of conversation came up a couple times, how hard it was—before any of this ever hit the news media in regard to the allegations that were being made against him, et cetera—but his very, very tough time in dealing with the death penalty. In other words, I was told by Homer and by Mrs. Ryan that he had several sleepless nights that were just basically eating him alive. That he would either have to pull the switch on someone or grant some level of clemency, which he had a very tough time doing. Which I guess tells me he had to be a very compassionate person. Some of the crimes that people were being accused of sure seemed heinous.

DePue: What was your response when you heard all the comments and allegations, "This is purely a politically calculated decision on his part"?

Manning: I guess knowing and hearing his comments, or knowing of his reaction before that, I took that with a grain of salt, because I knew that that wasn't the case. It was heartfelt, there was no doubt. I may disagree with him on it. His inner person was having a real tough time making the decision to pull the switch on somebody.

DePue: By the middle of 2002 you had to be thinking that the Republicans' chances to win the next gubernatorial race are pretty darn thin. What was your personal process as far as your future was concerned at the time?

Manning: Basically, there were some things that I wanted to complete, which I held on and did. I was looking around, making sure that people knew that I would be available at some point in time. Again, I had some very nice conversations with some of the nongovernmental organizations. It's just the timing wasn't right. Ducks Unlimited, for instance, had called me, and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation talked to me. But it was too far in advance. I wanted to make sure that my departure from the Department of Natural Resources was such that I took care of as many things as I could possibly take care of before I left. I felt like that's what I was hired to do.

DePue: So in your mind, you're staying with it until the new administration comes in.

Manning: The new administration comes in. And then hopefully it would be in capable hands. And move forward from there.

DePue: Where did you land?

Manning: My first duty stop after the Department of Natural Resources was as director of fish and game in Wyoming. It was a position that I just absolutely adored. Unfortunately in that timeframe, my father was diagnosed with cancer. This is after—he'd had bad luck there for a time—after he had the terrible stroke. I was spending virtually every weekend in Denver Airport flying back and forth to make sure that he and Mom—that things were taken care of. So this position then came open.

DePue: This position being?

Manning: The executive director here at the DuPage County Forest Preserve District. Mr. Pierotti, the president, reached out to me and asked me if I was interested or would consider coming back to Illinois to do it. I did and I am.

DePue: You have mentioned Governor Blagojevich many times. Give me your assessment of Governor Blagojevich and what you have observed from the outside, very much from the outside, in terms of his stewardship of natural resources.

Manning: I could be very short and succinct in saying that he doesn't have a clue. But I can go beyond that, in that he actually—from my perspective—broke federal laws by trying to take fish and wildlife funds from federally designated funds—through Pittman-Robertson and Wallop-Breaux, which are federal statutes—and trying to sweep those funds.

He was a terrible, terrible manager of our natural resources and steward of our natural resources. He tried to sell off a state park in far southern Illinois. He decimated the agency. He considered combining agriculture and DNR at one point in time, or at least that's the word that got back to me. In my opinion, he's probably been the worst natural resources

governor the state has ever experienced, and overall the worst governor, from all perspectives, the state has ever experienced.

DePue: My guess is that you had no shortage of people who would call and complain.

Manning: I had a number of them that would call and complain. I was extremely supportive of his first director, Joel Brunsvold, who had been in support of the Department of Natural Resources, as a legislator, on many many occasions. Joel and I are still very good friends. I think the world of him. I think Joel's hands were incredibly tied. He was working for someone that did not have any concept of what natural resources are or how they should be dealt with. I did hear a lot of complaint. It wasn't only from the Republican side of the aisle. It's interesting. Democratic legislators and people would say, "This isn't quite right." No, it's a long way from right.

DePue: My guess is that people within DNR were—

Manning: Oh yeah, I heard a lot from past staff members. There were a number of staff members that saw the handwriting on the wall and left, which I can certainly understand.

DePue: Your thoughts—toward the end of his administration, 2008 timeframe, he was trying to do all kinds of cost-saving measures, including closing state parks.

Manning: One of the things that infuriates me more than anything else is that as a manager, as a chief executive, he had no talent and no understanding whatsoever. I say that with some very specific things to back it up. For instance, in the Fish and Wildlife Fund he laid off a number of biologists, a number of people that were necessary for the agency to retain its structure, its direction, its coordination. He had over twenty-five million dollars of funds that he didn't know how to use, which were federally authorized funds that he could have used for that purpose. He could have offset the operational dollars that he was paying out of the General Revenue Fund to those biologists, et cetera, with the Fish and Wildlife Fund, and kept the parks open. Just a total ignoramus in regard to the way government works.

DePue: Some were speculating that it wasn't just a cost-saving measure; that he had targeted certain agencies and institutions.

Manning: Yeah. Speculation, and it is only that. But quite frankly, I think he was terribly jealous of Governor Edgar, incredibly jealous of Governor Edgar. Governor Edgar was honest. He was well respected. He was the type of person who was forward thinking. He managed our natural resources not for two years out or five years out; he was looking fifty and one hundred years out, with the things that he did. And to Blagojevich, the Natural Resources Building, the natural resources effort, the programs that had been put together were simply a log in his eye, because he knew that he could never accomplish the things that Governor Edgar did. So instead of trying, he decided to decimate it.

Again speculation, but I think you may find a lot of truth in that. I think he was scared to death that Governor Edgar would run against him during his second term, which I would have loved to have seen happen. But I understand why Governor Edgar did not. I appreciate both ends of it. If I was Governor Edgar, I think he made the right decision personally by being close to and staying with his family and grandchildren and enjoying himself. But Blagojevich wouldn't have had a chance against him had he run.

DePue: You've had a very close relationship with three governors here. Obviously, Jim Edgar and George Ryan. I wouldn't say you had a close relationship, but you were watching closely with—

Manning: Watching closely. Exactly.

DePue: —Rod Blagojevich. Your assessment of Edgar.

Manning: My assessment of Jim Edgar was and is that there is a lot more to Jim Edgar than what you see on the surface. He's a very deep thinker. He's a very profound, thoughtful man. He cares greatly and cares deeply. I think he still does. And I get a kick out of watching him on the news media, and the things that he says. He wants what's best for Illinois, and always has. I think his political motivations were not out of self-promotion or arrogance. I think he wanted to do the best thing he could for Illinois. And that's a pretty tall order.

Maybe in some degree, his heart problems were because he worried so much about the budget, about how he was going to accomplish and accommodate those things that he set out to do. Honestly, in the very beginning I didn't think I would stay eight years. I thought, This is a great experience, and I'll do this for four or five years and maybe look back at a not-for-profit or something akin to DU, or DU and move back into a position there. But once I became involved and understood his dedication, his vision, his desire to make things happen, make things right—I loved it. I wanted to be there as long as I could.

DePue: How would you rank him in terms of governors, at least in your memory?

Manning: I know Jim Thompson now, but I didn't know him when he was governor. I have a great respect for Jim Thompson. I understand some of the things that he dealt with. But I do think that Governor Edgar is the best governor that I can remember. I don't see how anyone can compare anyone else to him. He was a very, very good governor.

DePue: Are you making that assessment because of his passion for natural resources?

Manning: Not just his passion for natural resources. I think his ability to slay the dragon, the budget, when he first came in, was very significant. It was a horrible time financially. His trust and faith in the people that worked for him as professionals and following their lead, saying, "Here's how we can do this,

here's how we can come out of it," and then him going forth and championing those suggestions and recommendations, showed that he was, in truth, a good leader. Because a good leader asks the people around him that he knows and he trusts, and then makes a decision based on their recommendations. That's what I saw him do. And I was very impressed with that.

DePue: Let's ask the same kind of questions about George Ryan.

Manning: Governor Edgar managed to save money and put money aside during his tenure as governor. Governor Ryan spent money. He kind of enjoyed spending money. He liked to spend money for what he thought were good things.³¹ Well, okay. It's two personality differences. But had Governor Ryan not had this cloud over him of conviction and the problems that he ran into, I think he would have been thought of as a pretty good governor too.

It's very easy when somebody's down-and-out to kick them, say bad things about them. I can't do that about Governor Ryan because I didn't see any bad things. I really and truly didn't. So I have to again go back to my own personal assessment. Did he do the things that he is accused of? I have no way of knowing. So I'm not one to stand in judgment.

DePue: Twelve years. It's a long time to be the director. What's the thing you're most proud of, the accomplishments that you look back at?

Manning: The thing that I'm most proud of is the staff, the work that they achieved, developing and opening the doors for constituents and people that were involved in the agency. The best staff in the state government when I was there. It was a matter of building their confidence. It was matter of building their self-esteem and letting them know that I wasn't going to let them swing out there. If somebody was going to hang them, they'd better have two nooses because they'd have to come for me too.

DePue: Anybody who listens to this is going to be impressed by the accomplishments that you did have during that tenure. So turn the tables on you—any disappointments or regrets looking back at it?

Manning: Yeah. Obviously, there are always disappointments and things that in looking back I would have done differently. I think I probably would have handled the deer situation somewhat differently. But again, that's a very contentious issue.

I think, looking back, that probably during the second term of Governor Edgar I would have petitioned him to look very closely at dedicated funding for DNR. We were so busy, we were doing so many things, we were going so many different directions—there just wasn't room on the plate for it. But it's something that is a very important component of the longevity of an

³¹ Edgar makes a similar assessment of Ryan as a legislative leader; Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, 30.

agency, and longevity of programmatic success of an agency, that I wish I would have talked to him about it. I just didn't have that opportunity.

Finally, I wish that I would have talked to him and Governor Ryan about the potential of a commission form of governance for the IDNR. The reason I say he or Governor Ryan: as Governor Edgar was leaving, I was ascending in the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and moving through the chairs on their executive committee, to eventually become president of that organization. As I moved through those chairs, I learned and realized that Illinois is deficient in the governance of their fish and wildlife agencies. It should be an agency that is on a commission basis with its own dedicated form of governance. That doesn't mean that the governor would have any less influence. What it means is there's longevity and professionalism. I lost during my tenure probably one of the best wildlife managers in the continental United States. Basically, it was probably due to political insecurity. There's a number of people in the state of Illinois. You won't attract the best and the brightest for positions that they feel will only be there four years.

DePue: Can you share that name with us?

Manning: Sure. Jeff Ver Steeg. He was the absolute best wildlife manager in the continental United States. He's now deputy director in Colorado. I hated to lose him. I really and truly hated to lose him. I'm sure he had other reasons. His wife's family is from Colorado, and there were unquestionably other things that provided pressure on him. But there are other people. To be able to attract Jeff back to the state of Illinois as director under today's circumstances would probably be an impossibility. So I wish I had petitioned at the end of Governor Edgar's term or the beginning of Governor Ryan's term to at least look at that so we could attract and hold those people.

DePue: This has been a fascinating discussion. We've covered an awful lot of turf in the last few hours. What would you like to say in closing?

Manning: Oh my. The experience as director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources was one of the, if not the, most rewarding experiences I've ever had in my life. It was a tremendous group of individuals to work with, both in the governor's administration and the staff that I was blessed with during my tenure there. I couldn't have asked for anything better or anything more.

DePue: Thank you very much, Brent.

Manning: You're welcome. This has been fun.

(end of interviews)