INTERVIEW OF THELMA SCHRANK
INTERVIEWERS ARE KAREN BREWSTER AND BARBARA CELLARIUS
SEPTEMBER 1, 2016
IN SLANA, ALASKA
PART 1

BARBARA CELLARIUS: This is Barbara Cellarius with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and I am here with Karen Brewster from the Oral History Program at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks and Thelma Schrank from Slana. And Thelma, thank you for letting us interview you today. We are here in Slana at Thelma's home. It is September 1, 2016 and we are going to be talking about -- especially about Thelma's experiences up here in Slana, but if you could start Thelma just talk a little bit about where you were born, where you grew up.

THELMA SCHRANK: I was born and raised in San Antonio. I went to a rural school, graduated. My mother always wanted to come to Alaska cause her sister lived here who actually lives at Nabesna. And so when my little sister graduated from high school, my family loaded up our vehicles and we came to Alaska thinking we were going to stay for six months and it has been forty-four plus years so far. So here I am in downtown Slana. I have been -- I managed a roadhouse for nine or ten years and then moved a couple miles down the road to this location. And I have taken weather for National Weather Service and then ultimately went to work for the Park Service.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So when did your family come up here? What year did --

THELMA SCHRANK: 1972. My sister graduated in the last of May and we arrived in Alaska at Slana, July 22, 1972.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what did your parents do up here?

THELMA SCHRANK: Well, my dad died when we were young so it was just my mother and she helped run Duffy's Roadhouse along with me for a long time and then she got tired of the roadhouse business and decided that she'd cook at the Little Chistochina School. And then by that time it is like oh, I don't want to do anything and so she kind of moved around. She lived in King Salmon and she also lived in Wyoming for a while. She had a fellow and so she kind of moved around with him. My brother went on to be a Alaska State Trooper and my sister moved to Anchorage the first fall of '72 because this was a little too remote for her. So she went to work in the legal profession. She went to work for the courthouse and then lawyers and on and on so.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so the family you were related to was --

THELMA SCHRANK: That is the Ellis' at the end of Nabesna Road.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. And was Mrs. Ellis?

THELMA SCHRANK: Yes, Lorene Ellis' is my aunt. She is my mother's sister.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I guess, when did you start working for the Park Service?

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And how did that happen?

THELMA SCHRANK: I started August 1983 because they had actually purchased land next door to me and the superintendent came to me and said, why don't you go to work for us? And I go, well, yeah, I guess I could do that. So I started out in a tent frame with two catalytic heaters and I'd go down in the early morning and light the heaters and shut the tarp and I'd come back here and get dressed more appropriately, but no uniforms back

when I first started. Didn't have a uniform and I had a great big old military desk and I wrote permits to people who didn't want them because it was brand new Park Service, new rules, ATV permits and so I wrote permits to people who didn't care for them.

KAREN BREWSTER: What is an ATV permit?

THELMA SCHRANK: All-terrain vehicle. It was so that they could take their ATV's off the road for hunting or berry pickin' or recreation whatever they wanted to do.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then were you also doing hunting permits?

THELMA SCHRANK: Back then we didn't have hunting permits because we hadn't gotten into the subsistence portion of regulations. So it was just general hunting permits, although people knew they couldn't hunt in the Park there were at that time I believe that we didn't even -- we didn't allow any hunting in the Park. I can't remember back that far, but they could hunt in the Preserve. But it just changed a lot of the real estate around to things that people could do and couldn't do.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Yeah. And what was the response from other people in the community to the fact that you were now working for the Park Service?

THELMA SCHRANK: It was more like what are you doing working for the enemy? And I told them that if they would deposit a check to my account every two weeks and pay my insurance and set me up a retirement plan that I would be glad to quit. And some of them -- a lot of people didn't like the fact that I worked for the Park, but then again we kind of put the reverse on it to where wouldn't it be nice for a local to be able to infiltrate for lack of a better word tell the Park Service what locals want or what they really feel because they wouldn't really do that in an open meeting. They would just rant and rave and carry on rather than getting to the point and how can we fix it. So it has worked out pretty good.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah, you would have conversations with your friends and neighbors probably over dinner or you know what the –

THELMA SCHRANK: Well that or there would be information that come out going the Park Service did this and this and this. And I could go no, that's not how it happened. It was this and this and this and could clear up a lot of controversial things by being able to know what was going on with the Park Service versus the community or whatever. So I think it worked out really well, you know. After a while they went, oh, yeah, it is not bad. She can tell us stuff and any of the things that I relay to them were -- was information that was actually available. They just didn't read what was written or read between the lines to know what it meant. They were just confused with language.

KAREN BREWSTER: But I say it must have worked the other way that you could take local interests to the Park and they would listen to you?

THELMA SCHRANK: Correct. It worked out both ways. So it was sort of like oh, well, we didn't know they felt like this or we didn't know this happened or that happened. And so for the most part you could put out fire before it actually got to be a big blaze just by being able to carry information back and forth between the two parties.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And did your -- when your family moved up, did they purchase property here?

THELMA SCHRANK: No, actually I am the only one that purchased property cause my brother went running off to join the troopers and my sister went to Anchorage and my mom worked around and she lived on some of the property that Ellis owned but she never

purchased property. I was the only one that purchased any land and that was this property right here.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how old were you in '72 when you came up?

THELMA SCHRANK: Twenty-four.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so at age 24, what did you think you wanted to do with your life, did you know?

THELMA SCHRANK: I was going back to Texas and get married. That didn't work out real well.

KAREN BREWSTER: So why did you stay up here?

THELMA SCHRANK: Alaska has a way of getting a hold of you and holding on and I liked it, you know, I love the mountains and I just liked everything about it, slower, lower pace, not so fast moving and so it was nice. And my sister loved it. My brother loved it. We all fell in love with Alaska. It is just I'm the only one that stayed around here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And did you do any work with the Ellis with their outfitting operation?

THELMA SCHRANK: Not so much there. I did cook like the first summer, but after that they had purchased Duffy's Roadhouse up on the Tok Cutoff and I managed that for like nine years. So that is pretty much a full-time job there. Cause we were open seven days a week, six to ten, six in the morning, ten at night and just minimal amount of help. And it was one of those things where there was a gas and food and propane and groceries and bar and liquor store. So it was pretty busy just keeping up with that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that must have been like the center of everything here?

THELMA SCHRANK: It was very busy because we were there in Duffy's long before they had VHS movies or satellite TV, so every two weeks at Duffy's on Friday night it would be movie night. And so everybody came from like Mentasta Village and Chistochina and we did have some people that came as far as Gakona to have a hamburger and watch the movie. And those would be late nights because after the movie was over well then people would stay around and they would drink beer and play the jukebox or play pool. And then you would have to clean up and then you have to be -- go to bed and then you wake up and be open at six o'clock in the morning, so. There was a lot of truck traffic in that time period so it was pretty busy.

KAREN BREWSTER: And were there telephones in the area or was Duffy's the only one with a phone?

THELMA SCHRANK: Duffy's had a phone and Mentasta Lodge had a phone and Postys at Chistochina so there was the three main businesses along the Tok Cutoff and those were the only phones for years and it was those were party lines.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, really!

THELMA SCHRANK: Yeah, so you could sit there and you would have to wait and wait and wait while somebody was yacking to their neighbor or their relative stateside and then hang up and hope you got the phone next. So we had a party line.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: When did the phones come in where individuals had phones?

THELMA SCHRANK: Ah, you know I don't really remember because we had Duffy's phone for a long, long time. It was years, quite a few years and then when I moved down here phones were -- they were putting phones in because the first Park Service phone was actually in my house here in this house and the phone would ring in the afternoon or at

night or days off or whatever and I would answer the phone and take messages and then if they needed to get a hold of the district ranger, they called the Park Service phone or my phone and I'd take a message and go run down the district ranger and go, hey, you need to attend to this because we didn't have radios back then and so it was just the communication was just this telephone and then leaving messages and that was it.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what years did you run Duffy's?

THELMA SCHRANK: '72 through '80.

KAREN BREWSTER: So phones must have been coming in right around 1980 then?

THELMA SCHRANK: Yeah, right about in there and then shortly after that time VHS tapes or Beta tapes came out and everybody was getting VHS tapes so the movie kind of went down the drain. And it was -- that was a shame because it was a community get together and everybody knew that the movie was Friday night and so they would start showing up for the movie and we had benches and they would sit on benches and you would play the first reel and then, excuse me, during the intermission you could go out and you get a ice cream cone or you could order a hamburger or you could order another beer or whatever and then you take your stuff back in there and you -- we didn't do popcorn, but it was candy bars and snacks and chips and that sort of stuff. So it was a gathering place and then we would have the movies on Friday night and then we would have a matinee on Sunday afternoon. So that if you didn't like the big crowd on Friday night then you could come back. And we had all sorts of movies because you would order them from Pictures, Incorporated in Anchorage and they would send out the big box with the film and we had 16-mm camera. And we shared with Ellis because they wouldn't drive 45 miles one way to come and watch the movie. They would take the movie back there and they would watch it and then we dropped it off at Sportsmen and Sportsmen watched it and then we would get the movie back and then we would mail it in and then we would get another one in a couple of weeks. So it kind of, you know, went around.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: How has the community of Slana changed in the years that you have lived here?

THELMA SCHRANK: Ah, all the old timers have died off, the people that come in here and homesteaded around here. And when I say homestead, I mean really homesteaded back in the sixties rather than the homestead area we have out now that was done in 1984. Different type of people. Ah, not to pigeon hole folks but they were people that had jobs or had skills and utilized those for whatever. If they were working on a pump station or for DOT or whatever, compared to a lot of the folks that are out in the community now that are on some type of public assistance or ones that work seasonal jobs during the summer and then collect unemployment in the winter. So they were just completely different folks.

KAREN BREWSTER: So those people who were here in the sixties homesteaded what did they do to make a living besides going away? They didn't do farming on these homesteads?

THELMA SCHRANK: No, they -- most of them were construction workers I think or commercial fishermen. So they had a short time span and it would be like the men were the one that did the work that went away and did the construction or the commercial fishin' and the women stayed there and picked the berries and canned the fish or whatever. But most of them worked -- I would believe construction more than anything.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did they do any trapping in the winter?

THELMA SCHRANK: They did trap in the winter and there is some of the women that were out -- the wives trapped also, so they did depend on trapping a lot for economic gain.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Are there any particular memorable stories that you have from your early days here in Slana?

THELMA SCHRANK: Roadhouse days were long and hard and then I moved down here and, of course, it was completely different cause I didn't have to be at a job for at a certain amount of time, but I did take weather observations like 15 times a day for aviation weather and so I had to -- I stayed here and pretty much did that it is like every hour. So that was a nice job that I could do at home and still make money.

KAREN BREWSTER: They paid you for the weather observations?

THELMA SCHRANK: Uh-huh. They paid me for the observations and then I went to work for the Park Service so and the Park was good about letting me do weather observations at the same time. So I had -- my plate was full. I had plenty to do.

KAREN BREWSTER: I would think those roadhouse days there was some pretty wild times at that roadhouse?

THELMA SCHRANK: There was some good times. There were, but people were really good. It was like their entertainment every two weeks. It was nice to have the movies or have meetings or whatever like every two weeks rather than every Friday night because people saved up their money and then they could spend it like every two weeks or they would come once a month some of them. But it was nothing for us to have 50 or 60 people that would come in and watch the movie.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was just thinking the local bar, you know.

THELMA SCHRANK: We really didn't have any trouble because they knew that if they caused trouble that they would get eighty sixed, kicked out of the bar and that was the happening place, the fun place and it is like well if you get eighty sixed that means you can't come back and so the rest of your family can, but you can't, you know. And they didn't like that so they pretty much behaved their selves and you could kind of point your finger and go, hey, settle down and people were really good about that. We actually didn't have much of a problem. You know, one or two fights, but not bad. Nothing that we had to call the troopers for. Nothing that we couldn't take care of ourselves in house.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well I can see if I were sitting there and you came over and I'd straighten up pretty fast.

THELMA SCHRANK: They were all pretty good, you know, and they were respectful because they were.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, they knew you.

THELMA SCHRANK: They knew me. I had been there and I didn't treat one person better than another, treated everybody the same. I tried to be kind to everybody. If I could help them out, I'd certainly do that and they knew that whatever I said is what I meant and that I didn't go back on my word. And if I wasn't the bartender and there was somebody else that was working, they knew that I would back the bartender and it is sort of like if he doesn't want to wait on you, I'm sorry. You have to make nice with him, not with me. I'm not going to go over the bartender. He's the guy that has to put up with you late at night when I'm not around so. We had -- it was pretty good. We didn't really have any troubles.

KAREN BREWSTER: And part of this was during pipeline construction days. Was there a lot of extra traffic through there?

THELMA SCHRANK: There was, but we really didn't have a lot of bar business because all we had at that time was just beer and wine and there weren't wine drinkers around. So we just carried like three kinds of beer was all and there were truckers going up and down the road all the time because they were hauling lots of -- they were hauling fuel up to Tok. They were hauling supplies to the border and they would make trips and then come back, you know. And Duffy's was the perfect place for truck traffic because it is flat. It is at the top of the hill. So they would come up and the CB was the big thing back in then -- that day. So they would go ahead and, you know, they would be 15 miles down the road, put me a hamburger on, I'll be there in a minute. You know, and we pretty much catered to them because they were such good business. If people see trucks at your café, they usually stop cause they know the foods good. That's an old saying whenever you are driving around, even nowadays if you see a place that has got lots of truck traffic, it is usually because the foods good or the service is good or the people are good to you.

KAREN BREWSTER: Good to know.

THELMA SCHRANK: You know, when you're traveling just keep that in mind.

KAREN BREWSTER: Good to know.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: You talked about how as people started to have more home entertainment, VCR's and that kind of thing.

THELMA SCHRANK: Uh-huh.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: That things maybe tapered off a little bit at Duffy's?

THELMA SCHRANK: Just different kind of clientele I guess. We didn't have -- we didn't do movies anymore, but then we got into VHS tape rentals. You know, where one door closes, open a window type thing. So then we started renting out VHS tapes. Just different. Anything you could do to make a dollar.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, if people weren't coming to Duffy's as much, did that change the community of Slana are people staying home more and that changes relationships?

THELMA SCHRANK: Well, I think it does because like nowadays they either have DVD's that they get through Netflix or they have satellite TV and so people don't get out like they used to. Some of the neighbors have talked about how they used to have parties at individual people's houses and it wasn't for any particular reason. It was just that, hey, we feel like having a party, you know. And so then you'd call up or dial up or whatever and come to the house, potluck, or we're going to play poker or whatever and people would do that. And then I think that as we've progressed in modern technology that our social skills are lacking. We don't get out and mingle like we used to. I do my mingling at the Park Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: But there you are mingling with visitors.

THELMA SCHRANK: I am, but it is --

KAREN BREWSTER: But it is local people there too.

THELMA SCHRANK: Local people come in. It works really well because we know all the locals that do come in, but you'd be surprised talking to visitors in the way that we are able to do because it is a small ranger station and not a big visitor's center. They may not know me and I may not know them, but I might happen to know somebody that knows them or knows where they live and so you can carry on a conversation. Sometimes they

stay around and visit for quite a while, but they feel comfortable doing that and they are always -- and they get lots of information about the Park whether it is personal stories or what's going on or issues or whatever. So it is pretty nice. They get to learn -- I think they learn more about the area and about the Park because we can give them personalized service.

KAREN BREWSTER: And when you started at the Park, were you the front person meeting/greeting visitors? That is what you did when you started?

THELMA SCHRANK: I was the only one for years. They started out with the tent frame and then they brought in a couple buildings and they made one building into a ranger station and that front office was small and had the district ranger's desk and my desk and a couple chairs. And we had one stand for postcards. That was it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you say something about a small supply closet?

THELMA SCHRANK: We had a very small supply closet that we kept paper and stuff in. That was supposed to be the bathroom and, of course, we didn't have running water. All we had was outhouses, but that was what was planned and then in '94, I believe, the building burned and then we got our local maintenance fellows built a garage and the current ranger station. So it was really sad to say a blessing in disguise that the building burned because then we got a big office. And we are busting at the seams like as it is right now, but it is so much different than what it was. When I started if we got 25 people that stopped in a month that was a big amount and now by the end of this year we will have had like 5,000 people that have stopped in.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you are opening May --

THELMA SCHRANK: Well, I started – I start in mid-April, five days a week and then Memorial Day we switch to seven days a week and we are open through the end of September for hunting season.

KAREN BREWSTER: So why do you think that has changed, that increase in visitation?

THELMA SCHRANK: People are becoming aware of the Park now, whether it be folks that do hiking manuals and they will come in and they will hike and then they will put it down are -- the way the media is anymore with Twitter and Facebook and all of that sort of stuff more people are becoming aware. Although there are still a lot that will stop in and go, geez, we didn't even know this place existed. Well, I have never heard of that Park before and the Park is 36 years old.

KAREN BREWSTER: And millions of acres.

THELMA SCHRANK: Millions of acres, but a lot of people are very complimentary about the Park because it is still wilderness and still remote and there is not big crowds and there are not buses and there is not a lot of congestion and so they like the quiet, remote, seclusion that they have even though the road is not the very, very best it is still something that they can travel and get to a destination.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: I wanted to ask. You talked about how some of the original folks who lived in this area were homesteaders.

THELMA SCHRANK: Uh-huh.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And that there was a different kind of homesteading that occurred in the late 1980's. Can you talk a little bit about how that affected the community here?

THELMA SCHRANK: In 1984 when they opened it up to homesteading, it was advertised in papers and magazines and Paul Harvey has come to the Last Frontier, come to Alaska,

this is the last homesteading and it is free land. Well, a lot of people that didn't have anything in the places that they lived whether it be California or Idaho or Wyoming or Texas or New Mexico, wherever, saw this opportunity for free land. And so they came up here and it was like the Grapes of Wrath. I mean you would see them with the washtub tied on top of the station wagon, dirty kids, and all their belongings piled into the car. And when they would go to the post office on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday or Tuesday and Thursday it started out as, they had all their belongings with them because the people that were their neighbors would steal their stuff. So they came with all their stuff in the car and they went back with all their stuff in the car. A lot of them were on public assistance and so they -- there is no bank around here and they couldn't afford to actually drive to Tok or drive to Glennallen to cash their check and so they cashed it at the post office with money orders. So for probably five, six, seven years at least the common currency around Slana was money orders. They'd go to the store and they would leave their money order blank and they would give the money order to Denny at the store or to Duffy's for groceries or beer or whatever and they would just leave it blank. And then those businesses whether it be Duffy's or the store or Postys, wherever, they left it blank. So whenever the gas truck or the grocery truck or whatever came up you just handed over these blank hundred dollar or fifty dollar money orders. It was currency around here at that time.

It was really weird, but as the first couple of winters the thing with homesteading for five acres you had to live on it five months a year for five years in a habitable dwelling. One of the dwellings was a house that was built with bales of hay. That was his little abode. Another gal with kids built one out of Visqueen. She had a frame and I am talking about it was 25 and 30 below and she was living in this Visqueen tent, house. Another guy who didn't have a lot of smarts I guess build a cabin out of creosote telephone poles because they were putting in new under line telephone wires or telephone lines up on the highway and you could have the telephone poles for free. The cross members were free, but you had to take the 15 strands of wire and roll it up. They didn't want you to just take the poles and leave the wire. So this guy saw a gold mine so he went and gathered up all these creosote telephone poles and built him a little cabin, struck a match to his wood stove and creosote just run off the logs. I mean he just didn't have any idea of the land that is back there where a lot of homes or houses are built they built out of spruce logs.

KAREN BREWSTER: The black spruce.

THELMA SCHRANK: They were like this big around. They are what locals call pecker poles. They were just like that. BLM did not give section line access and so they had -- it just looked like a deck of cards and there was 350 filings, something like that at the get-go. And that was quite troublesome for the Park because by that time we were into talking about subsistence and doing subsistence qualifications and at one time they talked about excluding Slana North and South from subsistence rights and that was muddled over time and time again, every meeting it was the same thing. And that finally just kind of went on the back burner and of those 350 filings, there is probably not more than 30 or 40 people that live out here now out of those filings. There is a lot of people that got patent to their land, but left because there was any economy and then they had the welfare reform and so they didn't have a way to get any kind of income and so they moved on. So now it is just pretty much the diehards that have a summer job, most of them, summer job or they

work for the Park Service or they work for DOT or they commercial fish or they work in the hospitality end of things whether it is cleaning rooms or cooking or whatever. So it's -- the whole dynamics of the neighborhood has changed and not to where if everybody in Slana shot a subsistence animal I don't think it would hurt the population. There is just not that many people and, of course, just because you have a hunting license doesn't mean you're successful. So it has all worked out, but at one time they were talking about excluding Slana North and South from subsistence use within the Park.

KAREN BREWSTER: And people in the community were not happy about that?

THELMA SCHRANK: Oh, no, because they wanted to hunt. They didn't want to be excluded and part of their reasoning was well, we live here and we are out here and the Park didn't really have a mandate to where you had to live here and still don't. That you have to live here X amount of months or years before you qualify for subsistence. You have to have an Alaska hunting license for which you are qualified and then if you move out into this area and it is going to be your primary domicile residence then you qualify.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did the people of Slana who were already here how did they feel about these 1980's homesteaders and their different lifestyle?

THELMA SCHRANK: Oh, well, there was, you know, animosity amongst everybody and it was more like you stay over here and I will stay over here, you know, it kind of separated a community for a while, but it is like anything else it has just kind of the community is settled down and there is not that problem.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you feel that way when you came as a newcomer in '72?

THELMA SCHRANK: No. Everybody was, oh, glad to see you. Welcome to the community and shake your hand, glad to see you, you know. Oh, you going to be running Duffy's, oh, good. Well, we will be up there for dinner Friday night or whatever. They were accepted, but it wasn't a huge influx of people coming in. It was only four.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

THELMA SCHRANK: You know and everybody was spread out and for the most part people were glad to have new people in the community. I look at it now and I think about what -- how I was when I was 24 years old and going, man, these people sure are old around here and now I are one. I'm like the old timer in the community. There is very few people that live out here that has been here longer than I have and that makes me feel really old.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you, Mary Frances DeHart, who else has lived here as long?

THELMA SCHRANK: I've lived here longer than Mary Frances, but Nancy Dooley (phonetic) and the Taylors down at Grizzly Lake. That's pretty much -- that's the old timers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I guess the Ellis there --

THELMA SCHRANK: And Ellis, yeah of course. They have been there since 1960.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

THELMA SCHRANK: But yeah, that's pretty much the old timers. And then I look around -- you look at the people that come up with the homestead in 1984. They have been here a long time now too.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And are there many of the original homesteaders left?

THELMA SCHRANK: There's -- I don't think so, maybe 10 or 15 families, if that.

KAREN BREWSTER: By original homesteaders you mean in the 80's or --

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Yes.

THELMA SCHRANK: In the 80's, uh-huh.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: In the 80's homesteading
THELMA SCHRANK: Yep.
KAREN BREWSTER: And that land that was BLM land you said.
THELMA SCHRANK: It was BLM.
KAREN BREWSTER: Was it all boggy black spruce land or was it quality land?
THELMA SCHRANK: No, it was pretty swampy and the road that goes into Four Mile now is actually on Park land and it started out to where there was no road and then so they made -- they had back then they didn't have four-wheeler ATV's. They had three wheel ATV's and so somebody started making a trail and then somebody else and then first thing you know somebody drove and it got to be a problem to where it was easier for the Park to permit them that road than it was to post it and try to keep them from going in there because of all the land that was there it was the drier section. And so it is just down one side as you drive in and then after that it is not on Park land. But we did that so that we could control and when I say we I mean the Park could control what kind of culverts they put in or what kind of construction that they did for like the creeks because it crosses Rufus Creek and there are fish in that creek. So we wanted to have some kind of control over what kind of culverts and what kind of construction was done to make sure that that didn't ruin the fish habitat there.
KAREN BREWSTER: It seems very open minded for the Park Service to allow ATV use and a road to be built.
THELMA SCHRANK: Well, whenever you have one district ranger and one gal in the office there is not much you can do to -- to alleviate that problem. You just don't have -- there is not enough people and you would have to have somebody stand guard down there and it is sort of like you might as well just go ahead and let's permit it and at least have some kind of control over the width or the type surface or the culverts or whatever rather than just willy-nilly through there and then that way it is a decent road and people can get in and out and they used safety as a factor because if there were a fire or emergency, at least they could get in and out the road. But all those kids when it first started out before there was a road in there, there is no school bus that goes back into the settlement area. Those kids walked three or four miles out to catch the school bus to go to school. There were some pretty tough little kids.
BARBARA CELLARIUS: In the winter?
THELMA SCHRANK: In the winter cause their parents didn't walk out with them.
KAREN BREWSTER: And those were the days when it was still 40, 50 below?
THELMA SCHRANK: There was some days there was pretty darn cold, you know, and you'd send your kid off. I don't know how they did it because I would want to know that my eight year old or ten year old got to the bus stop all right. But for the most part the kids would carry a gun with them, little kids were carrying rifles in case like springtime in case they ran into a bear or something. I don't know what would have happened if they would have had to shoot one, but fortunately we never had to face that. But the district ranger spent a lot of time doing, excuse me, first aid or domestic calls because we were closer than the troopers. And they -- people recognized the Park or the Park Service rangers because you wore a uniform and you had a badge that you were the law in the land. And you could find out who had poached a moose or there were times that Fish & Game was up here three or four times a week, Fish & Wildlife Protection, cause

somebody had poached a caribou or poached a moose or something. And you always knew when somebody had killed something because they would go to the little local store and buy a gallon of barbecue sauce, you know. It was cause well you cooked the ribs first. Have to have barbecue sauce. So it was pretty easy. Oh, well, we know Joe Smudt got one because he came and got barbecue sauce.

KAREN BREWSTER: A different kind of rangering.

THELMA SCHRANK: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it is interesting. You say how the ranger -- they didn't like the Park being here, but then once it was here they probably appreciated having that ranger here to help with those --

THELMA SCHRANK: Well, the troopers certainly did and if you cut something, you know, it was at least they knew that we had first aid and that we could help them and perhaps save them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So they did come to appreciate having somebody around?

THELMA SCHRANK: I had a district ranger one time that told me it had been really, really busy with a lot of stuff. It was during hunting season. It was really, really busy and he had worked a lot of hours and so I tried to make sure that if somebody needed something, I'd -- it was my job to decide if it was immediate or if it will be okay for a day or two and I had this one day and I go, man, this is really important. So I called the district ranger and he answered the phone and he said it better be burning or bleeding. Yes, sir, it is pretty important. Okay, what is it, burning or bleeding?

KAREN BREWSTER: And was it?

THELMA SCHRANK: It was important and he needed to attend to it, but that was part of what I saw as my job is to make sure that I could give him an afternoon off or whatever if I saw that it, well, that's pretty important, but, nah, it is not that important. You know, I would try to very important and not so much to forget it later on in the season and that was part of the job is within the division I work in is to try to help those guys out.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So I wanted to ask a little bit about sports hunting and how it fits into, especially, the guided sport hunting, how that fits into the community here along Slana, Nabesna Road.

THELMA SCHRANK: For the most part there is really not any guided hunting along Nabesna Road anymore, excuse me. Years ago when I first come to the area, Lee Hancock was the guide and Don DeHart, but they were the guides that operated along and actually hunted along the Nabesna Road or in this corridor so to speak. Others did more flying and would fly out and go across the river or something like that. And then over the course of the years there has been so much more sport hunting by resident hunters that has come into the area that there is really not any guided hunting going on along the Nabesna Road at all.

KAREN BREWSTER: So where are they going?

THELMA SCHRANK: They will go -- the Park is divided or the Park and Preserve and obviously only sport hunting is allowed in the Preserve is divided up into guide areas and so those guides have to compete with prospectuses for guide areas and then in turn they have that as exclusive to guiding, but that doesn't keep air taxi or resident hunters or whomever for coming in and guiding -- or --

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Hunting.

THELMA SCHRANK: Hunting in that same area not guiding.
KAREN BREWSTER: Keeps other guides out, but not hunters out?
THELMA SCHRANK: It keeps other -- that is supposed to be the theory.
KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.
THELMA SCHRANK: Keeps other guides out. In exchange for that right to guide in the Preserve, they also pay three percent of their gross to the Park Service for that privilege, but resident hunters can still come in, air taxis can still come in. Those aren't regulated like a guide is. A guide is still, as far as I know, regulated to X amount of clients per year and that was done way back the second superintendent I think, Dick Martin. They did a three year average and if you had 15 hunters as your three year average, that is what they gave you for your guide area in the prospectuses. Some guides had as many as 40 because they had a lot of caribou hunters, etcetera and so they could still take that many according to their prospectus. So the guides have moved out, stretched out and for the most part the hunting that is done along the Nabesna Road is Alaska resident sport hunters or subsistence hunters.
KAREN BREWSTER: And so for those guide areas was it one guide per area or was each of those areas shared by a few different guides?
THELMA SCHRANK: For the most part they are only one guide per area. There is a couple different places that have overlapping and I believe that whenever they go to do the prospectus again that that will probably change.
BARBARA CELLARIUS: To try to reduce that overlap.
THELMA SCHRANK: And they don't have that overlap because it winds up that it is sort of like well if Joe is going to hunt there, I'm going to hunt there first and I will kill everything out and, you know, then I'll go over to my exclusive area. So I think they are trying to alleviate that discrepancy or that problem.
KAREN BREWSTER: So the guides want to have an exclusive area?
THELMA SCHRANK: They do.
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.
THELMA SCHRANK: But we, the Park, and this is personal opinion only not speaking for the Park Service, I believe that we need to make an adjustment to air taxi operators cause I really feel like they have free range and they can go and dump six or eight hunters into one drainage rather than what a guide tries to do, most of the guides that I know, they want to farm. Go, okay, this drainage will support two sheep this year and then we can leave it next year and then the following year we can take two or three out of the same spot. But if you have an air taxi operator, he is just interested in coming in and dropping the hunter off in a drainage where there is sheep or where the guy has asked to go not taking into consideration that the guide is not hunting that area because he is letting it, the sheep evolve and get larger, you know, so that you have a better growth. So I think that one of these years perhaps we will have to see how that works out to try to put a hold on air taxi operators.
KAREN BREWSTER: It is interesting the difference that, you know, as a guide you are regulated and you have to be certified and a registered guide, but the air taxi can just drop off any hunter. They have to be an Alaska hunter don't they or?
THELMA SCHRANK: Well or you can do second degree of kindred if you are a sheep hunter, father, son or brother, father, whatever. The other thing is that that guide has got to make

sure all his paperwork is in order and he is paying three percent of the gross. Sheep hunters nowadays are paying fifteen, sixteen thousand dollars for a sheep hunt.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow!

THELMA SCHRANK: An air taxi operator comes in and gives $150 to the Park for a yearly permit and that's it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

THELMA SCHRANK: And he is not charging air taxi rates. He is charging two or three thousand dollars for that set out when normally if he landed in that same spot, it would be $400. So, but he is not having to pay that high percentage that three percent.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because he is not guiding. He is just dropping off hunters.

THELMA SCHRANK: Correct, but he is till affecting the resource.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, definitely the way you are describing it for sure.

THELMA SCHRANK: Yeah and I think that is an unfair. Obviously you can't -- what -- the way that I understand the story is that the Park can't tell resident hunters they can't come in and hunt and if they choose to fly with their brother or they choose to fly with an air taxi, they still have the right to come in and hunt.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it is only nonresidents who need to have a guide for sheep hunting?

THELMA SCHRANK: Correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do they need to have a guide for caribou and moose?

THELMA SCHRANK: No. They have to have a guide for sheep, grizzly or brown bear and mountain goats.

KAREN BREWSTER: But a resident does not?

THELMA SCHRANK: A resident does not.

KAREN BREWSTER: I do find it interesting though. I have heard that about some of the old-time guides, you know, back in the 30's, 40's and they were using horses and things that they were sort of managing the population. They were very conscious that is their income that is their resource.

THELMA SCHRANK: Correct, but the population -- when I came to Alaska in '72 was probably 450,000 people.

KAREN BREWSTER: In the state of Alaska --

THELMA SCHRANK: And now in Alaska now it is like seven hundred and some odd thousand. So we have doubled our population pretty much and just a lot more hunting pressure. There is also the part that plays about the different landowners, whether it be federal or state or Native land because there is a lot of land around nowadays even within this National Park that is taken up that is either Native land or University land or private, whatever, so we are restricting -- I mean our hunting grounds have gotten smaller too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

THELMA SCHRANK: Population larger, hunting ground smaller.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Have you seen changes in the wildlife populations in your time here?

THELMA SCHRANK: Yes. The Mentasta caribou herd for one thing. I have personal knowledge of that because I did and have hunted the Mentasta herd, but that was back in the 70's and early 80's when -- (phone ringing)

End of Part 1