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Interview with County wildlife officer, Michael Miller

Peter Wickline

Michael Miller

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Accession Number: LAK-PW-A110199. A

Researcher's name: Peter Wickline

Event: Interview with County wildlife officer, Michael Miller

Place: Mark's home in Mt. Vernon: 3857 Mink st.

Co-workers present: none

PW: [Interview]- number one with Michael Miller for the Life along the Kokosing series on November 1st 1999 at 4 o'clock in the afternoon at Michael's house in Mt. Vernon, Ohio.

So...your job here is the Game...commissioner-?

MM: The wildlife officer.

PW: The wildlife officer.

MM: Yup, assigned to Knox county.

PW: How long have you had this job?

MM: Ten years.

PW: Ten years now?

MM: Yeah.

PW: And...what did you do before that?

MM: I was a watercrafts officer for a couple of years.

PW: Where was that?

MM: Here in Ohio, also. [sound of pen clattering on table, accidentally dropped by interviewer].

PW: Knox county or no?

MM: No, division of watercrafters assigns a district, while division of wildlife assigns counties. And I was...I've been in Knox county four years, and I what-? Was for...six years in Franklin county.

PW: Alright. Well, what got you into this?

MM: Probably, reading hunting and fishing magazines when growing up- growing up fishing and listening to stories of grandparents that hunted and fished a lot.

PW: So, do you have family in this area?

MM: No.

PW: No?

MM: No, I'm from Cincinnati.

PW: Alright, so...what brought you into this area in particular, this job?

MM: Well, working in Columbus, I developed a-a friend of mine's -what- girlfriend's grandparents owned a farm in Knox county. So, we used to come up here to go deer hunting and rabbit hunting all the time. So, then I got hired to the division of wildlife, and once you're are hired on, then it goes based on seniority based on ability to transfer. So, Knox county came open, so it was a choice between moving to Licking or Knox county, so I moved here. And I chose Knox county because it has a lower population per square mile and it just has more diversity to offer somebody. It's a good mix of a rural area, but it's still developing- has modern amenities but it's still rural, I guess you might say.

PW: So, how would you describe your job, what you do here?

MM: My job is I have to do everything related to wildlife, be it enforce hunting, fishing, trapping laws, pollution laws, firearms laws, on private property. On state property I have full police power to enforce any criminal violations, I do fish-wildlife management surveys. I also teach hunter and trapper education, teach different programs as far as high-school kids, talk about different types- different species of wildlife for management programs, and answer public

inquiries, questions, whatever, basically about anything related to wildlife, is what my job responsibilities are.

PW: Alright, this is kind of an open-ended question, but since we're a study of life along the Kokosing...what is the first thing you think about when-

MM: [pager beeps, Michael rises to shut it off] turn my pager off here...go ahead.

PW: -when you think of life along the Kokosing, the Kokosing itself? When you have to deal with it?

MM: Life along the Kokosing, that would probably just have to do with people -basically the sight of the Kokosing river valley as far as how it was settled, and how it's been used, and how it's probably going to be used in the future, as far as life along the Kokosing.

PW: So more specifically what's the impression you get of current life along the Kokosing, the way you deal with it in your job?

MM: Well, let's see...

PW: For example, what do you think of relationship between the local human populace and...

MM: Well actually, as far as the Kokosing is concerned, it's -it was probably one of the main - one of the early travel corridors for people probably coming into the area. At least, I imagine the indians, because most times their trails and paths were along streams and rivers, because it -well flat, easy terrain to traverse and well -water, we need water to drink. But, overall in the county I think the Kokosing river has been well taken care of by people in general because it's a healthy stream. It was selected last year, or the year before last as a state scenic river.

PW: Right, it was just elected.

MM: It's got fantastic fishing for smallmouth bass, which require a fairly healthy ecosystem. It does have, in some sections of the river, different types of fish and aquatic life that are characteristic of extremely high water quality. A lot of the smaller streams that do empty into the river have those same species of wildlife, so overall it's been taken care of generally well. I think it's been used -I'm not really familiar with all the different uses of it that its...had over the years but it's been taken care of fairly well by people.

PW: [pen skitters on table again] Pardon me. Have you observed any changes in how things have been going along the river while you've been working here for instance growth in certain pop-wildlife populations? Or, a decrease in certain populations?

MM: Well, as far as...yeah, the biggest change has been most species of wildlife have increased in populations in recent years in Ohio in general. Species that have actually declined would be reptiles and amphibians. Those are 'course they're linked to water, at least for some portion of their life. And now, I'm talking to Jerry Scot who was here, and officer here, thirty years ago, and it was quite common for him to check a lot of people who would go frog-gigging and things like that along the river. And he used to write a lot of tickets for people overbag, which means that they had too many frogs. And now, virtually no one gigs frogs on the river because there are not very many frogs. And, when you're along the stream there at night, you don't hear very many -it's in part mostly bullfrogs, for the most part. But, at the same time, there has been a correlation, thirty-forty years ago it was still common practice for people to shoot great blue herons, and different types of animals that would eat those...eat a large number of amphibians. And now, you see a large number of those types of birds on the river but I still don't think that's a real true link as far as why the frog population's down. Probably has something to do more with -probably some sort of minor, well probably chemical or pesticide use for the most part. It'd be that -not so much from industry because Knox doesn't have a tremendous amount of industry, but probably more from agricultural production, just different types of chemicals used. It doesn't

take much to mess up the lifestyle of a frog. So...

PW: So, do you think there has been a change in agricultural practices?

MM: Oh yeah, greatly. And that's been documented all over the state, in a lot a lot of old farmers and county...An example would be bobwhite quail, you know, until '77-'78 Knox county used to have a lot of quail, but we had those hard winters, bobwhite quail is at the northern end of the range, and agricultural practices have changed as far as -we've gone from small fields with brushy fencerows, and woodlots separating those fields to large fields where guys are taking out their fencerows to make room for larger equipment to increase production. So that has in turn affected bobwhite quail habitat, because it's not there. At the same time Knox has done a good job, because Knox used to be known as the no-till capital of the state because most of Knox county is gently sloping to relatively hilly on the eastern side, so there was a lot of contour plowing, but now, particularly in flat areas, they've done away with all the filter-strips, for the most part.

PW: And, so that aside from causing a decrease in, well, possibly being linked to a decrease in reptile and amphibian populations, this has led to an increase in other populations?

MM: Species that are more adaptable to human development like white-tailed deer and wild turkeys and things like that because what happens there is [sound of farm equipment coming in through open window, grows louder throughout the next few lines] matured to more of these specific nature habitat.

PW: Are there any particularly- uh, could you perhaps close that window, [sound of equipment overwhelms other sounds, sound of windows sliding shut, sound normal again] because we can filter that out, but this won't, this won't at all. So, are there any particularly problematic animals to farming and- not just farming but to roadways, other...just aspects of human life that are getting into... that are getting to be a problem in the population?

MM: Most species of wildlife, because people, in general most people really -the problem in wildlife is either deer or racoons, are the number one and two animals that most people complain about. And then people complain about everything else, because as our society has grown and changed from an agricultural society that was attached to the land as far as actually understanding life and death on the farm, as far as everything from raising a chicken to slaughter to beef and hogs. To actually having to work for a living, as far as manual labor, and being out in the elements and weather. And it's changed in our service economy now, where people don't have to do anything but go to McDonalds, or go to their business in Columbus in their air-conditioned car, air-conditioned office, come back home, turn on the television, watch tv. And people tend to get upset a lot more, as far as minor inconveniences...of the woodpecker deciding to peck on the side of their house, to a deer eating in their garden, or anything like that. I got a phone call returned today of a lady who, for two days we've been playing phone tag, she's had an injured turkey in her basement. And, it's not a very hard problem to solve, it's one as simple as you go catch -you pick up the turkey and throw it outside, that's all you have to do to it, and if it was injured to the point to where it's not going to be able to survive on its own, then just go ahead and kill it, put it out of its misery. But people will let something like that sit until somebody such as myself or they actually get a hold of somebody who explains to them how to take care it. So I think people have gotten to the point where if it's not going exactly the way we want it to be it's an inconvenience and it's a bother we don't -it shouldn't happen that way. But, deer of course cause a lot of problems with automobiles and things like that.

PW: You mentioned that worked in Franklin before this?

MM: Yes.

PW: How similar are the two counties in the problems you encounter?

MM: They're not very similar, things are changing in Knox county because of an urban mentality moving into the county. So actually the way Knox county is slowing becoming -it's still an agricultural and rural area, but people are moving here from urban areas and they're bringing that urban mentality with them. They're not -they're moving here because it's the county, they see animals and they see trees and they grass and all this kind of stuff, but that's not really what they want, they want the best of both worlds, they want everything. So they want to move here, they want to see deer, they want to see squirrels, they want to see rabbits, but they don't want the inconvenience of having the deer eat their garden or eat their flowers, or anything like that. It's kind of a weird thing, it's -they want that but in turn they don't, because as soon as it happens, then they get upset about it. And of course people move, they want, and it's nice to have a twenty-four hour Kroger store, but you just look at Mt. Vernon, it's a growing city, and Knox is going to have sixteen-hundred new homes on average for the next five years, that in turn, pushes out wildlife. It creates greater problems as far a management of...well, septic systems in the county, water tables. It causes a lot of additional which are going to affect the Kokosing in general, so it's kind of weird people are willing to just relax and enjoy the country the way the country should be, they want to change it to be like the city.

PW: So do you think that, not only is the larger farming causing more of these animals, but people's attitudes are causing more problems with these attitudes, er -animals? pardon me.

MM: Yeah, because people want to go the grocery store and pay, what is it, fifty cents for a loaf of bread that's as far back as I can remember it. Now, what, it's on sale, it's ninety-nine cents a loaf. And not on sale it's a dollar sixty-nine, and that's still cheap compared to other countries, but in order for bread to stay cheap...this year and last year are some of the lowest agricultural prices in forty years. I think wheat's a dollar sixty a bushel, corn's a dollar sixty to a dollar eighty a bushel, soybeans are four and a quarter a bushel. Ten years ago soybeans were eight to ten dollars a bushel, in turn to make up for that, farmers had to either 1) go out of business, or 2) expand their operations, by either increasing the amount of crops -the amount of bushels they could squeeze out per acre, and they do that through use of fertilizer and pesticides; soil ravishment practices. Or, they expand their operation and till more ground, and those are the only two ways they can do it, because you can only grow so many bushels an acres on an acre. So, in turn, you have to expand, so that means that they're going to use areas that they might not normally use for agricultural production which takes away space for wildlife, it takes away space for somebody to live, it increases runoff, siltation. They have to, in turn, use more chemicals and herbicides and pesticides. All the same, to keep that dollar sixty to dollar loaf of bread, bread that people want. But at the same time people want a place to live, and so they move out, and the tractor that runs down the road or the guy picking corn next door, when they're trying to watch tv or they're trying to sleep...they call and complain about the fact that the landowner next door's harvesting crops that's going to wind up on their table. And that's what is hard to understand, and that's probably a big threat as far as to the lifestyle in Knox county, because I know that's been brought up, there's a planning committee in the county that deals with that.

PW: Focus 2100?

MM: I think so, that's, you know they did a survey at the county fair of what do pe -how -what type of lifestyle basically the people are going to continue to have in Knox county. So I think that the county commissioners are looking at some sort of plan development in the future, that would actually limit the type of development as far as...maybe no more -you'll not be able to buy a lot, a five or ten acre lot, and put a house on it. There'd be a planned community development

with, say, a hundred acres and they'll put two hundred houses on it, the regular development like what you have in the urban areas. Which would actually...and they would plan that to where you still have the atmosphere of living in the country, but you don't really have the benefit of having extra space.

PW: I was going to ask if you'd heard about those sorts of plans. What do you think of those plans?

MM: I think they're probably good, because there's only so much land. Well, God created one Earth, there's only so much property, human population's going to continue to increase, and unfortunately everybody can't have five acres or a hundred acres or two-hundred acres. But if people still want to live in the country, they can still have the atmosphere of it in a planned development. And of course it will help everything as far as having planned sewer, water, and things like that, and that would help out. And it also helps out with property rights, as far as...a lot of times you have people calling you and complaining to you that the neighbor next door is spraying manure on his field. So, it'll help out a lot.

PW: Have you heard about the...um, what is it called?...the greenway expansion between -it's not a part- 2100 is greenway expansion is between park areas to try to give contiguous-

MM: Yeah, I've heard a little bit about that because I think that's an idea pretty much everybody's using, as far as when they're planning parks and recreational areas for people, as far as that. And that's a good idea because it provides travel corridors for wildlife to get from one place to the other also. But, at the same time...the funds available to purchase is hard...

PW: Do you see any problems that could arise from doing that as well?

MM: Probably the biggest would be property rights, an example is of: the bike path. Bike path, a wonderful ideal, but people aren't willing to share the bike path with each other. An example that I can give is the deerhunting season; people are on the bike path, walking on the bike path, that's fine. You're not allowed to hunt on the bike path, but a landowner, off the bike path, has the right to hunt his own property. But there seems to be conflict because people that are on the bike path don't think you should be able to hunt there, and it's not their property. People want a bike or say they rent a canoe and canoe down the stream, and stop and want to have a picnic on someone's private property. The bike path is the same way, they go on it -you know, the family goes on a ride on the bike path it's only so wide, but there's a nice field right there for someone to go enjoy, they climb the fence, and they're off in the neighbor's farm field. So, those are conflicts and people just don't want to...it's one of those things, well, 'A guy has five-hundred acres, he shouldn't care if I sit in his field, but I have a four-acre lot, and I don't want somebody to sit in my front yard.'

PW: So you get called in on disputes of people being on other people's land?

MM: Oh yeah.

PW: And, people complaining about individuals hunting on their own property or hunting near the bike path?

MM: Right, right. And it all comes down to private property rights. And it's your property, and if it's legal, you're allowed to do that on your property, and people have to have a little consideration for each other and say 'Hey, I may not agree with it, I may not like it, but that's just too bad.' [phone rings]

PW: uh-hh

MM: This phone'll ring, it will go off here in a second.[phone rings again, answering machine starts in].

PW: Alright, uh, where were we? Oh yes, bike path. And...that remind me of something, because

I know of a farmer in Gambier who has farmland abutting against the bike path. He's also right next to the river, therefore. And...do you get called in on problems of farmers and the river, for instance, fertilizing too close to the river? Or...or-

MM: For pollutions?

PW: Yeah.

MM: So in other words if you [unsure what this means] sprayed manure and we get a rainstorm and it washes off into the stream and kills something, then yes, I investigate those. Or if an oil spill from like a pump jack or an oil well or something like that, yeah. Or manure that's misapplied, or apply manure and it rains too soon after you've applied it, and it washes into the stream, then yeah, I deal with that.

PW: Are any of these increasing problems, or just steady?

MM: No, they're...actually, they're always there, I think. Like with the dairy industry and poultry. They keep prices low, basically they expand into these large farms, and you have a greater chance of having an accident when you're dealing with, say, a hundred-thousand gallons of manure versus five-thousand gallons of manure. And, you can only spread so much manure on a field, so...yeah. When accidents happen they're bigger than what they used to be, because it makes a world of difference in a stream if you have five-thousand gallons going in the stream or a hundred-thousand gallons going in the stream. And, so with those problems the potential's actually worse. Now, the other thing is that it's easier to trace back because you probably only have one large operation in an area so it's easy to find where it came from, but at the same time I think it's actually more devastating to the ecosystem, because it's just a larger -it's a larger spill.

PW: Do you get call from hunters -uh, not hunters- from farmers concerning first of all problems... I know that there's a practice of putting concrete abutments down on the river so it doesn't flood into your property, and I know some complain about the wildlife that spawns along the river that comes-

MM: Yeah, landowners call and complain like about...the beaver. Beavers love to eat corn, so there's cornfield nearby the beaver will come over from the river and eat corn. But as far as actually trying to control the streambanks stabilization the division of wildlife has a program dealing with trees and reforestation of streambanks to try and prevent soil erosion. Some landowners are willing to do something like -things like that. But there's not a law that requires them to do that. I think on the Kokosing there's only actually one or two stretches and they're short stretches of the stream that don't have trees on them. And, the land owners have been dumping concrete and stone and stuff like that. I think, years ago, there was one structure where somebody had dumped tires along the bank, and actually I think it's still legal, it may not be, but I think it is, where they can actually chain tires to the bank, and they used to use cars and automobiles for stream bank stabilization, because it's something easy, and people are looking for a way to get rid of their junk anyway so they figure 'hey, we can use tires for this, or, whatever for this.' But for the most part most guys do try to leave a strip of timber along the stream because trees are the best thing as far as keeping the bank stabilized. And, it helps with water quality in general.

PW: What's the number one problem you get called in for? Or, if there's not one, some of the more common ones.

MM: The biggest problems are trespassing concerns, as far as people trespassing. The other would be nuisance animals, nuisance wildlife. As far as a landowner calling about agricultural damage or people just calling about a racoon in their chimney or something like that. Those are the two most common complaints I get.

PW: Hmmm...not much that can be done about the trespassing. Do you see many steps being taken either towards or away from dealing with the growing animal population?

MM: Well, it's getting harder to manage wildlife because of the animal rights movement in general, because most of the people in that movement...it's done purely and strictly on emotion and their own personal opinion on what should be done and they don't have solutions to what should be done. The example would be, the best example you can give right now is the Cuyahoga valley national recreation area, outside of Cleveland, every year they have deer starve to death in the park. And they starve to death because there's not enough food to get through the winter. There's a group, another 'save the deer' group up there and they don't want to allow the national park service to cull the herd by shooting them, and then donating the meat to feed food shelters. So they would just as soon rather have the deer starve to death, because their whole, their big thing to always tout is birth control. Birth control does not work on wild animals, it doesn't work in the human population so why would it work with wild animals? One is, there are no drugs that can be safely used for wildlife. Then you have idea of administering the drugs to wild animals, so it causes tremendous problems. It just- people need to learn to be a little bit more considerate of each other, and understand that we're all different. We all have different ideas and opinions and not necessarily try and force your opinions on other people. You want to have something in open discussion, it should be done in truth and fairness, instead of just trying deceitfulness to try and lead people to your side.

PW: Okay, you're mentioning these groups, are you seeing, you mentioned that you see a lot of people complaining about the animals in Knox county in particular. Do you see counterparts to that in Knox county, people who are very heavily into animal rights?

MM: Yeah, there's just a few small groups, but they are very vocal at times. Most of the time in Knox county -they don't have a tremendous influence here. And it's just because basically it's still a rural county, with rural mentality about how things are handled, for the most part. And, you see that in a lot of different avenues, as far as from where the nuisance animals and animals in general, to some landowners not being willing to call when some wildlife violation takes place, like somebody's spotlighting or shooting or hunting illegally a lot of land owners in the county don't call, because 'Hey, it's not my business to call to get somebody in trouble. That's their business, and if you're there and you catch them that's fine, but if not, that's fine also.' And it's more of a- people just tend to mind their own business and do what they need to do to take care of themselves, and just leave each other alone, for the most part. I mean, they're not too concerned with what their neighbor's doing unless it is actually something that's going to impact them. And then, most of the time, they have a discussion with their neighbor, as far as...They try not to bring the police or anyone else into their problems, they would just as soon pick up the phone and call their neighbor and say 'Hey, your cow's in my yard, would you please come and get it?' versus calling the sheriff's department to come to get the cow to take it back to the neighbor. So it's still very much a- I think people try to be personable with each other and communicate with each other, which is nice, because then you're not dragging government in to solve problems that they can't solve anyway.

PW: That's something I've heard a lot about as I've studied the county, that there's still a good personable level. But, do you see that decreasing, are you getting more complaints as more people

-as you described, city people- city people, are coming in?

MM: Right, it's changing. It is changing ever so slowly, as people move it, it is. And that's just because of, I can remember watching, what was that show? 'In search of...' where they had, it

was on like when I was in grade school. They had a thing on their with rats in like a maze, and once the population built up to a certain size, they had well, rats were eating their own babies, they were dying from stress, they weren't eating right, all different, all the problems that you see in an urban society of people, you saw in these rats. And that sticks out in my mind. To solve that problem, most people don't actually want to deal with the issues that cause those problems in an urban environment. Instead, if you have the funds to move, you move. But, where people move, they take those problems with them, they don't solve them.

PW: So is there any particular part of Knox county or parts of Knox county that you see as being-becoming the solution to that, where people are moving?

MM: Apple valley.

PW: Apple valley?

MM: Apple valley.

PW: So that's where you get most of your nuisance calls.

MM: Yeah, for just nuisance animals in general, Apple valley, and in Mt. Vernon. Gambier doesn't call very much, Fredericktown calls a little bit. It's where the majority of people are moving to, Apple valley would call the most, then Fredericktown, then just in Mt. Vernon. In general, most of the people that call are, are senior citizens that just are looking for help, or, people that have moved in, that don't know how to deal with certain problems, because they've never experienced them before, a lot of times.

PW: So, problems like roadkill-

MM: Right, like they hit a deer, or -a good thing like I'm dealing with now with the landowner keeps calling me is the neighbor bowhunts next to their property. The neighbor's got two-hundred acres they've have fifty acres. The neighbor shoots a deer, the deers runs over on that place and dies. The landowner says 'you can't come and get the deer,' which is his right. Well, the guy can still fill his deer tag, so because he can't go get that deer he can shoot another deer. So, if it runs over on the landowner's property, the landowner still says 'no, you can't come get it.' So now, in effect, there's two dead deer, there would have been one in the first place if the landowner had allowed them to go get it. But the landowner, instead, instead of looking at it that way is calling me trying -I don't know why he's still calling me- complaining the fact that this guy shouldn't be allowed to shoot any more deer, because he's already killed two. So, therefore, he shouldn't be able keep one. I explained to the landowner that if he'd let him get the one, there'd be one dead deer, and if you looked at your opinion on hunting, you would have been much better served by allowing him to come and get the first deer, than still being able to continue to hunt and possibly kill, I don't know, possibly five or ten deer that wind up dead on your property. And, in reality, well, your opinion would have been better served, because he would have killed one instead of more, but they don't look at it that way. That's just kinda how it is like in Apple valley with things, just like the neighbor next door having a dog barking all the time, it's just an inconvenience and you just have to learn how to deal with it.

PW: Is there anything in particular...you've mentioned a few problems, you've seen nuisance animals population -certain populations increasing, certain populations decreasing. Is there anything that worries you in particular for the future? Whether or not it's a current problem or something that isn't a problem yet, but concerns you?

MM: People's lack of respect for each other, and people not respecting other people's opinions, and people trying to force other people through legislation to do what they want. I think that's a real fear. You can look at pol -you can pick anything, any topic you want in politics, both local and national, mostly national. There are people looking to government to solve problems, and

they're problems that can't be solved by government, it's a problem that people have to solve themselves.

PW: Are there any current local legislations at least, that are making your job more difficult?

MM: Luckily, no. On the local or state level, no. [pause] So are you dealing with like a specific section of the Kokosing river?

PW: Well, it's Knox county in general, but the idea is that...at least this is the theory is that the one thing you will find everywhere in Knox that's a unifying...symbol, however you want to put it, is the river, the Kokosing. And it touches just about all aspects of Knox county.

MM: Yeah, well, because the other group that came they started out -they were trying to do the headwaters area, they had a specific area they were talking about, and that's what they were talking about. That's why I was wondering if you were just being specific or just in general.

PW: No, in general, but I'm particularly interested in the interaction between wildlife and the rest of the community, because when a community grows, as Knox county -as you said- is growing, how it impacts on the rest of the ecology of the area is important, and people quite often ignore that.

MM: Somebody you might try talking to maybe would be the mayor, Dick Mavis or maybe some of the city council members, because I talked to them a few weeks ago at city council about deer in the city. And in general, most of the deer are along the stream corridors, and that's what wild- deer for the most part use the stream corridors for travel corridors, because those are usually areas that have some sort of cover, as far as trees or brush, when they move from place to place. And of course, the Kokosing flows right through Mt. Vernon, so that might be someone you might try talking to about that.

And in the city as far as dealing with water supplies and stuff like that, they're building a new water treatment facility and all kinds of things.

PW: Okay, a couple more questions: I've asked you what tends to be your most problematic, your most common kind of problem. What's your least favorite part of the job?

MM: Telephone calls.

PW: Just in general?

MM: That would be the most, in general, because that is the most stressful, frustrating thing to deal with, because we work out of our home, so we get- [tape cuts off, moments later, machine clicks off, we both hear, and the tape is flipped]

MM: Telephone calls come at all hours of the day, and most people don't have common sense enough to realize...someone will call at two o'clock in the morning, to say that there's a deer hit beside the road. I'm not going to get up at two o'clock in the morning and go out and take care of a deer that's hit beside the road. You know, now, if it's a deer that has run through somebody's front window and is running around in their house or something like that, then sure. Or, people will call, at three o'clock in the morning to ask 'can I go deerhunting tomorrow? Or today?' -or- 'what time is legal shooting time?' or they'll call saying 'I found a -some sort of a snake in my basement' and I'll- and people just don't look at the kind of question that they're trying to get answered, as far as importance. So, that's what causes stress, or people call here and leave threatening messages on the answering machine or just harassment in general over the telephone, and so, that would be it.

PW: One question, you mentioned deer season, this is an aside question, when does deer season start around here?

MM: The archery season's already in, that's usually about the first of October to the end of January, the deer-gun season is always the Monday after Thanksgiving for six or seven days.

PW: Okay, I'm trying to remember what it is from back -I'm from Western Massachusetts, which is somewhat similar to this.

MM: Yeah it's probably close, within a week or two of each other. It's the Monday after Thanksgiving and in Knox county it runs for six days.

PW: The gun season?

MM: Yeah, and then, December thirtieth, for five days there's -to the third, or something like that- that's approved weapon season, where it's muzzle-loaders, black powder, things like that.

PW: Have you seen a change in limits-?

MM: Yeah, actually, Knox county is very restrictive right now, again. It was about five years ago, they killed forty-three hundred deer in the county during the entire year. This last year they killed twenty-three hundred deer in the county, because wildlife, in general, is managed by public opinion, as far as how much wildlife people are willing to put up with. So, now, the deer herd was brought down because people said there were too many deer, too many car vehicle collisions, too many damage complaints, things like that. And then, people changed their mind because they're not seeing as much deer as what they'd like to see. So now, the regulations are designed to allow the deer population to grow back up again. So then, what'll happen in another couple years is people will complain that there's too many deer, so then you'll have liberal bag limits and longer seasons to kill more deer and bring the population back down again.

PW: And you're not seeing an increase in any predatory population would be perhaps helping this out?

MM: Oh, no. In the state of Ohio, just because the urban population -man is the only large predator in the state of Ohio, that's it. I mean, there are coyotes, and they'll occasionally take fawns but as far as

-there are no large predators that can actually...

PW: So there's been no fluctuation, no increase, no decrease that you've seen?

MM: No, coyotes have increased over the last hundred years in Ohio, that's because of agricultural changes, because they prefer more open area. In the old days, we had timber wolves that was the type of habitat we had, and very little coyote habitat. Of course, as all that changed coyotes have increased their population, because they're very adaptable to people. But as far as what they eat most of their diet is small game, mammals, and roadkills, but they will occasionally take fawns, but it's not enough to control population.

PW: What -just to get the opposite of "you're least favorite", what's the best part of the job?

MM: Hm, that's tough. Well, actually, the best part of the job is also -because my job is all dealing with people, it's very little with wildlife; that's the easy thing. It's dealing with people. The best part of the job is actually...is working with people, that's the best part of the job, as far as be it anything from doing law enforcement to programs. Probably the most rewarding is dealing with kids, because I've been here long enough to where...a ten year old -will go from fourteen to eighteen years of age, in the hunter education class, you see a kid go from fourteen to eighteen, and as a human being you change a tremendous amount in your lifetime. So, I've taught kids hunter education classes, and then seen them in the field where they're happy, because this is the first deer that they've killed, and it's a great thing for them. So, that's probably the most rewarding, is dealing with stuff like that.

PW: So far as hunters themselves, are you seeing an increase or a -

MM: It's a decrease.

PW: There's less hunters?

MM: Oh, yeah. We're equal to what we were in about 1945, and hunting is slowly on the

decline, for many reasons, mostly it's from a change a shift from an ag- to an urban society. And the accessibility and time, for people to go out and do that type of thing, if...There's so many activities that people enjoy now, be it from soccer to football to video games to whatever. It's one thing...it's easy to go hunting if you live in the country and you go out your back door, or drive five minutes, but if you live in the middle of Columbus and you have to drive an hour to go, that limits it.

PW: And it's been getting more difficult for hunters?

MM: Oh yeah, that is. It's just lack of accessibility. You've got urban sprawl, somebody puts in -a landowner sells off a part of his property, and there's a fifteen acre lot, right in the middle of a farm field...it's a limiting factor to hunting.

PW: Do most farmers allow hunting on their property?

MM: Yead, most do, Knox county is a very strong hunting county. In general, I'm trying to think, licensed hunters, as far as actual deer permits sold there's probably about four thousand, thirty-five hundred to four thousand deer permits sold in Knox county, and that's not counting senior citizens and landowners that get free licenses, those are just those that are sold for deer season. Knox has four or five thousand fishing licenses sold, so yeah, it's a pretty strong percent of the population, in general. Most landowners that involved in agricultural production actually, they do a lot of hunting, and they hunt, themselves, or family members, or friends. Knox county's a big area, a lot of people from Akron-Canton area, own property down here just for hunting purposes, or vacationing, things like that too.

PW: What's the policy on people hunting on their own land, I know it's legal to, but what's their limit? Is there a limit?

MM: They have to abide by all the same rules and regulations as everybody else, it's just they don't have to purchase a license.

PW: So, this year's limit is-?

MM: For deer, it's one.

PW: One deer.

MM: They can kill one deer of either sex for the archery season or primitive weapons season, deer-gun season, the first two days are either sex, the remaining four are buck only. So, they just have to abide by those regulations.

PW: So it's one for each season or one for the entire?

MM: One for the entire season.

PW: One for the entire deer season.

MM: Yes, in Knox county.

PW: I see. This has been pretty complete, an odd question. What has been the best single experience you've had during this job?

MM: The best single experience during this job...that's a hard one. The best single experience is probably actually getting the job and actually graduating from the training academy, that'd probably be the best. That would be it because I achieved something that I've always wanted, and there are so few -there's only a hundred...there's a hundred and sixty commissions in the state of Ohio, and when I applied for this positions, there were...right around two thousand people applied for twenty jobs. So, that was a pretty high point. Other than that, probably a big high point was last year when we defeated issue one, that was a high point. They tried...some animal rights groups tried to do away with the hunting of mourning doves, when we won that issue on a statewide ballot referendum that was a real high point.

PW: What would the result of issue one not being defeated have been? What would happen if

people could no longer hunt mourning doves?

MM: They would have been back every year with some sort of referendum. The most interesting thing about that whole thing is...I don't know if you watched the news last week, when they were picketing McDonald's, talking about how McDonald's skins livestock -skins cows alive for their hamburgers, which doesn't happen. I'd like to see somebody skin a fourteen-hundred pound steer alive, it wouldn't make it too long.

PW: I raised cattle, so I know.

MM: Yeah, well, the same people that put issue one on the ballot, was the humane society of the united states and PETA they paid a group, I think it was from Nevada -I can't remember what city- to come and collect signatures to put it on the ballot in Ohio. They did that, they got it on the ballot for referendum vote. These people, in every state in the country, actually in Massachusetts is one of the worst states in the country for this stuff, is every time they win, they realize that they can win again. And it's piece by piece by piece, and most people don't understand wildlife issues because they live in an urban environment so these people are successful with the urban population of a state, and that's where the votes are at, so through just a fifteen-second television commercial you can sway people one way or the other, and that's easy to do in politics. But...well anyway the same people said that this was all they cared about, was stopping mourning dove hunting, and since then they've -they lost- and they've been protesting fishing, they've protested Ohio state university college of medicine's medical research. They've protested the -what was it- March of Dimes. They were those same exact people that led the anti-dove hunting Richie Layman and Bill Long. They were the same ones standing in front of McDonald's and basically it shows, because the filed a suit against a couple of television advertisements that the Ohio Zoo/Wildlife conservation was running, talking specifically about, that if these people win this, that they will come after other things and that they really are against all of these issues. This is just the one they're fighting right now. And Richie Layman and Bill Long, on television, said 'no, we're not against these other issues,' but since this, since -in the last year, since last November, you have seen these people com out, and protest absolutely everything that they said they weren't against.

PW: So, why were they against the March of Dimes?

MM: Because of medical researching, medical research. For a cure for...to find a cure for, is it scoliosis? I can't remember what March of Dimes raises money for, MS or something like that? And they're against medical research for that, and that's why they protested the March of Dimes walk in Columbus. It's just incredible, and that's what I mean by...in the state wide poll we got sixty percent of the vote to keep dove hunting in Ohio. But the sad fact is, to do that, it was done through advertising a lot of it, and I did a hundred and ninety-something programs in Knox county last year, just talking about that issue in this county. And, we won sixty percent of the vote, but it took two-and-a-half million dollars that was raised by, mostly just people who hunt, fish, and trap in the state of Ohio to defend that, and they only spend about six-hundred thousand dollars, and that was it. It takes very little to put something on...it took -what- two, almost four times as much money to counteract what they were saying. And what they were saying...it was not true, plain and simple.

PW: Is there anything that has gotten through, or just rules in the books that you feel are...cause more difficulty or you wish weren't there, or you wish were a little looser?

MM: Oh, we have a lot of stupid laws, in general as a society, and hunting-fishing-trapping laws are no different. There are a lot of just dumb laws, but in general most of them are pretty decent. The problem is being captured by special interest groups, and I think you see legislation in the

last couple years dealing with that, for example, trout fishing laws. The trout fishing organizations in this state are very elitist, they have quite a bit of political clout. Generally you consider them upper economic class, for the most part, and you tend to see a lot of regulations where they want to -say, like an example would be limit a stream to dry for fly-fishing only, you're not allowed to keep any fish; barbless hooks. And then, a ten year old kid sits on the creek bank with a worm and a hook, and they want the kid arrested. A lot of resources are for everyone in the state of Ohio to enjoy, plain and simple, and I hate to see us being captured by special interest groups for that, to make their own little special niche of a public resource, because resources -wildlife in general in this country, is a public resource, based on the fact that in Europe it's not. In every other country in the world it's owned by the private land owner. So, the deer's on my property today and on yours tomorrow, the ownership of that animal changes. Because the average person in those countries couldn't hunt or fish, without permission from the landowner, that is why in this country it is held as a public resource; it's for the benefit of everyone. People tend to have forgotten that, then you get into a whole basic thing of people not paying attention to the constitution in general anyway, but wildlife -that's why it's a public entity, it's not even owned by the state; it's held in trust by the state for everyone in the state of Ohio. So you could cut a deer into twelve million pieces everybody's got a little piece of it. And that's what I think a lot of people have a hard time understanding. And that's why it's such a hard thing to manage, because of the fact that there's twelve million people with twelve million different opinions.

PW: Well, that's pretty much all I have, is there anything else really important that you think we haven't mentioned?

MM: No, I don't think so. The river is an important resource in the county, it's had an interesting history, it's fantastic fishing, it's probably one of the better smallmouth streams in the state of Ohio.

PW: I've had contact with Mark Gilmore, down at the Kokosing livery, I was invited to a public dinner of his the other day, the closing out...I was talking to various people there who fish there, they were saying it was great.

MM: Oh, it's really good fishing, oh heck yeah. We can, on a good day, I mean you can catch fish now, but on a good day like in the summer time, when the fish are actually active. Say you and a buddy go fishing, for four or five hours, you can catch thirty or forty smallmouth bass. You can't beat that, that's fantastic.

PW: And what's the limit on bass?

MM: Eight a day. So you can catch as many as you want and in general...see, technically by law, to wade in the Kokosing river and fish you have to have permission, written permission from the landowner. But for the most part most landowners don't care, so long as you don't tear the place up, leave trash behind.

PW: Do you see an affect on this from other things that might be happening, such as the obviously the chemicals you mentioned, Del-Co perhaps...

MM: Del-Co, that's just a...I don't think -it depends on what...I don't know what -I know what they were talking about as far as residue or whatever from the water treatment plants as far as that water would be, they put it in the stream. I don't think it -I think the potential might be there eventually to affect water tables in some areas of the county because that area of the county up there that's pretty much the headwaters, so yeah, that could affect something.

PW: But you haven't observed anything.

MM: No, no in fact they're still working on that plant, so it hasn't really gotten into full

production yet. I think that's just a -pretty much a political issue as far as who's going to control water rights, that's all.

PW: That's all?...You recommended a few people for me to talk to, the mayor?

MM: Yeah, I'd talk to Mayor Mavis about deer in the city, or any of the council members would be good people to talk to, I'd talk to -maybe if you're interested in people who hunt and fish, down at the river's edge there in Mt. Vernon, the owners, they're born and raised here in Knox county, you talk to Mark Gilmore, Mark's a good person to talk to. Craig Cambell, Craig Cambell is born and raised in Knox county, he's a teacher at the prayer center, he would be a good person to talk to because his family actually lives over there in Howard, and he fishes on the river a tremendous amount, he would be a good person to talk to. Guy that works down there at the children's services, McLarenen? He runs a canoe livery, also, in the county. He would be a good person to talk to, he was heavily involved with the -to get it designated as a state scenic river. And the 4-H county extension office, Larry Hall, they do some stream monitoring on the Kokosing river. And there's also a teacher at the high-school, I don't know his name, but they do stream monitoring along the Kokosing, the high school students.

PW: Do you know the 4-H county extension's number? Larry Hall's?

MM: No, not off the top of my head, it's in the phone book under Knox county, county extension office.

PW: If I call any of these people, can I say that you recommended that I talk to them?

MM: Oh yeah, yeah. Actually I'm sure they would all talk to you, I don't think that would be a problem. And that would give a bunch of different people to talk about it from different perspectives.

PW: Thank you, you've been an incredible help, the information's been great. Alright, thank you for your time. Is it all right if perhaps at a future time I come back and talk to you?

MM: Yeah, that's no problem.

PW: Alright then.

MM: No sweat.