

Smithsonian Folklife Festival

James White  
Retired Engineering Technician for the Forest Service  
Lufkin, Texas

Interviewer: Arlena Aragon-Husband  
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Arlena Aragon-Husband: Okay, we're recording.

James White: All right.

AH: And speak up, if you would, please.

JW: Okay. Hello. My name is James White in Lufkin, Texas here. I'm a recent retiree from US Forest Service in Lufkin Texas at the SO [Supervisor's Office]. I was born and raised and graduated from a school in the little East Texas town of Jasper, Texas, about fifty-five miles southeast of Lufkin. After graduation I went to Houston and worked there in the engineering field as an engineering technician. After forty years old I knew I was having to get my ducks in a row and think about retirement. Luckily I applied with the US Forest Service and I did get my foot in the front door and started out in the engineering and surveying field. I worked about 50 percent in the field and 50 percent in the office, which was real good, I liked that. This is a great area to work in compared to Houston - a lot of difference.

I did begin my work here in Lufkin at the SO in October the first in 1984. I originally was going to work until 65 and retire, but I decided to go ahead and retire at 62 years old at the end of 2003 December thirty-first - which I did - and enjoying retirement. My job here at the SO was as an engineering technician also. A little bit different than when I first started, but we've been advanced quite a bit in our computer field, and technology, and things were more electronically motivated than when I started, when most everything was manually - especially engineering and drafting.

I enjoyed my time in East Texas when I was growing up. Usually a person wants to go back to his roots, and I loved East Texas and Louisiana where all my family is from. I just recently got back from New Orleans - a four-day and four-night trip. I came back to East Texas and will start now enjoying my retirement, probably.

Growing up in East Texas was really different from growing up in a big city. I was used to the ways of the Forest Service anyway, so that's the reason I wanted to come back. But I loved engineering, surveying, all types of engineering, and all the things that we found in the forest, you know - different kinds of historical artifacts, things of that nature. A long time ago we didn't

think anything of it – we would leave it there, maybe pick it up and take it with you and keep it for a souvenir. Now, of course, we don't do that. Anything that we see we report back. I have reported some old things that I've found, some old springs. When I say springs I mean water springs – that was back in the revenue days. We found some old, old, old vehicles – goes way back - the trees are growing through them. Just all kinds of things - bones and stuff that could be interesting.

And I've really enjoyed my tenure at the US Forest Service. There's a lot of things that can be gained by that. I wasn't a forester. People have asked me about all the trees and stuff, and I don't know about the trees. I know about the engineering, the real good recreation areas we have. A lot of people go out and enjoy those. And the pretty lakes – all the other things that a lot of people don't think the Forest Service has.

I think that in the years that I've been there the Forest Service has improved quite a bit on its technology. We've travelled quite a bit on our schooling and education - things in the Forest Service. The fires – we've had some fires here. I didn't get much on the big fires but I have been on the fires here. The recent blowdown that we had several years ago, I was in it quite a bit - spent a lot of time with that. Also we had some floods – there's been a lot of flooding in East Texas, we've had to redo a lot of bridges and roads. That was interesting. We've had the shuttle disaster – that was here. Unfortunately I didn't get to work out in the field on the shuttle, but I made up for the difference in the office. I was the one who stayed in the office and tried to keep the office work up. So in regards to my tenure at US Forest Service over the nineteen years that I worked here, I've enjoyed it. I would suspect that everybody in the Forest Service likes it. I understand that there's a lot of people retiring, and it will probably be new technology with the new generation coming up. Thank you.