

RBRL OHD 005-05
The Oral History Documentary Series
Rick Main
Rick Main Interviewed by Sarah Duncan
Date: July 25, 2005
Original: audio recording, 100 mins.

DUNCAN: This is Sarah Duncan interviewing Rick Main for the Sandy Creek Oral History Project at the Russell Library. This is July 25, 2005 and we are at Keepsakes by Shirley on Atlanta Highway in Athens, Georgia. And actually the first thing I should ask you is how do you spell your last name?

MAIN: M-A-I-N

DUNCAN: M-A-I-N, okay. That is what I had down. Why don't you tell me a little about yourself?

MAIN: Let's see. I don't know what to say you know do you want a history of...

DUNCAN: You can start anywhere you like. Where you were born or what you did for the SCS, anywhere you like.

MAIN: Originally from Ohio, came down here in 1970 with the U.S. Forest Service. I worked with them at the Forestry Sciences Lab there on campus and transferred to the Soil Conservation Service in '71 -- I believe it was -- '72 ... one or the other. And [I] worked there until I retired in '94 doing ... well one time I was personnel officer but most of the time

I spent as what they called a contract specialist. Which we were in charge of all types of acquisitions, anything from pens and paper to cars and office buildings and leases for office space and construction, mostly little flood water dams like Sandy Creek. And we did a lot of channel work and some recreation like adult swim beaches and things out there but mostly flood control. Then in the latter part of the early ... or late '80s I guess it was, we set up the national task force for flood control work around the country. And when we would have a hurricane – like in South Carolina here a few years ago – they'd put together a group of us and we would go right there try to restore the area to what it was before the flood. I wasn't often involved because I retired in '94, but we went and spent some time up in West Virginia and the task force itself got to go all over the country which was a lot of fun.

DUNCAN: That was in the late '80s?

MAIN: When it was started yes. It is still going on. People are still there I guess they are still doing some of it.

DUNCAN: What kind of stuff were you doing there?

MAIN: Mainly when you have a big flood a stream will go out of its bank and maybe start a new channel, our job was to put it back where it was. Try to restore the area to where it was before the flood: put the stream banks back, re-vegetate them, stabilize them so they won't wash off, and maybe have to replace a bridge or something along the way, depending on

what it was. Along the coast it would be beach restoration and sometimes putting in some kind type water to break up the wave action so it won't happen again.

DUNCAN: Oh, I see. Actually before we go on ... okay there we go. What kind of educational background did you have?

MAIN: A few of years at Ohio State University a few quarters over here, mostly in service training. The Soil Conservation had an extensive training program: several hundred hours of training in fields either purchasing or contracting that kind of thing.

DUNCAN: And you had worked with the Forest Service before that? What did you do with the Forest Service?

MAIN: I was what they called an administrative officer in charge of hiring, firing, paying the electric bill, seeing that the air conditioning worked that kind of thing.

DUNCAN: So you came down here from Ohio to go to UGA for a while and then...?

MAIN: No, I transferred because of the job.

DUNCAN: Oh I see, okay.

MAIN: I was with the forest service in Ohio and I was offered to either go to Philadelphia or Athens, Georgia. Well, I had never been to Athens, but I had been in Philadelphia and knew I didn't want to go there. So we ended up here and have been here thirty-five years now and don't plan to move.

DUNCAN: It looks like you are pretty well settled in. So then originally with the SCS what was your first job with them?

MAIN: Purchasing agent, and then personnel officer, and then contract specialist.

DUNCAN: Maybe you could describe just kind of the day to day work of a contract specialist. What you would do.

MAIN: Well, you would go see three or four people that were buying the pens pencils and issuing orders -- either at that time mostly in writing -- written purchase orders. Developing the wording and the detail for contracts for construction and sometimes these things can get pretty thick with "legalese" -- which you had to put in there and be sure you had the right clauses and things in there for that particular kind of work. Mainly [I would] go out and see that the work got done right -- check it out -- which was the fun part of it because you go to get out of the office.

DUNCAN: So you did get to spend some time in the field?

MAIN: Yes.

DUNCAN: And that was your job while Sandy Creek Park was being built?

MAIN: Yes.

DUNCAN: Okay, how did you first get involved in the Sandy Creek Park project?

MAIN: The organization?

DUNCAN: In the park project itself.

MAIN: You know I don't really know who actually went to the county commission and said, look we got some money from ... Congress is giving us all this money let's spend a little bit of it here. Somebody in our organization went to them with this idea and they liked the idea so they developed a joint effort there to develop it. I got involved because of the construction part of it. Seeing that -- there again -- the paper work was proper.

DUNCAN: Yes. Who do you remember, I guess, really pushing for the project at that point?

MAIN: I don't really know because I wasn't involved until they got to the point of actually getting ready to do the work, so I don't know who decided that that would be a ... I know the county commissioners were involved -- 'course that was when they had commissioners and

separate city government, before they consolidated. And I don't remember the county commissioner name, chairman at that time.

DUNCAN: Was it Jim Holland maybe?

MAIN: Might have been, he was chairman there for quite a while. My memory is not that good anymore.

DUNCAN: His name is come up a few times.

MAIN: Okay. We were given the money to do these recreation projects and we could put up half ... in other words if a job cost a million dollars, we could put up half a million. The county had to put up the other half. They could either do it in cash money or in work, labor. Clarke County decided to do it in labor and we split and split the thing down so that their labor covered their half of it. It worked pretty well. I think they ended up having to put up just a few thousand dollars cash because it didn't quite balance out, but the majority of it worked out real well. Their 50 percent covered the labor. By using the prisoners they actually made money I would think. We would design a project. We would determine what it would cost to build, and allocate whatever the labor was to the county, saying this is your share. And if they got it done cheaper that was okay, 'cause that was their desire. They could have gone out and hired somebody to do it and we would have paid them the same amount of money, so they came out in good shape. And they were able to do more things because of the jail labor that they could ... of course we accused George [Chandler] of -- he

was real close to the Sheriff at that time -- of arresting certain people [DUNCAN laughs] because they had certain capabilities. One fellow was a bulldozer operator and once he got out of jail they'd go arrest him again. [BOTH laugh] No, he didn't do that. [Phone rings].

DUNCAN: Do you remember what the park looked like the first time you saw it?

MAIN: It was just covered in trees. They had cleared out a little area around the lake -- 'course they built the lake back in the late '60s I think it was before I got there -- but it had kinda grown up. It was just wild typical country with trees, and grass, and weeds.

DUNCAN: Was there any kind of farming going on there?

MAIN: I don't think so; I think it was in forest, in trees. I believe, I don't remember because -- like I say -- when I got involved there they went out and started clearing it immediately to build a ... I think we built the swimming beach first. We found a -- I want to say a five or six year project. But I think I was involved five or six years then I got involved in other things and the county kind of changed direction. And then George left, so I don't know if they did much after George left or not.

DUNCAN: Yes and when did you first see it?

MAIN: I really don't know. It probably would have been in the mid '70s. I don't know the exact date. Because we were doing about seven or eight of those at the same time so I don't know which one we were doing then.

DUNCAN: So post dam, pre-park?

MAIN: A little pre, not too much. I probably never went on site before they started working on it. Then once they started working on it I was out there quite often, just to see if things along. We assigned an engineer and a couple technicians, civil engineering technicians, to help oversee the work. And they were out there on a daily basis. I'd go out there every once in a while just to see how they were doing see that things were working and to get with George. 'Cause George and I would try to balance out the money, be sure the money balanced out. And if he wanted to go and do this certain item, we had to make sure he wasn't earning too much money. That he wasn't doing more than his 50 percent. 'Cause the rules that Congress set up for this money said that the county could not do more than fifty percent. Once they got over fifty percent they had to stop and pay money. We couldn't reimburse them more than fifty percent regardless of what they did. And they do more but they did it on their own. [Phone rings]

DUNCAN: So it had to be exactly 50:50?

MAIN: As close as we could get it, yes. So, George and I kept that balanced. We probably got together about two or three times a month to go over that, be sure we stayed in balance.

DUNCAN: What was the money from the Soil Conservation Service used for, do you know?

MAIN: It was just money appropriated by Congress specifically for water based recreation.

DUNCAN: I mean like what parts of the park would that have been used for, obviously not labor cost because that was pretty much taken care of?

MAIN: Well, everything that required any kind of ... the buildings, the soccer fields because those soccer nets out there they had to be purchased, grass and fertilizer had to be purchased for the soccer field, basketball goals and a basketball court, fishing piers. I don't know if they put a boat dock in out there or not.

DUNCAN: Yes.

MAIN: There is a boat dock, boat ramp out there I don't know.

DUNCAN: Yes, there is a boat ramp.

MAIN: The camping on the far side, the east side of the dam the camping area, horse trails. Of course for a horse trail they had to buy fencing and stuff to put on the trail you know bark or whatever they used. Anytime there was expenditure like that we were involved as far as the money was concerned.

DUNCAN: So, all the materials that went into the park, contracting for building the actual structures, is that right?

MAIN: And the materials for the structures. Some of them we had to hire laborers because George didn't have brick masons and specialized labor and so we had to hire that to be done.

DUNCAN: No one around to arrest? [BOTH laugh]

MAIN: Not at that time.

DUNCAN: That's too bad. Had you ever worked on any other projects like this?

MAIN: Recreation projects? Yes, we had a bunch going on at that time. We had a big one up on Lake Lanier, mainly they're just camping areas, and boat docks, and restrooms, and showers, and things like that. Those were probably the two biggest ones. We did some work on Hiawassee and in North Georgia. And then down on the coast we did a lot of boat docks, boat ramps, and fishing piers. 'Cause we could do a large number of those kind of things and spread them out all over the state because they didn't cost much money. If you are building a boat dock you may have \$10,000 or \$20,000 in it, but if you are building a big recreation area like this you may have \$2,000,000 or \$3,000,000 million well, you can spread it out and do more good for people by building smaller things. We could build just dozens and dozens of fishing piers, and boat docks, and boat ramps mostly in South Georgia.

DUNCAN: Who were the sponsoring agencies?

MAIN: Counties.

DUNCAN: Mostly counties.

MAIN: Yes, that was one of the requirements that the county had to sponsor it and maintain it after it was built. They had to be willing to maintain it.

DUNCAN: Do you know why Sandy Creek in particular was such a large project?

MAIN: I think because our headquarter is here in town and it was one of the first that we got involved in so wanted to see what we could do, see how far we could go, how many things we could do since we had never done too much of that. But I am sure that the main reason is that it is so close to the head people they could take credit for it. When they had people come down from the national office they could take them out there and show them around out there.

DUNCAN: So you remember how the design of the park was decided on?

MAIN: I don't know how the particular design was decided on but I know it was a big problem. We put out bids for architects and they came back -- I don't remember the dollar

amount was, built was relatively high -- and the county didn't like it, didn't agree with it. [With] the architect they had to put up half the money the county did, constructionists and architect was half too. They didn't want to spend that much money, but they found a local architect that would do it for about a third of what the lowest bid was and they decided to go with that and we told them that we couldn't because the man wasn't qualified so we didn't spend any money on it, but they went ahead anyway. That caused a several year delay in the project because this fellow was having problems trying to get that design. He was a landscape architect trying to design buildings and he didn't have the background. So several years after they finally got all the designs they came back to us and said, "Will you look over this and see if you can help us do it?" And we put our design engineers on it to, well, almost completely rewrite the darn thing, the designs. Because he didn't know how to figure weight and loads and things, you know if you put a roof on it the supports have to be such and such and he didn't know how to do that, so we had to have our people do that. Some of us didn't like that idea. We shouldn't be spending our money on that kind of thing, but and they did. As far as the design and why the buildings look the way they do I do not know who first decided. It was a group thing at the end, I know saying "This is what we want." Mainly the county saying, "This is what we would like to have." And we said, "I don't see why not." We didn't care what they looked like as long as they were substantial and could stand up to many, many years. That was our main thing.

DUNCAN: Yes, what about, not so much the buildings, but the overall layout of the park, was that kinda reworked too?

MAIN: No, no that was pretty well set out -- where the fishing items would be, and the swim beach would be, and that kind of thing -- in the initial design, which that part was in pretty good shape.

DUNCAN: So it was the buildings that...?

MAIN: Yes, and some the buildings had to be moved a little bit even after it was decided what to do because of the topography, or it wasn't a good place to put it because a road would be better through there or something. Once you get on the ground you have to make some changes.

DUNCAN: Oh yes.

MAIN: Most of it was pretty well set up ahead of time.

DUNCAN: What was it like working with the county? It sounds like that maybe wasn't the best thing in that case?

MAIN: No, once we got started ... I am trying to think of who was there before George and I can't come up with a name. George was probably one of the easiest person I have ever had the privilege of working with. He took pride in doing it and he wanted to do it right. He put many many hours out there that he didn't have to do, but if you have been out there you can see the result. It is a nice place, but he made it easy to work. We had a little trouble with

some of the paper work, in that there was just so much of it and trying to add all the figures up sometimes took a while, but it wasn't a problem, it was just time consuming.

DUNCAN: When you say there was a lot of paperwork was that just legal stuff or ...?

MAIN: Trying to be sure we balanced out ... in other words if they needed a pound of nails or a role of wire or something and being sure that the receipt for it was in the file so that they could add them up and come up with a figure. Sometimes they would send someone out for it and they wouldn't bring in a receipt or it got filed in the wrong file or... [BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: Oh boy. Let's kind of get broader for a second. You mentioned before as we were getting started that Congress actually decided that the Soil Conservation Service should begin doing recreation projects. Was Sandy Creek originally going to be a recreation project?

MAIN: No, no it was built strictly for flood water control and not until probably six or seven years after it was built was it decided to be a ... because at the time it was built, we did not have the authority to do recreation work, this is something that came about in the '70s, just some projects that came up and we don't do it anymore. [Phone rings]

DUNCAN: Oh really, why not, do you know?

MAIN: No, I don't I think the part of the National Park Service is doing it now.

DUNCAN: Okay, so it was actually the dam, that whole project was already sort of in process quite a while before the recreation aspect?

MAIN: It had been completed for a number of years before any recreational work was done out there.

DUNCAN: Okay, that is interesting.

MAIN: And the reason it was chosen over ... you see there are about four of them right up in that general area. It's the largest one is the reason it was chosen. The others were smaller, I think they are about half the size of that one so there's a lot more water so they canoe around in. [DUNCAN laughs]

DUNCAN: Do you know if any user studies were done to try to look at who was expected to use the park.

MAIN: I don't know if it was done initially, but I know before we built the recreation area there were one or two done, so that we would have some idea of the number of persons that might use these camping facilities and there was even some talk of putting in some R,V. camping with underground water and electric. I don't think they ever did that.

DUNCAN: No, they haven't. Apparently the idea has been revived from what I hear, but.

MAIN: I know there was a study done on that and for some reason at the time we didn't do it. We just went with the primitive camping.

DUNCAN: So, they had kind of looked into how many people might use that kind of an area?

MAIN: Yeah, and we thought they ought to have the R.V. camp because of the University football season at that time there were no -- to my knowledge -- no camping areas within about 30 or 40 miles of here that R.V. campers could use. I am not so sure there are too many now, there are some around Gainesville. We thought it would be a good idea, but it never got through I don't know why.

DUNCAN: So in the planning for the recreation it sounds like it was a new idea for the Soil Conservation Service...

MAIN: It was.

DUNCAN: What were considered sort of the peers? What parks or what areas did the SCS look at to decide out what they were going to put there at Sandy Creek?

MAIN: Well, we didn't make that final decision as to what to put there but we got some ideas that we had gotten from the Forest Service. They had been doing this in the National

Forests for a long time and from the National Park Service. We also actually borrowed some of their building standards, the shapes and what they are made of and what lasts and what doesn't last just to get some ideas of what we could do, but as far as we went out there that was the counties decision it's their property. If they wanted to put something out there that we didn't think we could justify as water-based recreation then we couldn't cost share in it. [We were] very lenient on that we are very liberal. So everything out there we think could in some way be tied into the water. In other words family would come out there to...maybe the kids swim in the lake and the parents could play basketball or picnic or fish or something so it all ties in together.

DUNCAN: Yeah, I see. So when you say water-based recreation, what is the definition of that?

MAIN: I am not sure there is one. I guess the way we looked at it is if a family could be encouraged to come to that location to participate in any type of ... even just get their feet wet then we could consider that water-based recreation. That is why we built basketball courts and tennis courts, we though that's not but it is. The way we looked at it they don't come just to play tennis, they come to picnic, or fish, or to swim on the swim beach, and they may play tennis while they are there. Just an expanded, give them a little more to do while they are at that location, so it is very broad. You could justify building about anything with the definition we used. I think at one time we even talked about putting in a baseball diamond out there, but there wasn't enough level area, so they did a soccer field. I haven't

been out there in 15 years or so, they may have even put in a softball field or two or something.

DUNCAN: I think there is something like that there.

MAIN: That wasn't part of our plan. We couldn't stretch it far enough to include a baseball field.

DUNCAN: I think the way it is now there is something sort of like that, but there aren't lines painted on the grass, so it could be used for soccer or picnics or whatever. How did this compare to other Soil Conservation Service projects?

MAIN: As far as what money or time or?

DUNCAN: Well, you take that anywhere you want with it.

MAIN: It was one of the smaller projects we were involved in most of our dams we built ... this was a small dam at that time it cost \$100,000 maybe \$150,000.

DUNCAN: Oh really, wow.

MAIN: In the latter years ... of course as prices go up things go up and we were building the \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 or \$3,000,000 dams. This was a smaller project. The project we

did at Lake Lanier was probably the largest recreation project we did. It was several hundred acres of R.V. camping with bathrooms and showers of course then you have to do underground water and everything, so it was -- and roads -- so it was a lot more involved.

DUNCAN: Do you remember I don't know if you were involved in this part of the project, but I have heard that there was originally plan that there would be anywhere from ten to fourteen dams as part of the Sandy Creek Project and three or four was actually built, do you know why that was?

MAIN: I don't know the exact number that was built. When our design engineers would go into an area to do flood studies they would design the maximum number of dams that would completely control the 100 year flood or the 200 year flood depending on how serious it was, that means the amount of rain that comes down. They might design 15 dams; well, they'll go in and build the most critical ones first. And once they get done, because of changes in land use, it might not be feasible to build the others. Like they may have wanted to put it in where the housing development is, or a factory. The factory wasn't there when it was designed but five years later there is a factory there because these are long tem projects. They may take 30 years to complete and sometimes you can't do the rest of them. And I imagine that is what happened in this one because when it was designed it was almost all completely rural. That whole are right in there -- lower Jackson County, upper Clarke -- three or four years after we start building, people started building houses, and putting in chicken houses, and they just couldn't build the dams then, or maybe they weren't needed. Maybe these others did enough flood control from the changes up above to something else that there was no problem and

you didn't need to build them all. I can't remember ever building all the dams that were designed in an area because of these changes that come about. And the counties have other priorities. If you reduce the flooding to a certain extent that [it] doesn't cause too often much problem, the county may say, "Okay that's enough. Lets put our money somewhere else and lets get you to put your money somewhere else." That is probably the main reason that it wasn't completed. And I don't think there isn't too much flooding problems in Athens anymore, you get a little on the south end of town over on Macon Highway but that is because of runoff in city streets, and there is nothing you can do about that from our standpoint.

DUNCAN: Now I know there is 50:50 for recreation; 50 percent funded by the Soil Conservation Service, 50 percent funded by the county. What about the other pieces of the project like the dams themselves?

MAIN: The flood control? 100 percent federal. The county was responsible for getting the land, now they might have to buy the land, somebody might donate the land to them.

However they got it that was their problem, they had to get the land. Once they got title to the land we would build the dam at no cost to the county for the flood control. Now we built some dams where it had to be this high for flood control, and we built it this high for recreation purposes. The county has to pay the difference.

DUNCAN: A bit higher for example.

MAIN: If they wanted a deeper pond or a bigger one then they had to pay the difference. That wasn't the case here 'cause that dam was completed before they even started the recreation. So it was 100 percent federal money.

DUNCAN: But the county actually bought not just the land for the park -- or acquired I should say -- not just the land for the park but the land for the dam and the lake itself.

MAIN: Yeah.

DUNCAN: Okay, okay. I didn't realize that.

MAIN: I think most of it was donated because it was just swampy, not good for anything, at least where the dam is. Now the recreation area they probably had to buy that because it was probably good farm land at one time. I don't know. All we cared about is they had a deed, they had a title. [BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: Sounds like the key thing.

MAIN: They probably had to condemn some of it, but I don't know.

DUNCAN: So you said that the land where the lake actually is now was mostly swamp?

MAIN: Yeah it was.

DUNCAN: Okay, I didn't know that either.

MAIN: It was unusable for most anything.

DUNCAN: Was that because of erosion?

MAIN: Just the way the land fell you know. It was low, nice low area, nice area to put the dam because it's already swampy.

DUNCAN: Yeah, no need to worry about it. I heard that the design of the dam is unique; have you heard anything about this or do you know anything...?

MAIN: It's not. It is a standard design. It is just an earth dam with a concrete spillway or a concrete -- I guess spillway is as good of word as any -- where the water drains through, but it was just our standard design.

DUNCAN: Okay, was it larger or smaller or anything like that, average?

MAIN: Well, probably a little bit larger than average, not much though. We have built a lot of them that are much, much bigger. We finished one before I retired in Hall County that was probably five or six times as large and about foot deep right out at the dam, a big one for water supply. That is another program we got into. After we got out of recreation we got

into water supply. We were building dams and helping counties develop rural water supply, and water treatment plants, and water towers, and water distribution lines. Don't do that anymore either. [BOTH laugh] Congress keeps switching these things around, certain times we can do certain things. But this dam, the Sandy Creek dam, was not much larger than average I don't think, if I remember right.

DUNCAN: You mentioned water supply, now I have heard that the water at Sandy Creek could be an emergency water supply for the city of Athens. Was that one of the goals of the project?

MAIN: No, not when it was built, it was strictly flood water control.

DUNCAN: So that may have been something that got tacked on.

MAIN: Well, the water is there they certainly can use it if need be.

DUNCAN: What was the reaction within the SCS when the word came down from Congress that it was time to do recreation projects?

MAIN: Most of the old time employees did not like it. You know [it was a] radical change from what they were doing before and they were not really interested. But some of the younger folks thought it was something different and really got involved with it and did some nice work, some really nice ... well like I said Lake Lanier over in Gwinnett County we did a

big recreation project. It is just very pretty. They got really involved, our engineering staff especially. They really took it to heart and once projects got started they got really involved, you know put a lot of effort into it. 'Cause they knew it would be around a lot longer than they would, something to look at.

DUNCAN: What about in this project specifically?

MAIN: Since it was one of the first ones it was probably a little more difficult to get people enthused -- our people -- because they were used to working in other places and doing other things, it was something new and any time you get something new it takes a little while to get people up and running and really behind the project.

DUNCAN: What about you personally?

MAIN: Well, I got a big kick out of it. I like doing that kind of thing just from the standpoint of giving me an excuse to get out of the office more often. And there again it is something you can see. If you build a dam back in the boonies somewhere only you and the land owners would probably ever see it never even know it is there, but you build one of these recreation projects and people see it and they say, "Well gosh, Soil Conservation Service is doing something for us, you know government money coming back to help the local economy." You know, that gives you a good feeling.

DUNCAN: What kind of reaction did you hear from the public?

MAIN: We didn't ... of course the county commissioners probably did probably a lot of adverse publicity [unintelligible] wasting their time. I don't know. We didn't hear any because we were not involved in the local politics or the local area. We left that to the county commissioners. [DUNCAN laughs] We didn't want local people to even know we were involved really, that was up to them. They should get the publicity for it and accolades because that's the way it ought to work.

DUNCAN: Yeah well that's interesting. That actually is one thing that I heard that it was kinda a big secret until the park actually opened in 1981. Do you remember that?

MAIN: I don't know that they were trying to keep any secrets or not. There were a lot of write ups in the paper in the '70s and early '80s about the construction and everything, so I don't know that they were trying to keep it under cover.

DUNCAN: Maybe it was just because it was so far away that no one ...

MAIN: Could be. I don't remember hearing anything about that.

DUNCAN: Do you remember about how long the SCS was involved in this project from the very start to the ... you know?

MAIN: Probably 'til about the time that George Chandler left the county government, of course we were involved up until then and after he left I don't think we did any more work out there to speak of. I take that back we did. There was a lady whose last name was Smith.

DUNCAN: Nancy Smith.

MAIN: Nancy, Nancy, yes. I couldn't think of what her first name was. We did do some work with her but mostly I think there was like riding trails and maybe some more picnic areas, none of the big items. They were already done; all the big buildings and things were done. But we didn't do much after he left 'cause it was probably 95 percent done when he left. There wasn't much left to do.

DUNCAN: Was that all for political reasons that just a contact had gone or just...

MAIN: No just, you know the building was just done; they didn't need much of anything else. I think they did build one other ... either built another building for an office or built a wing onto one building for an office, in other words expanded a building. But I think that was the only really construction that went on just because the project was done. In other words they set the project out: we are gonna have this, this, this, and this, well this, this --it was all done.

DUNCAN: I see.

MAIN: But then I guess somebody said, "Well lets have some horse trails" -- which wasn't in the original -- so they put in some horse trails. Those kinds of projects, they eventually get completed or run their course.

DUNCAN: And that was the plan from the start that the Soil Conservation Service would be involved in the construction phase and then leave rest to the county.

MAIN: Right the county then would be responsible for maintaining it once it was complete.

DUNCAN: What about any kind of additions. I mean you did mention the horse trails, what if someone were to today -- I know you are not with the SCS anymore -- but if someone today were to say, "Oh lets have an R.V. park after all", would that be something that they would get involved in again?

MAIN: No.

DUNCAN: Okay.

MAIN: Because then in the late '80s early '90s Congress decided we didn't need to be in recreation projects anymore, we were going to do some water supply. So no, we would not be authorized to do that anymore.

DUNCAN: Okay. I was going to say I guess if it is in water supply you could, but I guess not anymore either.

MAIN: I don't think they are doing water supply anymore, I haven't kept up with up with it but I don't think they are.

DUNCAN: How did you see the park change over time, from when you first saw it until, you know, its completion I suppose?

MAIN: To tell you the truth I didn't pay that much attention to it. I was more interested in seeing that the money worked out right. We'd go out every now and then and see a new building that had been built, especially if we had hired a contractor to do some of the work. We'd have to be sure what he did was correct before we paid him. When most anything was done we would go out there and get with our engineers and we'd say, "Well this was built and this was completed. We can move onto another phase of the project." I didn't really pay that much attention to it.

DUNCAN: Back to the money stuff then. How involved were you in just a day to day level with the money? You had said that someone would have bought a few pounds of nails and they would need to get their receipt to you and so on. I guess what I am asking is how bureaucratic was it? How many people were kind of involved with each of these decisions?

MAIN: I had one clerk that kept up with most of that, but George had a clerk, a personal secretary that was keeping the file and like I said once or twice a month he and I would get together and we'd go over the file and see if he thought well darn it they did such and such and it's not in here, just to be sure it was complete. But as far as actually adding each thing up and coming up with a total, two or three times a year we'd go through and do that. Then say okay well that phase is done it all balances out, put that away and we'll get on to the next one. So it wasn't all that involved, keeping pieces of paper to have a trail was just the main thing.

DUNCAN: So it wasn't as though every single day you were...

MAIN: Oh no.

DUNCAN: ...having to deal with this. How many projects would you work on at a time?

MAIN: It varied a lot, probably a dozen maybe fifteen. Some of them recreation, some flood control. It wasn't all recreation or anything like that. It depended a lot on how much money congress gave us. Every year they would give us a different amount of money for construction purposes and for watershed work. Some years we could do everything we had staff to do, and then hire some more staff because we got more money. Then some years you wouldn't get too much money and we would have to cut back. The size of the projects determined the number. If you had \$10,000,000 worth of construction money and you built two great big projects that cost \$5,000,000 a piece you only did two, but we tried not to do

that. We tried to do smaller projects where we could spread them out around and not concentrate in one area of the country.

DUNCAN: Yeah. How big a project was Sandy Creek compared to...?

MAIN: I don't remember the total dollar amount, but it seems like it was only \$400,000 or \$500,000. I may be wrong because I don't remember ever adding up the total. You know we do it in phases. As compared to other projects it was probably small it was one of the smaller ones dollar wise, but then it was done in the '70s and '80s you know if it had been done in the '90s it would have costed a lot more to do it. But it was one of the smaller projects. And purposely it went on for a long period of time because the county didn't have the facilities to do it all at once. They had to do it in phases. They couldn't build four buildings at the same time they didn't have enough people and they had other work to do. You know the county engineer is supposed to be working on roads and ditches and stuff. So he couldn't put as much time in. So we set it up to do in phases and I think it was somewhere like an eight or ten year project. Because George was able to get in there and get some work done I think that cut a couple of years off of that, and reduced the time period so it -- I would have to look but I think it probably only took six or seven years to finish.

DUNCAN: That sounds about right from what I have heard from other people.

MAIN: Initially we thought it would take longer, but he was able to get a lot more work done than we had anticipated or even the county had anticipated -- cause he was able to go out and arrest these people. [Both laugh]

DUNCAN: You mentioned that your overall budget changed quite a bit from year to year or maybe from administration to administration.

MAIN: That too. [BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: Did the budget for the Sandy Creek project ever change?

MAIN: No, the way we work these projects – in other words you set up the whole project, say its going to be a ten year project and it is going to cost X amount of dollars per year. So once we set that up and the county agreed with us, it was kind of set in concrete and Congress says “Okay this money is earmarked for this period of time. You can’t use it anywhere else, but it is still there. We are not going to take it away from you.

DUNCAN: I see, I see.

MAIN: The changes in our budget did not affect that, once our budget was made.

DUNCAN: Okay ... I guess I am just curious to hear -- I feel like I have asked this question a few times -- but just if there is any other project that sticks in your mind as similar to this? You mentioned that it was a little bit special because it was in Athens.

MAIN: And it was one of the first ones. We were at the same time doing one on Lake Lanier. It was very similar but it did not have- Sandy Creek has a big building out there they use for, I don't even know what they call it now, got a big fire place in it.

DUNCAN: They have one called the pavilion, but I know what you are talking about.

MAIN: We didn't build those things in Lake Lanier but we built a lot of R.V. camping areas where we put in concrete camping pads, and individual picnic tables, and individual grills and everything for R.V. camps, and then five or six restrooms scattered around the area, and four or five boat ramps into the lake. Relatively similar to the Sandy Creek except that it was more closely associated with water because it didn't have the basketball courts or the tennis courts or anything like that it was strictly fishing piers and boat ramps. It was much larger as far as area covered and dollars invested and I didn't know that until I got involved, but it is a lot more expensive to put in underground water and underground electric then it is to do most anything else. And they wanted all the utilities underground to disturb the least number of trees as possible so that was some constraints there that caused that one to be a lot more expensive.

DUNCAN: I see.

MAIN: We were doing one in Gwinnett County -- we did all these within the '80s. The one in Gwinnett County was about the same size -- maybe a little larger -- and there again it was mostly R.V. camping.

DUNCAN: Why was it that R.V. camping was built at those two sites?

MAIN: I think the counties thought they could make some money. They could charge people to rent these spaces and at least make enough to pay for maintenance. Sandy Creek they charge what a dollar to get in or whatever, but that's not anywhere near the cost of maintenance out there. I think that is the main reason, they saw a need for R.V. camping and thought they could at least have a nice area and it wouldn't cost them hardly anything.

DUNCAN: Yes, and neither of those projects, Lake Lanier, the Gwinnett County project, neither of those had basketball courts or tennis courts or...?

MAIN: If they do we did not participate. They might have put them in since but initially no, they weren't designed for those kinds of things.

DUNCAN: What about beaches?

MAIN: No, neither project had a swimming beach. I am not sure we could even put one in Lake Lanier, see that's owned by the Corps of Engineers and they have some restrictions as

to what you can do a certain number of feet of the water. We probably could have gotten special permission, but I don't remember them ever even talking about that. They just wanted the recreation and the picnic area. Oh I am sorry, I am wrong. We built a very large swimming beach up there 'cause I remember it washed away one year right in the middle of construction and we had to redo it.

DUNCAN: Oh dear.

MAIN: Yes. The flood came through and the lake came up and washed the whole thing away and we had to start all over. So yes there is a swimming beach in the one in Lake Lanier, but not in Gwinnett County.

DUNCAN: Okay, then you mentioned there are underground utilities at those both of those parks and that wasn't...

MAIN: See there are no utilities to the camping area that's why they call it Little Sandy Creek, so you didn't have to do all that sewage, see you didn't have to run sewer lines. 'Cause when you have the R.V. there you've got to have individual sewer lines or at least have a central area where they can come and clean out their tanks.

DUNCAN: Oh I see.

MAIN: Which if you don't have R.V. camping you don't have to worry about that thing.

DUNCAN: What about electricity.

MAIN: Yes, you have to have electric hookup on every campsite.

DUNCAN: Really?

MAIN: So that they can plug in their air conditioner, you know. [BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: The wilderness experience.

MAIN: And they can watch their TV.

DUNCAN: So it sounds like in all these cases the design of the park was completely left up to the county, but you did mention that when the designers chose [unintelligible] SCS really didn't approve it.

MAIN: Not the initial architect that is correct because we didn't feel he was qualified to design the buildings.

DUNCAN: So it was the architect himself rather than the...

MAIN: As far as what they wanted that was fine. And we ended up building what they wanted. That wasn't the problem; the problem was with the firm that they selected.

DUNCAN: Okay. So I suppose there was some sort of a review process to approve of an architect and then get the money.

MAIN: Yes. The county hadn't been too involved with architects so we told them that we would develop a bid package and put out a bid for an architectural firm. Give them a preliminary idea of what we want so they can bid on it. And we did that and when the bids came back they were a little higher bit higher than we anticipated, not all that much maybe ten or fifteen percent, but they were way over what one of the county commissioners had got with this local firm and he convinced everybody to go -- it might have been Holland I am not sure, don't quote me on that one. They convinced the county to go with this fellow and they did. And he drew all these things up and then -- like I said -- they came to us several years later and wanted us to review them and see if we could work with them and see if we could do it and our people at that time said, "Yes, we will do it." So we put a couple of engineers on it to redesign some of the areas and fix them so that we were able to build the building and it would last. That was our main thing we were worried about were the buildings ... and we did. [BOTH laugh] There were a group of us that thought we shouldn't do that instead of having our engineers involved in that they should be doing other projects. But that's the way it goes sometimes.

DUNCAN: So when the SCS pulled back funds was there ever talk of pulling all of the funds for the recreation project or just the architecture?

MAIN: Just the architecture funds. Because we still wanted to build the project, we just wanted to make sure it was safe.

DUNCAN: How did working with the counties, with Gwinnett County and I am not sure what county Lake Lanier is in but...

MAIN: Hall County

DUNCAN: Okay yes. How did those county governments compare?

MAIN: From my standpoint they were pretty similar. Each county had a ... in Clarke County there was a county engineer, in Hall County they actually had a director of the recreation department we worked with, and Gwinnett, same thing they had a recreation director who was ... in the other two counties the people were not as diversified as George was. They didn't have to go out and pave roads and work on ditches. Their whole thing was recreation. That's all they were responsible for so they could spend more time on it. They didn't get the projects done any quicker, but as far as working with them George was easier to work with because he had the technical background. These folks were administrators. Very nice people, very willing to work, but they just didn't know ... they couldn't talk to the engineers -- engineer to engineer -- like George could. So it was harder to get some of the

things ... to determine what needed to be done and explain to them and convince them this is what needed to be done. George didn't have any problem because he understood, engineer to engineer he would understand. So no matter how gung ho they were to get the work done it was no more difficult, no more time consuming. We had to assign an engineer to those two projects who could explain things to people in layman terms. [You] didn't have to do that with George. They had to do it with me because I didn't understand them either, but from that standpoint it was a little more difficult to work with them but in all cases I don't know why maybe we were just lucky but we worked with a group in the county that wanted to get the work done and wanted that project to succeed and they weren't worried about politics and that doesn't happen much any more. So they took pride in seeing that they did it right. It was a lot of fun.

DUNCAN: Yeah, Yeah. How about the Oconee River Soil and Conservation Service? Did you work with them?

MAIN: Water. That is a state agency.

DUNCAN: Okay.

MAIN: That we work closely with. I didn't personally work with them but our agency did in other aspects. Most of our work was working directly with farmers in erosion control. That's what 90 percent of our work has been ever since it was started. And the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission and Committee has the same goal, has the same purpose.

So our local -- when I say local -- people that we had in the different counties surrounding worked directly with them. But I didn't at all.

DUNCAN: And you don't remember working with them on the Sandy Creek project?

MAIN: No.

DUNCAN: Okay.

MAIN: I am sure they were involved at some point just because it is something with their [unintelligible] but I didn't work directly with them.

DUNCAN: Okay. What were some of the challenges you faced with this project?

MAIN: Well, once we got the architectural part straightened out there weren't too many. It went pretty smooth. I guess one of the headaches that we had was George was getting done quicker than we had anticipated so we kept having to go back and get the funds moved up. In other words if you have a ten year project you got so many funds this year and you'd have to go back and say well look we need some more funds because it is going faster than anticipated. Well, George you are going to have slow down and go do something else for a while because our money ran out.

DUNCAN: Really? Wow.

MAIN: So that was one of those things, it wasn't really a problem, but it was one of those things that had to be done. I can't think of any ... sometimes George would have trouble getting people out there because they would have to go to court or something. [DUNCAN laughs] All in all I think it went pretty well, I really do. I was kinda surprised that the county was able to give George as much time to spend out there as they did, but they seemed to think he was gettin' everything else done too. He was taking a lot of personal interest in it and that helped. I don't remember any big problems. I am sure there were some. I know we had some internal problems. We wanted to sign a couple more technicians at a certain point in time or another engineer because the work was going faster than we anticipated and our people said no we need them somewhere else so you had to kind of jockey that kind of thing around. That's typical of any project you know.

DUNCAN: Did you ever have to slow the project down a little bit?

MAIN: Occasionally, especially toward the end of our fiscal year. If George would come up and say we are going try to start this building and we'll need this much. We'd say look George we don't get more funds until July 1st or whenever it is you're going to have to wait a few weeks or a month or so before you commit us to the financial end of it, other than that, no.

DUNCAN: With those other two counties did they use inmate labor for those projects?

MAIN: No, the one in Hall County used their own staff. They had a big recreation staff and they were qualified to do the buildings and things and in Gwinnett County they actually had the road crew come through and cut the roads and pave the roads. Well I tell you, I think we did hire a firm to do the asphalt paving, but they laid them out and put the base down and things like that, but they didn't use prisoners at least to my knowledge. If they did we didn't know about it. I think Clarke County was the only place we used prison labor, well, not prison but jail labor whatever they call those folks out there. [DUNCAN laughs]

DUNCAN: It seems like the term changes from year to year.

MAIN: Yes, the people with the black stripe running down their sides you know. [BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: Working on the chain gang. You said that this project moved along more quickly than you expected or than the agency expected.

MAIN: Than initially anticipated uh-huh. Because we didn't think the county would be able to put as much time in it as they were able to or that things would go as smoothly. When you plan something for an eight to ten year period, you try to think of all the problems: weather, and politics and things that get involved that will slow it down and that is why we thought it would be an eight to ten year project. If we could just go hire a contractor to do it, it was about a four year project, or maybe even less because a contractor will get in there and get it done, but we knew that the county couldn't put 20 people in there 40 hours a week. It just

wasn't feasible if it had they had other work to do. So that is why we space it out that way and make it easier for the county, as far as, they also had to have money to pay these people and they didn't want to put a whole lot of money out at one time. They spread it out it, makes it easy for them. Paying their county engineer and everything and they didn't want to hire people to go in there and work, so by spreading it out it made it a little easier on everybody.

DUNCAN: Did the other projects in those other counties move along more quickly or less quickly or?

MAIN: The one in Hall County went along a lot quicker. Because the fellow that was in charge -- the recreation director -- had his own staff. And he could decide what that staff did everyday. And he had several different areas to look at but he concentrated most of his staff on that one project, which made it easier for him to get something done. He wasn't worried so much about his people being pulled off and go somewhere else to do something. He didn't have to worry about that.

DUNCAN: We 're gonna get [unintelligible] or whatever. [DUNCAN laughs]

MAIN: Get paroled.

DUNCAN: Yes. Darn.

MAIN: The others -- the ones in Gwinnett and the other county -- the other ones we were working on pretty much stayed to schedule.

DUNCAN: Was working with counties a new thing for the Soil Conservation Service? You'd mentioned that 90 percent of the folks they worked with were farmers.

MAIN: No, not as far as our flood control work was concerned. Anytime we would go into an area and want to build a dam for flood control the county had to agree to help and get the land rights, so we worked for them for 50 years or more on those kinds of things. And I am sure there were other things that we worked with counties with, but that was the only thing I got involved with was the watershed work. So, no that was not a new thing, that was old, we were used to doing that.

DUNCAN: Yeah, yeah. So it wasn't just that you were having to establish a relationship?

MAIN: No, no that was already there.

DUNCAN: Okay, I see. Those flood control projects, how long term did those tend to be as opposed to the recreation projects?

MAIN: Usually, you'll go in and in six months you will have it done. If it is a really large one and depending on the time of year -- if you start one in the fall you are going to be closed a month or two for bad weather, but if you start in the spring you can have it done before the

fall, unless you are building a really big one now like this one we built, like I said, in Hall County for water supply it was a three year project. It was what was called a mass concrete dam it was I don't know how many hundred thousand cubic yards of concrete it was a tremendous job. They even had to bring their own concrete plant in and set up and make concrete on the site, so it took a long time. You had to put down a later of concrete and then let it set for a while before we could do something and then put another one and another one. It was just the way it worked. It was time consuming and I am not even sure they are done yet as far as the water supply.

DUNCAN: Really?

MAIN: I don't think they have finished running all of the water lines through the county or whether they are even going to or not. When we set it up we were just going to do the south end of the county which included Banks Crossing -- if you know where that is -- where all those shops are up there.

DUNCAN: Okay that sounds familiar.

MAIN: The outlet shops and the outlet malls.

DUNCAN: Oh, Commerce.

MAIN: Commerce.

DUNCAN: Yes, Yes.

MAIN: That was the main reason the county wanted to build because the county could supply water to those folks and charge them for it and then turn it paid [unintelligible]. It gave the county income to put water lines other places. That was what got them interested and they are charging those people a lot of money for water.

DUNCAN: I bet. Maximum refund for your dollars worth. How long did the flood control part of the Sandy Creek project take?

MAIN: I don't know it was started before I went with them. They started building those dams in the early '60s. Probably eight or ten years. I just don't know.

DUNCAN: What about that dam specifically which I guess is -- I know it has a name -- number ten or whatever?

MAIN: Chapman. Yes, number ten is the watershed dam and the lake is called Chapman Lake or something like that.

DUNCAN: Yes.

MAIN: There again I don't know how long it took them to build the dam because they built it before I got with them. It probably didn't take more than six to eight months I would think ... there wouldn't be a reason for it to take longer than that.

DUNCAN: But the actual project started as early as the early '60s?

MAIN: The development of the project might have started back in the late '40s, early '50s. A lot of times ... when SCS first got into this business back in the '40s they went around and developed the different watershed areas and started developing the flood control needs and our design engineers would develop ... design where the dams needed to be, the size of the dams and all that kind of thing and then put it on the shelf until we could convince the counties that this is what they needed and they needed to get the land so we could build the dam. And that might be 10 years down the road or 20 years from the time it was actually planned by our planning department and something started, but now once it started construction it only takes six to eight months.

DUNCAN: Yes, I see, so that explains the big difference of the extent of the plans?

MAIN: When that plan was first developed probably in the '40s, early '50s at the latest they may have had 14 or 15 dams there, but some of the counties didn't want to get involved or some of the counties for various reasons they weren't done or weren't needed.

DUNCAN: I see, okay. Let's take a little break.

DUNCAN: You sort of talked about some of the different goals of the Soil Conservation Service: obviously soil conservation being the name, and then recreation and flood control later. How important was wildlife management or certain general natural resources management?

MAIN: I tell you, at the time I was with them we didn't do much. We were more interested in soil erosion than anything else, building terraces on farmland and tilling controlled water run off rather than wildlife. We did do some wildlife plantings. If we were in a marsh area if we could convince the land owner not to plow up the marsh area we could plant in some kind of feed for wild birds or and that kind of thing, but we didn't do too much of that.

DUNCAN: What about sort of any other general ecological management that looked at the flora and fauna I guess of the area instead of just the soil erosion?

MAIN: Well, that all works together, you try to determine what is the best types of plants or types of grasses that you need to put in that area to get whatever the owner wanted plus control the erosion, sometimes it was best to put it in pine trees sometimes it was best to grass the area with a fescue type grass -- some type of grass. I don't know I am not an agrologist. Those were the types that we did with the land owners. Try to convince them, "You have a lot of run off here. You've got to do something different. Here are some of the things you can do. If your field is in row crops stop it, don't plant anymore." That is one option. Not a good one because people need to plant to make money, but that was an option.

Just put it in hay or something and there again don't plow no till conservation. Don't till, tillage was a big thing with us. Go in and plant your plants without plowing. Using various means either you know ... I can't get into the details I don't know them, it wasn't my expertise, but for example if we convince the farmer to go into what we call no till in the fall. You leave say he had a field of corn you leave and the corn stalks, you go in – either in spring or fall -- with a disk and you cut those corn stalks up and try to push them down in the soil. You don't remove them. You use them as mulch and help stabilize the water, the earth. And then when you get ready to plant, you go in with planter that instead of digging -- lots of planters they dig a little trench and you don't do that you go in with a plant that just pushes them down into the ground and doesn't disturb the surrounding so you don't get erosion. And you do that for several seasons and you get a good base of mulch and you get your good plants but it takes a little bit of chemical. You've gotta use some chemicals to kill the some of weeds and things. And we got into some controversy with the EPA over what chemicals to use and was it causing run off problems. You had to take that into account too, but we still think it's a good method. Our people would go to the farmer, sit down with the farmer and say, "Okay he's got cows here and corn growing here and he's got wheat here. Maybe that's not the best mix. Maybe we should move the wheat over here for some reason. Or do something differently or rotate your crops -- especially if you are doing things like cotton you've got to rotate your crops. It just takes all the elements out of the soil. Your cows, if you have a dairy operation you have a lot of runoff and when you clean your dairies you get a lot of stuff that is going to fill your streams, you got to do something with it. Build a lagoon or something and try to develop a whole plan for the whole farm. And then work with the farmer in getting it done and helping him lay out these different things so that

eventually he would have a pretty good operation, but not causing too much erosion or environment problems. We still do that that is a big thing around here, chickens, chicken houses, waste of chickens developing different methods to control that or what to do with the waste.

DUNCAN: How big of a problem was erosion in this area of Georgia and that Sandy Creek area?

MAIN: It is not so bad from here north, but from Macon south it is terrible. That was a big cotton growing area back in the turn of the century and all the topsoil was gone. So the only thing you could grow was pine trees and even then not very good ones. But up here erosion isn't as bad as in South Georgia because of the soils or North Georgia because of the hills and the mountains, but you have erosion everywhere. Every time it rains you are going to get a little bit of erosion. And if you've got a hill and you plow down the hill you are just helping make furrows for the water run down you need to plow across the hill to help stop it just slow it down and that is all the flood control work we did was to slow that water down. You can't stop it it's has to go off, but you can slow it down where it doesn't take much dirt with it and that is the type thing we still try to do.

DUNCAN: What about in the Sandy Creek area?

MAIN: I don't think there was much problem. I think it was in pine trees or pasture. I don't think it was too much problem. I don't know. I don't remember seeing it. I wasn't out there when they built the dam.

DUNCAN: You said the reason the dams were originally built was for flood control not run off erosion or ... How did you take that philosophy and apply it to the recreation idea?

MAIN: Well our wonderful Congress said, "We got some extra money here with all this park business. [BOTH laugh] We want to start a program where we get local rural recreation." In other words we weren't authorized to do any recreation work in downtown Atlanta, it had to be rural. And spend money in the rural areas to develop recreation projects. That's what started the whole thing. Now as far as this particular one I suppose somebody on our staff got the bright idea to go talk to the county commissioners and say, "Look we're gonna to have some money, why don't we do something with it? Let's keep it here and spend it. And then that just bloomed into the park.

DUNCAN: What about as far as the types plantings that would have been done in a farm area, were any types of planting like that done at Sandy Creek?

MAIN: I know our agronomist developed the types of grasses and things and plants that needed to be there. For example the grass that is on the soccer field is a different type than what is on the bank across the way in the camping area because of different uses. And I

know our agronomist did that kind of thing. As far as the trees and bushes and shrubs out there I am not sure they were that involved. They weren't worried about that kind of thing.

DUNCAN: Yeah, Yeah. There wasn't really an eroded area in the first place I suppose so it wasn't so much of a concern?

MAIN: I don't think so. I don't think so.

DUNCAN: I guess it was George Chandler -- I think it was George Chandler -- who mentioned that after the Soil Conservation Service had come through and taken a bunch of land for the dam and some of the topsoil had gone into the dam and they did do some kinds plantings. Do you remember anything like that?

MAIN: Well, I know of course that once they built it in they had to go back and put in grass and things to stabilize it and around the edge, but that would have been all that we would have done.

DUNCAN: Okay, so nothing in the natural areas where the hiking trails are?

MAIN: Just in the recreation area.

DUNCAN: Okay.

MAIN: But as far as building the dam for the flood control no. We wouldn't have done anything but stabilize the bank around the lake.

DUNCAN: Was wildlife management important in Sandy Creek project? Was that ever considered a goal?

MAIN: I don't think so. I don't remember hearing anything about it, specifically doing specific things for wildlife management. There were a lot of deer and things out there just naturally. They have always been there. Nancy Smith now, she might have put some food out for them -- for some of the different animals -- because she was real heavily involved in that and the Nature Center. She was really in charge of the Nature Center mostly and they gave her this when George left I think. So she might have done something I do not know. We did not do anything for wildlife.

DUNCAN: I was just wondering sort of if that was something that was in the plan at all or not.

MAIN: I don't believe.

DUNCAN: Interesting. What was particularly memorable about the Sandy Creek project when you think back about it what stands out in your mind?

MAIN: I don't know of any one thing that jumps out. I do like that building that's out there with the rock fireplace. I think that is very pretty. I think it really and sets the tone for the whole place. Nothing....

DUNCAN: What about the process?

MAIN: Just the fact it got done is something. 'Cause anytime you are dealing with politics and county commissioners -- who are political by nature they have to be -- you usually run into a bunch of problems and a bunch of delays and we didn't. It went very smoothly. Maybe that is the thing. Had it not gone so smoothly maybe something would have stuck out, but no it went...

DUNCAN: Is there anything that sort of stands out in your mind as a particular accomplishment of the park or of the...?

MAIN: Not really because we did it in phases and we knew what was going to be done in a particular year. We were real happy to get it done and completed and just forget about that and move on to something else.

DUNCAN: Yeah, alright. Seems understandable I guess. Did you work with Cecil Chapman?

MAIN: Uh-huh. A little -- when I say a little -- he retired not long after I started. So I didn't spend much time with him.

DUNCAN: Okay. What do you remember about him?

MAIN: I am trying to think. Not much. In fact I am trying to remember it seems like he was only there just -- might not have even been there when I finally transferred. 'Cause I was working with them a little bit before I even transferred. With the forest service we worked pretty close together with him so I knew him. I can't think of anything that stands out I just know the name and I can picture him.

DUNCAN: That is fine. I have just been kind of asking people since the lake was named for him. [DUNCAN laughs]

MAIN: Well he was in charge of the Soil Conservation Service at the time they decided to actually do it. So maybe he pushed it I don't know.

DUNCAN: Yeah, okay. How did the final outcome of the project compare with your expectations for it?

MAIN: Actually I think it ended up a lot better than we anticipated -- there again since it was relatively new, that sort of thing was relatively new to us that it went on so smoothly and finished up so nice and looked so great. I don't think we were really anticipating for it to

turn out to be as nice as it was, just because we had no track record, to know what to expect. I think that everybody that was involved with it is very pleased with what happened and what is still happening out there.

DUNCAN: When you say better than you expected what specific things were better then...?

MAIN: It just looks nicer than you'd think about when you see it on paper. I mean, you see a building here and you see a grassed area there and a boat ramp or a fishing pier and they fit in with the surroundings. There is one fishing pier out there, if you don't know where it is you can't find it, because it is nestled back in the trees in a cove back there and it looks like it has been there forever. I mean that kind of thing is what we wanted to see and it worked. So it turned out a lot nicer than we had anticipated on paper.

DUNCAN: What about the actual use of the park?

MAIN: I don't know. I assume it is getting a lot of use.

DUNCAN: Uh-huh, yeah.

MAIN: That's to say I haven't been out there in 15 years probably, maybe more. So I don't know, I think it's probably getting as much use as they want it to have. You don't want too many people if you can help it because it over runs the place. I know I was out there once -- I take that back -- I was out there about 12 years ago to a retirement party. We'd rented that

building – whatever they call it -- out there for a little retirement party for one of our fellows.
Everything was there and everything worked. {BOTH laugh}

DUNCAN: I guess the building didn't fall on your head? [BOTH laugh]

MAIN: No didn't fall down or anything.

DUNCAN: It's all a matter of what your expectations are. [BOTH laugh] Well, I was going to ask if you visit the park, but it sounds like you haven't been out there.

MAIN: No, no I haven't.

DUNCAN: Why not?

MAIN: I don't know I just there is nothing out there that I ... when I go to do recreation I don't do those kinds of things, very seldom. I haven't had the reason, the need.

DUNCAN: What kind of things do you do?

MAIN: I play golf, or sit around with the grandkids that kind of thing, read. The wife and I like to go gamble. We don't fish or anything.

DUNCAN: When you mentioned golfing it reminded me of something I meant to ask. Was there ever any sort of talk of having a golf course?

MAIN: I think there was. I think about halfway through the project someone mentioned that this would be a good location and a good need or a city owned or county owned golf course and I don't know if it got any further than that. I think one of the -- and here I am just trying to remember -- the area is located almost at the very end of the county. In other words if you go to the upper end of the lake, you are in another county.

DUNCAN: Yes, it borders Jackson County.

MAIN: So that limited what Clarke County could do. They-if they were going to build a golf course it had to be on county land. They couldn't go into Jackson County and buy land.

DUNCAN: I see.

MAIN: And I think there was already a housing development approved by the planning commission and the county commission and go below it, so it was kind of constricted on what they could do because they would have had to get a lot more land. Some of us thought I think at the time -- initially -- it was a good idea. I don't think it ever flew. I don't think people were really interested in doing it.

DUNCAN: It just occurred to me that a lot of projects like that do have golf courses, but I guess... What have you been doing since you retired? [DUNCAN laughs] Hanging out here?

MAIN: That's essentially it; wife and I try to keep this place going. Learned a new vocation I guess you would say. How to engrave and I don't do that very well, but my wife does.

[BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: Now what did you do again? You mentioned that after working here you then did some field work in West Virginia for flood control for the Soil Conservation Service. How long were you in that position?

MAIN: Well, that was just a -- well, I was still here -- when they would have a natural disaster they would put together a team from all over the country together. There would be maybe six or eight of us who would get together and go to that area and spend a week or a month or whatever and come and go. Did that for a couple of years and then I retired it was just before I retired that they finally decided to do that. But at that time they had two teams one would take care of things west of the Mississippi and the rest of us would do east of the Mississippi. And we think we got the raw deal because they had more problems east of the Mississippi. [BOTH laugh] They had hurricanes in South Carolina and hurricanes in Florida and Hurricanes in Puerto Rico -- Puerto Rico was a part of our area -- and then a tremendous flood they had in '86 that killed a bunch of people. It was a mess.

DUNCAN: What was your actual job in that?

MAIN: We were hiring the contractor and working up the contracts, and bidding the jobs out, signing the contracts, seeing work got done, agreeing to pay them if they did the work right according to orders, get rid of them and get someone else if they didn't. On a short fuse we were doing these contracts. We bid the contractor, wrote the contract and had a contractor on site in less than a week. And we would have maybe 30 or 40 contractors at the same time 'cause it was a big area. So there was a lot of paper work to get things going and making sure the work got done because we only had a short time to get it done before the rainy season again. Those kind of things were a lot of fun. And of course the ones we did in Florida and South Carolina was mostly beach erosion. We had to stabilize the beach.

DUNCAN: So the actual work of the job was some what similar to what you had done here?

MAIN: Yes, just in an accelerated mode. You had to cut a lot of corners and do a lot of things that you normally wouldn't do. For example normally when you bid a project you give them a 30 day period to go in and look at it and decide what they want. Well we gave them 48 hours in some cases. So it was a lot different and a lot of times you ran into troubles because they weren't able to in that length of time really see what ... so you had to work with the contractors up close.

DUNCAN: Yeah. Why did you decide to retire?

MAIN: I just got tired of the politics.

DUNCAN: Really.

MAIN: When we first started the emphasis was to go in do a good job and get it done. Toward the end it was appease the politicians and I just got tired of it. So in mid '90s Congress decided that the Department of Agriculture had too many people and had to get rid of 25 percent of the work force -- had a reduction in force as they call it, or downsizing -- and offered anybody that had 30 years service could retire with immediate retirement. So I volunteered. [BOTH laugh] I took it five years earlier than I had planned but I decided well take it now and get out.

DUNCAN: And how long had you been with the Soil Conservation Service at that point?

MAIN: I had been with the government 31 years.

DUNCAN: Including the Forest Service?

MAIN: Yes, 20 with the Soil Conservation Service.

DUNCAN: When you say there was too much politics, was that more on the local level or the federal level?

MAIN: Federal level, putting up with the bureaucrats within the agency who were trying to make a name for themselves so they could move on up or go into politics on there own. It just wasn't as much fun as it had been, let's put it that way. A lot of us felt that way and a lot of us got out.

DUNCAN: Uh-huh. Do you have any idea of why that might have been at that...?

MAIN: Just the nature of the ... I think all agencies go through that federal and state. Soil Conservation Service has been around 60 years that's a long time. A big portion of the people were eligible to retire, were retiring and they were bringing in a lot of new people. Things just change. Things don't work the same now as they did 20 years ago.

DUNCAN: Yeah, yeah. Do you think the actual nature of the projects changed as well?

MAIN: A little bit not too much. They are still doing the same basic things, erosion control with local farmers, that's our bread and butter. They are still doing that but they are not doing much of anything else. Of course their work staff is about a third of what it was 20 years ago and they are still reducing down. And as they reduce down they cut programs out and for example we aren't doing much watershed construction projects anymore, just these emergency type things. Very few floodwater dams are being built anymore. [It's] just a new direction, a different direction.

DUNCAN: Yeah. Had that already start to happen when the Sandy Creek project was in process?

MAIN: No.

DUNCAN: Really?

MAIN: No, that was the heyday, like I said that was the first recreation projects. So it was just ... everybody was enthused because we had a new program to try and get something done. And spend money in the local area that was one thing the Soil Conservation Service was good at. If they got money they spent it in the local area they don't spend it in Washington, or Philadelphia, or weird places like that. [BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: Weird places. So, when you say it was the heyday of...

MAIN: Of the recreation work, of the money available to do those kinds of things, and the watershed things too. We had a lot more money in the '70s and early '80s to do watershed construction work then they do now. The money is diverted -- well, salaries have gone up so much and the cost of everything, the cost of buying cars and things. There isn't that much money left in the total budget to do a lot. Congress has cut the budget too which in some ways I can understand. If you have fewer people you ought to have a lower budget. Different directions, different groups, I don't know if they will ever get back into doing flood water work. Probably not it's probably...

DUNCAN: You mentioned that as a flood control project Sandy Creek worked. Have there been any studies done of that?

MAIN: I believe so. Every year -- I am trying to think of the intersection, on North Avenue ...I can't think of what the cross road is ... you come in off the by pass ... can't remember -- but anyway there was an area, several areas in Athens that every year would flood, that don't flood anymore. They still could and if you get a really tremendous rain you could get some flooding, but with normal rain fall, they don't get any flooding. So, yes it works, I don't know if a study has been done to see just how much it reduced, but we can tell by going to the areas that, in the '70s when we first moved, here flooded every year. They don't flood anymore.

DUNCAN: Do you think it worked as a recreation area?

MAIN: I think it still is. Like I said I don't know how many people go up there but it is still being used. So people are getting to benefit from it.

DUNCAN: Do you think that is something that the Soil Conservation Service should get back into?

MAIN: I wish they would, yes. I think it is a good thing for -- well like areas that state and country that don't have much recreation. We have the infrastructure to go in and do that and

build a recreation area. If Congress would give us the money, but they don't and it's not something we are allowed to do anymore. We can't spend our money on that anymore, but yes I would like to see them do it I think it is something that is needed and something that will pay benefits for many years. Just like Sandy Creek it's paying benefits now people have a place to go.

DUNCAN: I guess I am about done with questions; do you have anything to add?

MAIN: The only thing that kind of strikes me at Sandy Creek, if it hadn't been for George Chandler's enthusiasm it would not have been completed. I mean, he just did a tremendous job and he was really concerned and he kept people hopping if something wasn't getting done quick enough he would call them and he'd say what's going on. He wasn't bashful. He kept the people working and he did a good job. And I'd like to see them name it after him, [BOTH laugh] but he's not a politician so it doesn't work that way. That is the main thing, if there had been a different county engineer it may or may not have gotten ... it probably would have been completed, but it might not have got to the quality that we've got out there and then when Nancy Smith came what she was really interested in keeping it up. I think that helped too. The first couple of years it was in operation kind of set the stage. People wanted to go up there and enjoyed it and it kept the price down. It's still down isn't it?

DUNCAN: I think it's two dollars.

MAIN: It was a dollar a piece maybe two dollars a person.

DUNCAN: Two dollars they just raised it a couple of years ago. [Phone rings]

MAIN: That is still pretty darn reasonable. [Phone rings]

DUNCAN: Well, thank you very much.

MAIN: It was a pleasure. It brought back many memories. [BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: Well good.

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[End of Interview]

Biographical Information

RBRL OHD 005-05

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Occupation:

U.S. Forest Service 1970-1972

Soil Conservation Service 1972-1994

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Subject Analysis

RBRL OHD 005-05

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- Duties for the Soil Conservation Service
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- Budgeting and cost sharing with sponsoring agencies
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