

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: **Richard Donovan** (RD)

INTERVIEWER: David Todd (DT)

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Please note that the recording includes roughly 60 seconds of color bars and sound tone for technical settings at the outset of the reels. Numbers correlate with the time codes on the VHS tape copy of the interview. "Misc." refers to various off-camera conversation or background noise, unrelated to the interview.

(misc.)

DT: My name is David Todd. I'm here for the Conservation History Association of Texas. It is March 3rd, 2008, and we are in Lufkin, Texas. And we have the good opportunity to be visiting with Richard Donovan, who has been active in—in river protection and forest protection and has had a long career in—in—in the forest industry with Temple-Inland, and also as a leading realtor in this part of the state. And with that introduction, I wanted to say thank you for spending time with us today.

00:01:51 - 2433

RD: Thank you David.

DT: I thought we might start with listening to you talk about the history of the forest industry, which of course is—is probably the leading major industry in this part of the state. And it's—it's had a—a large impact on the environment for this area as well. Can you go back to the nineteenth century perhaps and—and tell us about what the traditional t—timbering operations might have been like?

00:02:21 - 2433

RD: Well, the initial timbering industry came—e—entered into Texas in about—began working about 1890, and by 1920, our forests were gone. It was the cut-out, get-out culture that—the forests of the Northeast had been exhausted and they were looking for another supply of timber. And they found the South and Southwest forests to their liking, and they brought their machines and their railroads into Texas. And in about the lifetime of one—one man, about 30 years, about the working lifetime of a man, it was gone, it was over with. And during that period, they extracted all of our virgin timber and left behind a—a devastation. The landscape was devastated as far as I could see in many places. Most often they didn't cut any trees smaller than twelve inches in diameter. And today that's a diameter of a tree

00:03:22 - 2433

that—that most timber companies are looking for, but they—they ignored those trees. But in the forest where the big steam skidders were used, all those trees were snapped off just like toothpicks. And they began skidding those huge logs that they cut down and bringing them out to the railroad spurs to be loaded on to trains to take them back to the sawmills. So you can imagine it looked like Hiroshima or Nagasaki photographs of—of the time. And it stayed like that until—in many places until the Forest Service—U.S. Forest Service—bought approximately 600,000 acres of land in East Texas and began reforesting those

areas, planting them in pine trees. And then timber companies, such as Temple-Inland—it wasn't Temple-Inland at the time, it was Southern Pine Lumber Company, but the Temples came and began

00:04:17 - 2433

purchasing land along the Neches River in the 1890's. And Mr. Temple had vision to—to see that there was going to be a tomorrow. And he began planning his cutting practices so that they could come back again at a later date and continue to re-harvest an area, called selective management. And that method of harvesting pine trees prevailed until, actually the 1960's, I suppose. Then we entered into the—into the era of clear-cutting. And clear-cutting is where you go in and, once again, you leave the scorched earth policy behind. And it's—it was even worse than it was when the timber barons left out, picked up their railroads, and took down their sawmills, and took their money and left. And clear-cutting is—leaves the same situation as that did on the ground. The only difference is, is after a clear-cut, the

00:05:22 - 2433

landowners come back and plant their property in row after row, just like it's a corn field, of loblolly pine trees with intention of harvesting some twenty-twenty-five years later when the diameter of the log is about twelve inches. And that is what you see sweeping across East Texas today. And nothing will live—virtually nothing will live in those pine forests, they're sterile. To make them even more sterile, the timber companies will, after the pine trees are planted and kind of established, to take care of weed growth so that weeds don't come in and shade the pine saplings out—or little seedlings out, and starve them of the nutrients and moisture in the ground, they will come back and spray them. Kill all the weeds and all the hardwood sprouts that have sprouted out of the stumps. And they would kill them then—or kill

00:06:17 - 2433

the weeds or sprouts. And then after the pine saplings have reached around six feet or eight feet in height, something like that, in all likelihood they will come back with an aerial spray herbicide from a helicopter and they will kill any hardwood sprouts that have re-sprouted the second time. So there's nothing there for the wildlife to eat, there's no dens for them to—or cavities for them to den in. So you have no birds or wildlife to speak of that live in a pine plantation. Now hardwoods are a little bit different story. Initially the timber companies did not go after the hardwoods, back—back in the 1800's. However, when Mr. Temple began his operation, he had a couple of hardwood mills, huge mills. And they logged the Neches pretty severely. And—and everywhere, I'm just speaking primarily to the Neches, but all of East

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Texas was logged for its hardwoods. But then when I came along as a young boy in the 1940's and 50's, following the end of World War II, and during World War II, the United States was on a railroad building boon, and so was Mexico. And crossties were very much in demand. So that brought about a phenomenon known as peckerwood sawmills. And East Texas was filled with peckerwood sawmills. Peckerwood sawmill took its name from the fact that much like a peckerwood bird—the woodpecker bird, that when it left a site, all that remained on the ground was a pile of sawdust to let you know that it had been there. And they could move, they were very portable and they could be moved without a lot of—a great deal of trouble. But these peckerwood sawmills went after the hardwoods, and they

took just about
00:08:17 - 2433

anything that would make a crosstie. So that was the second phase of the war on hardwoods. And then in more recent times, hardwoods have just been seen as a more or less a nuisance. And the Forest Service began poisoning hardwoods back in the—back in the 30's act—and 40's and 50's. And, not only that but private landowners could be subsidized. I—if a landowner wanted to rid his property of those obnoxious hardwoods, the government would subsidize him to do it. Much like when they sent trappers in here to get rid of the wolves and things that were considered pests, the government subsidized that as well. So, the war on hardwoods has been going on for some time. More recently, and it's kind of a twist to this, that the red cockaded woodpecker—an endangered species of bird—the Forest Service has used that as—as an excuse to eradicate hardwoods out of the
00:09:19 - 2433

forests, because it supposedly obstructs the fly-aways of red cockaded woodpeckers. And, to my way of thinking, they do that to the excess. And as always they can exploit that things to their advantage. But that's kind of an idea of where the timber business is going. When I was a young man growing up, for instance, in this small town of Zavala, a little hamlet, there were five sawmills. And some of them were pretty good sized mills within the, quote, un-quote, city limits of that town. There was a big steam mill that operated there and there were several pine mills that were there. There were no hardwood mills initially. Then as the pine mills were cut out and their timber was gone then they began to bring hardwood mills in to cut crossties. And I—my days go back to the days when they logged the woods with
00:10:18 - 2433

mules and horses, and loaded logs and put wood on freight cars to haul it to the mills, rather than loading it on trucks which came little—at a later time. So I—I've run the whole gamut of the timber industry lately.

DT: I think you mentioned at one point, that—this was off tape, that—that you'd seen the—the evolution from using mules and oxen all the way to trucks and trains and so on. Can you talk about that—the—the change in technology that you've seen?

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RD: Well there has been a tremendous technological change in—in logging. In my earliest days, I remember when trees were cut down with a crosscut saw. Two men, one on either end, pulling the saw back and forth through—through the tree. And as resin built up on the saw, they would take the turpentine bot—the kerosene bottle out of their pocket and flick drops of kerosene onto the blade to lubricate the blade as it traveled back and forth through the saw, to keep the resin build up from getting so—so thick. And then the pulp waters, they cut their product down with little bow saws and hauled it out of the woods on—on trucks. Mules and horses were used to, quote, un-quote, bunch the logs. To bring them out to where the trucks were and haul them out to where it was loaded on freight cars to be hauled to the sawmills.

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Matter of fact, I worked in the general store part of the time I was growing up, and I would have to deliver loads of oats out to the corrals where the mules and horses were temporarily corralled out on the log site. And a 125 pound sack of oats, and I—sometimes I'd have to carry it several hundred feet to—to get it to the—and it was it was in mud, you

know, and all that sort of thing. So it was a big event when people went from skidding logs out with horses and mules to the—first start out just farm tractors. That was the first thing they began using was just regular farm tractors to skid the—skid them out with. And then, of course, they began developing this four-wheel drive skidders and—and they get bigger and bigger. And today they just have these big shearers that just walk up to a tree and crunch it down, and

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bring it over, and lay it back, and drive on to another tree, and crunch it down, and well—and just go around the places to be harvested like that, and pile those piled up into logs. And then there's another (?) boom piece of equipment that picks the logs up and lays it on the big 18 wheeler trucks, huge trucks, they haul them out in tree length logs. Back in the earlier days of horses and mules, of course they cut the logs into lengths, usually twenty foot lengths to haul them out—or—or 16 foot lengths, and—to haul them out of the woods. And—but everything has gotten bigger and better and more powerful. And of course it takes huge roads to accommodate equipment like that. In the earlier years, five years after you logged a tract of land, they were just taking—because after they got into what they call managed forest,

00:13:37 - 2433

they were only taking the merchantable timber out. And five years after they had been there, you—it's almost no trace. The roads had disappeared for the most part, and the stumps had rotted, and the tree tops had certainly rotted. But today they have these big huge roads that they put in and—and when they leave it's—most often it's a clear-cut. So yeah, I've seen a lot of technological changes take place in the forest.

DT: Maybe another way to look at the timber industry is to—to look at how the—the products have changed. I mean, it seems like for many years—you were talking about dimensional lumber and railroad ties, but in more recent years, from what I understand, there have been things like oriented strand board and MDF, and of course, paper and cardboard. What does that mean to how the timber industry has worked and what the forest looked like?

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RD: Well, it's a—it's a fiber product today, more than just a dimensional product. Now of course they still make two by fours, and two by sixes, and two by eights, and one by fours, all that sort of dimensional product. But they also make fiberboard and particleboard and cardboard. And plywood is not nearly the product that it once was, simply because it's not a fiber board, it's not a fiber product. And fiber you can utilize much more of the tree and you can use smaller diameter parts of the tree like the limbs and—and the part of the tree that's not—not suitable for dimensional products. You can engineer the product much better, the tolerances are much more specific, and it just lends itself to utilizing so much more of the forest than—than it once was because used to—much of the forest was wasted. Now hav—much of the

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timber was wasted. Now having said that, and this brings me to a—even an—another topic we're—topic we're getting in Lufkin a—a biomass plant that's going to generate electricity from certain biomass products. And much of that will be timber off fall. But I hearken back to the days of the farmers in the early 20's and 30's, where or even before that in East Texas, farmers would come to an area and they would farm it until it was exhausted. They

pulled all the nutrients out of the ground before there was commercial fertilizer, and they would move onto another place and farm it until it was exhausted. And then keep—continue moving—we had the dust bowl days, as you recall, from that, out in the West. But I wonder, and I'm not a—a

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biologist or soil scientist or anything like that, but common sense tells me that if you continue to take all of these products off of the land, and you put no humus and no nutrients back into the soil, a generation, two generations from now, what is—what is the forest land going to—going to be like? What's it—what's going to be its nutrient content, what's going to be its composition, what's going to be the minerals present in there? I don't know the answer to that, but it makes me wonder.

DT: Well let me ask one other question about—about the forest industry. M—my understanding that—that s—some operators are using prescribed burning. And I'm curious what you think about that approach, and is it—is it a good thing, a bad thing, depends on the situation?

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RD: It very definitely depends on the situation. It's a mixed bag. You can—it's—it's very simple matter to go to the rolling hill country of East Texas, to the east of here. The sand hills in the longleaf country. And you can see what prescribed burning is doing there and the amount of erosion that's taking place. You burn that—that duff off of the ground, the—the pine straw and leaves that are on the ground, the duff. And you open it up to when rainfall hits, and raindrops hit it and dislodge particles of sand and—and carry them downstream and are silting up the creeks and gullies that—that are there. But having said that, for as long as mankind has been present, for sure, and probably even before that, the longleaf country

00:18:10 - 2433

evolved under fire. It was a fire tolerant—and in fact that's probably the reason the longleaves existed was because they're more fire tolerant than loblolly and so they were able to survive—survive under fire. Where I ho—my big problem with—with fires, not in the longleaf country which is—it probably needs to be there, certainly for the benefit of the red cockaded woodpecker, I think. Of course, let me put a caveat there as well, but yo—you destroy so many species when you do that. Dogwoods and all the blooming flowers, and things that are in—in the longleaf country, the native wild azalea that's here in East Texas, beautiful flower in the spring. But it's in the loblolly area that I find fire most objectionable, and once again, I have disagreement with the U.S. Forest Service about how they burn in those—in those zones. They're—they're burning simply to kill hardwoods is what they're burning—is

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the reason they're burning. And hardwoods are the underpinning of wildlife, both birds and animals. So yes, fire is good in certain areas of the forest. Fire is bad, very bad, in other areas of the forest. And it depends on what you call bad. To me bad is to destroy a wildlife habitat. To them, good is to increase plant production. So, it depends on what side of the coin you're looking at.

DT: You—you just mentioned the Forest Service, and I thought we might take this chance to talk about how the national forests originally got set up in East Texas—I think you mentioned that back in the 30's about 600,000 acres was—was purchased.

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RD: Roughly, that's—that's right and, if you remember, we were in the depths of the depression. And during that time—and the Great Depression it's called. And there was no work, people were—were hungry. Now there's one thing good about living in a rural area. People that lived in rural areas survived and did quite well in East Texas, because the woods were full of semi-feral hogs, people could grow gardens and corn crops and—and they survived and hunted and fished. So survival in East Texas as—whereas in different parts of the United States, was not the case. But survival was—was not a big ordeal in East Texas at—at the time, but people were broke. In fact, Temple-Inland, as I recall, sold a huge amount of land just in order to s—to survive, to the U.S. Forest Service. So the Forest Service—and this was all

00:20:56 - 2433

cut over land, this was the—the timber barons had come in and stripped of all the merchantable timber, most of the merchantable timber. And so the Forest Service bought these lands, and immediately organized a CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps. And the WPA or the PWA, ever how you want to call it, the Public Works Administration. And they began building things like Boykin Springs, a campground east of here, my—one of my favorite spots in East Texas. It has been for many, many people for many, many years. And they began planting trees. They get credit for planting a lot more trees than they planted, but nevertheless they did plant a lot of trees. Put a lot of young men to work and were able to send money back home to their families in order to be able to buy things that they couldn't raise on the farm. And so the Forest Service accumulated that land. Now, we like to think of it—or

00:21:54 - 2433

most the un—unlearned think of that land as being one 600,000 acre block of land. But unfortunately it's not. It is very fragmented, you have partial—just scattered in many, many areas, and some of them are not even contiguous to the other. Most of them are not contiguous. They are scattered all over this part of East Texas there. And then, to make matters even worse, the Forest Service, in order to log that land, go in and construct huge roads. And then these roads, of course, are open to the public. Now, they put gates across them but people have four wheelers and all that sort of thing, and they circumvent those gates. And they introduce garbage and litter. People haul their trash off and dump them in the National Forest. Fire ants migrate down these open areas and are problems to—to wildlife, particularly the

00:22:50 - 2433

young. Even get up in the nests and get the chicks. Of course they intrude into the wildlife areas where they're trying to raise their young. But probably—maybe the most damaging part of it all is outlaw hunting. Or not even outlaw hunting, just exposing more and more of the wildlife landscape to hunting pressure. And these roads are one of the most in—intrusive things that you can do to a forest, one of the most disruptive things you can do to the forest, just as far as wildlife are concerned. Of course, they're very good for hauling logs out of the forest, if you're a—if you're in the timber mindset. And—and that's where the U.S. Forest Service—that's where their focus is, is ra—raising timber. Now, having said that, I will say that the Forest Service is much better today than it was a—a decade ago even. And that they solicit input from the public more. Now, they solicit it, but that doesn't mean that they

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necessarily implement your suggestions. We—well we do have an impact m—m—maybe ever so slight, but they—they do grant us the—the fact. And—but of course under the Mark Rey administration of—the present administration, Mark—Mr. Mark Reyes, we backslid a good bit. I hope that the next administration comes in has a different attitude toward the national forest. But we're proud of the national forest, that's public land, that's your land, that's my land, that's the—the public's land. And it should not be managed just for the benefit of raising pine trees to be hauled to the sawmill. And most of the public wishes that that were not the case, unfortunately that part of the public does not have the political clout that the timber industry has. And so we—we do not enjoy prominence in their policy making that we would like to have.

DT: Y—you mentioned the—the impact of roads in some of these national forests. I understand that—that under the—the Wilderness Act that was passed in '84, that some of these lands that have not been cut by roads were set aside. Do you—do you know much about the—the process of that and what the impact has been?

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RD: I—I do know a little bit about it. Unfortunately, we had a 4,000 acre tract, as I call, in the Sam Houston National Forest—was the only forest that qualified for that protection. And to my understanding it was not protected, so i—if I'm correct about that, we have no land in Texas that qualified for that protection, or if it did qualified it—it was not protected. So they continue to build roads in all the national forests in Texas. It had to be a certain size contiguous block to qualify for that, and we didn't have anything like that.

DT: I guess one of the other big changes in—in the landscape, at least in recent years, has been the sale of private timberlands not to the Forest Service, but to other timber operators. I believe Champion International paid for Louisiana-Pacific, most recently Temple-Inland had sold literally millions of acres. And I'm curious, first of all, why did those sales occur? And why do you think—what do you think the impact will be from those sales?

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RD: Well, supposedly, according to money managers, the sales were financial. That—they felt like that they could take that land—that money that was invested in that land, and invest it in other things that were a higher yield to them. They would avoid taxes—real estate taxes, so it was just strictly a money decision as I understand. When Arthur Temple managed the—the company, when he was the president of the company, and was building his empire, they had—they operated under a selective cutting management style. They went in and harvested out the trees that could be marketed to that time and left the others growing. But they became a public company then, and the pressure was on to increase the bottom line. And so they gradually began to change to clear-cutting, which is the optimal—optimal

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way to do it. And you use bigger equipment of course, and that results into increased output, you use less manpower to do it. Where it took several men to go in and cut down a tree, and cut off the limbs, and cut it into lengths, and skid it out. One man can go in on one machine and do all of that, you know, by himself. So it was—just strictly economics was the—was the idea for selling that land. Now, your question is to the impact, it's—it's really—it hasn't really manifested itself yet. You know, i—it's all speculation, but my speculation is it's going to be, it's going to have a dreadful impact. For instance, Temple-

Inland just sold a million and a half acres of land. And I worked for Temple for twenty—twenty years, and in just general terms, Temple's objective was to cut timber in order to log their mills. Whereas the people

00:28:53 - 2433

that have—or that management trust, the real estate trust, and the insurance companies, and the pension funds, and all those people that have bought this land recently, they're going to be a lot more worried about maximizing their bottom line rather than just logging their industrial facilities. And so, it's going to become even more like a farm. They're going to plant fencerow-to-fencerow, so to speak, although there are no fences. That's just an East Texas term that I use. They're going to plant property line to property line; they're going to deaden the maximum amount of hardwoods. They're going to do everything that they can to increase the bottom line productivity of that, so they can show a bigger profit. And so that's going to have a tremendous impact on the amount of hardwoods that are out there.

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thing is, is I can envis—envision as time goes by, in fact it's already happening, that they're cutting these properties up into ever smaller and smaller tracts. And that will continue, and—and I—I can envision at some point and time that real estate development companies will move in, in the more desirable areas, and even start cutting it up into subdivisions, and lots, and camp houses, and recreation areas. And you'll have even more fragmentation, and the more fragmentation you have, of course, the more wildlife habitats you destroy. So those are the real impacts that I see of the divesture of these timber companies of their lands.

DT: We talked about the—this sort of working forest. The—those that were owned by Champion International, and of course Temple-Inland, and—and those that had a multiple use like the national forest. I thought the—the last thing we might talk about is—is those lands that were set aside for the Big Thicket National Preserve. Can you tell us much about how the Big Thicket became protected in the—in the 70's?

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RD: I can remember a—a fair amount about the Big Thicket. It—the Big Thicket started out as a really big and grand idea. The Big Thicket was a—virtually an impenetrable area of East Texas that the early settlers just avoided because it was so dense, and so wet, and so forbidding to try to come in and—and attempt to farm. And that was what they were all after, was places to farm. And so—and to travel, you—it was very difficult to travel through that area, so it was just—people just tried to avoid the Big Thicket. And it was only with agro—later technology allowed people to get in there and to log it and—and—and to utilize it, that it was used. But, as you said, in the 70's—well, even before that, Ralph Yarborough was the first big champion that I recall, he was Senator Ralph Yarborough—was the first bi—

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champion of the Big Thicket that I recalled. And they were trying to get a rather large Big Thicket area established as a national park. And, of course they were opposed by the timber companies, primarily. But, a—a—a lot of the public at large, not all of the public. But the Big Thicket is a really unique biological and wildlife area, there's just I—I'm not conversant with all the flora and fauna that's found in that rather unusual wetland. But it was—they felt like that it should be protected, simply because of all the—the biodiversity

that's there. But Yarborough and them never could—never could get congress to allocate the money to—to buy the land, so it rocked on until Charlie Wilson. Congressman Charlie Wilson of East Texas was kind of encouraged to champion the—the project. And as I recall, the very first thing that they proposed was the string of pearls, and—which was just some little slivers

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of land that came down a couple of the creeks and—and part of the river. And rig—as I recall it was thirty-something thousand acres, that—that—that figure may be totally wrong, I'm not sure. But it was a very small parcel of land. But Charles Wilson began to take more interest in it and—and surprisingly he—he bucked the timber companies, because they still were opposed to it. But Charlie Wilson took it on as a project, and through his guidance, the Big Thicket National Biosphere Preserve was—was established. And they're adding to it, they just added an additional, I believe, 102,000 acres to it since the first of the year, if I'm not mistaken. So it is just about maxed out, as to what congress had—had allocated and

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set aside for it to be, you know, to be established. Now, of course, there's work afoot to try to get that expanded and I hope they're successful at it because it's worthy of protection. But...

DT: Why don't we stop for just a moment. In the late 90's, I think it was in 1998, you learned of proposals to build reservoirs, particularly Rockland—a reservoir on the—the Neches River. And I—I understand that that inspired a lot of interest on your part to see if—if the dam could be stopped and the river could be protected. And—and even more than that, that people would learn to—to understand what was down the river and—and appreciate its long history and its importance to—to East Texas. And in 1999, and again in 2001, you—you took a long canoe trip that was well publicized and—and grew a lot of efforts to protect the river. I was hoping that you could tell, in your own words, how this interest in the river grew for you, from—from your days as a child in East Texas.

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RD: Well, that—that is an interesting phenomenon, David. Actually, Rockland Dam goes back to my infancy, almost. Rockland Dam, I think was first proposed in the 1940's, and never was built. Dam B was built first. It was a trial dam that was built across the—the Neches, a very small flow-through dam. But there were—you know, we weren't quite as adept at building dams then as we are now. And I remember my dad taking me to the area of where Rockland Dam was to be built, when I was just a small child. He wanted to go down and they were coring to—to see what kind of, you know, structures were beneath the earth where the—for the foundation for the dam. But, that's my earliest memories of Rockland. And it has surfaced a couple of times over the years, but not with any strength. But one day,

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and, as you said, in 1998, I picked up The Lufkin Daily News and there was this huge picture on the front page of the paper a—full color, showing the Neches with Fastrill Reservoir up on the northern Neches. Rockland, well—first was lake Palestine above Fastrill—which is already there, it's another small lake, then Fastrill Reservoir, and then Rockland Reservoir, 125,000 acres of that, and then Dam B on down below that. And it just was such a shock to me because I had grown up on the Neches. I have hunted and fished the

Neches all of my life, since I was fourteen or fifteen years old, I grew up on the Neches and its tributaries. Walking the creek banks and letting mosquitoes suck the blood out of my veins, and camping, and fishing, and hunting squirrel and deer and coons and possums. And just every matter of thing

00:31:10 - 2433

that you could think of, I hunted as a—as a young—young man. And I saw that—that layout of those dams, and it just stunned me. And I was just like I'd lost a family friend, because the thing said they would probably start construction of Rockland Dam within ten years. And I didn't know what to do, I mech—you know, it—it really didn't at that time dawn on me that I could do anything. I'm just one person, and East Texas is not really environmentally aware. And I was a part of that for a long, long time. We—we in East Texas, we—we like to—we like to pummel the Earth, it seems to me like. And if you want just a visual indication of that, just drive up and down our roads and look at the litter and the trash that are along our roads. And I don't know how we're going to change that, it's a—it's a mindset that we—we need to be proud of where we live, because we live in a beautiful area.

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And—but we're so close to the forest sometimes we can't see the trees, or so close to the trees we can't see the forest maybe. But, anyway I saw that and I—I muddled that over in my mind for—for quite some time. And just perchance I was reading the U.S. Forest Service Forest Management Plan. And it's a big thick tome of a book about that big and I—I read a lot in it. And all the sudden, I read that there exists the possibility that the Neches River would qualify for a wild and scenic river, under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. And I just couldn't believe that, and then I—this idea just flashed in my mind. I thought, well, you know, if I were to get out and canoe the river and—and try to get some publicity focused on the river, that the people would recognize what a beautiful treasure that we had there. And that they would just come out of the woodworks and start beating on dish pans and

00:39:18 - 2433

things like that, and—and congress would be forced to act and protect the Neches. And I was pretty naïve about it, to tell you the truth. But anyway, I proceeded with that idea. I went and talked to KTRE Television, a local television station, and The Lufkin Daily News, and The Jacksonville Daily Progress, and Palestine Herald, and The Jasper Newsboy. And of those pe—of those companies that I talked to—paper companies and media companies, The Lufkin Daily News, Jacksonville Daily Progress, and KTRE TV expressed an interest in it. So I—we devised a—places that I would meet them and places I would hand off copy to them. I would keep a—a journal—a logbook, and I would hand off notes to them at different places along the river. And they would do stories. And I—I thought—I was—I was pretty excited about that, we were going to get something done. So I pushed off from Highway 175, northwest of Jacksonville, and came all the way down

00:40:22 - 2433

to Dam B over a period of twenty-four days. But during those twenty-four days I really encountered some—some—the—the—it was in the fall, it—the river—fall of the year, and the river was extremely low. A lot of logs in the river, treetops, shallow water, so it was a very strenuous trip for a 65 year old man to—to be making. And—and I camped out, of course. Had a little one man tent that I went and bought purposely for the—for the project. And—but I can't tell you the thi—now I wish every person, man and woman, it's—at some

point in their early life could do that. It would change their whole perspective on the world. I mean, we—you would have a diff—different appreciation for the place in which we live. To see how it works, to see all the inner workings of nature, like, for instance, a—a log that's rotting on the ground. You see the—the bugs and the worms just crawling into that log and

00:41:32 - 2433

gnawing on it, and the fungi that's growing on it. And it's slowly decaying and decomposing, and going back into the ground. And maybe at some stage it was a hollow log and maybe some kind of wild animal had his den in there. And—but all of that nature at work—and the termites that are eating that up. And just seeing how critical all of this is to our wellbeing. And when, you know, when that's destroyed and when it—those functions are gone, what is going to happen to the world? And I saw so much wildlife, just—white-tailed deer were in abundance, otters were—were maybe not abundant, but I saw numerous otter. Beaver, in fact, beater—beaver are, really they're kind of back in such numbers that they're causing a problem, in that we don't have very many huge hardwood trees left in the river bottoms. They were

00:42:28 - 2433

cut and hauled away years ago. So what—what few we have, and the beaver are girdling those giants. And they're just stripping the bark off all the way around them, as high up as they can reach. That's what they're eating. And the trees are dying and li—and many of them. So I'm afraid that that blessing is going to be a curse as well. But saw a lot of beaver, coyotes, raccoons, white-tailed deer, as I said. Even in the late fall, there were a lot of birds, particularly shore birds, and wading birds, brilliantly colored wood ducks and mallards, and even saw one merganser hen. But—but the nature that I saw—squirrels just chattering and whistling, and hawks circling overhead, and one eagle—one eagle, white—white headed eagle. Just a magnificent display of wildlife that I experienced on that trip. And at night, the nights were almost unimaginable. You—I would slip in with my

00:43:44 - 2433

canoe, pull up on a sandbar or something for a campsite and pitch my tent. And I didn't make a fire, most often. I just had a little propane burner that I warmed noodles and—and poured hot water over noodles because I wanted to keep the weight as low as I possibly could in that canoe, because of dragging it over those treetops and things. So wildlife would never even know I was there. And coyotes would come up within a few hundred feet of me and just bark and howl and yelp. And I've ev—even hear the small whelps, you know, the small pups, barking and yapping, you know, at times. And the owls, I love owls. And the barred owls, and the great horned owls, would—would talk back and forth, you know, and call back and forth. And I—it was just the nights were—were spectacular. And sometimes it would be totally devoid of sound. And I don't know how to explain that, but there

00:44:44 - 2433

would be absolutely no sound whatsoever, and you could just—you could feel the silence. Then other nights the—the little miniature frogs would—would—would be chirping real loud. And the—and there were still some crickets at that time of the year, and they would be chirping. And—and just the whole array of—of sounds at night that you could hear. And one night I remember particularly I camped under a—a big white oak tree and there was a nest of flying squirrels in the tree above my head. And flying squirrels are one of those animal—one of those animals that can see at night. And they—they feed at night, unlike an

ordinary squirrel, who can not see at night and feed in the daytime, but they feed at night. And they just rained that acorn litter down on my—debris down on my tent all night long, and

00:45:35 - 2433

chirping up above, and that was quite interesting to hear as well. So I—I can't tell you that it—that that first trip was a rousing success, because the paper did cover it well, and the TV stations did cover it well, but it was no groundswell. And I sat back and waited for it to happen, and—and it didn't happen. And I was disappointed that it didn't happen, but I learned—I learned a lesson from it. And so, two years later—and I had talked to the people at Texas Conservation Alliance, and—by that time—and they thought that it was a good event, and so I decided to do it a second time. And we decided to extend it on down below Lake B. A. Steinhagen, or down b—on down to the Beaumont Port at the Golden Triangle area. And a million

00:46:36 - 2433

people or so live in that area, and—so if we could make them interested in—and also the Big Thicket is part of their heritage, and the Neches nourishes the Big Thicket. So we thought, well, you know, we can get them interested in it as well, so—maybe get a little bit more public participation. So we decided to extend it on down to the Beaumont/Golden Triangle area. So we—and Gina was going to go with me on this one—my daughter Gina. So she put in with me and we traveled together for—and we made the same contacts with the same media, only we went to Beaumont and contacted the Beaumont Enterprise, and Channel 6 and Channel 4 television stations in that area. And got them interested in it, and they expressed a lot of interest. So Gina and I put off and traveled together for a few days. And Texas Parks and Wildlife—complete surprise, they showed up and met us at the, I believe

00:47:42 - 2433

Highway 84, I believe, the hi—I can't remember exactly what highway, but this girl's name was Karen Loke. Karen Loke with Texas Parks and Wildlife met us and she traveled with Gina and me for—for two days and one night. We camped out and took a ton of funny—footage, and I don't know whatever happened to that footage. It went into the archives somewhere I guess. And maybe they used some and I'm just not aware of it, but Karen was a good trooper and she participated with pulling over logs. And I enjoyed her company, and she interviewed us extensively. And then we left her at some other road—down the road. And I can't tell this without telling about my wife, ya'll. My wife was such a key, integral part of this whole venture that I—I've got to—I've got to give her due credit for it because she would

00:48:38 - 2433

meet me at the different highway crossings and bring me fresh water, and bring me maybe clean clothes or whatever I needed. You know, I told her the previous time what I would need the next time. And she would wait hours sometime at those road crossings, because it was impossible to plan the speed that you were going to be due to—due to the number of tree fall that you had encountered. And—so she was just such an integral part of this thing that I've got to give Bonnie more than half the credit. So, as we travel down—one thing interesting that I saw and I—I never was able to—to validate this. But I passed by a place that was up on a high knoll and I saw these little teepee like things that people raised game—roosters under. I don't know if you've ever seen how the—these game roosters are

raised,

00:49:37 - 2433

but they have little board teepees. And they will tie a little rooster underneath that little teepee and will feed him, and then they take him off and fight him in cock fights, which is illegal, but nonetheless they do it. Well, I saw quite a number of these little teepees—a little bit larger than ones they use for—for the cocks, but—in this open place. And there were dogs tied underneath those, a number of dogs. Like, I would say maybe two dozen dogs. And I was puzzled about that. But I didn't stop, I kept going. And so—and they were all kinds of dogs, I couldn't see any particular breed. But, a little while later, I passed a dead dog floating in the water. And some distance on down the river, I passed another dead dog floating in the water. And then, a short distance on down the river, I passed the third dead dog

00:50:38 - 2433

floating in the water. So the only thing that I can surmise, that that was a—those were sparring partners, I would guess for those dogs that were chained back up behind those little teepees. I suspect that those were fighting dogs. And that these were dogs that people would just drive around, and pick up, and take back to that camp and use them as sparring partners for those—for those fighting dogs. But like I say, I never did validate that, but that was something that I surmised. Another thing of interest that I saw on that trip, there's—I passed numerous dead deer carcasses floating in the water. And both—both—all of the carcass that I saw had been skinned. And a shoulder and a—and maybe a—a hindquarter had been removed, and maybe all the shoulders and hindquarters. But, anyway, these were illegal hunters. Hunting season was still several weeks away yet. So I did see some

00:51:38 - 2433

remnants of the old East Texas outlaw hunting culture that's still present in—in Texas. It was very prevalent when I was a young man. They ran deer twelve months out of the year, 365 days a year with dogs. And they would only stop when it got so hot and dry in the summertime that the deer—that the dogs couldn't smell the deer tracks on the ground. And then, if we got a little thunder shower or something like that, and you were in the woods, well you heard the—you heard the deer after—the dogs after the deer, running. And you stood and listened to the chase for a while if you—if you wanted to. And I always liked it, I loved it. I loved coon hunting, and fox hunting, and all of the things that's involved with dogs. But there was evidence that the deer hunting—outlaw hunting culture was still evident

00:52:26 - 2433

in—in East Texas on that trip as well. The 1999 trip, as I said, was moderately successful. But the 2001 trip that we—that we took, when we got them all involved, was—was spectacular, beyond our wildest dreams. Never did I dream that there would be so much coverage and so much interest in it. When we got to what I call Anderson Crossing, which is a county road across the Neches, that bridge had been burned out a few years before by people that didn't like people using their roads. So they had gone out and soaked the bridge with kerosene, set it on fire, and it burned it down. And so that road was u—unusable for a few years, until the county came in and built a metal bridge across the road. So now they—across the river, so now they

00:53:34 - 2433

can come back using it. So when I got to Anderson Crossing, Gina—let me regress for just a

moment. When we saw how much interest that was being created by this second trip—with the Texas Conservation Alliance approached Gina about being the media organizer for the rest of the trip. So Gina had to pull out and start helping organize media events. Well, when I got to Anderson Crossing, well the two Beaumont television stations were there, as well as the Lufkin Daily News was there. And the Jacksonville Daily Progress Reporter was there. So we had, what I call, a—and incidentally Ellen Temple was there. And I mention Ellen because she is one of the stalwart environmental advocates in East Texas. So we had what I called a floating press conference for the next ten miles. And I was really concerned
00:54:42 - 2433

because there were some pretty expensive television cameras in those canoes with people that had never been in a canoe before. And—but luckily we didn't have any trees to cross, it was pretty smooth going down through there. And that's also the—and put in a little commercial plug here. That is the starting point of the Neches River Rendezvous that is held in the first weekend, first Saturday in June of every year. (Coughs) Excuse me. And—so we had a floating press conference with those television cameras and newspaper reporters, and—asking questions and floating down through there. Well, when we got to the Highway 7 bridge, which was their takeout point, well there was KTRE there, and it was their second time to film us. And this gentleman by the name—I can only remember his na—last name, Dodi, but

00:55:36 - 2433

he was the KTRE news coordinator at that time. And he wound up doing a six part series, staged at different intervals of the time that I was on the river, and did quite lengthy stories on the river, and footage of the river, and comments. And then gave opposing people's—the water board's views, and the engineering firm's views, and different people's perspective on—on the dam and on the river itself. Quite an interesting series. And he was at the takeout point in Beaumont when I took out and did a wrap up on it. But they were all there were filming as we came in. And just as we were about to leave on the second part of the trip—and Gina was going to join me at that point and go for a few days, who should step forward but Tony

00:56:32 - 2433

Freemantle and Kevin Fuji of the Houston Chronicle. Now here's a paper of a—of a circulation of somewhere around 750 to 800,000 readership. And so I'm thinking, "Golly Ned, what—what could have precipitated this?" And actually, as I come to find out later, it was just a chance remark by Brandt Mansion of the Houston Sierra Club. And Jan—Brandt had just been talking to Tony Freemantle as I understand it, and just mentioned the event and Tony zeroed in on it and—and came up prepared. And—and they traveled with us for four days and four nights, a distance of, I think about fifty miles. I'm not sure about it but I think the distance was about fifty miles. And Kevin took a lot of beautiful photographs and Tony wrote a—a tremendous story that made the front page of The Chronicle some weeks later—Sunday edition, by

00:57:31 - 2433

the way. Beautiful, full color picture on the front page of The Chronicle. The Associated Press picked it up—it made their wire, and we got inquiries and calls from as far away as New England about it. So—and I'm thinking, man alive, this is, you know, beyond my wildest dreams. You know, I just never could have even envisioned anything like this. So, we traveled on to Dam B. And Gina had put together a really spectacular news event at that

area, m—m—once again there were TV people and newspaper people there as well, and a lot of locals from around the area. So we camped out at Martin Dies Jr. State Park, and I took a shower. And I will mention here at this point that during that last trip, oh for twenty-seven days, I slept between sheets two nights. The rest of the time I spent sleeping underneath

00:58:38 - 2433

the beautiful stars along the bank of the East Texas Neches River, listening to the wildlife and wo—watching the wildlife, and being immersed in all those sights, scents, and sounds of the Neches River. But, after camping out and having a good breakfast of scrambled eggs, and—Bonnie re-provisioned me at that point with some food, because it—I'm now where there's enough water flow that I can take bacon and eggs and—and things like that, and really enjoy life a little bit better than noodles and hot water. So I then proceed on down and at a small community called Lakeview, there were some people that know what date I'm supposed to be there. In fact, I had to layover a couple of days in order to meet my schedule. We—after my first trip, I felt comfortable enough that I—what kind of schedule I can make that

00:59:38 - 2433

I began to predict points that I—that people could meet me. And I was—I was usually within four hours of when I said I would be. But I got to Lakeview because the lower Neches—I had anticipated being tougher going than it was. And it was not, so I was way ahead of schedule. So when I got to Lakeview I had to pull up, and spend some time. And the people were just great with me. I camped at a little national park campground there. Some people took me out to lunch at a little local beanery there in Lakeview. And—some, then as I made my scheduled departure, there were many people in canoes and kayaks from all different—in fact even Houston people were there. And they paddled with me that last six hours. I guess—five or six hours it took me to paddle from Lakeview on into Collier Ferry Park in

01:00:33 - 2433

Beaumont. And I hit that coastal wind coming in, and it was really, really difficult paddling that—the canoe would catch that wind and it would just kind of turn you sideways almost. It was—it was a struggle to paddle. But we made it into Colliers Ferry Park, and Tony Freemantle with The Chronicle was there to catch my take out point. And, once again, a big coverage of news media, as I said, KTRE from Lufkin was there for the final. And I—I—I—all I can keep repeating is the awe that I have for the coverage that we got. I—one thing that I mentioned, that back on that river, some gentleman had heard about the trip. And he called my wife and he said, the next time you see your husband, you tell him that if he wants to stop at my

01:01:30 - 2433

campground and take a shower, that I'd just be more than honored for him to do that. So Bonnie described his house and—was a camp house, and I watched for it, I knew about where it was going to be. And I saw it, and I pulled in, and he was there, he was waiting on me. And I went to his cabin and took a good, long, hot shower. And he made me a cup of coffee, and I drank a cup of coffee. And then we sat on his front porch, and had a coke—coffee and a coke right back-to-back. And we talked about the river, and—and he—he was a little older than I am, and we exchanged stories. And—but time to go, I had to leave. So it was just a really great adventure David. And I—as I said earlier, I wish everyone could do it.

(misc.)

[End of Reel 2433]

(misc.)

DT: When we left off at—on the last tape, you told us about the trips in 1999 and in 2001 on the Neches, as you paddled down the river trying to promote protection of the stream. I thought you might tell us sort of the next chapter where you actually wrote a book about your trip and—and got it published and—and got a very good reception.

00:01:44 - 2434

RD: Well, I do take pride in that story, because that is—it's really quite interesting. I—as I said earlier, I kept a log book that I would hand off to the news media as I went down the river. And I'd had that thing in—in a loose leaf binder, and—and Gina was aware of it. And Gina at that time was a member of the Governor's River Advisory Board. And these boards met at different—this board met at different spots around the states, periodically. And it was kind of the custom that the host of that board—whatever particular spot they were in—or reason they were in, would give some kind of little memento gift. And so Gina, it was—it was her turn and they were having it at Boggy Slew—Temple-Inland's Boggy Slew camp house out

00:02:31 - 2434

on the Neches. And Gina said, dad, she says, I would like to give them a copy of—of your river notes. And I thought, Gina, nobody's going to be interested in a copy of those river notes. And she said, dad, says, do it. Well, I didn't, I—I didn't do it. And so as time approached for her to have the meeting, she came to me and she said, dad, she said, here's some coupons from Office Max. She says, you go to Office Max, and says, you have those copies made and bound into a spiral binder. And I think she told me fifteen, as I recall. But anyway, I—I did. Dads do what their daughters want when they put their foot on their neck. And—so I went to Office Max and I had the copies made and gave them to her. And she had—hosted

00:03:18 - 2434

the meeting, and she handed those things out. Well, perchance, a copy of it made its way to Texas Parks and Wildlife desk in Austin. And, gosh, the lady, whose name escapes me, who I hold very dear to my heart. Maybe it'll come to me in the course of the conversation. But—it made it to her desk, and she read it. And she called me, she says, Mr. Donovan, says, you need to write a book about this. And I said, yeah, sure, yeah, sure. So I—I hung up with her and—and some days passed and she called me back again. And she says "Have you given any more thought to writing that book about your—about your trip?" And I said, well, really I haven't. I said I don't consider myself capable of writing a book. And she said, well you really need to. And I said, well okay, I'll think about it. So—so more time passed and she

00:04:23 - 2434

called me, she said, look, she says, I'm going to make an interview—or a telephone interview with you, with Tex A&M University Press and—to talk to you about—about your book. She says, I've sent them a copy of your manuscript of your—or a copy of your log book, and said, she—somebody's going to be calling you. So a few days later the phone rang and Ms. Shannon Davies with the Tex A&M University president editor—one of the editors there. And Shannon was a very charming person, I liked her immediately. And she says, I've read your—your log book. She says, I think this would make a good book, and would you do

a little something else—would you write a little something else and send it to us, and enlarge it just a little bit. So I did, and she sent word back that—that she really liked that, that maybe it has a future. So she said, write some more. So—and she kind of told me what she

00:05:26 – 2434

wanted, so I sat down—and A&M has a system, I think, where—that they send things out to three writers. Three—I meant three reviewers. So she sent this first manuscript out to a viewer and he—and I got his remarks back. It's—I don't ever know who they are. Said, this has potential, I think there's something that we really do, but says it needs to be a lot longer and—and more detail, et cetera. And so she asked me if I was interested—or would I continue to do it. And I said yes I would. So I made another—I enlarged it and did a lot of stuff. She sent it back and this guy came back, and I think he's an anti-environmental guy; I really do, because he just pulverized me. He just—there wasn't anything good about the whole deal. He just really put me down in so many ways. Not so much about the book, but about the contents of it and everything. So that kind of annoyed me. So I was kind of

00:06:23 – 2434

determined then to—to do something with it. And so I began to work on it in earnest, and I came out with the third manuscript. They sent it off and got a real glory report on it. And they printed it, and it came out in June. Had the grand opening at the Temple History Center in Diboll, and it was a tremendous success. Well attended. It—it took me four hours to go through the—the people that were there and just an unbelievable thing. You—you—you got to look at this—this the perspective that I had no idea that we were going to get this kind of response, even to the point of somebody wanting me to write a book about it. And you think, well that's what you set out to do. And—and really that was the spur that kind of drove

00:07:19 – 2434

me on, was the fact that that's what I had set out to do, was to promote the Neches, and here was this opportunity. So it—it just—it went off really, really well. I began to make book signing appearances. And we were going into November, just into the Christmas Season, and Texas A&M University Press let us run out of books, just at the peak buying season. And so we were without books from November until March, I believe it was, that we didn't have any books because they are printed in, of all places, China. And—but it's a beautiful book. They did a really, really tremendous job with the photography and—and the maps, and it's just—I thought they did a great job with the book. But we've been out of—we were out of books for a long time, but we got them back. And it's been—we're in the second printing now, and

00:08:12 – 2434

the sales have been quite spectacular. But I—I was just blown away by the fact that—that we got to write a book about it and it's doing so well.

DT: The—the book is called Paddling the Wild Neches, right?

00:08:27 – 2434

RD: Right.

DT: And through your—your canoe trip, and then the press coverage, and then the—the book, and the book signings, these were all, I guess, steps towards trying to promote your concern about—about the Neches River and about the proposals for the dams. What sort of impact do you think you've seen in the years since the trip and the book?

00:08:56 – 2434

RD: That's a really good question. It's—it's an excellent question. There's certainly a lot more awareness about the Neches River, and about environmental issues in the broad spectrum. In fact it has been translated into some initiatives that I never dreamed of. At the present time, we're working on a project called the East Texas Experience. Now, I'm not having much to do with it, I'm just not on the log. But Ellen Temple and some people are really involved in this, which our hope is to make the people of East Texas aware of what we have here. Catalog all the interesting and historical places, generate a infrastructure—an infrastructure that will accommodate guests to come here. And make East Texas a tourist desent—dest—destination and increase the income of people in this area of the state. At the

00:10:09 – 2434

same time, protect these natural resources that we hold so dear. There has just been—I've been invited to speak to any number of groups around the area, I am well received by all of them. But, as far as any concrete thing, as I said, The East Texas Experience and the activity that the Conservation Fund is doing here to preserve land and then make it into public domain has been, the—the real concrete things that I can (?). Oh, don't let me fail to mention—and I don't know how much—well I do know how much, we had a tremendous impact on the establishment Upper Neches River National Wildlife Refuge.

DT: Let's talk about that.

00:11:02 – 2434

RD: Yeah, that's a—that's a spectacular thing, and it's a—about a 25,000 acre refuge that's under—maybe something a little less than that. But wildlife refuge on the upper Neches is some of that pristine, rare, almost exotic, hardwood bottomland. It's—it's almost gone. It's—it's almost non-existent in this state, and even in the United States anymore. And that is some beautiful hardwood bottomland forest up there. And the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had been working to establish that thing since sometime back in the 80's. But like all bureaucracies, time grinds slowly with them. And—and they just saw fit last year, I believe it was, to designate that as a—the Upper Neches National Wildlife Refuge. Well, it just so happened that

00:11:55 – 2434

Dallas—and I speak of Dallas in the broad umbrella sense, had its eyes on the same area to build Fastrill Reservoir. And so they immediately filed a lawsuit against U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to halt the designation of that area as a refuge, even though the refuge had already taken in one acre of land to confirm the fact that it was going to be a refuge. And it's a donated tract. And—but they filed that lawsuit, so we're now suspended in time awaiting the court's decision. Supposedly the court is going to give us a decision sometime the latter part of this month. And that's been hanging on now for some six or eight months, I don't (?) how long. But hopefully sometime by the end of this month, or certainly maybe in the month of April we'll find out what the—what the court's decision on that's going to be. Now, if

00:12:51 – 2434

we win, whether Dallas will appeal or not, I don't know. If the court rules in favor of Dallas I don't—whether the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will appeal. You know, I just don't know what to expect from here. But that was a great victory because—first thing is when we heard that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was interested in doing that, our group, the

Texas Conservation Alliance, and its a—affiliate that we spun off, the Neches River Protection Initiative, generated—and I hear different figures, somewhere between 12 and 20,000 pieces of mail. And faxes and e-mail have been to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in support of that. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that it was by far the most correspondence ever generated by

00:13:43 – 2434

the establishment of any wildlife refuge that they had done in the nation. So that shows you the awareness that has been created among—among the loc—local people for—of—of what the environment holds and the value that it is, and the value that we have here. So, yeah, there has been some real good environmental awareness generated by the activity that we've done on that river.

DT: You had mentioned th—the City of Dallas has plans for Fastrill Reservoir and how concerned you were about it. I thought this might be a chance to maybe roll back the clock a little bit to talk about earlier reservoirs that were built on the Neches and the Angelina. And try to understand what kind of impact you saw from those reservoirs that—that led to your concern about what Fastrill might mean to the Neches.

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RD: Those are good points, Dave but before we leave Fastrill, let me make just a couple comments more about that, that I was about to forget. Fastrill—Dallas doesn't even know for sure that they need Fastrill or not. That's a "just in case" designation. They may need it sometime in the next forty or fifty years. In the meantime, those people that hold property there, their property is—is dead because you got that hammer hanging over all the time that—that you may be condemned and taken for—for a reservoir. But, that dam is being built, essentially. And this is going to take a whole different change of mindset in—in Texas for sure. But that dam is being built, these are my words, so that the people of the Dallas metropolitan area can have lush non-native lawns of Saint Augustine grass, and non-

00:15:40 – 2434

native shrubbery landscaping their property. Now that's—that's the gist of why Fastrill Reservoir and all these other reservoirs are being built. And somehow or another, we're going to have to get away from that model, of the Saint Augustine grass and the pittosporum and the photinia and all of those things that—that—that require watering. We're going to have to go to xeriscaping, or certainly to native plants. You know, we have yaupon and—and wax myrtle and all those kind of shrubs that could be utilized. And we have native—native carpet grass that if nursery people would—would, you know, experiment with and develop it, it could be done to—to take care of that. But th—this landscape watering has got to change. Farming has got to—different methods of farming—of course, I don't think anything

00:16:36 – 2434

from Fastrill was slated to go to farming, but there's an awful lot of water used in—in agriculture. Back to your remarks about earlier dams, yeah know, I can remember the construction—I learned how to water ski in the brand new bar ditch at Dam B. Behind, if you can believe it, a twenty-five horsepower motor, and that was a big motor in those days. When I was growing up, a twenty-five horsepower motor was a big motor. And I learned how to water ski in that bar ditch. And then, following the tremendous drought of the 1950's—it's still the record drought of history in—in Texas. And I lived through that, I saw the Neches where that I could leap across it in many, many places. But following that record

drought, there was a big interest toward building of reservoirs. And Sam Rayburn Reservoir is known as McGee Bend dam at the time. But Sam Rayburn Reservoir was one of the reservoirs that was

00:17:35 - 2434

built. It's a—once again I speak in around numbers, 125,000 acre reservoir. It was built and I—I believe the gates were closed on it in 1965. But that happened, and as I digress—you call me back if you need to. But that happened during a time that was also a tumultuous area in Texas, with the closing of the woods, where farmers were being and—and I use that word loosely because Texas was not a—a this part of Texas was never a big farming country, but just a minimal amount. But people let their wild—livestock run wild. They ran on the highways, there were people killed and maimed with hitting livestock on the roads. And hogs were abundant in the woods and—and it was just a way of life. And people used dogs to manage this livestock with. Whenever a man got ready to work his cattle, unlike the western

00:18:34 - 2434

cowboy who turned to his horse and rope, these men turned to their dogs and their rawhide whips, and their blowing horns. And—but they began the condemning of land and taking of land for Sam Rayburn Reservoir, just as all of this was kind of coming to a climax. And I helped some of the people take their stock out of the Sam Rayburn Reservoir area. In fact, one man had some animals that were so wild that he could handle them in—in no fashion, and he came to me and asked me if I would go shoot them for him. And—and I did, and that's where we got some of his cattle out of there. But it was a—it was a very heart rendering, emotional time because a lot of that area was—it was on the Angelina, which is a tributary of the Neches,

00:19:29 - 2434

was—you'd hear people talk about, you know, Washington-on-the-Brazos and Goliad and places like that as being the cradle of—of Texas. Well I—I will accept that, but if that's the cradle of Texas, I would say that the Neches River basin is the womb of Texas. Texas was nurtured right here in the Neches River valley. And a lot of old family cemeteries are beneath the area of what is now Sam Rayburn Reservoir. And people fought that bitterly. And homesteads that had been there for—I—I remember one old family, the name was J.T. McGilbury. Still lived in one of the old, pioneer homes with wood shingles on the roof, and at night he could look up through his roof and see the stars. So you can imagine how hard a place like that was to heat in the wintertime. But these were elderly people, and that's where they had spent their lives. And you stand there in front of a fireplace to warm with it and it was just like

00:20:360 - 2434

you're on a rotisserie. You—you baked on one side and you froze the devil on the other, and you just sat there and constantly turning. People wore their overcoats and their boots in the house and—and slept on feather—feather mattresses and covered up with feawe—feather quilts and things. So yeah, it was—it was pioneer like. But this dam took this land away from these people, and consigned them to a life of—actually when they got their money, they couldn't go out and buy anything else because, number one, they paid them insufficient money for their land. And number two, when this cash flow started coming out, you had dollars chasing land. And the land just escalated in value, so they started out, I think maybe some of the first land maybe was paid for, maybe like fifty dollars an acre. And

then, along toward the last of it they were paying 125, but that still wasn't enough to replace.

00:21:31 - 2434

So a lot of those people lived out their lives in—in virtual squalor because they'd had their lands taken away from them. And their cemeteries, and their churches, moved and uprooted, and—and eventually just demolished and destroyed. So it was a very tumultuous time for—for those people i—if you lived there. Now there were promises that there were going to be spectacular growth and wealth and it didn't happen. Most of the things—and I say most of the things, there were areas that did develop reasonably well. But most of the things that developed around the lake were—well they were not top-of-the-line residential area developments. And so no one really made a lot of money off of it, except the people that built the dam. And then of course the—what we refer to as the water hustlers. The people that make the money selling the water, and just got the office complexes, and the expense

00:22:35 - 2434

accounts and—and that sort of thing. They—they make a lot of money off of that, they got high salaries and that sort of thing. So Rayburn and Dam B both were big traumatic events to the population of—or that part of the population of East Texas.

DT: You talked about the—the kind of—kind of social and cultural impact of these dams. What sort of ecological effects did you see from the construction of the dams in the years that—that followed, or—or maybe during the—the clearing of the land for the—the dams themselves?

00:23:15 - 2434

RD: Well, of course, they—they brought in huge machines with cutter blades on the rollers that the—they called choppers. And what they didn't cut down and haul off, well then they came in with those big chopper blades. They just chopped up the landscape, just ground everything up. And there was nothing left. It was just a moonscape out there when they were through with it. And the Rayburn covered a lot of national forest. And by that time, it was already getting to the point where the national forests, save for the Neches property that Temple-Inland owned. The national forest was already the last retreat for hardwoods. And that reservoir covered up a lot of U.S. national forest land and those hardwoods, the place that I used to hunt and fish a lot. And there were a lot of oxbow lakes and—that were full of fish and alligators and wildlife. And—of course all of that was obliterated. And

00:24:24 - 2434

you've got to understand that these trees and things were being pushed down all year long. And there were literally thousands of bird's nests filled with eggs and baby chicks and dens of bobcats and raccoons and—and all of the cavity dwellers. Woodpeckers and owls and hawks and—all of those animals, all of that was destroyed. All of those baby chicks, and all of those eggs, and all those young critters were—they were destroyed. And young fawns were—were killed with having trees thrown over on them. Now, the animals that fled, where did they go? Well, they had to go in and make their livelihood in places that were already stocked with wildlife. So you had a die off, you had a Diaspora, I call it. W—with that, because you know, you push still more animals onto a place that's already saturated, and you're going to have a die off. So it was a tremendous impact on—on wildlife and—

00:25:33 - 2434

and forests, plants. Rare—some of them rare plants as well, and cavity trees, and nesting

sites.

DT: And then downstream of the dams, once the dams were—were installed, how did the river change below those—those big dams?

00:25:59 - 2434

RD: Well, you know, you look at the Big Thicket. And then you just come back upstream to the Big Thicket. But bottomlands are designed by God, the creator. And you, you know, me I—I—I believe in God. And those nights on the river, if—if there's ever a place that you are close to your—your maker, it's—it's there, with all that silence or maybe with those animals making those noises. But ecosystems evolve.

DT: Let's resume, if we could. We were talking about the—how the—the river bottoms changed after these dams were put in.

00:26:38 - 2434

RD: Well, these ecosystems that are—are that—all along the river are adapted to seasonal floodings. We get torrential rains here and we get tremendous runoff and the river that's in its, what we call in its banks. And it's flowing happily along, and then all of the sudden you come a big inrush of water, and the river's flooding, get out of banks, and flood the bottomlands, and stay out in the bottomlands for weeks at a time sometimes. And saturate the land and—and these ecosystems have evolved and developed to—to sus—sustain themselves and to flourish indeed under those kind of conditions. Well, when you put a dam in, of course, you interrupt that process. You begin to starve those ecosystems of the overflows that they need to sustain them. And so they begin to contract, they get smaller. And less—more

00:27:34 - 2434

drought tolerant plants begin to take their place. And yo—you ha—you change the whole ecosystem when you do that. And the—every time you build a dam, you increase that drawdown of that seasonal flooding that is so essential to bottomland habitat growth and—and prosperity.

DT: I understand that—that also it—it's increased the—the saltwater inflows coming in from the bay. What—what sort of effects have you seen from that?

00:28:06 - 2434

RD: Well, it's strange that you should mention that, because I knew as I made my last trip down the river in—in '01 that I was going to encounter the saltwater barrier that was under construction between the little community of Lakeview and Beaumont. And when I got there and saw that thing I was just awed by it. It's essentially just another big dam that's built there to keep saltwater from encroaching back up the Neches and destroying the ecosystem as it—as it penetrates farther and farther inland. And the reason is saltwater is making these encroachments in the—upper—I mean the lower Neches is the reduced flow of the river. Plus they continue to dredge out the ship channel. And the dredging of the ship channel plus the

00:28:52 - 2434

reduced water volume flow down the river allows the saltwater to push further and further inland. And of course, you know what saltwater would do to vegetation. It would just—it would kill it. And they had to build this monumental saltwater barrier there to reduce that—that effect.

(misc.)

DT: So far we've talked about the development and management of the national forest

and—and of—of large dams and reservoirs by a variety of different agencies, from the—the Forest Service to the Texas Water Development Board and the local river authorities. And—and I was wondering if you could tell about your experience as an individual citizen trying to deal with these—these large agencies and make your case and try to get a response from them.

00:29:52 - 2434

RD: I believe my best response to that would be the Texas Water Development Board. That's—had recent encounters with them and very frustrating. But, like all bureaucracies, they—they have a constituency. And you have to give them good marks because they do a good job for their constituency. You know, they're—they're people just like you and I are, doing their job. And they're hired to do that job and they are—or else appointed to a board to do that job. And they set out, and I—I can't do anything but admire them for getting the job done. At the same time, the public trust—the public good suffers. And I only wish that people that hold those kind of jobs were more attune to the public good rather than the specific narrow thing that they're focused on, that they've been hired or appointed to do. The Texas

00:30:53 - 2434

Water Development Board is a perfect example of that. That's an agency that is almost totally, I think—in my opinion, beholden to special interests. And those special interests are municipal water authorities—or water authorities in general. Big bureaucracies that want to grow, they want to expand their—their quote, unquote kingdom. They want to have more filing cabinets, and more secretaries, and more employees, more company cars, and they can get a bigger salary if they do that. They become more important. So—and once again that's—that's the way we work, that's the way America works, the way we run. In addition to those bureaucracies, there are the engineering firms. The engineering firms want to build these dams and build these TxDot, this Trans-Texas I-69 corridor across Texas, from—from Laredo to Texarkana. They want to do that because that increases their fiefdom. That puts

00:32:01 - 2434

money in their pockets, and the bulldozer people and all of those. And so they have a big constituency there. Then there are real estate speculators, and developers that enter into the equation. So there is a big constituency of all of those issues that—that you have to deal with. And a lone individual's voice is like a voice crying in the wilderness. You're not heard. And there are really only two ways that you can affect issues like that. That's been my finding. And one is power which comes through money, and that's what they have. And the other is power which comes through numbers, people, voters, people that will speak out. And if I had th—the choice of which one I'd rather have, I'd rather have the power that comes through money, but

00:33:01 - 2434

lacking that I'll take the power that comes from the people. The big problem there comes is getting those people to speak with a unified voice, to get the people organized to speak. And that's a difficult thing in itself. But in my meetings and dealings with the Texas Water Development Board and its special interest focus, I have not been very successful in affecting any change with them at all. I have been to numerous of their meetings that's held at Nacogdoches, and I always get announcements of when those meetings will be. And I've been there, and I've requested to speak and they've been cordial and very pleasant with

me, and—and granting me a request every time—granting my request every time I ask. They've listened attentively and politely and allowed me to make my say. And when it's over, the door slams shut and that's it. Nothing ever becomes of that. On at least

00:34:02 - 2434

two occasions, when the region I planned was—and the reason our plan includes the building of Fastrill Reservoir, let me add that, which is what has my attention. When i—i—two different occasions when the plans were developed, a year apart, I've attended meetings where the meeting venue was jam packed with people that were opposed to the building of the dam. And we were all allowed to speak. And once again all that information was duly recorded on video and folded up in a box, and I guess sent to Austin and nothing happened to the plans. It went right through as it was. And that was just a dog and pony show that—that the—you know, government put out there to appease the local peasants, I guess. And then, following that, I had the opportunity to make a trip to Austin. Drove three and a half hours to Austin to

00:35:02 - 2434

make an appearance before th—the state board. And, once again, that venue was jam packed with people that were opposed to different projects that they were doing over the state. And we were granted four minutes each to speak. And the board sat up there and talked to each other and did various things while we were speaking. And recorded everything, I'm sure. But when it was over with, when we all got in our cars and came back home, and the state water plan was left unchanged. Then another time I was approached and asked if I would like to be on the—the river's flow committee, which guaranteed a minimum flow in the river so that it never would get below environmental—safe environmental levels. And I said, yes, that I would—I would do it. So they asked me to put together a resume and—and put together

00:35:57 - 2434

a lot of information about myself, which I hurriedly did, and—and sent it off. And I never heard anything back. And later I heard that that board had been staffed and still never heard anything. And then, just a chance meeting with the—with the president of that board at a—at a function one time. He said, oh by the way, he said, you weren't accepted to that board. And I thought, well, you know, I don't think I probably ever really had a chance to get on it to begin with. That was just a—a—a bone that they had thrown out, you know, to maybe appease us. But I find it almost impossible to deal with—with bureaucracies. They're—they're entrenched, they have their own agenda like the Forest Service. You know, we can appeal things to the Forest Service. We have avenues that we can try to affect change. And—but it gets nowhere. Tha—the Forest Service has gotten better, I've got to give them a little bit—a little bit of a plug here. They've gotten better, even though they don't implement very much of it.

(misc.)

DT: Well, we've talked a little bit about the development of the timber industry and development of the water industry in East Texas. And I think that—i—it seems like this is part of a process of building an economy. But also has—has made it more and more difficult for individuals to get access to some of these resources that are being developed, and—and privatized, essentially. And—and I guess you can trace this back to the commons, and—and the passage of some of these stock laws, and—and the game laws. And then all the way forward to, I guess, current day where I think you were saying off tape that—that a

lot of younger people are pretty disconnected, I guess, from nature. I was wondering if you could, as—as the tape sort of winds down here, track that to—to—from the passage of some of these stock laws through to what you see as—as troubling, I think you put it, about kid's attitudes towards the woods.

00:38:17 – 2434

RD: Well the decade of the 1950's was definitely a watershed decade for East Texas. It was the dying of the last frontier of—of Texas, essentially. I guess maybe people along the Rio Grande might argue with that. But at least a great culture that has swept across the underbelly of the United States, all the way from the Virginias and the Carolinas ended on the Neches River in the 1950's. And that was the commons, that everybody treated the land—the land as belonging to everyone. And if you wanted to protect something, it was the landowner's responsibility to—to—to build a fence around what he wanted to protect. And everything else was open range. And in my early lifetime, you went anywhere you wanted to. You could get on a horse and ride for days in any direction in my hometown of Zavala and not

00:39:14 – 2434

encounter a fence. If you did encounter a fence you might ride a short distance, find the corner of it and be—be free of it again. So all up and down the Neches River and Angelina (coughs) excuse me, was—was unfettered ingress and egress. Then the stock laws, people grew tired of cattle killing and maiming people on the highways. People grew tired of cattle, and horses, and hogs coming into towns and scattering dung up and down the streets. And—and fleas and ticks, and—just lying down in the roads. I can remember Mr. Barge feeding his cattle right in downtown Zavala, and interrupting the traffic, stopping it on Highway 69. For long periods of time, cars would have to just sit there and wait for, you know, some minutes before they could ease around and get through all that mess. So the—there was a real problem, but it

00:40:12 – 2434

was a culture and a society that had evolved over time. Lufkin's stock law was passed—or Angelina County's stock law was passed in 1952. But that doesn't mean that the began to close the—the woods off at that time. It was just a fire—shot fired across the bow. But as time passed and more and more people were forced to enclose their animals behind fences, and as authorities of the—the county sheriffs and things were expanded to force that, the—the woods became more and more closed off. And the timber companies were—this was a—a great boon to them. They had been wanting to close their woods for—for quite some time. For—one reason, probably the main reason was that hogs root up little pine seedlings to eat that tender root off the bottom of that pine seedling. So hogs can destroy. If they had

00:41:12 – 2434

planted an area or a natural seedling had occurred there, they could destroy an area of pine seedlings in a night. And so companies were—they didn't like that. And then people felt nothing about going onto company land, cutting down a cypress tree for—for the lumber out of it, to make cypress shingles for their house. Or if a bee tree was growing on company land, they went in and cut down the tree and—and extracted the honey from it and just left the tree lying there. And they just used the land as if it were their own, and—which it had been for generations. So the company seized these opportunities to form up hunting clubs. And the hunting clubs were often—the company's hired old outlaw hunters, to be their enforcement officers. Well, these hunters knew the whole tricks of the trade and they knew

how to—how

00:42:06 – 2434

to s—stop people from—from hunting. They also took bulldozers and plowed ditches across all the old wagon roads that led down to the river. They put fences across many of the roads. They did everything they could to close off access to the river and to the forest, simply because—to protect the integrity of their hunting clubs. And they charged people to be a member of these clubs, which over time has grown to be really significant income for the companies. But originally it was just to protect their—their private property rights. Today, because of these actions that have been taken over a period of time by private individuals as well as companies, there is essentially—the younger people have been disconnected from the land. There's no—there's no appreciation, really, for the natural things that take place out there. I find it interesting sometime, and I have conversations with young people, and I'm

00:43:16 – 2434

talking about college educated, thirty year old young men and women. And I ask questions like “Where is the Neches River?” And most often they do not know. And it's a—forms the western boundary of our county. I ask them where the Angelina River is and—and they don't know, and it forms the eastern boundary of our county. They can't identify a sweet gum tree from a hickory tree. And to me, that is—that is tragic. This may be not important that they know how to identify those trees, but they need an appreciation for the fact that each one of those plants forms a different function, and it enriches our life by what it does. Sweet gum trees, or black gum trees, particularly are notorious for their cavities, so that wild animals and b—nesting birds can nest in them. Oaks the most sizable bounty that—from coast to coast, I

00:44:19 – 2434

guess, along the eastern seaboard for sure, the mainstay food supply for animals and birds is acorns. Acorns is the manna of wildlife. So every time you cut down an oak tree, you deprive a wide array of birds and animals of food stuff, plus they're also a great source of cavities. So you reduce the nesting sites for many plants and animals. So we have these people that are detached from nature. They—they want to know about it, but they're experience with nature is they read a natural—National Geographic magazine, or a Walt Disney program on television, or a video game that they can play and interact with nature. They don't—they don't feel the—the heat, and they don't feel the mosquitoes. And they don't feel the air in their face and they don't smell the sound—or the scent of decaying cellulose, or the smell of wild azaleas wafting through the air, or hear the call of the—of the pileated

00:45:25 – 2434

woodpecker, or at night the hoot of the barred owl, or the great horned owl. And so, we don't really—all I can say da—David is that we have just totally lost our contact with—with nature. And they're all interested in it, but they can't put their hands on it. They can't become a part of it, they can't—they can't experience all of the senses that I've tried to—to mention.

DT: Well, I think you—you've been very clear about why these things are important to you and—and why they should be important to—to younger people. We often try to—to wrap up these interviews by asking if there's a particular place that you like to go to that reminds you of all these things, about why it's important to you to protect the forest, to protect the

ivers. And—and gives you some solace and comfort to go there.

00:46:34 – 2434

RD: Well, actually there are two places. It's hard for me to—to bring it down to just one. These two places are essentially adjacent to each other, and they're all a continuation of a place called Longleaf Ridge in Angelina National Forest. On the western terminus of Longleaf Ridge is Upland Island Wilderness. It's a 14,000 acre wilderness brought about primarily by the efforts of one man, Ned Fritz. Now he had an awful lot of help, but Ned Fritz drove this stake in the ground. But you have majestic hardwoods, you have Graham Creek flowing—you have any number of creeks flowing, but Graham Creek is the largest creek. You have Orwell Creek and Cypress Creek, and Mill Creek, and any number of creeks flowing through – big creeks –

00:00:00 – 2434

flowing through Upland Island Wilderness. But Graham Creek is the main artery of—through the middle of it. It give you these beautiful har—hardwood bottomlands, pitcher plant seeps, rare orchids, towering hardwoods, higher elevations for East Texas, 260-300 feet elevations. The—the strum of the wind through the towering pine trees, it's—it's an almost unearthly sound to hear that wind in those tall pines. Different than anything you've maybe ever experienced. Then you move on over into the Boykin Springs area, and more of the majestic pines. And then those clear running streams. Boykin Creek, for instance, Sherwood Creek, Orwell Creek, all those springs, and—and the Boykin Springs there, they gush out of the ground.

00:48:21 – 2434

They just act like fountains, just exploding from the ground. Most of the other places, they just come out in a series of small springs bubbling up in sandy bottoms, and coming down through that forest headed toward the river. Much of that land has been eroded by off-road vehicles before some of our efforts got the ORVs prohibited from using that area. But there are countless, beautiful areas in there with those creeks and hills and pine forests and pitcher plant seeps, and as I said, wild azaleas and orchids, and—and wildlife. But the—Longleaf Ridge, Upland Island Wilderness, Boykin Springs area. And—and Boykin Springs Park was build by the CCC and the WPA back in the 1930's, and for literally decades, it was a favorite spot of campers and hikers and people that just want—and swimmers. Boykin Lake—but

00:49:28 – 2434

Hurricane Rita two years ago took a heavy toll on it, and the U.S. Forest Service shut it down. And as far into the future as I can see, makes no attempt to reopen it, because that's not part of their agenda. They—they're into growing pine trees and—and building roads. The Sawmill Hiking Trail that connected Boykin Springs with Old Aldridge, the ancient sawmill town. And Bouton Lake, which is the southern terminus of the trail, which is in u—Upland Island Wilderness, right (?) of Upland Is—that trail is being closed down by the Forest Service, simply because it's too expensive to—to maintain. So those are just some of the environmental impacts that—I will allude to again, that the bureaucracies have on beautiful places that they don't—they don't care about keeping because it's an expense to them rather than an income.

DT: Well, I've asked a number of questions. Maybe I can leave you with one sort of open ended one, is there—is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't covered in—in some detail?

00:50:44 - 2434

RD: I'm sure there would be. The only thing that I could possibly add, David, is we all live on a finite Earth. W—you know, I just got through reading some interesting articles about the Polynesian Islands. And thousands of years ago people—how they did it no one knows, but they migrated from Asia to cover those Polynesian Islands, thousands of miles out into the Pacific. But every single one of them that they went to was a virtual paradise when they got there. But as the impact of their civilization was felt on that island, they ate up and they destroyed most of the things that were on the island, and in the surrounding sea. And so they—they move on to—to the next island. So I just use that maybe as a microcosm to point out what—what I think, and what I'm afraid of is as our population

00:51:46 - 2434

expands—and it's the number one concern that I have for the environment, is our increased appetite for natural resources. And as those things are consumed, the generations that follow us are not going to have the experiences even that we had to look at or the natural beauty, or the healthy air, and the healthy water. So, it's—it's not so much for me, I'm an old man, I'm not going to—it's not going to be a concern of mine. But, other people's children, their grandchildren, that's what my concern is. And so, things that we can do to educate and preserve is—is what I'm dedicated to the remaining time that I have left.

DT: Thanks for explaining this to us. You've done a good job. Thank you so much.

00:52:41 - 2434

RD: Well, I could have chased a lot more rabbits, but I tried to keep myself confined as best I could.

DT: Well, you did a good job, thank you.

00:52:50 - 2434

RD: Thank you guys.

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[End of Interview with Richard Donovan]