

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: **Maxine Johnston** (MJ)

INTERVIEWERS: David Todd (DT)

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

DT: This is October 11, 1999 and my name is David Todd. I'm here for Conservation History Association of Texas in Batson, Texas, a little bit northwest of Beaumont. And we're visiting with Maxine Johnston, familiarly known as "Micky" by many of her friends. And we're going to talk a little bit about her many efforts in conservation in east Texas and throughout the state. And I wanted to take this opportunity, at the outset, to thank you for joining in.

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MJ: Yes. ...over 20. The Big Thicket Association is 35 years old and I was member number 23.

DT: We'll start at the very beginning. And I'd like to ask you about your childhood and if there was any early influences; parents, teachers, friends, that interested you in conservation?

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MJ: Yes. I was born in Gillam, Arkansas, Sever County, north of Texarkana. Small town, called Gillam, with about a 110 people in it. I grew up on a farm and I spent a lot of time in the wooded areas around our farm. And I used to have a favorite place to go with a book to read. And it was a little crooked tree next to a little streamlet. And I used to stretch out on that and read. And I'm afraid that my brothers and sisters used to say, "N—Micky is goofing off. She's not doing her part of the farm chores. She's off out on that creek reading." So, I grew up on a farm. And I think having grown up on a farm, one almost inevitably becomes aware of that nature, the seasons that change, the rainfall and it's influence on everything, the animals and the growth of vegetation in those woods. You grow up with it. It's becomes a part of you. And I think there was a historian named Tomball, or something like that, that once said that if you grew up on a farm you were likely to be far more in tune to nature and—and to understand people and events better. Because of that background. I don't know if it's true or not. But I think it's a great idea.

DT: Could you tell us about your father? I understand he was in the lumber industry.

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MJ: Yes, my father was a sawmill man. He owned and operated a sawmill. He was also a timber estimator for a number of the timber companies that were operating in Arkansas at that time, mostly very small timber companies at that time. And they were not the big enormous corporations that we have today, that he was dealing with. It was smaller operations. And at that time, of course, clear-cut—this was in the 30s and 40s, clearcutting

was not something that was done in those days. So, my father mostly estimated hard wood, pine saw, timber and told them how many board feet they would get out of a given tract. And, he was very good at it.

DT: You said that they didn't clear cut in those days. How did they manage and cut the forest in those days?

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MJ: (talking over David) I'm not sure that there was that much knowledge of forest management among private landowners who were doing some of the selling of timber and the buying of timber. I'm not sure that there was any real understanding of management plans. I think that came much later. This is 30s, remember, and the, if you look at east Texas and what happened to it in the 30s, there wasn't any management or foresight. There was simply, get out there and cut those things and you'd have seas of stumps everywhere. I think some of the landowners, the private landowners were more responsible. But it was a case of an innate knowledge that you cannot totally deplete a resource and expect it to produce anything for you in the future. And that you change it too markedly. It was—it was sort of an ingrown understanding, I think. I don't think it was a matter of real forestry knowledge or anything like that. I may be underestimating. I don't know.

DT: You grew up in Arkansas and later came, in your teens, to southeast Texas?

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MJ: Yes. I came to Texas when I was fourteen. And I found it to be a very monotonous, dreadful area, flat, no hills. You could look for miles and not see anything, particularly if you were going down to the Gulf Coast. And, it took me a while to readjust my sights. And to realize too that this area had its own very special qualities, but that you have to refocus your vision a little. It's not a matter of geysers or mountains or waterfalls or anything like that. It's a matter of looking at what you have and determining what is—what's interesting about this. What is unique. What is worth knowing about, you know. And so I had to totally refocus in order to appreciate southeast Texas. Because at first, I—the only thing I wanted to was to go back to Arkansas. But now, I am so thorough transplanted that I don't think you could budge me out of this place.

DT: Once you had been transplanted, what did you find special about this part of the world?

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MJ: Well, actually, I sort of got introduced to the Big Thicket almost accidentally. When I was a student at South Park High School in Beaumont, I had a marvelous English teacher named Alice Cashen, who owns this house—once owned this house that we're sitting in. Alice was always getting her students to write papers about the Big Thicket. And so I started being interested in Big Thicket folklore. And for a long time I collected stories about people around here and things like that. And then I discovered that Francis Abernathy was doing it and that he had the skills and knowledge and everything. And so I stopped doing it myself and gave all my files to the library. And Abernathy has done it and done it beautifully, the kind of thing that I wanted to do when I was just growing up. So my first exposure, my first interest involved the history, the area, the folklore and the people. I've always been almost as interested in the people as in the vegetation. Not quite, but almost. Because there have been so many absolutely fascinating people that I have been so fortunate to meet and to work with. And I think they are just as diverse as the Big Thicket itself. And—and I like them for that very diversity.

DT: Could you give us some examples of the special people? Especially ones who may have

known about the Thicket...Lance Rosier, or any of the people who are familiar?...

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MJ: (talking over David) Well, of course, Lance Rosier is the one that first peaked my interest in the natural world of the Big Thicket. I ran across him when Alice and I were out mowing in the cemetery, out here at Guedry Cemetery. And he showed up and he started telling me about all of the little purple orchids that used to grow out there, that were not there any longer. And Lance was a strange person in that, he never met a stranger and he always started off by asking you questions, like what's your name. Where are you from? What aren't you married? And that kind of thing, you know. He was great. And he never remembered—never forgot anything that anybody ever told him, I don't think. He was a blotter. And, so that was my first exposure to him. Then I discovered that, I was working at Lamar University in the library, and several members of the Biology Department there learned that I lived next—very close to where Lance lived. And consequently, he didn't have a telephone, I became a messenger boy for the Biology Department. Whenever they were having a field trip, "Micky, would you drop by and tell Lance that we'll be out this Saturday, or this", or whenever. And, of course, I managed to invited myself along on a number of those trips. So I've covered a lot of these woods, particularly around Saratoga and the Tyler—Hardin County and Tyler County areas. And, to some extent, the Polk County area, with Lance personally. And there aren't many of use left that can say that.

DT: Tell us about some of the trips into the Thicket or the forest near Saratoga.

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MJ: (talking over David) Well, Lance was almost, but not quite, charismatic. And he had this little habit, when he was talking to groups, of putting his fingers together in a little pyramid like this. And he's wait 'till everybody got quiet and then he would start telling about the area, about the plants that occurred there. And, he—the man could make a weed sound like the most glorious little creation of our for—universe. And I know that Ned Fritz always said that there's never anything like a weed. But, there's a few weeds around. Anyway, Lance took these field trips. And there'd be sometimes busloads of teachers who would show up with a—he would take garden club groups. He would take conservation groups. He was—from the very time that R.E. Jackson died, Lance became the most knowledgeable, the most con—per—person most likely to be contacted about the Big Thicket. The resident expert, as it were. And he was a simple man, self-educated. But he learned from everybody that came here, some of the scientists that came here, Doctor Donovan Correll, Doctor Ulla Whitehouse(?), some of these people. He would learn from them, Doctor Clara Gunn(?), from—I believe from Terra Brown(?), from LSU. He had a—a group of people that he called "The Doctors", meaning the professors from the universities that had been here that he worked with. And he would find a plant that he didn't know what it was and he would send specimens of that plant to every one of them. And there's a—a fascinating story about Silky Camellia, up in Newton County, where he sent, he knew he had something unusual and unique, Olsa Brown(?) had found it, Olsa Hall(?) had found it. And so he sent specimens of this Silky Camellia to all, about six or seven scientists. And they all said that it was an Azalea

or

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something of the sort. I've got the story of tape with Lance telling it. And, he said he knew that wasn't an Azalea. And he said that Doctor Claud McLeod told him later that, that was one of the worst errors he had ever made in identifying a plant. It was a Silky Camellia. And

once they got it identified, somehow or another the Men's Garden Club from Houston came over on a bus trip. And somebody took them up to show it to them. And then there was an article in the Houston newspaper about how the Men's Garden Club of Houston had discovered this Silky Camellia. Lance was indignant. Olsa Hall discovered that plant and he should have gotten credit for it. You would have thought that it was something really, really important, who got credit for the—discovering that plant. Because to Lance it was—it was just dreadful that Olsa Hall wasn't getting the credit.

DT: You mentioned some of the other experts and lovers of the Big Thicket, one fellow named R.E. Jackson. Could you tell about him?

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MJ: Yes. R.E. Jackson was a Santa Fe Railroad conductor. And he—one of his assignments was this old ghost road Bragg tram road. The tram was put in there about 1904. And he ran that line for a number of years. But he was also assigned to some other areas. Jackson, I think, probably was first intrigued with the wild life that he saw as the train was going through the forest. And he was a very visionary man, actually. He thought that these—some of these animals were going to disappear as the forest were disappearing. And, he started leasing land. And at one point he had about 18,000 acres leased. And they were even bringing in things like bear, trying to restock. I think all the bears were killed fairly soon after they brought them in. But they tried. One of the things that he did, used this 18,000 acres for, he had two or three meetings every year at which he would bring in scientists and people in official capacities with government, generally, agencies that could help in preservation efforts. And he would have these big parties that would go on for two or three days. And they would have field trips for all of these people. And he would feed them something called Mulligan stew and tell them that it had things like crow and armadillo in it, but he would tell them that. Anyway, R.E. Jackson probably was sort of like a one-man army. He was able to involve so many people in the effort. And we recently found a number of his papers and we now have a better clue as to what he was doing and how he was doing it. And I think in Doctor Gunter's paper, when Doctor Pete Gunter did a paper on Jackson recently, and in that he noted that just a lot of the people who were members of the East Texas Big Thicket Association, which Jackson formed, were movers and shakers, not Indians, they were Chiefs. And there were a sprinkling of local people who were very knowledgeable and who were very much dedicated to the preservation effort. And they helped Jackson a good deal. But a lot of his effectiveness was in working with some of these agencies. And he was working with people from Kirby, people from the hunting clubs, you know, pretty wide range of people that he had put together. They were fairly adventuresome about what they wanted to do. I found one note in Jackson's papers in

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which he identifies where the 435,000 acres are—were located by the amount of acreage per county. And his Big Thicket stretched all the way over to San Jacinto and Montgomery County, much wider than a lot of people around here like to think it was. And that brings up the matter of where Big Thicket is. And you can get as many definitions of that as there are people, almost. But, the Handbook of Texas defines it as, essentially, all of the area between maybe the Sabine River and The Brazos. It's a very—that is a historical Big Thicket that was a part of the area and it's diversity and it's culture.

DT: And how far north would it have gone?

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MJ: Probably he would have pushed it as far north as, much, p—probably past Woodville, (?), I'm not sure. There's a map in Claud McCloud's book that pretty much covers the area. And—and in Jackson's, one of Jackson's contributions was the involvement of the Texas Academy of Sciences and the A & M experiment stations in doing a Biological survey of the east Texas Big Thicket region. And they put together a pamphlet which was published in 1938 which lists all of the flora, fauna, vegetation that were authenticated by Doctor H.B. Parks(?) and V.I. Corey(?). And that was a very significant thing for Jackson to accomplish. Because it helped not only to impress others with the diversity and the richness of the region. But also it helped us, in later years, in the Big Thicket Association. Now, of course, we had much better documented, much better surveys later on. But this was a beginning, which was critically important to everybody.

DT: Could you describe what unique characteristics the survey found?

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MJ: Well, I think in his preface to the Biological survey, Jackson talked about the fact that it's a l—he called it a life zone which Geraldine Watson would later have used the word ecotone area. Where north, south, east, west merge. It's a cliché in Big Thicket now that you have a meeting and mixing of vegetation and fauna from both east, west, north, south. And that you have here climate, you have diversity in soils and everything that contribute to it that make it the diverse region that it is. You'll get much better explanations of the diversity of the Big Thicket from somebody other than a librarian. Ask Geraldine Watson. Ask Paul Harcombe. Ask any of the people of the National Preserve.

DT: Maybe you could tell us more about R.E. Jackson's initial efforts to protect the Big Thicket from development and to create a sanctuary of some kind.

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MJ: Well I think that his early efforts were probably more effective, more focused in that, he had a vision of a large area that would be kept largely in tact and that would be preserved. And I think that over the years he became very discouraged by a number of things. In the first place, we had the Great Depression that was, sort of slowed everything down. And then you had the World War following that. And in the meantime they had spent a lot of money on the National Forests of Texas. And, you know, going back to Congress and trying to get another block of money to buy this area was not really that realistic. The—the timing was bad, you know, for it. And so he became discouraged, I think, a little bit. And so he started doing things that were not quite, that we today, as conservationists would think were totally unacceptable. For example, he even had a proposal to dam a couple of the streams and make lakes to attract tourists and everything. I think in his early years he probably wouldn't have done that. I think he was just was determined to find some way to save the area. And so he was willing to do a few things like put in some lakes and everything to try to attract people. One of the ones that I thought was the most inconsistent with conservation was that he had some plan for some kind of a aviation station somewhere that—where they could bring these planes in. And it, this was during the World War. Anyhow, it was sort of alien to what he started out to accomplish. And I think it was frustration. I mean, you know, the man started this effort in 1929. And he died in 1957. And he devoted most of his energy to Big Thicket during that entire time. So, you're bound to become a little frustrated.

DT: You mentioned that part of the frustration was because the Federal Government put a good deal of money into the National Forest.

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MJ: Actually they didn't put a good deal of money into it. For the time it probably was a good deal of money. But I think they bought a lot of that National Forest for like 2 ½ an acre, didn't they? But then 2 ½ was a lot more money then than it is now.

DT: Why do you think the forest got the priority over a preserve in the Thicket?

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MJ: I honestly don't know. I don't know. Probably better ask Ned Fritz that.

DT: After Mr. Jackson was involved I understand that there were other groups that sprang up in the 50s and 60s to try and protect the Thicket. Can you talk about the beginnings of those?

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MJ: (talking over David) Well, if you are a Lance Rosier fan, as I am, you will think that the Big Thicket, the early Big Thicket Association never died. Because Lance never admitted that it was not a viable....

(Misc.)

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MJ: ...really. That the first Big Thicket Association didn't—had died. He would keep referring to it. If you look at Mary Laswell's(?) book, he will say, "The Big Thicket Association is trying to do thus and so." But, there wasn't really a Big Thicket Association because it had died with Jackson, and was not a formal organization any more. So finally, in 1964, Lance called a meeting. Because some of the people in Saratoga had decided that they should have something to attract people over there. And they wanted to start a Big Thicket Museum. So they started out calling themselves Big Thicket Historical Society. Lance called the meeting. He presided at it. Then, this was on October 4, 1964. The very next week, October 11, they met again. And by this time Lance had gone out a buttonholed quite a few more people and brought them in. and most of those people said, "What's the point of having a Big Thicket Museum if you don't have a Big Thicket?" You know, and, "It's vanishing on us." So, you had all the sudden, some really bon-a fide conservationists there. And Lance, of course, was one of them. And so the focus changed, at that meeting on October 11, they changed the name from Big Thicket Historical Society to Big Thicket Association. And then they wrote a constitution and bylaws and filed for articles of incorporation, which included all of these goals.

DT: Could you just back up a little bit and talk about the historical resources that people wanted to protect in the Thicket? I understand that it has a rich folklore and history to it.

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MJ: It does. But the quote Geraldine Watson, folklore gets preserved in books. And you can't really preserve folklore other than the way we are doing it here with oral history, with boo—books that are written on the subject. How do you project that, I mean, the Big Thicket is the area, the vegetation, the forest, the streams, the water. This is what is Big Thicket. And you can protect that. All you can do with the folklore and the history is record it. Well, you can protect, to some extent, you can, as we did in the museum, we brought in agricultural implements, saw mill, oil industry equipment and that sort of thing, and exhibited those. Which, I think, were very, very interesting, particularly to the local people. And I think, to some extent, to our other visitors. But, most of the people who came here because of their interest in pre—preserving a portion of the natural area, were more interested in, you know, what is here and why. And one of the biggest contributions that

Geraldine Watson made was to define, for the first time, in words that layman, like me, and other conservationists could understand, the whole concept of diversity and plant communities, plant associations, how they get subdivided, what the over-story is, what the under-story is, what the forest floor contains and the uniqueness of these areas and the areas where these areas overlap. And you can, as Geraldine used to say, you can stand in one place and you can face at a different direction and you can find an ecosystem in every direction you were looking. This sort of thing was defined by Geraldine. And we owe her, big time, for it. And she too shared a little of this charisma factor that Lance had a bit of. And she could absolutely spell bind groups of people, whether they were church groups coming out here, or garden clubs or whatever. She was just fantastic about interesting these groups. She was our—our public information. Our communicator.

DT: How do you think that people communicated that this was an important venture, to protect the Thicket? What caught people's interest?

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MJ: Actually, I think it—the idea that this area need protection had been around for a long, long time, probably even before Jackson. It was just something that people felt, that this area deserved protection. And, Jackson laid the groundwork for that, but it fell into a—a sort of a hiatus in between him and the start of the new Big Thicket Association. Now, after the Big Thicket Association formed, and after we started the museum, I think the museum contributed to the conservation effort, markedly. Because we had annual pilgrimages and we invited everybody to come in and camp on the museum grounds. We organized field trips. The first pilgrimage that they had attracted over a thousand people. And we had guides enough for about 400. And so you had the phenomena of a man like Amos Leard(?), or Neal Gutter(?)—or Neal Rider(?), or Geraldine going off into the woods followed by that fifty to sixty people. Well you, you know, that's—it's difficult. You can't move that many people through the woods and they can't all hear you. Because some of them are strung way back there at the back. But that kind of effort the museum contributed to. We had the exhibits that talked about ecosystems. And we had the pilgrimages and programs that people could come to. And it was sort of a gathering place for conservationists in the period between 1964 and the passage of the bill in 1974. Now after the bill passed in 1974, there was somewhat a lessening of this activity. Because people moved on to National Forests, trying to save some wilderness areas in National Forests. But, the Big Thicket Association stayed focused on this area. Because we knew we had to get the money to acquire the land and

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that was going to take a—a massive effort to get money for it. And, in fact, I don't think we got money until about, really of any substantial amount, until the Ford Administration when they finally did that a—Heritage Program. And all of the sudden we got \$137 million in one year and that made a lot of difference in the acquisition program. Early in the program ... early in the program we had a lot of problems with the spite cutting and everything. After the boundaries of the Big Thicket National Preserve were published in 1975, there was a good deal of spite cutting.

DT: What is spite cutting?

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MJ: People who said, "You may get my land, but you ain't going to get the timber." They cut the timber out of spite. And you couldn't really reason with them, in every instance,

because—and tell them they were going to get less for the land, because it wouldn't appraise for as much. But, actually, that's another story. The other thing that happened was that we had a lot of people show up who said, "If you can buy our land, we will not cut it." Because there was a developer who had bought 900 acres down here in the middle of the Rosier Unit. And he had a bill at the back coming due on it. And he said, "I have to have the money, or I'm going to have to cut the trees." So we had that 900-acre tract. There was another one where a contract had been let already and the—the man, the—it was a big timber company, Temple Inland, Temple Eastex at that time, that owned 400—they bought the timber on 400 acres down here in the Rosier Unit.

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Temple Inland lost the money they paid for the timber because they refused to cut. So, there's a good side to it too. There were a lot of bad guys who marked off properties and said, "We're going to use this for development, so you...", you know, they did it, I think, deliberately to raise the price of the land. They were saying, "You're buy—buying development property, and therefore it's worth more per acre." One of the ones we thought was hilarious was one of the landowners who claimed that the Beaumont Unit area was going to be prime development territory. Well, Bill Jewel(?) did a—a lot of over flights and took pictures of that area during some of our rains. And he was able to show the courts that anybody that built houses there was asking for it. It was not prime real estate territory. But that was one of the early problems. The—so, we identified, at one time, I think 33 hundred acres that we called endangered tracts. And we started an effort to try to get a special supplemental appropriation from Congress in order to save these. Because most of them had deadlines on them for cutting or for meeting bank notes. And we—there were also, about this time, the Pine—southern pine beetle hit. But that began about 1976. And the entire Beach Creek Unit was decimated with logging that was influenced or—or, by the Texas Forest Service. They implemented a 1963 Pest Control Act, I think it was called. And they mandated that the Big Thicket, the Beach Creek unit, had to be controlled. International paper owned most of the timber there, but they didn't want to touch it with a ten-foot pole. Because they knew that they would be crucified, probably, for it in the media. The Texas Forest Service hired, first, a logger that was a small logger and—that went in there and did a lot of work, which was damaging. And then they hired a bigger log—logging firm that went in there and did even worse damages. But they were cutting behind the beetles instead of in front, the

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way they were moving. So, by the time this whole fiasco was over, about 1200 out of the 4800 acres in the Beach Creek unit, had been decimated by logging that had to do with southern pine beetle, quote, control. That was—we—we thought, okay, Beach Creek Unit probably needs to be high on the acquisition list in order to stop some of this. And so they prioritized all of the units as to, what kind of threats existed for those. And then they started buying them in that order. So, we had—that—for Big Thicket Association there was a massive 10-year effort to get the bill passed. And then about the next 10 years was devoted to trying to get the money to buy the land and with fighting to get appropriations for endangered tracts and with trying to stop the decimation of some of these units by the activities of the Texas Forest Service and—and the Pest Control Law. There's the worst story about that is like the Loblaw(?) Unit over here which has 550 acres. And it had been—the liti—ownership had been it litigation since turn of the century. And, so,

consequently, there were some tracts, I think, in there that were owned. And this is one of the stories about a conservationist who put his money where his mouth was. Raymond and Nance McDavid(?) bought some tracts in the Loblaw unit, many, many years, probably about '65, '66, and then here ten years later it's decimated with pine beetles and Texas Forest Service is again invoking this law. And, so Raymond McDavid alerted the Park Service to the fact that they were going to let contracts to have the timber cut over there. And we all went into May Day formation. And Bill Jewel, who was the Land Acquisition Officer, said to me, "Now, Maxine, don't go off half cocked." He said, "We're going to save this." And, that man produced Declaration of

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Taking documents. He walked them through—the Corps of Engineers was acquiring the land at that time, he walk them through every office that had to be taken care of. Got all the signatures, the Corps of Engineers'. And then he took it through the Park Service hierarchy. Got all the signatures he needed there. Went to the Solicitor General, got the approval there. And then he called me and he said, "Okay, the ball is in your court." He said, "The thing has to be approved—a—a Declaration of Takes—Taking has to be approved by the Congressional Subcommittee within two weeks of the date that it's filed. And so, he said, "Do whatever you can to get it out of that committee." So, Pete Guenther and I divided up the members of the committee, especially the ones that were on the subcommittee that had to do with this issue. And we tried to contract every one of them. We usually didn't get to the Congressperson themselves, but we got to an aide, an environmental aide that was helpful. And we made it. We managed to get the Declaration of Taking through, which saved the entire Loblaw Unit from logging. Now, it's a—it's a beautiful lesson in southern pine beetle handling. Because here you have an area that was predominately pines with more hard woods at the northern end. The trees were just allowed to fall wherever they fell. The only time they were moved was if they fell across the road that was in there. And the Unit has recovered. It—and, you know, it's—it's going more toward hard woods now, which is nature at work. And, it's—it's just a textbook lesson in, don't try to control pine beetles.

DT: What was the Texas Forest Services' rationale for doing these salvage cuts against pine Beetles?

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MJ: (talking over David) Well—they thought they—they thought they had science which backed up their view point that southern pine beetles can be controlled by cutting in front a buffer zone, in front of the direction in which they're moving. I think they have some new measures now that are probably more effective of controlling. And—and I always put quo—control in quotes, because I don't think they can do it. They do pretty well with some of the, I think the pheromones that they use. But, I'm not an expert on that either. I've just got all kinds of opinions without expertise.

DT: You mentioned some of the threats that you saw to establishing the Big Thicket, I think you mentioned....

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MJ: Before or after?

DT: ...well, in the '60s and '70s, the developers, I think was one.

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MJ: There was a—a, there were two groups that fought the establishment of the preserve. One of them was called Save Our Lands and Homes, Save our Homes and Lands. And the

other one was called Save Pine Island Residents in Thicket, which meant, the acronym was SPIRIT. And, they were very good at spreading rumors, scare mongering. One of the—my friends in Beaumont happened to be traveling behind a couple of people that were going down the road stuffing mail boxes with flyers. And she stopped and asked if she could have one of them. And they said yes. And it claimed that every house on that road was going to be in the Big Thicket National Preserve and they would not be in their home by Christmas. They would be moved out. Well, you know, with this kind of erroneous information, scare mongering, a lot of the peop—local people were terrified. The Se—National Park Service did something really stupid. They put out a survey. And their method of doing the survey was to go around to the post offices in the area and they'd show the postmistress, or postmaster a map. And they'd say, "Who lives in this area?" And she'd say, "Oh, there aren't any houses out there." Or, "Well, there's a little community of 50, or something." And, I think, I did—I did some phoning and I phoned all the postmasters of all the little Thicket towns. I think Warren took about 200 of those surveys and stuffed them in boxes, it ran him(?). The people were not selected. They were just stuffed with these things. And, I think here in Batson, they came to the post office and the guy said, "we don't have anybody that lives out there. You don't need to leave any with me." Because he knew where Pine(?) and Bile(?) was, and there wasn't anybody out there. So, it varied from one place to another. Okay, these surveys hit these homes, these homeowners. And it asked them, how many bathrooms do you have? Is your house a brick home or a—a whatever, you know, a frame home? I'm not sure, but, how many bedrooms and that kind of thing. Well, of course, everybody, and it said, "You are in an area that is being studied for Federal Acquisition", well, it took all of the work and effort that Bob Eckhardt and the Big Thicket Association could do to try to dispel it. And we never did fully dispel it. There are still people today,

0:46:17 - 2050

I had an argument with a man over here in Saratoga two weeks ago, that told me that his house was in that preserve and that all of their efforts to keep it out had been successful. Uh uh. I was with the survey team that surveyed the boundaries. His house was never in the preserve, never had been. But, these people who were circulating these documents by sticking them on the mailboxes and buying ads in the Enterprise. There was one ad in the Enterprise that claimed, I think, that 250 or more homes were going to be bought. And that, oh I forget how many thousand people were going to be displaced. And, or course, I wrote letters to the editor. And I called up the guy that did the story on it, Ed Holder. And I said, "This is a bunch of non sense. Come out and talk to me and let me show you the maps and so forth." So, Ed Holder showed up in my office and he recanted some of the stuff that he had written early, about it. It—there was so much misinformation. And we were constantly trying to correct it. And, of course, nobody wanted to believe the Big Thicket Association. And Eckhardt did everything he could. He put out news release after news release saying, there will be no homes, unless they are on the interior of units and cannot be left out. And even there, they will be able to take live estates. So, today I read one of the documents, not too long ago, that came out of the Park Service. There were fewer than 15 homes that were actually taken. And I'll be you there has never been a park anywhere that disrupted fewer people.

DT: Given that, that very few people were actually disrupted, where do you think the real fears were for the groups like SPIRIT, and others that were against the preserve?

0:48:20 - 2050

MJ: (talking over David) The f—the first fear, of course, was that they were going to be thrown out of their homes. Their—their homes were going to be taken from them. They were probably, and they still say taken. Never mind that the government paid far more than most of these places were worth. If—if you look at the total amount spent on Big Thicket lands and you divide it by the number of acres, I think the cost per acre is astronomical. And that's partly because the Judge down in Beaumont appointed a Real Estate Commission to rule on these values. And I think they, consistently, were well above, as much as 50% above and often more, above the government appraisals. Which are required to be at fair market value. The government is required to give a fair market value offer to these people. So, everybody was handsomely paid. I don't really fault them for wanting money for that. They were giving up lands that maybe they had some fondness for. Or maybe they thought their children would inherit it and love it and enjoy it. I always, when they mentioned this to me, I'd say, "How do you know that your children are going to stay here? Wha—what makes you think they won't go off to Houston or Dallas for their livelihood? And, doesn't it comfort you that this piece of land that you love will be here for ever?" You know, you try to reason with them like that. And I found out, at one time that Beaumont Chamber of Commerce had a Visitors Bureau and a—a Unit that was often being asked questions about where are the Big Thicket units and will my home be in it and everything. And I started getting questions at my job, at Lamar University in the library. And, I finally asked them, "Who is referring you to me?" Because it—the calls were so numerous. And they said, "Earl Brickhouse."

0:50:30 – 2050

Well, Earl Brickhouse was the head of the Visitors Bureau. And, anyway, I was happy to do this. And there's another story that Eckhardt was involved in and that involved a conservationist, essentially, from Houston. The Park Service would not answer anyone who asked whether or not their property was in the proposed preserve. And they did that very carefully and cautiously. Because, at that point in time, they were all recommendations. The law had not passed. And, God knows what Congress was going to do with, you know. So, they did not feel that they could conscientiously tell anybody whether or not. Well, they would call me because I could tell them, at least, this is in the recommendation. This is not in the recommendation. Because we had fairly good maps that we had marked up with the data. And, Eckhardt knew this and he started referring people to me. And, there was a wonderful gentlemen named Wendell Lay(?) from Houston, who owned a—a big chunk of the Hickory Creek Savanna unit. And he called Eckhardt's office and he said, "I want to know if my property is in there." He said, "I have an offer for the timber", which was Long Leaf Pine. And he said, "I might take it if this is not in the preserve, but if it's in the preserve, I will not sell it." And so, I checked out my maps and I called Eckhardt back and I said, "It's in the proposal for the Hickory Creek Savanna unit." Wendell Lay did not cut it. That, I think, is evidence that there were an awful lot of good people who h—happy about the fact that some of these areas—and that felt a responsibility to—not to harm the land. For every clown that went out there and cut something out of spite, there was probably at least three or four people that were more responsible.

DT: Speaking of the friends of the effort, could you mention Bob Eckhardt's role in promoting the preserve and maybe talk about Ralph Yarborough?

0:52:57 – 2050

MJ: (talking over David) Bob Eckhardt's role was critical because Bob Eckhardt took the

recommendations of the Big Thicket Coordinating Committee, which we've gone past up to this point, and we need to get back to that. He—he filed the bill that was recommended by conservationists. His bill was the first one that really had good maps, with the bill itself. And here for the first time you had a configuration of actual recommendations that had come from conservationists that were introduced by Eckhardt. It—his bill was our bill. But, to back up a little bit. We have failed to mention one of the things that was extremely critical. The Big Thicket Association was simply a small east Texas organization. We had a few members in other places, but essentially, we were green horns, who needed some help and guidance. And one of the people who became involved was that grand old guru of Texas environmentalism, Ned Fritz. Ned formed a Big Thicket Coordinating Committee. They got representatives from each of the major conservation groups like Audubon chapters, Sierra Club chapters, Texas Conservation Council, Texas Committee on Natural Resources, all of these groups were part of an umbrella organization. And it was from them that we and the Big Thicket Association learned a lot of lessons about lobbying, about how very, very small some of the vision and outlook of some of our members were. I remember Alice Cashen coming home from that first meeting of the Big Thicket Coordinating Committee and she said, "Micky, do you realize that a 100 thousand acres is simply 12 miles, squared?" She said, "That's a

0:55:08 – 2050

pittance of what we need to save." And, I think Ned contributed not only enlarging our sights, but he also let us know very—he taught us the political lesson that you start out with something that's ideal and be as generous as you can in defining it. Because you're going to be whittled down in the process, through the processes of compromise, you're going to be whittled down to far less than you really want or you really need. And, I—I think his contribution was made—actually, you get down to it there are so many people who made major contributions. Ned Fritz, Archer Fullingham running that newspaper over in Coonch and lamb-basting all of the timber companies and the locals.

DT: Talk about him, please.

0:56:08 – 2050

MJ: He—he was fantastic. I—we had our own newspaper in Archer. And he just gave hell to everybody, the locals that opposed the park, the timber companies. He was—and really Archer didn't get on board until Yarborough got on board. Because he was a Yarborough fan. And if Yarborough said it was good, it had to be good. So, he became far more active after...now Price Daniel had started an effort to try to get a state park established here. And, unfortunately his timing was bad in that, or maybe fortunately, his timing was bad in that he was running for reelection. And everybody assumed that he was doing it simply as a means to shore up his campaign or something. And, or course, Archer didn't like Daniels, and so he opposed it. As long as Daniels was the man that was proposing the park, but once Yarborough got involved, Archer got on board.

DT: And what was Ralph Yarborough's, the Senator's role in this?

0:57:24 – 2050

MJ: Actually, Ralph Yarborough wanted to introduce the Big Thicket bill a long time before he did. He had already done Padre Island National Seashore, Guadalupe and I think Senator Alan Bible(?), who was Chair of the Senate Committee, told him, "Don't you come in here with another proposal for a park." And he said, "Well, not at least 'til after we get Guadalupe through." And after they did that, he introduce the first Big Thicket bill in 1966. And when

he introduce that bill, he told us in the—the big reception we had over here in Saratoga, he said, “Normally it takes from eight to twelve years to get a ba-bill passed.” He says, “You have to have a period of public education. You have to convince people that this needs to be done. So that they will, in turn, put pressure on their Congressman.” Well, he was right on target. Because he introduce this bill in 1966, and it didn’t pass, finally, until 1974. So, Ralph Yarborough knew what he was doing. Unfortunately, we didn’t have him all the way through they fight. Because he was replaced by Lloyd Benson. But Lloyd Benson turned out to be pretty much of an asset too, in the long run. And, you have the phenomena of Ralph Yarborough, who never quit. Never mind that he wasn’t in Congress. He was still in there pitching and

0:59:04 – 2050

using every contact he had to further the Big Thicket cause. He later served even as President of the Big Thicket Association for a couple of years.

DT: Could you talk about some of the political maneuvering; the strategies and tactics of trying to get the Big Thicket bill through Congress?

0:59:28 – 2050

MJ: Well, let’s see. The problem, partly, was that the local representative was John Dowdy(?). And he was, everybody felt, a tool of the timber companies. And he was absolutely opposed to anything beyond a 35 thousand acre national monument, which had been proposed by the National Park Service in 1966. And so, he was—teamed up with Earl Kabble(?) from Dallas, and they were forming a pretty good roadblock in there. Then Dowdy was indicted for bribery. And, effectively, this Second Congressional District did not have a representative, or one with any credibility, which allowed Bob Ar-Eckhardt to come in and introduce the bill. Because, normally, one Congressman will not meddle in another Congressman’s District. But since we had this debacle with Dowdy, then Eckhardt was—felt he was free to introduce the bill. Well, after he introduce his, George Bush—he introduced his bill for 191,000 acres. George Bush came along and introduced one for 150 thousand acres. I think John Milford(?) from Da—north Texas—Dale Milford(?), he introduced one that was es—essentially the Yarborough bill that had been introduced in 1966. But...

DT: How many acres were in that?

1:01:15 – 2050

MJ: Hu—it said in Yarborough’s bill at least 100 thousand. It never did define an area and it didn’t put a limit on—it just said at least 100 thousand. And Benson reintroduced the Yarborough bill when he came in. But, at any rate, here you have this situation of everybody and his brother introducing bills, Jack Brooks out of Beaumont, Jim Wright. They had had their—their Big Thicket bill pending. And, of course, the one the conservationists were backing was Eckhardt’s bill. But Eckhardt, well, Charley Wilson enters, at about this point. Because he runs against Mrs. John Dowdy for the Congressional seat. And he wins it in 1972 and he becomes Congressman as of 1973. Charley and his campaign had promised that he was going to resolve this Big Thicket issue. And I remember going to a meeting over in Coonch shortly after he was elected, that he had called to talk to homeowners. And there were about 2 or 3 hundred really angry...

END TAPE 50

DT: Maxine, you were telling us about Timber Charley Wilson, could you resume your story?

0:01:40 – 2051

MJ: (talking over David) Right. Right. Well, I think we all were very, very hopeful about Timber Charley and in a sense he delivered. I think at first, in a sense, he wanted to keep his distance from the conservationists. And his distance from the timber company people. You know, he was going to resolve this thing. But he wasn't going to be real, real friends with either. We invited him to meeting after meeting that he never came to. But he would occasionally call one of his own. But the meeting that I had started to tell you about was the meeting in Coonch(?) where some irate landowners had showed up at a meeting he had called. And a very small handful of conservationists went. And that groups were very belligerent. And they would say things to him like, "We're going to get you Charley", and that kind of thing. And Wilson would flush very red in the face and he'd say, "Well that's alright". He says, "I had a job before this one. I guess I could get another." I came out of that confrontation of Charley Wilson with those landowners, with an enormous respect for the man. Because he stood his ground. And I, at one point, got up and started trying to refute some of their claims that they were going to loose all of this tax valuation which was going to close all the schools in Hardin County. And they were going to take away all of the land and therefore the livelihood of all of these people and all this stuff. I started trying to refute it. And I said, "You can't tell me that the—a timber company that owns over a million acres is going to go broke over the loss of something like 37 thousand acres in the case of the timber—temple. Well, one of the people from the Forestry pe—thing jumped up and started shaking his hand, "Now that's just the trouble with you people, you say so and so. And you don't have any foundation for that." And I said, "Go look it up in Moody's Industrials". I said, "I've got copies of it in my files. I know it is accurate". Anyway, after the whole thing was over, Charley came up to me and he said, "Maxine, in this forum, you just should have shut up. You shouldn't have said anything." He said, "You just shouldn't have said anything." He said, "You know, your—your out numbered here. Very little that you say is going to impress anybody." But the funny thing is that the guy that stood up and shook his nose—shook his finger under my nose later asked me to recommend him for the

00:04:12 - 2051

Executive Director of Texas Forestry Association. Which is another fun story. I don't have time to tell you all these fun stories. I got to be a member of the Texas Forestry Association. Because I, Ollie Crawford(?), who was one of our foes, and who had organized much of the campaign against the Big Thicket Park, I confronted him one day and I said, "Why is it that you are a member of the Big Thicket Association. Are you trying to keep track of what we're doing so you'll know how to combat it?" And, I said, "Maybe I should become a member of the Texas Forestry Association." Do you know that he went back and recommended me for the Texas Forestry Association. You have to be recommended there. And, so he paid my first year's dues. And I have now a certificate that says that I've been a member of the Texas Forestry Association for 25 years. But, we—we got into some battles with committees over there, where I was copying—writing letters to committee. Crawford was writing letters to committee. We were copying each other. And it just got to be a really big ball of wax one time. And I finally backed out of the whole venture by saying that, "The Big Thicket Association was a small organization with a limited budget. And that he had enlarged our readership of this exchange to the extent that we could no longer afford it." And so we—we just quit. We weren't making any progress with it anyway, in convincing anybody of anything. Alright, I've done it again. I got off on a tangent. Now lets get back to Charley. Charley had this notion that there had to be some recognition made of the wants of Hardin

County, particularly. Because Hardin County had most of the land. There were patches of land in Polk, Tyler, Liberty, Jasper, Newton Counties, that sort of thing. But, Hardin County was to be the one that had most of the land involved, something like 55 thousand acres, I think. So he felt there had to be some compromise with Hardin County. And since this Save the Village Creek group—Save Our Homes and Lands had made so much

0:06:37 – 2051

noise, he determined to leave out Village Creek. Well, of course that mobilized all of the conservation community to try to save Village Creek. And in fact, when we went to Washington to the hearings in 1973, we had a—a marvelous aid of the Sierra Club, up there, Linda Billings, who caught us all together in a room one evening. And she gave us all assignments; which Congressmen we were to go to see and we all agreed that most of these areas were no longer in contention. But that everybody would focus their attention and testimony on Village Creek. So we tried to s—had an all courts press to try to save it and we failed. It was left out, because... And I have a telephone conversation that was recorded with Congressman Wilson in which he said, “You ain’t gonna get Village Creek, Maxine.” But, the same man sat on the s—s—the steps out on the front of the capitol and told me, “If you people will just shut up about Village Creek, I’ll get the timber companies to give you some of it later.” But he says, “We’re not going to be held hostage over this thing.” And I said, “Charley, I can’t make an agreement like that on behalf of conservationists.” I said, “It’s a promise that has no substance because I don’t know how many acres you’re talking about. I don’t know what kind of preservation you’re talking about. I’m—I’m not empowered to make that kind of a deal.” And I think over the years, Charley came to realize that he had made a very grave error in leaving out Village Creek. And he called done day, in 1986, he didn’t call himself, he had his Aid, Larry Murphy call, and he said, “Maxine, are you still interested in Village Creek?” And I said, “You’ve got to be kidding. Of course we’re still interested in Village Creek.” And the, I think the interesting thing was he then asked me, “Maxine, how do you get along with Ned Fritz.” And I said, “Like everybody else in the world.” I said, “I admire Ned enormously and sometimes I disagree with him.” And I said, “When I do we fight. And when we’re in agreement, we have love fests.” I said, “So, what else is new?” And,

0:09:18 – 2051

anyway, he introduced the bill after that. And he really worked hard to try to get it passed. But I think Senator Gramm threw so many roadblocks. The first—I—I think Charley himself worked for the timber company, so they talked about exchanging lands with the National Forest Service for timber company land, in order to get the land and not add to the... That may have been Graham’s idea too, but I think it was Charley’s, originally. But Graham then came along and he listened to all of these area home owners who were saying that they—the was a provision in the bill that said the Secretary of the Interior could take any properties that were adversely impacting the preserve, or something. Well, of course, this is in every National Park bill, just about, because if there’s somebody going to put in a garbage dump or a pizza parlor right next to a waterfall or something, they have to have some means in stopping that kind of thing. It’s—it’s standard legislation. But, these people of Village Creek took that and said, “This gives the Secretary of Interior the license to come in and take our property away from us.” And, you know, this private property issue, in the last 10 or 15 years, has been pretty much a bug-a-boo of everyone. It’s a terrible injustice, I think, to the cause of preservation that they hang so many issues on private property. You

know...

DT: The issue you mentioned about Village Creek brings up the question in my mind, that the Big Thicket is such an unusual shape for a National Preserve that there are units, such as Village Creek and there is the Rosier Unit and other units. And it's scattered and follows, I think, a lot of the river ways. Can you explain why it's that shape rather than a continue big block that most parks are shaped?

0:11:35 - 2051

MJ: (talking over David) Well, in the first place, there had been so much development, so much timbering, so much agriculture, so many towns, so many roads, railroads, so much, power lines, utility lines, incursions into the area that there were absolutely no large blocks of land that hadn't been disturbed by development. And if you are trying to represent the diversity of the region, you have to look for it in what may sometimes seem like isolated pockets. You know, the best representation that there was of beech-magnolia-loblolly Forest was in the Beach Creek unit, up in Tyler County. Best, (?) on the hard wood flats, down here in the Rosier area. The best savannas, in Hickory Creek and savanna and the Turkey Creek unit. You had to—to decide what it was you were trying to preserve. And, we were trying to preserve some—the best representations possible of the diverse plant associations of the Big Thicket. And, consequently, you had to take them where you could find them. And, one of our fears from the outset was always that these areas would be so small that it would be difficult to protect them. Because you have the edge effect that sort of miti—works against you, on of these things. You asked about the corridors and the streams. Most of us felt strongly that the water is the lifeblood of Big Thicket. We thought the streams were critical. We also felt that they were important for migration of species. And I'm not talking about just animal

0:13: 34 - 2051

species, I'm talking about plant species as well. The migration of species was one of the reasons that we felt that these corridors were really going to be critical to the thing. And, by the way, one of the men from the National Parks and Conservation Association gave us credit for the leadership in establishing a corridor concept for Big Thicket. And I think another thing that is unique to Big Thicket is, I don't know of any other park that was established because of its diversity, necessarily. That wasn't the rationale for starting it in the first place. I'm not sure, there may be others. I'm not that well informed. But I know that we did, sort of pioneer the corridor concept. And if you look at the first map that was put out by the Coordinating Committee, it was 300,000 acres. And it had wide corridors along virtually every stream in the area; Cypress Creek, Little Cypress Creek, Minard(?) Creek, Pine Island Bayou—the entire length of Pine Island Bayou. It was all an effort to provide protection, partly, for the units that we had. Because you got Big Sandy Unit sitting up here and it's connected to the—will be connected to the Turkey Creek Unit by Big Sandy corridor. And if we can ever get the Village Creek thing through, then the Turkey Creek Unit will be connected to the Nature's River unit. That one bill that we're still trying to resolve all the problems with—of acquisition, the bill is a reality, the acquisition is the problem. By the time we get that resolved...

(Misc.)

0:15:49 - 2051

MJ: Now, I think of the original 84,550 acres, they were only connections between some of the units with the Nature's River and with Pine Island—Little Pine Island. With this

addition that Wilson introduced in 1986, which we're still working on, you will have over 90% of the units—the land area, connected with corridors.

DT: Speaking of these corridors, what are some of the threats to the corridors themselves? I understand that the Core has plans for floor control work on some of the contributing streams. Can you talk about that?

0:16:40 – 2051

MJ: Yes. A lot of the Big Thicket Association's present efforts have been directed toward people trying to manipulate our streams. We just finished a hassle with the Pine Island Bayou Flood Control District. We managed—we fought it repeatedly since, I think the first time we fought the Pine Island Bayou channelization thing was about 1966. And it has recurred every few years. And they keep bringing it up again. And they keep developing more homes on the flood plain. We—they finally got a bill through the legislature last year, and so we had to take it, there was an election to confirm the Legislatures action. And we managed to defeat that overwhelmingly by working with the timber companies who were going to be most impacted by it in terms of taxes. And so, here you had ancient enemies coming together to work—to stop a common threat. I think, personally, that flood plain development is something that we really need to address in the future. We need better enforcement of some of the regulations in—that are existing. But, right out here on Pine Island Bayou right now, you can see that they've clear

0:18:17 – 2051

cut about a seventy-acre area. And they're probably going to plan houses in it. And that bridge at Pine Island Bayou is under water whenever it floods. And here you've got this guy that's clearing all this up in preparation for planning houses there. Okay. That's one thing. Flood plain development, Pine Island Bayou, we've got that put that one to rest, temporarily. It will rear its ugly head again one of these days. In the mean time, there's Houston and it's enormous population growth and the need for water. They're attracting—and trying to attract industry over there. They have to have water for all of these homes that they're building. They have their eye, we believe, on Rockland Dam, on the Neches, as one of the sources for water. And I think that the Beaumont establishment is probably for—they want to keep our water—their guests at(?) Trans Texas Water Plant, because they want to keep our water here. But, on the other hand, the want to sell it for a profit to Houston, or whoever needs it. And, of course, Sabine River is supposed to have a surplus of water, so they want to trans-ship it, through a series of canals, over—in the Texas Water Plant—Trans Texas Water Program. But, part of the problem that we foresee coming, and very soon, is this Rockland Dam. It's been on—was one the books for a number of years. The Big Thicket Conservation group, they lobbied to have it removed from the active—what—what do you call it? D—de-reg—d-something—de-authorization, that's the word. Every time I do it on my computer, the computer objects that there ain't no word, de-authorization. But, the—we did get the Rockland Dam de-authorized in about 1984 or 5, somewhere in there. But they can get it

0:20:26 – 2051

re-authorized just as quickly as we got it de-authorized. So, it's...and besides that, we now think, Janice Bezanson and I were discussing it and she says they will not need federal moneys for this because they can get state moneys for it. So, we have this bug-a-boo coming up. And once again, I think we're probably going to be working with timber companies in trying to defeat it.

DT: You mentioned to controversies that threatened the Big Thicket's continued protection. Can you talk about others? There are exotics that I've seen coming in, the tallow trees. Is that a big factor?

0:21:20 - 2051

MJ: It's one of the abominations that I'm not sure that we know what to do about. I know the Park Service continues—considers it one of their major challenges to do something about it. They also have a lot of other things like feral hogs and things they would like to do something about. But, I am not aware of anybody who has come up with an answer for tallow Trees.

(Misc.)

DT: We were talking about the affect of tallow trees on some of the Big Thicket tracts. I understand it's also a threat to native prairies. And I was wondering if you could tell us about some of the native prairie tracts that you've tried to protect over the years?

0:22:19 - 2051

MJ: Well, because of the fact that there is no representation within the Big Thicket National Preserve of prairies, with prairie vegetation, the—Ned Fritz and Geraldine Watson, a long time ago, started an effort to try to locate some areas that had not been plowed, that had not been grazed, and that still had some of the native grasses and pimple mounds and things that are characteristic of prairies. They managed to find a tiny tract that was in the middle of a subdivision. And they wanted to buy as many of those lots as they could. And the Atlantic Richfield Company put up some money. And the Texas Conservation Foundation purchased it for nature conservancy. It became overgrown with invading vegetation. And, about 1979 or 80 we had a massive effort made to clear it. And it, again, because these things keep coming in and—and obscuring what we're trying to save, the grasses and the wildflowers. In fact, if you look at Gay Oda Esula's(?) book called Wildflowers of the Big Thicket, there's a statement in there that the Mary C. Prairie(?) has the best collection of native grasses and wildflowers of any—of the existing prairies that are left. And, I think she said there were over 40 of the grasses out there that she had collected. So, it's—it was an area that was important because this was not represented in the preserve. And it, prairies, by ver—very nature, with suppression of fire and with development other things, you are loosing them so rapidly. There just aren't any prairies left. Just a tiny few samples. And even some of those have been disturbed by man. So, this was an important thing, we thought. And they bought six acres there; two lots. And that was the one that got into bad condition. We re-cleared it and burned it in 1979. And we thought we were off to the races again, that we were really going to take care of that prairie this time. But it again, was neglected. Nature Conservancy simply had too many items on its agenda, too many places to take care of. They had, by that time, acquired the Larson Sanctuary, which

0:25:05 - 2051

the Big Thicket Association helped them to acquire. They'd acquired Weire(?) Woods. They'd acquired Big Thicket Boggs and Pinelands. They'd acquired the Wilson Preserve in Beaumont. And they had not enough personnel, not enough manpower to take care of these properties. And so tiny little Mary C. Prairie was grossly neglected. And, so Brandt Mannchen went to the officials of Nature Conservancy and asked if they would transfer it to NAPA. And, at that point, this was in 1992, they transferred it almost immediately. I think they were glad to have it off their agenda, partly because I had been so critical of them for

not maintaining it. So, NAPA took over, Natural Air Preservation Association, and because of Tom Maddox, primarily, we have been able to recruit an absolutely fantastic group of volunteers, mostly from Houston Sierra Club, partially from Texas Committee on Natural Resources and a few from the Big Thicket Association. We have about 15 or 20 people that show up once a month, at a workday, the first Saturday. And it has taken us from 1993 until this year to clear the property of the invaders that had come in. We now have one little corner to work on. And we think we'll finish removing these things in 1999. Unfortunately, the ubiquitous, eternal, everlasting tallow trees are absolutely covering the place. Wind blown, bird... Anyway, we had Doctor Paul Harcombe from Rice University and Doctor Larry Brown from Houston Community College to come out and do a vegetation survey. And they worked one day, and listed everything that they could find then. And they want us to continue to have botanic surveys at other periods of the year. Theirs' was done in June. And, I think we will add appreciably to that list that they already had an impressive list of over a hundred species, just with their 3 or 4 hours of work. Doctor Harcombe and Doctor Brown, both, said, "Your biggest problem is going to be your con—continuing invasion of tallow Trees." And they don't think there's any help for it short of taking the things up by the roots when they're small, keeping them cut out of the fence lines that surround the property. We have developed our own little trial and error method of trying to do these. We've tried gurgling(?) some of the larger ones to see if that will do it. And then we have also

0:28:08 – 2051

bought—most—most conservationists are really afraid of herbicides. But, because of the fact that we were confronted with a problem that was just overwhelming here, we have tried this. We've tried cutting the stumps and then we have a small spray bottle that we spray the area immediately after they're cut. This is working to some degree. But, I'm not sure that there is an answer to the tallow Trees, other than eternal vigilance and hard, backbreaking work. Because they're always going to come back. There's too many of them around. I wish the scientists would get busy and figure out something that would do that. But, this—we had this Big Thicket Science Conference this week. And Doctor Daniel Simberloff(?) from University of Tennessee at Knoxville was our keynoter. And his topic was, Are We Doomed To Live On A Planet Of Weeds? And, I think his conclusion was pretty much that there's some hope, but it's going to be a real battle. And he talked about a lot of the different exotics that have come in and that are causing problems all over the states. DT: Speaking of weeds and exotics like tallow Trees, can you talk about other ways of managing land to keep it in the successional state that you want, like fires and controlled burns, etc?

0:29:44 – 2051

MJ: A lot of people think that the Big Thicket Association is often inconsistent. Because we tell them that we don't want these areas changed. We want to see what nature is going to do with them. Not what man is going to do with them. And then we turn around and we tell them, "But, here is a community which is fire sub-climax, and you're not going to keep it if you don't use fire." And the most prominent example of that, of course, is Pitcher Plant bollix and prairies. Absolutely requirements, if you are going to keep them. Now if you're willing to give them up, okay, no fire. And, we have a substantial disagreement with some of the other conservation groups over that. We r—we view Big Thicket as virtually—we'd like to see it, not frozen in time, but some of these areas were selected because of what that had.

Okay, if we're going to keep those things, we're going to have to use fire as a management tool. And so, here is your inconsistency. I'm—at the same time that I'm telling people that we have to have fire to manage a few of these areas, I'm—at the same time telling them that they can't take all of those logs out of the stream. Because, you know, that's—that's not the purpose of the preserve. We're not trying to keep a nice clear stream that will get water up—if nature did it, leave it. So, there's a sort of a dichotomy, I suppose. And what we do—do is to try to say, at the moment in time when this preserve was created, these areas were selected for these purposes. Consequently, the management that is given them should try to maintain that. But that's not true of areas like Loblolly Unit, Beach Creek Unit. You want to see what nature is going to do with them.

DT: We've talked about your efforts with the Big Thicket and prairies. But you've also been active at the state level with things beyond habitat protection through your work on the Sierra Club's Executive Committee. Could you talk about the concerns that the Sierra Club had during your tenure?

0:32:18 - 2051

MJ: The Sierra Club, probably, next to Texas Committee on Natural Resources, or it might be a contest between them, have probably been the biggest mainstays of our efforts to protect the Big Thicket. Because they are always listening. And when we ask for help, they give it. In the effort recently, to try to get the appraisals for the—between the Forest Service and everything for this land, resolved, most effective work that we had came out of Janice Bezanson with the Texas Committee on Natural Resources and Ken Kramer with the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra. Lone Star has a long history, too, just like TCONR, of involvement. The first Chair of the Coordinating Committee was R.N. Bonnie(?), who was a very dear friend and very much beloved throughout the entire conservation community. We had as our second Coordinating Committee Chair, Emok Hinche(?), Emok was also a state—both—both R.N. Bonnie and Emok Hinche were Lone Star Chapter Chairs, at one time. So, and then there are, I mentioned earlier, Linda Billings at their—their lobbyist in Washington. We used her as if she were our lobbyist. And, they were just enormously helpful. And, of course, every time you turned around, Ned Fritz was in Washington. Sometimes, making troubles. I remember one time Char—Charley Wilson called me, personally this time, not with an Aid, and he said, "Maxine, get up here." He says, "Ned Fritz is up here making problems." And I said, "Now just what do you think I can do Charley, to resolve that." And he said, there was some woman also that was up there, and I think she was from the Texas Federated Woman's Clubs, and she had antagonized Lloyd Bentsen and everybody else, and he said,

0:34:33 - 2051

"Get this woman out of Austin—out of Washington." And I said, "You have significantly overestimated my abilities, Charley. I can't move people in and out of Washington." But I did go to Washington at his request. And we had several confrontations. And I think Charley was trying to use me as a pawn, sort of, in this game with Ned Fritz. And I think he was frustrated that I was sometimes helpful, but very often not helpful at all. But, Charley and I were—became very good friends over a period of years. We knew we were always going to differ, but we also liked each other. I basically like the man. I think he's an interesting character. And so, I bet I got off the subject again.

DT: No, no, this is fascinating. And I'm curious if you could follow up and talk about your experiences in Washington and I supposed also in Austin as well, lobbying for protection,

whether it was for Big Thicket, or prairies, or other issues?

0:35:53 – 2051

MJ: I'm not sure what you asked me.

DT: Maybe some tales about lobbying, about working the halls of Congress or the Legislature, some of your experiences there?

0:36:03 – 2051

MJ: Oh yeah. Especially during the endangered acres period, when we had identified those 3500 acres. Geraldine Watson and I both went up to Washington. And we had maps marked up showing where all the cutting was going on, where all the development was going on. We had development, I think, in pink and the cutting in blue, or something else. And we would walk into these offices and fling down ours maps and tell them, "They're wiping out Big Thicket in the name of trying to save pine beetles or through spite cutting, or whatever." Geraldine and I had this little routine that we went through. I'd do part of the presentation and I'd do part of the... It was—I used to get so tickled at her when it would come time to do her part. She'd say, "Beach Creek looked like it had been bugged!", meaning bombed, of course. But, she was very, very emotional about it. And I think that made an impact on some of those Aids. And on others, I think maybe it turned them off a little bit, you know. I remember Geraldine trying to talk to the Senate Committee at one time. And she told me, before going in there, she said, "I have always talked to the committee about—these committees in my testimony about the scientific value of the Big Thicket." She said, "This time I'm going to tell them why I am so dedicated to saving this. I'm going to give them the emotional side." Well, she got cut off at the pass by Alan Bible. He would say, "That's in your statement, Mrs. Watson, go on to the next part." And he just kept cutting her off. So, there are people that you can give emotional appeals to, and that's another story about Archer Fullingham, same hearing. He's up there to testify and I give him this little lecture. I say, "Now, Archer, it's okay to write about Holy Ghost Big Thicket if you're down in your territory and you're the local character and everybody recognizes you as the local character." But I said, "I really don't think you should get up here and tell a

0:38:17 – 2051

Congressional Committee about going down into the Big Thicket and getting the Holy Ghost and talking in tongues." I said, you know, "Don't do that." Well, he got really livid with me and he said, "Maxine, why is it that everybody comes and asks me for my opinion and you treat me like an idiot?" And I said, "Okay, if you want to talk about the Holy Ghost, go ahead." He didn't, really talk about Holy Ghost. Because the night before we had all agreed that we were going to concentrate on Village Creek. So instead he talked about Village Creek.

DT: It seems often you got help from the media. Can you talk about how you got information out that way?

0:39:12 – 2051

MJ: Actually, I don't think the media was as important a part there. In fact I think they were sometimes they were a hindrance. Because the newspapers tended to sympathize with these residents who were getting flooded. And never mind that they went out there and deliberately built that house on a flood plain. And they're costing us money, constantly. Newspapers were more sympathetic with them. And they would publish things—local newspapers would publish things saying, "These people's homes are going to be taken." No they're not. But, you know, they quote somebody as saying that and it gets all over the

newspapers. The people who were the media that helped were the, quote, foreign press, meaning out of state. You had people coming in here, like from Times-Picayune, or the Los Angeles Times, and they would do these big pieces. A guy from the St. Louis Post Dispatch came down and spent a whole week. And he's one of our favorite people. He still corresponds with us occasionally. And then, about 10 years after he was here, they asked me to write a piece for the St. Louis Post Dispatch, all because that man was here and liked it. We had that—that wonderful piece that was done by the National Observer, covered the whole front page and an interior page of the thing. And it was written as if it were a letter to me from the man who did the piece. And he gave, he—he was just great. He spent all of his time here, about two weeks over in that Dunahow(?) house, and we just loved it. He was really quite... Then the guy who did the piece for National Geographic. He came and spent weeks here and we gave parties for him and had lots of fun. The group from the Chicago Academy of Sciences that came down here. Ned Fritz and the b—a group of people brought them through and we had a big wingding for them over here, one weekend. There were—and some of these people did editorials for prestigious journals, like science. I think one of the fascinating pieces of coverage that we got came from the New York Times. A man named Tom Eisner(?) who was head of the Department of Entomology, I think, at Cornell, came to a meeting in Houston, and decided that as long as he was in the area he'd come over and take a look at

0:41:57 - 2051

Big Thicket. Well, once he got here, and Harold Nicolas took him around and they spent a lot of their time looking at spiders and—and things like that, that he was intrigued with, he went from here to the Triple A S in Chicago. And by the time he'd gotten there he had, had some yellow ribbons printed saying, Save The Big Thicket. And he was marching around button-holing people at the AAAS meeting in Chicago and then here comes a—a news clipping from Chicago about this professor that's starting an ad hoc committee of scientists to save the Big Thicket. Then he writes an editorial for Science Magazine, and it's published, recommending the Eckhardt bill. And then he sends John Noble Wilford down here from the New York Times. And John Noble Wilford does a full-page spread in the New York Times. And then the New York Times editorially endorsed the Eckhardt bill, about two weeks later. We've just had such fantastic help. And some times a lot of it was not even something that we planned for. It was just like something that fell in our laps. But, a part of this came from that Chicago Academy of Sciences group who had a lot of important and prestigious people on it who helped to get some of this coverage by si... Oh, one of the woman I remember that was with the group had a in with Time Magazine. And, of course, we were on Time Magazine's back most of the time because it was owned by the—there was that timber company connection for a while. And, that was another thing, Pete Gunter had, when—when he was President of the Big Thicket Association, has a students all over the state, ripping those cards out of Time Magazine and writing Save the Big Thicket on them. And sending them back to Time. And they were postal reply cards, of course, so they even had to pay to get them back. Pete Gutter is one that you need to spend some time with, to visit with. Because, I think one of the things that will tell you how extremely important he was in that period, when he was working. James Cosine's(?) dissertation called, Assault on a Wilderness quotes Jim Webster of Kirby as saying, "The man whips on us to death with his attacks

0:44:47 - 2051

on clearcutting and modern forestry methods.” And, I think if—if Jim Webster says, “He whips on us to death”, he was giving the timber companies plenty of trouble.

DT: Could you briefly outline what the drawback to clearcutting is and what are the problems to modern forestry?

0:45:08 – 2051

MJ: (talking over David) Once again, you’re talking to somebody that really doesn’t know that much. But I think even a layman and an—un—unwashed person such as I, could say that it’s obvious that clearcutting is bad for everything. It wipes out the diversity and that diversity is not going to return. And, you know, it’s—it’s just bad for wild life, bad for everything.

DT: You’re very modest about your role as a layperson, but you’ve worked many years, as a librarian trying to help people understand, not just about conservation but other issues. And I’m wondering if you can talk about what potential there is for people to be more literate about the environment? And how libraries and other institutions can get the word out about the value of the environment and risks to it?

0:46:19 – 2051

MJ: Well, of course the—the library’s great advantage is their general availability and their absolutely dedication to collecting information on all sides of all issues. They do not take sides on anything. So you’re not going to find libraries out there proselytizing, I don’t think. You may find an individual librarian out there proselytizing, but probably not the profession as a whole. But by their very dedication to making sure the every issue has information available on both sides. They can help. I think a lot of the television programming that we’ve had has been reasonably good and has made people more aware of the problems. I wish it were, I could say that all of it was good. But not all of it is good. Furthermore, I’m not sure that people tod—two things concern me right now, I look at the membership of so many organizations that we have that are working for preservation and they’re elderly, like me. I’ll be the average age in some of these groups, like the Big Thicket Association were in the neighborhood of 60. Where are the young people? And I tend to think that maybe those damn computers (did I cuss good enough for you?), I think those damn computers may be at fault. Because everybody seems to be glued to the damn things. They’re either—I use them constantly, but mostly for word processing. Because I can wipe out errors so easily and I can move things around. But I find people who surf the Internet and who do—spend all of this time on the net. I find them confusing. That’s not my world. And I think, are they spending more time on that than on conservation. The other people I worry about are the—the black people. The ethnic groups that I don’t see many of them joining them. You go to that Golden Triangle Sierra Group, there’s not maybe one or two Hispanic names in the entire list. But no blacks what so ever. And I mentioned this to one of my Aids at the library one time. I said, “Why is it that you don’t join some of these groups and help us?” And the girl said, “Until we get the civil rights thing resolved, you’re not going to get any. That—that’s our first purpose and everything.” Well, we need younger people and we need more diversity within the conservation groups, it seems to me.

DT: Would you have a message to the younger generation why they should care and get involved?

0:49:29 – 2051

MJ: We’ve only got one planet; that I know about; that’s livable. And, we really desperately need to take care of the few areas that we’ve got. And they are precious few. When you

think about population growth, not just the United States, but everywhere, you have to worry. That—and—and you look at what has happened to the Big Thicket just since 1974. You fly over the area and you can virtually see the outlines of the units. Because shortly after '74, a lot of these areas were clear cut and planted to Pines. And so you may have this very even texture of a pine farm, or a clear cut or something. But, the units themselves you can fly over and you can say—you can almost see the shape of the Turkey Creek Unit or the Beach Creek unit, as you're flying over. And, I guess, those tiny little patches that we've managed to preserve here, there and yonder, are going to need protection and we need more young people. And we probably need some—to do something about population growth.

DT: Well, do you think that population growth is one of our big challenges or are there other environmental issues?

0:50:57 – 2051

MJ: (talking over David) Obviously. Obviously. I had a man here a few years ago from the San Francisco Chapter of the Sierra Club. And he wants us to drop everything else and not worry about all these other things. He says, "Maxine, if you'll just solve the population problem, we won't have all these other problems." I don't agree with that totally. It's—I think we need to work on them all. Because, in the meantime, they can pollute a lot of streams. They can pollute a lot of air. They can cut out a lot of our choice places. It's a matter of eternal vigilance. And it's a ballgame you loose, very often.

DT: You mentioned choice places, are there any particular places that you like to go in the Big Thicket or elsewhere?

0:51:50 – 2051

MJ: Well, of course, my favorite place will always be the Lance Rosier Unit right over here. Because I've been on so many field trips with Lance and with Harold Nicolas and others who knew and loved that area. So I know it very well. I know where all its little Beach groves are. I know where all of its pine savannas are. It's mine. So, in—in a special way that it will never belong to anyone else, it's mine.

DT: Let me ask one more question. You were talking about these National Forest places that you feel are yours'. Is there a special message that's yours' that you would like to pass on to those that see this tape or read these transcripts?

0:52:38 – 2051

MJ: That is the kind of question that I really would hate to take a run at. Because it's massive. You can't distill it in a few short words. I don't—I don't think I have any message other than eternal vigilance. And, okay, so you don't win one battle. Start over again and see if you can win on the next round. It's just—and try to preserve what is unique and important about our world, whether it's out there in the woods or whether it's the information that we have on our library shelves.

DT: Thank you very much. Well put.

End of tape 2051

End of interview with Maxine Johnston