

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Richard Donovan

INTERVIEWER: David Todd

DATE: May 14, 2020

LOCATION: Lufkin, Texas, by telephone

TRANSCRIBER: Trint, David Todd

SOURCE MEDIA: Google Voice, MP3 audio file

REEL: 4011

FILE:

Dogs_Donovan_Richard_14May2020_LufkinTX_19362251636a_NoiseReduced&SignalAmplified_AudioMP3.mp3

Google Voice [00:00:00] This call is now being recorded.

David Todd [00:00:03] No, no, no. This is this is the right one. You got me. I have, it's a little confusing, I have one, just regular old office phone. And then I got a number from Google Voice that allows me to record calls. And in fact, before we dive into this, I wanted to explain to you and for the record what we're up to and get your permission to do this recording and to move ahead. So here's what I want to do. I can recite to you:.

David Todd [00:00:34] With your approval, we plan on recording this interview for research and educational work on behalf of the Conservation History Association of Texas, for a book and a Web site for Texas A&M University Press and for an archive that we're keeping at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. And of course, you keep all equal rights to use the recording, if that's agreeable with you, we could get into this.

Richard Donovan [00:01:10] Well, I think every bit of it sounds wonderful to me. David, I just am so proud and pleased that somebody is looking at East Texas, because I always felt all my life like east Texas had fallen through the cracks. And most historical records, etc., etc. and traditions and the things that just expired here in East Texas had never been noticed anywhere else. That's probably wrong. I mean, I but that's just the way I have always viewed it with my bias, prejudices.

David Todd [00:01:46] Yeah, well I don't know, I think I'd agree. I'm so glad that you taking the trouble to to, you know, notice and record so much of this so, well with that let's let's dive into it. Today is May 14, 2020, and we are conducting an interview with Richard Donovan, who is the author of Paddling the Wild Neches, and a board member of the Texas Conservation Alliance, and a former realtor and employee of Temple Inland and a longtime resident of East Texas, and very knowledgeable about life there.

David Todd [00:02:29] So basically, I was hoping that we could visit with you to learn about the history of hunting deer as well as other animals with dogs in East Texas. And maybe we can spend a little time to learn about that from you.

Richard Donovan [00:02:48] David, I'd be glad to talk to you about. I will, I'll make this up front, you know, I came along just to catch a glimpse through the crack of the closing of the door, of the closing in the woods. I mean, it it happened during my early lifetime and it was a very traumatic experience for all the people of this area. Prior to, prior to that, free range in Texas, East Texas, was just taken for granted. People's livestock, horses and cattle and hogs just roamed at will. And if you had a crop, if you owned a farm or something, it was your responsibility to fence the animals out, rather than the animal owner's responsibility to keep them in something. So livestock roamed at will and farmers always had a big problem with

particularly hogs getting into their fields and destroying their crops and that sort of thing. So that was just always a problem throughout my life, in my early lifetime. Free range was the order of the day.

Richard Donovan [00:03:58] And then the first thing that happened to change all of that, and of course I know you're interested in the hunting aspect of it, but I think these two things are intertwined to a large extent. But free range came to a close in East Texas in the early 1950s. It began to happen then. I think I'm correct in remembering that 1952 was the date that the stock laws came into effect in Angelina County. Now, it took another decade or maybe a little bit longer for the rest of the Angelina, I meant the East Texas counties to become stock law because I remember some of them were way into the late 60s closing. So I can't speak to all of them. But I just know that Angelina County began in 1952 and it was strictly because of too people. You might say Arthur Temple and Ernest Kerr because Mr. Temple owned Temple Inland, or Temple Industries at that time and Ernest Kerr owned Angelina County Lumber company. And both of whom were huge timber companies at that time. And they didn't like people's hogs and cattle roaming across their land, and people burning the forest for the benefit of making grass grow for cattle to graze upon and hogs coming along and rooting up the pine seedlings as they were trying to sprout and grow back.

Richard Donovan [00:05:34] So there was a little bit of opposition to that in the very beginning of what was known here as the closing of the woods. And I don't know whether that was an East Texas origination, but that was a term I heard all my life, was the closing of the woods and it was a vy, as I said earlier, it was a thing that was very much resented by the populace. Then the stock law, laws came along. I believe it was in the eighties, but I came. The hunting, the dog-hunting. I mean, they came along in the 80s, I believe. You'll have to follow up on that because I can't speak to that from memory at all.

Richard Donovan [00:06:21] But up until that time, people hunted with dogs. And that was a tradition of East Texas that you cannot. It's just hard for me to tell you the way that that was wound into people's lives and their hearts here in East Texas was the ability to hunt with dogs. And they hunted squirrels with dogs; they hunted coons with dogs. But boy, the most important one, I suppose, was hunting deer with dogs. And that was for two reasons. One is that put meat on the table. But number two, it was just the sheer enjoyment of hearing the hounds run and watching them run, you know, and shooting the deer and all that, and the camaraderie that existed with all of that. So deer hunting was a really popular, and I'm not I won't call it a sport because it went on 12 months a year, and it was a, an essential thing almost, and it was very much intertwined with East Texas society. And everyone had dogs. They had all kinds of dogs. There were hog dogs, and stock dogs. And a stock dog and a hog dog can and probably most of the time were the same thing. But at times, they were not because some dogs were strictly catch dogs. You held him until the other dogs bayed the hogs up somewhere. And then when you got the hog bayed, then you went to him with the dog that you had under rein. And you were you own a horse, of course, because hogs would attack you and hurt you. So they rode up there with their catch dog and then they would point out to the caged dog which one they wanted and he would go catch one. And he was usually a big powerful dog and he'd go in and grab the hog by the ear, something like that most of the time. And then the otehr dogs would attack as well. So how am I going here? David, am I talking just right?

David Todd [00:08:33] Right. I'm just fascinated. Don't let me get in the way at. Tell me more.

Richard Donovan [00:08:40] Well, and then. And I by the way, I discussed a lot of this in my book, Paddling the Wild Neches. There's a lot of it covered in that book. But as the stock dog as

the catch dog caught the hog. Well then, the owners usually went up there and earmarked that hog and turn him loose and let him go or whatever they wanted to do with him. But if they weren't wanting to catch any dogs, hogs, they just simply rode up there, picked out the hog that they wanted, and usually with a .22, they circled around to get a good shot. Shot him right between the eyes. And he fell over. And maybe they shot another one or two. And then pulled the dogs off the hogs, and allowed the hogs to run back into the forest. And then they would throw a rope around the heels of those hogs and drag them out of the woods somewhere.

Richard Donovan [00:09:38] Somebody would come along with the early days, a horse and a wagon. I can remember, and I tell about story about it, in the, in the book about hunting with my great grandfather. I wasn't with him. I just went to pick up the hog back after he and some other guy had killed them. And I rode with my grandmother out there to pick them up. But that was the way they did it, and after we got a pickup truck, of course, then they rode out to where they'd dragged the hogs out to the road and loaded them back to a pickup truck, carried them back to the house.

Richard Donovan [00:10:12] And they had big cast iron pots with boiling water ready, by the time hunters got there. Of course, they had blown on the horns or blowing horns that were made out of cow horns and they could blow those horns. You could hear it for two or three miles. And so they warned the people at the house that they were coming and they had the fire boiling and everything. They dragged those hogs up there. And some people had metal barrels that they had, would pour the scalding water into and then slide that hog down into that metal barrel and bring him out real quick. And others just went over to the wash pot that was cast iron pot that was boiling with water. And they would bring dippers with scalding water and poured on the hog and turned the knife edge-down and then just scraped the hair off the hog. That was just a scraping motion that you would do to the hog. And that scalding water released the hair and you just took that knife and just scraped it all off and you scraped that hog just as clean as it could be.

Richard Donovan [00:11:18] And then you took him and you strung him up by his heels. And cut his open and his entrails and everything fell out, of course. And then you gutted him and went from there and you cut him up. Some of it went into salt box and some other went to the smokehouse where it was smoked. And the hams and things like that were smoked, of course. And then all during the winter, you could eat all that. I know one old gentleman one time that I knew very well. I ask him, how many hogs his family consumed every year. And he said nineteen. So that gives you an idea of how, what an essential part of the life that hogs were to families. And this guy would have been raised during the late 20s and early 30s. So you can imagine how important it hogs were to people's lives back in those days.

Richard Donovan [00:12:20] But you're interested in hunting, about deer. And so I will try to get off this other tangent that I'm on and talk to you about deer hunting. But it was a very much loved tradition and most of it went on. at the end of crop season and after people had gathered their crops and laid by and harvested and all that, well, then they turned their attention probably first to fishing. They went fishing first in the, the rivers. Then after that was over and it came the first cold snap, well, that's when people's attention turned most to the deer because that's when acorns would be on the ground at that time.

Richard Donovan [00:13:03] And deer would be in the bottoms feeding on those acorns. And so they were a little bit easier to find that way. And so what they would do is there would be a road or a fire lane, I guess, or a pipeline or anything that they could find so that they would have a free shooting area and they would put out what they would call stand along that road.

And they were never close enough together that two hunters would shoot each other, but they would string hunters along this road or pipeline or whatever there is they were putting out.

Richard Donovan [00:13:45] And then they would circle around going to the other side and somebody would take the dogs and they would turn the dogs loose and they would start walking toward those stands that are on that road over there and they would walk through there and the dogs would be circling around in front of them and distract a trail and start baying, you know, making a barking noise and sometimes would be a cold trail. And there were different kind of dogs, which is the type of dog that you hunted with, was important to a lot of people. But some dogs would pick up a cold trail and just trail it and trail it and trail it and bark and bark and bark, you know, and other dogs would just bypass a cold trail and they would just keep circling around until they get a pretty warm trail. And then they barked and you know that you had a deer close by.

Richard Donovan [00:14:43] So then they would start pushing that deer ahead of them toward that road where they had those stands set up, and then whatever direction that deer went out along that road, somebody was going to shoot at him. And most of the time they shot him but sometimes they shot at him and missed. And then what kind of deer it was. It was as a doe, it was a dead deer, if it was a buck, it was a deer. And if it was a fawn big enough to run, it was a dead deer. So they weren't very selective in the animals that they killed. And then they went back to camp, and sometimes they killed the deer and ate it there. Sometimes they took the deer home and dressed it and ate it there. But that's basically the, the picture of hunting deer in East Texas at that time.

Richard Donovan [00:15:37] And as I mentioned, they were, when I was growing, in fact, I can tell you that first Walker hound I ever saw. A Walker hound didn't appear in my part of the world until probably, I'm going to say, the late 1950s. Because a friend and I were coming in from the woods, hunting, and I had an old '36 Ford that didn't have any doors on it, and that was my car. I was just young fella and we were coming in from hunting and up in the road, going down a road, that had a white caliche rock top on top of it, U.S. Forest Service road. And we were going down this road and we saw this animal standing in the road up in front of us. It was as big as a Shetland pony looked like from the distance, and it was spotted, white and red spotted. And we were kind of awestruck with that dog. And we got to it. And it was really a tall dog and it was very dissipated. I guess he had been lost for four or five days and he'd run so far, and he'd run out of the range of the hunters chasing a deer. That's what Walkers were famous for. And he'd come out on that road and nobody knew where he was. They couldn't find it. So anyway, we stopped and got out and looked at the dog and he had a collar on him. And I'm getting into too much detail for you, I know. But anyway, we looked, looked at him. He had a collar on him, so I took him home with me. And we had a telephone at that time and I called the telephone operator and she was, she knew everybody and everything that was going on in the county in, with a circle probably 45 miles of her telephone office. But anyway, I told her, I said Beula, I've been out hunting and I found a dog down on the Forest Service road and she got Mr So-and-so's name on it. She said, oh, yeah. She says, I know he's been looking for that dog and says, I know his telephone number as well. You gave him a call and you tell him I've got it. So a little while later she called me back and then maybe the next day I don't know, anyway she called me. And she says, well, Mr. So-and-so says he was so glad to hear about his dog and he would be by there. And she told me what date he was coming by to pick him up and said, he sure did appreciate you picking up and calling him about it. So I put them the man back in contact with his dog. He was very thankful, but he was from Houston up here, hunting dogs and hunting hogs with his dogs. And he had lost that Walker hound. But that was the first one I had ever seen.

Richard Donovan [00:18:38] The dogs that were real common and popular up in here at that time were black and tan and blue tick and red bone, I guess, were probably the most common type dogs that that I grew up knowing back, of course, the cur dog was was the essential part of life up here too, and a lot of times the cur dogs were bred to hounds and had a dog with both a tendency to be a good hog dog, and yet have a good smelling nose that he could trail with to.

Richard Donovan [00:19:14] And as I mentioned to you earlier, and I'm just continuing the talk to you until you tell me to hush.

Richard Donovan [00:19:18] But as I mentioned to you earlier, dogs cannot trail during the summer time. It's just too hot. The ground is dry. It doesn't hold any scent and, you know, a dog just cannot do a very good job trailing in the summertime. So the people that had this hog dog, I meant deer dogs would just keep them tied up until had a little shower or something like that. And boy, they loaded those dogs in the back of the pick p and went wherever they wanted to hide and hunt, and put out the stands along the road, and went after it, and usually kill a deer. And that resulted in East Texas being almost totally depleted of deer when I was a boy in, in the 50s. People would just kill so few deer that it was just unbelievable how few deer were available. And that's when a place called Boggy Slough, which is owned by Temple Inland, or Temple Industries at that time, or Southern Pine Lumber company before that. And Mr. Kerr, I think that I might have misspoke who was with Angelina County Lumber Company? Well, I don't know whether I said that right or not.

David Todd [00:20:42] Yeah.

Richard Donovan [00:20:46] They had a place called Boggy Slough and it was up, and I forgot how many thousand acres were there, but it's thousands of acres over there. And they put a deer-proof fence around I believe, 640 acres, not a deer-proof, but a horg-proof fence around 640 acres of it. And they put put it in there strictly for hunting deer and they put posted signs all around. And they hired range riders and everything to protect that property. And the owners, I mean, the neighbors really resented that. I mean, they would furiously resented that and then they cut the fence and went in there and killed deer. And just did all kinds of mischievous things to be an aggravation to the company. In fact, one of the company range riders wound up killing one of the trespassers one time and had a big lawsuit about it. As I recal, he wasn't convicted, but I believe he was acquitted and I believe he left the country just out of safety measures, I think. And but that was just the kind of way deer hunting was at that point in time. And Boggy Slough became really a haven for deer. And they became so plentiful in Boggy Slough and they reared up on their hind legs, really, and got to browse until it was until it was out of their reach. You could see for, you know, this is not typical of that part of the world, but you could see for a mile, you know, because there was no no limbs in your way because the deer had nibbled all the leaves off of the browse and everything and everything it was, that they could get to, and the deer were starving because they had all sought safety in Boggy Slough. And it was just so overpopulated. And so Temple began trying to get more of its, you know, it would take hunters in there as a kind of a sales tool, you know. And so they begin to invite more and more people in there to hunt, hunt the deer, and they begin to harvest a lot of deer out of Boggy Slough. But that was just the way things went at that time. And I used to hunt in Boggy Slough, of course, when I worked for Temple and there were a lot of deers there. And they had a, they had deer stands built all over the oh, the several thousand acres and you, yuu were appointed one of those stands to go get into and you go sit in that stand, and you would (there were no dogs involved in this). You'd just sit in that stand and if a deer walked by, you shot it. And if it didn't, you didn't shoot a deer that day or you maybe you went again later on that afternoon or something like that. But.

David Todd [00:23:55] But it was a different way of hunting, wasn't it, too?

Richard Donovan [00:23:58] Yeah, that's right. Change, change.

Richard Donovan [00:24:02] Yeah. See, that's the way the people became when when the stock laws, stock laws and the hunting laws went into effect is that then opened the woods up more to the average ordinary man than it had before. But strangely enough, after about a generation, that disappeared because the timber companies all were, with the passing of the stock laws, the timber companies all began posting up their land. And when they posted up their land, then you couldn't go in there to hunt. And Temple owned, I think, I mean if forgot how many thousand acres they owned here in East Texas. And so did also Angelina County Lumber Company also had so many thousand acres. And then there were a lot of other smaller lumber companies that owned thousands of acres of land. So it really, fenced the common man out of a place to hunt. And so then you had to become a member of a hunting club somewhere. You were forced to join a hunting club if you wanted to hunt. And so that pretty well put that to a stop. And so nowadays you'd have to belong to hunting club. And you go out every year and fix your stand yourself, plant an oat patch out there. And then you go out, and you crawl up in your stand during the hunting season. You set there, and you wait for the deer there and you put a corn feeder out there, too, by the way, and you go out and crawl up in your box stand before daylight, and you sit there and wait until the deer comes up to the corn feeder to eat, and then shoot.

Richard Donovan [00:25:58] So my point is, there's not much excitement to hunting today like it was when in the days of the dogs, when you had all that drama going on, you could hear that dog baying way off in the distance, you know, and then he struck the trail, and as the deer approached you, as the dog approached you. His barking got more intense and got closer and louder, you know. And you knew that deer would come out right by you because you could tell, by the way the dogs' bark sounded. So you got ready and then you didn't know which side of you he was going to come out, whether he was going to come out in front of you, behind you. So you had to turn to face him and you didn't know whether he was going come to your left or to your right. And so, you know, it was just a very tense few minutes in there.

Richard Donovan [00:26:45] And then, boom, he bounded across that open space by you most of the time and you had to be quick on the trigger to take him down. And most people at that time shot deer with shotguns, with buckshot, double-aught shot, most of the time, was what was preferred by people. But there was number one buckshot, and aught buckshot, and then double aught buckshot. So the number one was the smallest and aught was a little bit larger and double aught was the biggest. And that's what most people hunted with because you didn't have the time to get up and take a bead on things, on the deer. After the hunting clubs came into existence, then people switched over to rifles because you were shooting out of a stand and the deer was coming up to eat, to grain you had planted out there or else to eat out of the feeder that you had out there. So being you had a rifle then you could take time to take a good shot at it.

Richard Donovan [00:27:56] Well, that makes me curious. So did the the older generation, the more traditional hunters who used dogs and used shotguns and, you know, it was a pretty fast-moving kind of sport, did they have had to have attitudes of contempt for people who sat in stands with rifles and deer feeders and scopes on their rifles? Did they see that as fair chase, fair play? Or or what was her attitude about this new kind of hunting?

Richard Donovan [00:28:36] You see, they had been shoved aside by that time. And so they were, they were pretty scornful about all of that kind of stuff. But at the same time, the younger people that were those people with children, they adapted to it because they had to. I mean, like I said, the timber companies and everybody closed their lands off. And all that was available was, you know, U/S. national forest, which was close to half a million acres scattered over East Texas, I think. But, that was the only place people had to hunt, unless they were a member of a hunting club somewhere. And yes, those people did treat them with scorn, but at the same time, they were the older generation and they they didn't last very long at that point. But I remember people, you know, I can, I can think of people like Archie and Bill Lott, Red Marshall and Genie Braun, his brother, and I just sit here and name these names, I guess if I could get my mind to it, of people that I knew of that just lived twelve months out a year with their dogs. I mean they hunted fervently and killed an awful lot of deer.

David Todd [00:30:07] And so I gather there wasn't a lot of attention paid to the seasons or bag limits or how many points or, you know, whether it was a buck or doe or a fawn. It was...

Richard Donovan [00:30:22] Zero or zero.

David Todd [00:30:24] Subsistence hunting, I guess. Is that the idea? Or just, it was such a sport that they loved that they..

Richard Donovan [00:30:31] It was both. Now you get back to Boggy Slough. Now back to them. I brought them into that picture I believe. The reason I do, of course, I know a lot about it. But Boggy Slough, now, when they, when the company fenced that, that was still back before stock law days, that they did that. But when the company fenced that, they were pretty meticulous about what kind of deer you killed. They, they wanted you to kill bucks. And sometimes they even required certain number points on the buck. That was that was pretty rare that the average man that was out there hunting, he wanted a deer. And if it was, and this is a funny thing too along back in the, this 50s era because the deer were getting kind of scarce. But if a person killed a doe and you were down there in a car, you put that thing in the trunk of your car. But if you killed a buck, you know, if it was a four point or a five point or whatever it was, you draped him on the fender. Back in those days, all cars had fenders on the front fenders. And you draped that deer across the fender of your car and you drove back and forth through town, until people got tired of seeing you. But you wanted to be sure and see that you had killed a buck deer and you were just so proud of that. That was a way of announcing to the world that you had killed a deer that day. I said that for humor. And that was true. But it was also kind of humorous.

David Todd [00:32:11] Yeah, I remember, I think in your book, you said sometimes they drove around until the deer was just a little bit rotten.

Richard Donovan [00:32:19] Well maybe I did, I don't know. Yeah.

David Todd [00:32:21] Yeah, well, this is fascinating. So I'm really curious about this time when there is this change over, both I guess earliest with the passage of those stock laws, and then later with the passage of the the laws about hunting deer with dogs. And what kind of reaction there was from people who had traditionally been in the woods, either running their hogs or running their dogs.

Richard Donovan [00:33:00] Well, David, that was a real squishy, squashy time in there. All I can say, and that's made not a very good adjective to use. But you see that, they closed that, they did those hunting laws kind of county by county, just like they did the stock laws, at first. I

mean, they had, they had, you could kill a buck a certain size in one county and in another county that was not, that was not required. You know, but like I say, I can't remember the details on those deer laws when they came in. But I do know that you could kill a deer in some county, and in an adjoining county, that you couldn't kill a deer. And you know, if you're out in the woods, you can't see an invisible line. If the river is the county line, of course, that's a easy marker. But if you're out in the woods and there's a survey line, it goes through there, that you know that you can no longer see, you don't know where you're in Newton County or you're in Sabine County. And people just didn't pay very much attention to it. And maybe killed a deer over in Newton County. And it was legal to bring it out in Sabine county. Well, he made sure that he came out through Sabine county. I'm just picking that as an example of the, I don't remember the laws in each county, but I do know that that was a conflict because some counties you could, and some counties, you couldn't kill a deer. And that was a contentious point. And finally, they just, Texas Parks and Wildlife, they just made their laws homogeneous to each stand. And you just couldn't kill a deer in general anywhere unless it was said it was OK by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

David Todd [00:35:08] Well, I think early you said that in the 50s, it was people like Mr. Temple, and Mr. Kerr, who, you know, felt strongly about trying to manage their own lands, protect their own acreage. What, who was the big proponent of limiting and banning hunting deer with dogs in the late eighties and I guess 1990 when that passed?

Richard Donovan [00:35:39] Well.

David Todd [00:35:39] Parks and Wildlife? Where was the political support for it?

Richard Donovan [00:35:44] You know it wasn't Mr. Temple and Mr. Kerr, personally so much. And I guess they both were. But or their companies would have been. But their companies were really against it because it was trespassing on their property, most of the time, hunting was. The owners just did ignored property lines. They came on the company land all the time and and you know, started fires near that sort of thing.

Richard Donovan [00:36:12] But. Your question was.

David Todd [00:36:20] Well, I was just thinking about how you explained that Angelina Timber and then Temple, were both proponents of having these stock laws back in the 50s, and I guess into the 60s and later in other counties. But I'm curious - it's almost a full generation later, in maybe the late 80s, 1990, when Parks and Wildlife says, you know, we're going to shut down this hunting deer with dogs. And I'm curious what what sort of spurred that or who spurred it? Why did that happen do you think?

Richard Donovan [00:37:01] Well, it was mostly because of trespass. I mean, that was the, that was the big thing that local people had against it because, you know, people had their own private property and they hated to look up and see a bunch of hounds running across the back of their pasture back there, through their cattle and that sort of thing. And, you know, they liked to have their own deer on the back of their land and not have people coming in with dogs and running them off. So it was it was just privacy and trespass, I think that that had more to do with it than anything. Plus, the fact that it was just so hard on the deer population, you just, you just put those standards up or they got like, like I think I maybe I told you when I talked to you the other day. We have a farm down on Farm Road 1818 and back in the 60s, hunting with dogs was still fairly common back in the 60s and people would come down that county road that went beside of our farm and would put the dogs out on the county road when the guys get out with them and then they'd have some people strung out along another company, logging

road on the west side of us, and then they put those dogs out and sick 'em in the woods and then they wouldn't trespass on our property. But the dogs would hit out on our property and go through there till they struck a deer track, a scent. And then they would start pursuing that deer and pushing it in toward that road to the west and then the stands over there would get a shot at the deer. So, you know, I didn't like 'em putting the dogs out and let them run across my land. And and nobody else did either. So I think the trespass and the fact that they were killing so many deer is two things that brought it to a close.

David Todd [00:39:12] OK. Maybe we can talk about each of those. So I'm curious of how people's attitude about trespass change. I mean, I guess this hunting of hogs and dogs and other kinds of animals, you know, with, with hounds and curs and so on went back a hundred or more years. Was it that the population of people was growing in or what made people feel more like, you know, what's mine is mine, what's within my boundaries is my kingdom. And you know, I want to protect it. It seems like there's an attitude that may have changed. Is that fair to say?

Richard Donovan [00:39:58] Yes, it is. One of your key words was population growth and another, another key word, or another key phrase is people getting killed on the roads. I mean, there were a lot of people hitting animals, struck on the highway and getting killed. So that was bringing about the stock laws. Well, I know you're not so much interested in that, but they're most closely intertwined, I think. And they begin to close the woods off. And that was the beginning of the closing of the woods. Like I said, I've heard that all my life. And that was the colloquialism, I suppose, but. As they closed the woods off, people, people liked that. And I mean some landowners liked that, the farmers and people like that. But when they did that, that forced the hunters over onto the local people's property. They didn't like that. You know, the extra push that put over on their property with dogs coming onto their land and all that sort of thing. So it was just a movement that grew with what I think you used the term, "increased population". I think that was one of the key words.

Richard Donovan [00:41:21] Plus the fact that they were just eradicating the deer population. I mean, you take and put hounds out there and if there's a deer out there, they're going to find that deer. And the only thing is, if that deer can somehow slip around those stands, well, then he's gonna get away. Otherwise he's gonna get killed. And so, and you've got hunters out there that they're gonna shoot a deer that doesn't make any difference, whether it's a doe or buck or a fawn, they're going to shoot that deer when it comes out and you can deplete the deer population pretty quick. And that's reason I said earlier this Boggy Slough became such a haven for deer because they would jump over that fence. They learned that there was sanctuary inside that fence and they would jump over inside that fence, and would stay in there and could get away from those hounds that way because the dogs would be in pursuit of them. And they'd come up against that fence, and the deer would just easily leap that fence. Well, when the dogs hit it, they couldn't, couldn't follow them. So deer just learned that that was sanctuary behind that fence, that wire fence. And the population just exploded into a bug sloop.

David Todd [00:42:40] Well, it would be interesting. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Richard Donovan [00:42:45] No, I was going to say that that took a few years for that to happen, but but over a period of time, it drew.

David Todd [00:42:53] Well, you know, it's it's curious to me, you know, now they're they're deer in the suburbs, wandering down, you know, St. Augustine lawns. And I wonder if you

could give people an example what it was like in East Texas when there were very few deer. And I guess the hunting deer with dogs was so effective in clearing out the woods.

Richard Donovan [00:43:20] Well, David, let me just put a footnote to what you just said. I can sit here in my chair and look out my window and say they're just almost any time. Well, not that frequently, but I see them frequently. And I live right here, almost the heart of the city of Lufkin. So there are a lot of deer now. But back in to when we were talking in the earlier years, the deer got so scarce that if someone saw a deer track. You know, people were in the woods all the time -loggers and all that sort of thing, so people were out fishing and like I said, the woods were full of people then. You don't see people in the woods anymore. People don't know how to act in the woods. But they would come in and say I saw a track down the, down the creek yesterday. You did? Was it a buck or no? Well, it was it was a great big buck. I can't believe there's deer that big left in in East Texas.

Richard Donovan [00:44:25] Well, you can bet that whoever he told that to would be back down there the next day or two with some dogs trying to find out, put them on that deer and run him out, and kill him. So that was the way it was. If a deer, deer track was seen somewhere, it was such an oddity that people came out and talked about it. And then as soon as they talked about it, well, then the people with the dogs went in and killed it. Does that make sense to you?

David Todd [00:44:54] Yeah. Yeah, it's a different world.

Richard Donovan [00:44:58] So I guess it got to a point. It got to the point where if you saw a deer track, that was a conversation piece. That's how small, how small the population in East Texas got and I'm talking counties adjoining Angelina and all through here, I'm told about East Texas in general. And if hadn't been for the stock laws and hunting laws, you know, we just wouldn't have any, we would have. You know, it's just like there were no otters and no beavers in here to speak of during my my lifetime. And it was only after they closed the woods and begin to make it more difficult. And now there are otters and beavers and mink and things everywhere. But they were trapped into extinction.

Richard Donovan [00:46:00] When I was a kid. Oh, man, Wes Karnes was an excellent trapper. In fact, he was the first person to catch a wolf in East Texas. There were no wolves in East Texas until I was probably in high school. And then old man Wes Karnes was an expert trapper and he was trapping for mink and just about anything. And that was the way he made his living and he caught this, quote unquote, wolf, and brought it in. Wolves were in East Texas until, I don't know, oh the 1920s or somewhere I don't remember when the last gray wolf was killed out here. But the wolves were taken out early nineteen hundreds and but he came in and caught this wolf because nobody ever dreamed that there was a coyote in East Texas. But Mr. Wes Karnes brought this wolf in and put him in his, he had a big cage that he put chickens in, and he carried this wolf home and got him out of the trap and carried him home and put him in that cage. And David, I'm telling you, people came from far and wide to see this wolf, that old man Wes Karnes had caught. And Mr. Karnes' son, Wesley, and I were in the same grade. We were good friends and we hunted together and all that sort of stuff. But I was always amazed at how far away people came to get to see that wolf.

Richard Donovan [00:47:38] And then in later times, you know, well, it turned out that it was coyotes that had made the invasion into East Texas. And I ought to put another note on that. And that was exactly the same time that the broiler industry was introduced into east Texas. And people that had these broiler houses - these chickens would die, you know. Oh, they were dying all the time. And the way those farmers disposed of those chickens, would just take

them out there and throw them in the ditch somewhere out of sight of the house somewhere. And so the coyotes just came in here and had a snack bar with all these chicken houses that used to be here in East Texas, course they're not here anymore because they've become a lot more, I guess you'd say, mechanized and people don't have them like they used to. But when I was a kid, it wasn't uncommon for a lot of farmers to have a chicken house and raise 3000 chickens. And then at a certain time they had to catch those chickens and they'd pay us boys so much to come out there at night and get those chickens and and put them in boxes or, you know, cartons and haul them off to the chicken processing plant. But those coyotes were drawn here, I think mostly, mostly, and maybe not, but it happened simultaneously: the chickens arrived here at the same time the coyotes did.

David Todd [00:49:19] And they'll be in the nineteen fifties?

Richard Donovan [00:49:22] Yes sir.

David Todd [00:49:24] Interesting. So the the wolves had been trapped out in the 20s, but then the coyotes arrived maybe a generation later with this.

Richard Donovan [00:49:35] I don't remember exactly I don't remember exactly when the wolves were taken out of East Texas, but the gray wolf was the East Texas Wolf, you know, it was smaller than the wolf to the north of us. Pretty formidable animal anyhow.

David Todd [00:50:02] Huh. Well, you know, it's we've sort of circled around this issue of the deer hunting laws and then the stock laws that generation earlier, but that they both seemed to have a big impact on people's attitude about the woods and the commonly held, or commonly used, land in East Texas.

Richard Donovan [00:50:30] Tremendous. Tremendous.

David Todd [00:50:31] Yeah. I just wonder if you could sort of try to sum it up and maybe help me understand that that change, that change in the culture and attitude about land and habitat with those two laws that were, were changing attitudes?

Richard Donovan [00:50:53] You know, a lot of things happened about that time, also is people began to move to the cities, too, and leaving the farms. And it was just a completely upheaval in the culture is what I'm trying to say, that it changed all of our, kind of simultaneously. And they all, I suppose, helped each other change - each of these events. But the people of East Texas came from a, changed from a urban, a rural society to a, I can't say an urban, society, but they were not so much farmers as it used to be.

Richard Donovan [00:51:52] When I was a boy, Shawnee Prairie, and that doesn't mean anything to you, but there's a place here called Shawnee Prairie, and called Windham Prairie and Bald Hill and all that is kind of clay country and through there is, is loamy soil. It's sand and clay mixed, but more clay than it is sand. And it was a good crop-growing country because it held moisture better and it held the nutrients in soil better. So it was better farmland. Plus the fact that it didn't have as many trees on it when the settlers first got here, and so it was easier to clear. So that, all that country was was farmland and, and I kind of forgot where I was going with that I got the tracked off of it.

David Todd [00:52:39] So this, traditionally it was farmed, and then you were seeing that the people moved to the cities and they abandoned those farms?

Richard Donovan [00:52:48] Exactly. That's exactly right. It was farmed and then World War II came along and the men were all taken off into the armed services and the men that weren't drafted, had something wrong with them, well, they were able to go to Beaumont and Houston in places like that and get jobs at the shipyard and their wives got jobs in the shipyards. I knew one family, some of these big deer hunters that I'm talking about right now, he and his wife and twin daughters went to Port Arthur, I believe where that shipyard was. And they lived in a house with two other families. And they got it arranged where that, and they all slept in the same bed, or the same two beds, I think it was. When they got on the graveyard shift and one was on the evening shift, and one of them on the day shift. And when one of them came in, the other one was vacating that bed and they went to bed and slept and they did that for quite some time during the war, working in the shipyards in, in Port Arthur, somewhere down there, I can't remember. But I won't call their names. But they were some of these big deer hunters that I'm telling you about here, that did that. And they had couple of, pair of twin daughters and I knew them real well.

David Todd [00:54:20] Kept the beds warm, I guess. They never cooled off.

Richard Donovan [00:54:23] The bed. They all slept in the same bed. That's right. Or the same two beds, I guess. And that's the way it worked. But it was an interesting time, but those people abandoned this part of the world, but they always want to come back and hunt. That's where I was going with this conversation is those people always want to come back and hunt during the hunting season. And they either took off from work, got their vacation during that time, or just went absent from work or something. But they came back particularly on weekends and wanted to hunt in the same way that they had always hunted traditionally, open range, everywhere. And that was a lot of the time with the resentment, and when they would burn the woods out of resentment and just mad at the timber companies and burn their trees up that they had planted. And it was just a very interesting time.

David Todd [00:55:29] Well, in that, tell me more about that push-back, you know, the burning of the woods. I saw you wrote about that in your book, Paddling the Wild Neches, about the arson. Do you have any stories about that?

Richard Donovan [00:55:49] Well, I think I put in that, in that book, about pines won't grow where my, they say, pines won't grow where my dogs don't go, and those kinds of sayings that they said back in those days. But yeah, that was mostly in the 40s and the very early 50s that that attitude prevailed. But the timber companies were trying to force people off their lands, you know. They, they had hunted that land for all their years and used it just like it was theirs. Well, then the timber companies come along and start planting it, put paint around their lands is the first thing they did. Temple's paint was blue and Angelina County Lumber Company's paint was orange and government land was red. And you could hunt on government land. But the national forest had red paint around their land. And so but then they put "posted" signs in addition to that paint that they put up. And they wouldn't let you come on, but then they would turn around and lease that land out to hunting clubs. And you could be a member of that hunting club, and that way you would defend the company's land against me. I mean, you would - you're a member of that club and you wouldn't want me coming on there, so if I came on there with my dogs or something, you would report me to the authorities because you were now a member of that club and that was part of your club. You paid money to be a member of it. So you have the timber companies enforce the law: no hunting on their land. And so then I'm really resentful of that because you've, the timber companies have boxed me out. And I would find a place that the, particularly I want to find a place where the little pine seedlings were up maybe a foot or so tall. Then I would step in there and set that on fire, and I'd burn up several thousand acres that you just got through planting, or several hundred

acres of it, that you had just got through planting, the timber companies had just got through planting. And it was revenge and a lot of that went on, an awful lot of it.

Richard Donovan [00:58:08] And I think God might be repeating myself, but our constable, who was a very efficient law man, by the way. I could talk to you hours about him, but he collected, I believe, 2500 dollar reward, one time for arresting a man. And he was a friend of mine. I won't call his name, but he got a 2500 dollar reward for arresting him and turning him in for burning the woods. And that guy had to go to Huntsville and serve some time. I don't remember how much, but he had served some time. And then he came back.

David Todd [00:58:44] Well, and when the constables or sheriffs and deputies and pasture riders would catch somebody who was violating stock laws, or later the dog laws, was it difficult to get them prosecuted or was there kind of a wink, wink kind of attitude about these laws, as not being too pay much attention to.

Richard Donovan [00:59:11] It depends on what decade you're talking about, David.

David Todd [00:59:17] OK.

Richard Donovan [00:59:17] Early on, the law wouldn't even arrest you. I mean, the sheriffs and the people like that, they, that was up to the game wardens to do the arresting, because the sheriff and people, they didn't want to lose the votes. I mean, the rural people would not vote for a sheriff that did that sort of thing. And, but as time changed then, and attitudes changed and the sheriff was then more, became more involved in it and the deputies as well. So it just depends on the timeline that you're talking about. In the early days of the stock laws, they didn't pay any attention to the speak of, even in Angelina county.

Richard Donovan [01:00:07] I remember well, Sam Rayburn reservoir. I don't remember. It was in the 60s, bout 64, or maybe or something like that, when they close the gates on Rayburn Reservoir. David, I'm sorry. I can't remember the dates on that, but it was in the 60s, and a friend of mine, an old friend of mine had to ask me to come down and shoot a cow for him because he knew I was a good shot. And I think I was in from college or something during the summer. I'm not sure what the score was on that. But anyway, he asked me to come down to the part of the land that was going be flooded by the lake and shoot a cow for him because it was a Brahma cow and she was very wild. And he couldn't even get close to her. He tried to catch her with dogs and everything else. He didn't have anything that could handle that a cow. She was pretty good size - Brahma. And so I went down there with a 30/30 and and he and a couple of his boys, grown boys, came in and started running behind her and got her running. And then I did, just like we did with deer hunting, just like I told you, I was waiting on the road up there for that cow to come trotting out up through there. Soon as she did, well, I shot her, but I told you that story, to tell you how it was up into the mid-60s that cattle were still... they had kind of fenced them off of the highways. But back in the bottoms and things, here in Angelina County, and everywhere else, there were still cattle roaming free will into the mid 60s.

David Todd [01:02:07] Well, you know, that was, maybe one last question I wanted to ask you, is it that it seems like a lot of the free range and I was thinking particularly the hogs, but it sounds like the cattle as well were down in the bottoms that were eventually flooded out with Rayburn and Dam B, Steinhagen. Did that sort of help change the attitude about the open woods, the commons, you know, when when all that land was flooded?

Richard Donovan [01:02:43] Yeah, it decreased that population considerably. You know, the people that pushed them out of there. And there was, oh, there were hearts broken over that. I remember an old man that, J.C. McGilverer, J.T. McGilverer. I went to the nursing home to see him one time. And, and it had been years since he lived on his land. I mean, they forced them out. And it just came up in our conversation. And he started crying right there in the nursing home. And I said, well, J.T., I'm sorry that came up. He said, "that's all right". But anyway, they took his farm away from him. And and and didn't pay him any money. You know, what he got, he couldn't take it out and buy half the little land that he owned had taken away from him. So anyway, it was a bad deal for them.

Richard Donovan [01:03:43] You know, people people, by attrition, I guess you could say, David, more than anything else, that is what changed the attitudes about people and about the stock laws and things like that. As I said earlier in our conversation, people today, right here in Lufkin, Texas: now we're a small town and I go to Huntington, or Zavalle, even places like that. People do not know how to handle the woods. I mean, the woods are a, I'm overemphasizing this, but I won't say it to make a point. They are a dark, brooding, evil empire in there, the woods are where there are all kinds of creatures that would devour you. You understand what I'm saying? The point I'm trying to make is that there's snakes in there, there. You can get lost in there and you'd never be found. And people are just afraid of the woods today. Whereas a couple of generations ago, people lived in the woods.

David Todd [01:04:59] So that may be one of the consequences of the, this end of the frontier, this closing of the woods, that people just, they don't know what to do and they fear the forest?

Richard Donovan [01:05:12] That's absolutely a fact, because people don't understand anything about the forest. They don't know what a raccoon, they know what a raccoon is, because, they seen maybe plenty of them in town, course there are a lot of them in town. But, to understand about a 'coon, you know how you, we used to hunt 'em and tree 'em. A lot of times laws we would climb the tree and throw the 'coon out and the dogs would have a big dog and 'coon fight. And the dog would, would kill the coon, you know. But we, we liked the fight. We, we loved doing that just to have the fight, you know. It was probably cruel, you know, a terrible thing to do, I suppose. People today would view it as very inhuman, inhumane. But we did it. And that was just a way of life. That's a long time ago. But if you ask somebody today, if they want to do that, they would look at you as if you were as if you're crazy.

Richard Donovan [01:06:14] It's kind of like I talk all the time about you drive all over my home town here, the town of Lufkin and for every teenager you see out mowing their yard with a lawnmower, I'll buy you your lunch. Because it doesn't happen anymore. Kids don't mow their own yards anymore. They're sitting in the house with their telephone or on the computer or something like that. And back in my age, it began not even having a law. I mean, we didn't have long lawns back when I was a kid. I mean, I didn't get a lawn until I was in the. I was in the fifth grade when I got my first lawn and it wasn't much of a lawn and my lawn mower was a big circular mower. It wasn't a rotary mower like people use to mow the lawn with today, it was a big circular mower, more like you mow down brush with. But that was my first lawn mower, big cumbersome thing.

Richard Donovan [01:07:26] But my point is people's aspect or perception of the forest are so entirely different today. And it's because we are so divorced from nature. I mean, when a kid doesn't have to mow the yard anymore, he no longer understands how grass and weeds grow and how you have to keep the flower beds clean and all that sort of thing. I mean, I maybe grinding a nut shell here, but that is the reality as far as I'm concerned.

David Todd [01:08:06] Sure, sure. And that's, that's a pretty tame kind of landscape compared to the deep woods. I mean, to go from Bermuda grass lawn to, you know, the bottoms of the Neches. I understand your point. Yeah. Yeah. Well, I guess I'm curious, do some of these changes about understanding the woods and appreciating them and going in them and feeling comfortable there? That seems to be, that East Texas was one of the last places that I'm aware of, where there was a culture of, you know, understanding the out-of-doors. Really, you know, instinctively. Is that fair to say?

Richard Donovan [01:08:56] And that's a real fair statement to say. And, and it began to change in the 50s. I mean, that that lifestyle began to change in the 50s. That perception of the forest, you know. You know. You know, David, kids nowadays, you ask what side of a tree moss grows on. And they can't tell you. Every kid in the world back in my age knew that moss grew on the north side of the tree. I mean, you're out in the woods and you're kind of lost and you start looking around, say, well, how do I get out of here? And then you start looking, you find a tree that's got some moss growing. Well, you know that that's north. You know, which way to go that you can at least walk in a straight line and come out somewhere. You may not come out where you want to, but you won't walk in a circle because, you know, I know of people walk in a complete circle at night. But you know, and on a cloudy night that is not hard to do, because when you're out coon-hunting at night or fox-hunting at night, you look at the stars and that's where you find your way out.

Richard Donovan [01:10:11] And I knew enough star locations that I could look it up at night and find my way out without too much trouble. But on a cloudy night, it's difficult. It is difficult.

David Todd [01:10:28] Yeah. You think it'd be hard enough during the day to find your way through the woods, but at night even more so.

Richard Donovan [01:10:37] You will walk in a circle. You will actually walk in a circle when you're lost? It just, that's a reality.

David Todd [01:10:48] Well, you have helped lead me in a straight line without going in a circle too much, and I really appreciate that today. Is there anything that you would like to add about in our little discussion about stock laws and dog laws, before I let you go?

Richard Donovan [01:11:13] David, all I can tell you, it was a traumatic experience for East Texans of that time. The, the stock laws to start with, because that really changed how people lived, because a lot of people depended. You know, there, the woods today are full of hogs. I mean, they are tearing up the country. I wish that Texas Parks and Wildlife would offer a. Not a reward, but what word, I'm getting where I can't...

David Todd [01:11:50] A bounty maybe or?

Richard Donovan [01:11:52] A bounty, a bounty on every hog that people brought in, like they cut the hog ears off or something like that. Because they're doing tremendous damage to the forest. They just tearing places up real badly. And because people simply, they're not managed anymore. Nobody cares anything about them. I mean, there are a few people that hunt them, but by and large they're just beasts like squirrels are out there. They just multiply and a hog will have two litters a year and her litter will likely be anywhere from four to eight pigs a litter. And, you do that twice a year and you can see what happens to the hog population. And it's out there. It's terrible right now.

Richard Donovan [01:12:42] And, but people just had their lives so abruptly changed by those two things. the passing of the stock laws and then hunting laws that forbid hunting with dogs. And that changed the culture of East Texas as much as any. I think the stock law was probably the most culture-changing, but the hunting deer with dogs was another one. Because those dogs, they, people loved to hear them and people loved to see 'em run. And people loved to shoot the deer and that was the big change.

David Todd [01:13:35] Yeah, and something that had gone on for generations, so I guess something that had been just really ingrained. You know, your great grandparents did it, your grandparents, did it, your parents did it. You did it with your friends. And it was just, must have been such a part of life.

Richard Donovan [01:13:53] That's right. It just came up generation after generation after generation. And then it was abruptly, you know, shut off. And then that's very traumatic for the people that are involved in it. And it was a momentous event in their lives. But boy, I loved the dogs, you know, the black and tans and the blue ticks and the redbone, and I love to hear the dogs run as much as anybody. And I remember one time that I was out squirrel hunting and heard the dogs running, and all of a sudden here came the deer right by me. And then a few minutes here came the dogs right by me. And it was just a real, you know, just a real experience to be put right in the pocket of that. The deer pace within probably 40, 50 feet. I mean, the dogs came right on top of me, I mean, you know, they weren't right exactly on the trail. But at that time they were just running by, just smelling the deer itself, in the breeze, you know.

David Todd [01:15:01] And high speed I bet!

Richard Donovan [01:15:01] Oh they were running wide open both of them.

David Todd [01:15:10] Well, when you tell these stories, I feel like I'm there. Thank you so much. You, you, love talking to you. And I hope we can catch up again soon. But thank you for the visit today.

Richard Donovan [01:15:25] Well, David, I hope I've given you some information that's worthwhile. I've just sat here and kind of blabbered and maybe not said some of the things that I should have said, but I just said what came in my mind as I was talking.

David Todd [01:15:40] It was very helpful and I really thank you.

Richard Donovan [01:15:44] All right. If you think of anything that I might have left out, or something like that, feel free to call me back, David.

David Todd [01:15:50] All right. Well, best to you and to your family. I appreciate it.

Richard Donovan [01:15:54] A real privilege. Thank you, sir.

David Todd [01:15:56] All right. Goodbye.

Richard Donovan [01:15:58] Bye, David.