

Transcript for “Justin Pullin, Deputy Chief of Staff of the National Weather Service in Washington, DC”

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

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Kelly Savoie:

Hello, Clear Skies Ahead listeners. This is Kelly Savoie, and I'm hoping you can take a moment of your time to rate and review our show wherever you listen to podcasts. We have produced over 60 episodes and you can help us reach even more individuals that will benefit from the diverse experiences shared by our guests. Thanks so much for listening, and I hope you enjoy this new episode.

Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series, Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond. I'm Kelly Savoie, and I'm here with Emma Collins, and we'll be your hosts. We're excited to give you the opportunity to step into the shoes of an expert working in weather, water, and climate sciences.

Emma Collins:

We're happy to introduce today's guest, Justin Pullin, Deputy Chief of Staff of the National Weather Service in Washington, DC. Welcome, Justin. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Justin Pullin:

Thank you, Emma. Thank you, Kelly. Nice to be here.

Kelly Savoie:

Justin, when did you become interested in meteorology, and how did it influence your educational path?

Justin Pullin:

So, my interest in meteorology actually came probably a little bit later than most meteorologists would answer. So, I was 12-years-old whenever I first really got the weather bug, if you will, and it was the summer after my sixth grade year where I was sitting down watching TV, and a show about tornadoes came on TLC back in the day where TLC actually showed educational stuff. So it was actually a four-part series on tornadoes and severe weather, and the show that particularly pulled me in was the story about the May 3rd, 1999 tornado outbreak, and in particular the tornado that hit Moore, Oklahoma. And the program really went into detail and took that accounts of all of the people that were working various parts of the event from folks at Storm Prediction Center that put out the outlook that day, the folks in the warning forecast office that were putting out those warnings, to the folks on TV, and then the boots on the ground.

So, the TV stations had storm chasers out that were tracking the tornado as it tracked into central Oklahoma. So that really pulled my interest in and I wanted to understand more about what went into thunderstorms and why tornadoes happened and those sorts of things. So, fast forward to a couple of short months later to October, 2002, hurricane Lily approached the Gulf Coast, and I'm from southern Louisiana, and it made direct landfall in Iberia Parish where I'm from. And that really just pushed me over the edge, and I said at that point as a seventh grader that I wanted to study meteorology so that I can understand these things more and make it a career from there.

Kelly Savoie:

Wow. And you get to experience it too. First you watched it on TV, and it sounds fascinating to show how they really got involved with all the aspects of it, and then you were able to witness it for yourself. So did you know that you could go to school to study meteorology at that point?

Justin Pullin:

So that fall, I actually had an assignment, and it's funny, because my mom was a seventh grade math teacher, and I just so happened to be in her class, but one of the assignments that we had was kind of exploring career options. And at that point I was like, "Well, I want to be a meteorologist, so I'm going to actually look into that and see what I need to study to become a meteorologist." And I looked into that. I learned that there was one school in Louisiana, the University of Louisiana at Monroe, that offered atmospheric sciences as an option. And from there, I had my sights set on going to school to be a meteorologist. And I knew that I needed to be good at math, I needed to have a good background in physics, and a little bit of chemistry to be able to get the degree, so I really focused in on my schoolwork. Not that I wasn't already doing that, but I knew the things that I needed to be able to take the next step once I graduated high school and got into college.

Emma Collins:

And this was seventh grade?

Justin Pullin:

Yes.

Emma Collins:

I know, yeah!

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah!

Emma Collins:

You knew all this? I love how you started with that you're like, "Well, I came to it later," and then you said you were 12.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah, I mean... And you had really... You were lucky because your mom was a math teacher, so there you go. You need any tutoring, "Hey mom, help me. Can you help me with this calculus class?"

Justin Pullin:

She always joked whenever I was in college that she laid down the foundation for math, but once I got into the upper-level math classes, she's like, "You're on your own. Go to tutoring."

Emma Collins:

That's awesome. That's so cool that you knew that from seventh grade, you knew where you wanted to go and what you wanted to do. And were there any opportunities that you pursued inside or outside of school once you got there that helped secure a job in your profession?

Justin Pullin:

So there were. Growing up, and it's my origin story, I have one of those personalities where I get interested in something, I really take a deep dive into it and want to understand everything about it. So that aspect about myself kind of helped to drive me and kind of kept the flame going throughout high school, because I didn't really have mentors, really, in terms of meteorologists in the area. I was able to pull one of the local TV meteorologists into my career connections class in high school to come and talk about careers, which turned me into the most popular kid in school for a day, so that was interesting. But in terms of people that looked like me and other opportunities locally to really jump in and shadow and do those sorts of things, that really wasn't there for me in high school. So fast forwarding to my freshman year at ULM, I got into the coursework and into the entry-level atmospheric science classes.

And my professor at the time, he had done storm-chasing off and on and had taken students so that the students can take what they learn in the classroom and apply it out to the field. So my second semester, he took a group of students out and I was one of them, and I thought it was really fascinating. We saw a couple of storms, no tornadoes...none of that. So it was kind of a bust in terms of a forecast, but it was still fascinating to be able to see thunderstorms in a different light, having had the baseline education at that point. So that was an early opportunity for me. Also my freshman year, there was another hurricane. Monroe is inland, so there wasn't the huge impacts, but the rain bands from Hurricane Gustav actually trained over Monroe Louisiana, and I think they received somewhere around a foot of rain in the 24-hour period, which caused a lot of flash flooding.

So that led me to the research avenue. And I really got into research my second semester of school, and then continuing into my sophomore year, I got involved in a research program at ULM geared toward freshmen and sophomores and participated in that, and then continued to grow as a researcher later on throughout my career at ULM, but pivoting my studies toward tornadoes and storm modes and looking at the country from that perspective. And that led me to be able to put together research and present at conferences like AMS. As I was still in school and working with my research advisor at the time, we put together a proposal that got me funding from NSF to continue my research through the end of my time at ULM. So those were neat opportunities for me to really develop my skills in a different way that you can't really do just doing the coursework, and also open up some other doors as well, including formal field research, which kind of came through a little bit of networking with previous ULM alum.

Kelly Savoie:

That's really great that you had all those opportunities for undergrad. And it's also great that you had professors that introduced you to professional conferences and to be able to present papers so early on. That's really cool. So when you graduated, what was your first job in the field and how did you end up where you are now?

Justin Pullin:

So my first job in the field was at AccuWeather, working in their Wichita office. So I believe they're now known as AccuWeather for Business. At the time as AccuWeather Enterprise Solutions. And my journey there was a bit interesting. Despite the fact that I had plenty of opportunities in terms of the research element, I knew pretty early on in my collegiate career that I wanted to do operational meteorology. So that kind of influenced the research that I did, which also influenced where the path that I wanted to

look at. So I was very much looking at going into the National Weather Service out of college, but at the time, what's now known as the Pathways program, it was actually going through a transition. So they used to be called SCEP. I think it was something along the lines of student career employment opportunities or something along those lines.

But that program was going away and we were transitioning into what's now known as the Pathways program. So there was a significant chunk of time in my college career where that wasn't an option for me. So I was a December graduate from ULM. So after the semester where I was supposed to graduate was the semester that I got an internship at AccuWeather for Business. So I moved to Wichita for the summer, which was great. I was able to go on my own and learn a lot, and I was able to go out and see storms happen because you're living in the middle of Tornado Alley at that point. And I learned quite a bit and really set myself up to get that first job after graduation. So I went back to Monroe and finished the fall semester and interviewed for the job and was fortunate enough to get it and started at the end of January the following year.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, wow. And so when you did the internship where you had to move, did they help you out at all with finding a place to live or were you on your own for that?

Justin Pullin:

So they have a pretty mature program for interns. They do the things where they send along the welcome packet and they get you in touch with the staff there. And at the time, the staff was very much young. I'm talking like 20-somethings and early 30-somethings. So everyone was super helpful in terms of telling you what places to look in, what places to maybe avoid, and some tips and tricks. There were folks willing to help me move in. Not that I moved with a lot, because I was just there for the summer, but everyone was very kind and helpful.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, that's awesome. After you worked at AccuWeather, how did you transition into a government?

Justin Pullin:

So, I guess the short answer to that is a bit of luck. So when I started at AccuWeather, this was January, 2013, the government actually went into a year-long hiring freeze. So even if I applied for Weather Service jobs right out of college, I would've been out of luck. So, for me, I just put all of my focus into the job that I had and the opportunities that I had in front of me, and made the absolute most of it. And working at AccuWeather was great. The area of responsibility is all of North America, so it's like a crash course in forecasting for all of the different regions. And while you didn't get into the deep nuances of a particular region, like for instance, I didn't learn truly about the Puget Sound Convergence Zone at the time, just an example, it allowed me to really get up to speed with my meteorology and really gain the confidence as a forecaster and warning forecaster as well, since that was a big part of the job.

But the hiring freeze lasted a year long, and then the spring of 2014 rolled around and the hiring freeze was lifted. So I decided that this is probably my chance to try understanding that the things that I had going against me was that I didn't have the opportunities to really go and truly be a volunteer in a Weather Service office because I grew up in between two offices and also went to school between two offices. So it wasn't feasible for me to go back and forth three or four times a week to volunteer. And I also wasn't a Pathways intern either, so I knew that it was going to be a long uphill battle, so I applied for every office that I could, which was 55, and I got one interview.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, wow.

Justin Pullin:

And it was with the Las Vegas office. And I made the most of that, and my career brought me to the Desert Southwest as an intern forecaster for the Weather Service in 2014.

Kelly Savoie:

That's great. I mean, that's just an example of applied to as many as you... You can't be picky, right? You got to be like, "All right, wherever they'll take me."

Justin Pullin:

Yep, yep.

Emma Collins:

So could you give our listeners an idea of what the duties and responsibilities are in your role as Deputy Chief of Staff?

Justin Pullin:

So Deputy Chief of Staff is... It's quite the interesting role. The way I like to describe it is it's like air traffic control, in a way, or being a traffic cop. You're doing a lot of coordinating with people from different parts of the organization, and you're keeping a pulse on everything that's going on within an organization. So I have a pretty strong idea of everything that's happening in the Weather Service, and I'm responsible for keeping things moving. So with that, all of that coordination comes a lot of personality management. And I say that personality management is probably what I do most on any given basis.

There are times where I have to go and give the nudge and might work with people on keeping things going, and sometimes there's short deadlines and I have to find a way to get that across in a way that's effective, but also in a way that keeps the person that I'm working with motivated to get things done and deliver. So it's a pretty big job. It's a very big departure from what I spent most of my career doing as a forecaster, but I was ready for a new challenge. And this has been a great experience, being at this level of the organization, particularly at a time where there's a lot of changes and exciting things happening.

Kelly Savoie:

And so how many people are on the staff? Is it a really big group?

Justin Pullin:

So our front office staff overall, so the Office of the Chief of Staff is about a staff of a little bit over 10 to 12 folks that are all doing various functions. And a lot of that stuff is geared toward making sure that the deputy director and the director of the Weather Service have what they need. So it could be anything from talking points, making sure that their calendar is up to date. And for myself as the Deputy Chief of Staff and the Chief of Staff, one of our big roles are being a chief advisor to the Deputy Director and the Director, particularly on a variety of different topics that are happening not only within Weather Service, but from the Chief of Staff's standpoint, what's happening in NOAA and even up through the Department of Commerce to this level.

Kelly Savoie:

Wow, it sounds pretty involved. You must have to really be an organized person for that position. It just sounds like you really need to be. So looking back at your career, what would you say is your biggest accomplishment so far, working as a meteorologist?

Justin Pullin:

I would say that helping to get a deployment team built in the Tallahassee office. So I've worked in three different forecast offices before I took my headquarters job, and when I went to the Las Vegas office, the concept of decision support services was still very new for the Weather Service. And one of the concepts that was born actually in the New Orleans office was the idea of deploying out to an emergency operation center or an incident command post to provide direct face-to-face support with emergency managers and law enforcement to help them to make decisions ahead of, during, or in the aftermath of a weather event or an incident.

So the Las Vegas office was one of the early adopters of this deployment team concept. And I think that I really pushed and pushed and pushed to my boss at the time to allow me to have some sort of involvement in that deployment team because that was one of the draws for me, moving from AccuWeather to the Weather Service is I wanted to be face-to-face with our end users so that I can understand why they needed to know the information that they're requesting. That was something that was important to me and something that makes me do my job much more effectively.

So the Las Vegas office was one of the early adopters. They had a really mature program, and I was able to take that concept and apply it in Tallahassee, because Tallahassee, that area of responsibility, extends up in southern Georgia and southeastern Alabama. So you get anything from tornadoes to hurricanes to floods, even winter weather. So there's a lot of different hazards that could affect the people in that region. So in 2018, there was a leadership change within the office, and we got a new meteorologist in charge that came in, and I presented this concept to him and he said, "Go make it happen."

Kelly Savoie:

Nice.

Justin Pullin:

This was September of 2018. Fast forward to October of 2018, and we have a tropical wave in the Gulf of Mexico that eventually became Hurricane Michael. And my MIC came out of the office on October 8th and said, "Do you want to deploy to Panama City? We think that this is where the bulk of the impacts are going to happen in Tallahassee," and I said yes. And I don't think either of us knew exactly what was going to happen at that point. Of course, we all know the story about how Hurricane Michael rapidly intensified and became the first Category 5 hurricane to impact the United States since Andrew. So I deployed to Panama City and really took something that was in its infancy and made the most out of the opportunity. And this is something that that deployment, along with the other two that happened, so we deployed another meteorologist in Leon County, which is where Tallahassee is, and then we had someone else deployed on Florida State's campus, which is where the Weather Service is, but they also have an emergency management presence and 40,000 students to coordinate with and get to safety.

It was a big effort, and just having the resources in place and having best practices in place, even though we hadn't been tested to that point, for that event to go the way it did, and for us to get the feedback that we got from first responders and emergency managers is something that I'm still very proud of to this day, and it's one of the examples that you can point at right now and say that this is the direction that the Weather Service is going to be going in the future, being face-to-face with folks, helping them

make those decisions, and just being that trusted source. I didn't realize just how much of a trusted source you become when you're face-to-face and you're the only option.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, absolutely.

Justin Pullin:

I became known as the weather guy, and there were times where I walked into the room and everyone would fall silent because they know I'm coming with bad news. And it was quite the experience, quite the experience, and it's something that has been career-changing for me in a lot of ways.

Kelly Savoie:

It's almost like a necessity though. It almost seems like it would be weird not to have somebody there.

Justin Pullin:

It truly is. And I think that with the direction that the Weather Service is going, stories like that are going to become more commonplace. And in a lot of ways they are. There's a lot more stories now where you have people deploying to EOCs ahead of hurricanes, and we have the incident meteorologists, the IMET program where you have fire weather meteorologists on the scene at these big fires that are becoming more commonplace. So it's something that has very much taken off, and just reflecting on the progress that we've made in the last 10 years is astounding.

Emma Collins:

That's incredible. You definitely should be proud. That's amazing. And then on the flip side of that, what are some of the biggest challenges you face in the field?

Justin Pullin:

So I would say for me, as a forecaster, and even to some degree now, it's really communicating threats and educating people. Obviously we know social media is a big presence in our lives in our society, and there's a lot of information out there from a lot of different sources. And as a meteorologist, I can sort through who to trust and who not to, but the average person won't be able to. So as professionals, we're competing against that. And it can be frustrating at times, and particularly ahead of big events, a lot of people want to talk about stuff, and it's not just weather, it's other things in society as well. Anytime something happens, everyone jumps in and wants to discuss it, and very quickly lines can get blurred and the expert's voice gets drowned out in the noise. So for me, that's a challenge, probably less so now that I'm in my current role, but it's still a challenge for everyone out in the field.

For me, as Deputy Chief of Staff, one of my focuses in my role is attracting the next generation of meteorologists. And that's a challenge because the next generation is looking for a lot of flexibilities in the workplace, and they have different priorities than the millennial or folks that are much later in their careers. And I believe now, more than ever, I think we have more generations in the workforce than ever before, I think. Obviously the baby boomers are toward the end of their careers in a lot of cases, and Weather Service in particular, there's going to be a big retirement wave coming here this decade.

So if you're a student right now studying meteorology, or if you're a kid like I once was in junior high or high school and you're interested in meteorology, there's going to be a lot of opportunities to come into the agency. But at the same time, part of my job and my desire is to make sure that our agency is

prepared for that next wave of scientists to come in, to not only attract them, but to also keep them in the agency and allow them to be able to grow their own careers as well.

Kelly Savoie:

I read that you participated in a project called Hailstone where you were the member of a hail collection and impact team, and that sounds really cool and interesting. What was that all about?

Justin Pullin:

So Hailstone was a grassroots research effort that consisted of Weather Service meteorologists, folks in research, students, so I actually started Hailstone as a student, as well as folks in the private sector. So a couple of ULM alums actually pulled this group of people together, and at that point, I had kind of gone off and gone out on a couple of trips, storm-chasing, and I was doing research kind of based off of the storms that I was seeing and that got notice of some of the ULM alums. So I had the two principal investigators get in touch with me and a couple of other ULM students that were also involved in research then, and they invited us to join this project.

So Hailstone took place over a five-year period. The first year of studying storms was 2011, and our last year was 2015. We very much got a lot of data from some very prolific storms. The first year we operated on, the storm that produced the Joplin tornado, and then two days after that, the El Reno EF5, which were very intense storms. But yeah, we were able to collect data on 76 different storms between our collection groups that filled in behind the storms to basically collect and measure hailstones, and then the impact teams that were driving into storms and putting out reports via GPS real-time, estimating what the hail size was, and looking at just the hail fall character as we cross-section storms as well.

Hailstone was a very coordinated effort, if you will, which it had to be, considering some of the storms that we operated on. And there were times where it wasn't safe. And the two storms that I mentioned were storms that we had to bail out of because there's a certain point where, especially on the impact team where you're core-punching a storm, where you can get disoriented really easily, and that's where things get really dangerous. So yeah, it was a excellent effort, it was a group effort from everyone, we collected a lot of good data, and it actually resulted in a paper in Weather and Forecasting that was put out by the group in 2017.

Kelly Savoie:

Nice. We all want to know, what's the biggest hailstone you measured?

Justin Pullin:

So when I say that first year we hit the ground running with a bang, we really did. So I believe it's still the state record, but we collected a six-inch hailstone near Gotebo, Oklahoma in May of 2011. And just to give the perspective for the listeners, that's roughly the size of a CD or a DVD, which was terrifying

Kelly Savoie:

And thick like a softball, right?

Justin Pullin:

Yeah. So the story of that storm, it's funny being...I was actually on the collection team at that point, so I wasn't supposed to get hailed on, but we were sitting kind of stage, watching the storm, thinking that we were safe, and it was a low-precipitation supercell, and those are notorious for flinging out large

hailstones in the area of the updraft. So we were sitting kind of minding our business, and you heard the sound of just wind and then a thud, and you see this humongous hailstones start kind of falling. Fortunately, it didn't just dump down on us right at that point, but they left craters in the ground and I was like, "Oh my gosh. Turn around and go."

Kelly Savoie:

Oh my gosh, that could knock somebody out, really hurt you.

Justin Pullin:

Oh, yeah.

Emma Collins:

Do you happen to know how fast they move, when they get up that size?

Justin Pullin:

So I think at a certain point they hit terminal velocity, so it's well over a hundred miles an hour at that point.

Emma Collins:

Oh my gosh.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, boy.

Justin Pullin:

Certainly something you don't want to be outside in and certainly something that can do a lot of damage to a car really quickly, which also from that day, one of our impact team folks... So those folks, they outlined their cars. They use shelving from a hardware store to build cages around the windows and over the roof.

Emma Collins:

Makes sense. Yeah.

Kelly Savoie:

My gosh.

Justin Pullin:

There was a little bit of a design flaw on one of the cars where they left what they thought was kind of a small square to put antennas so that we could communicate back and forth. Well, one of those six-inch hailstones found the hole there and cratered his roof, so-

Kelly Savoie:

Oh.

Justin Pullin:

...that was very much a picture that all of us were taking after the fact. And I think whenever the Norman office put the news out that it was a verified state record, that picture is on there as well. So it's made its rounds on the internet.

Kelly Savoie:

A meteorologist is a dangerous job. It really is.

Emma Collins:

It is. You never think of hail being that destructive until you hear those stories, at least in my experience with little tiny baby hail pieces. Yeah.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh yeah, like from New England. Even the little ones, I'm like, "Ow. Oh, oh, oh." I can't even imagine a six-inch one coming down from the sky.

Emma Collins:

We're very glad that you survived to go on and be very involved with the AMS. What are some of the activities you participated in and how have they helped you professionally?

Justin Pullin:

So my story with AMS goes all the way back to my time at ULM. ULM has a student chapter that they still have to this day. So as a freshman, I got involved in the chapter, and I spent my last three-and-a-half years, since I was a December graduate, as an officer of some sort. So I was a treasurer, then I was a vice president, then I was a president, and then I served as the proxy for my last semester of the group. So I, very much, at that time, as a student, and then going into the early part of my professional career, viewed AMS as an opportunity to share research and to download research and learn about what other people are doing. I didn't really view AMS any differently until I was well into my Weather Service career. So I actually let my AMS membership lapse after 2013.

Kelly Savoie:

Shame on you.

Justin Pullin:

I know. I know. I was one of the early-career folks that... I don't want to say turned away from AMS, but I was in operational meteorology, I wasn't actively doing research, and for me, the relationship with AMS was very much research-based at the time. So around the time where the Board for Early Career Professionals was launching, I didn't know anything about it until I returned to the annual meeting in 2018, and actually I was an award recipient for something I did with a small group of folks at AccuWeather. So I showed up to the award banquet and received my award and walked around the conference that Sunday and stumbled upon the early career conference. And I sat in and listened to a number of talks and I was like, "Well, that's interesting. I don't remember these sorts of talks being a thing at AMS the last time I was at an annual meeting," and I thought that was super neat.

And one of the sessions that I remember was talking about launching ECLA at the time, and I'm like, "That sounds really cool. I would love to apply for that. I don't think right now's the right time," because I

was super busy doing other things at the time. But I made contact with the board chairs and colleagues that were a part of the board just to learn more about it over time. And 2019 came around and I decided that I was ready to jump back into involvement in AMS. So I applied to become a member of the BECP and was accepted.

This was right around the time that I got a promotion out of Tallahassee and moved to Seattle, and then of course COVID happened. So a lot of the things that were goals for me and the Weather Service were put on hold because it involved me going out and being face to face with folks, which wasn't possible. So it allowed me to pour my time and energy into AMS and to really learn about all of the new and interesting avenues and ways to reach out and pour into the young and up-and-coming scientists and early-career folks.

So that got me into BECP. And a couple years ago, I decided to run for chair, and I was fortunate enough to be voted in by my peers and, unluckily for me, the conference that I planned was the one that we thought was going to be in person, and then it flipped to virtual at the last minute. So that was a challenge for everyone, but just a wonderful and solid group of people. I couldn't have asked for a better group of folks to work with on the variety of different things, and they very much helped that early career conference to be a success, because it would've been very easy to just fold whenever faced with that. And I'm sure that everyone else on the planning committee for that conference that year went through it as well. But I really, really, really enjoyed my time in BECP.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. I will attest to the fact that it's such a great board, everyone is so enthusiastic. You do so many things for the AMS, the webinars and the conference, and it's just great to participate and to be involved in anything that you all are doing. It's an awesome board, and you're being shy by not mentioning that you're going to be incoming Commissioner of Professional Affairs, which is a big deal. There's lots of boards and committees that will be essentially reporting to you, and you'll be much more involved, let me tell you. Prepare yourself, because there's a lot going on. But that's great, and I'm glad that you were able to see that the AMS has more to offer for early career professionals and other than research. Let's see. Looking back on your career, is there anything you wish you had done differently, different pathway, or do you think it went smoothly?

Justin Pullin:

I wouldn't say that it went smoothly. I definitely had it planned out differently, but I will say that I wouldn't go back and change anything. Not to say that there aren't times where I've had that thought. I really wanted to just jump right into the Weather Service right out of college, but having that experience at AccuWeather and working for a private sector company and understanding, being able to have that experience so that I could understand the differences between what private sector weather companies do and the government and seeing that everyone has a place, that has been something that has been good for me in my career.

And then for a lot of my time as a forecaster, I had some regrets in terms of the things I focused on in school. So I was very focused on operational meteorology and applying concepts and less focused on things like GIS and coding. And for a long time, I thought that I needed to be maybe not an expert, but be good in those areas to be able to move up. And I found out that that's not necessarily the case, and it forced me to be okay with not being super skilled in those areas and lean into my skillset where I am very proficient in. And now, as a supervisor, that's been something, a lesson that's been important to me, because that's where you go and you look for the folks that have those talents and bring them in and pour into them and let them take whatever opportunity or task that they have and run with it. So for me,

no regrets at the moment, which I'm happy with, but I'm always looking for learning opportunities and just always looking to grow in ways that I may not expect today.

Emma Collins:

So what advice or tips do you have for students and early career professionals looking to find government positions?

Justin Pullin:

I would say networking is huge. I know we talk about that a lot. For me, and I'll tell a personal story about how I got into the Weather Service. So you mentioned Hailstone. A lot of those folks on the Hailstone team were in the Weather Service. So when it came time for me where I decided to apply for the Weather Service, I reached out to those folks and asked them ad nauseam about the hiring process in the government, because it's very different than it is in the private sector. The resumes are different, the best practice that they tell you for private sector jobs or most jobs is no more than two pages. Well, in the government, you can give a 10-page resume. Actually it's encouraged because you have to put all of these details in there, and that's something that I didn't realize until I had conversations with folks on resumes and what to expect throughout the interview process and the timeline, all the way to how Weather Service interviews are.

So, network. I've expanded my network a lot over the years, and everyone that I've run across has been very gracious with their time and very willing to help. So it is, even to this day, can be very intimidating reaching out to someone that is a professional. And the one thing that I would tell young professionals and students coming out right now is that we have all been there. We've all been students, we've all been trying to break into the field with enthusiasm. And I feel like the majority of folks really remember that whenever they get these requests that come in with people wanting to connect. So certainly, connect with folks. Ask a lot of questions. You are not, as someone trying to break into the field, or even if you're currently in the field and in the private sector and want to have a career change and come to the government, no one's expecting you to be an expert in anything. So ask questions, don't feel ashamed.

Kelly Savoie:

And you were saying, you mentioned something previously about a Pathways program, so people should probably try to get internships as well?

Justin Pullin:

Yes. So the Pathways program is basically the Weather Services' version of an internship. So the call for that goes out on USA Jobs, typically once a year, and I very much, if you're interested in getting into the Weather Service, I very much encourage you to apply for that program. That is a way for you to come in and really live what it's like to work for the Weather Service, whether that's in a forecast office, whether that's in a program office, a national center like the National Hurricane Center or SPC. Different offices get Pathways opportunities at different times, so certainly keep a lookout on USA Jobs for those opportunities, and please don't be shy about applying for those.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, we're so grateful for everything you've told us about your career, but before we go, we always like to ask our guests one last fun question at the end of the show. So what is your favorite hobby, Justin?

Justin Pullin:

My absolute favorite hobby is photography, and keeping with the theme, my photography hobby was born out of around the time where I started storm chasing and going out into the field. So naturally I wanted to take pictures of thunderstorms. Well, when my career brought me to the desert southwest, I knew that I wasn't going to be driving two to three states over to go and storm-chase all the time. So I got a keen interest in landscapes whenever I moved to the Las Vegas area. And anytime I talk about my career and the fact that I lived in Las Vegas, everyone's like, "Oh gosh, what's it like? Were you on the strip all the time?" No. One of my favorite things about living in Las Vegas is that you're within a day's drive of six national parks.

Kelly Savoie:

I was just going to say that.

Emma Collins:

I don't think I knew that. That's really cool.

Kelly Savoie:

Yes. There's so many amazing national parks.

Justin Pullin:

Yeah. So I spent a lot of time exploring national parks and taking pictures of the beautiful landscape. And the photography hobby, for me, it allows me to tap into my creative side, which I don't always get to do that in my day-to-day job. So it satisfies that side for me, but it also involves weather too. So a lot of my favorite pictures have been fleeting moments that have had some sort of weather involved in it. So for me, it kind of marries my life-long passion with something that I really enjoy doing on the side.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, I have to guess some tips from you because I'm a terrible photographer.

Emma Collins:

Well, thanks so much for joining us, Justin, and for sharing your work experiences with us.

Justin Pullin:

Thank you for having me.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, that's our show for today. Please join us next time, rain or shine.

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is edited by Johnny Lay. Technical direction is provided by Peter Killelea. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoie, and the show is hosted by Emma Collins and Kelly Savoie. You can learn more about the show online at www.ametsoc.org/clearskies, and you can contact us at skypodcast@ametsoc.org if you have any feedback or would like to become a future guest.