

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: **Marcos Paredes** (MP)

INTERVIEWERS: David Todd (DT)

DATE: April 3, 2001

LOCATION: Lajitas, Texas

TRANSCRIBER: Robin Johnson

REEL: 2148 and 2149

Please note that the video includes roughly 60 seconds of color bars and sound tone for technical settings at the outset of the recordings. Boldfaced numbers mark the time codes for the VHS tape copy of the interview. "Misc." refers to various off-camera conversation or background noise, unrelated to the interview.

DT: My name is David Todd. It's April 3rd, year 2001. I'm here for the Conservation History Association of Texas and we're on a spot overlooking the Rio Grande just west of Lajitas and we're visiting with Marcos Paredes who's the warden for 245 miles...

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MP: It's a ranger not a warden.

DT: Ranger, excuse me, of a stretch of the Rio Grande as it runs from Big Ben National Park. He's also worked as a river guide on this and other rivers and is a private citizen in his conservation efforts. And I wanted to take this chance to thank you for spending this time with us.

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MP: Well you're welcome. I'm—I'm proud to be here.

DT: I thought we'd start by talking about your early days and if there might be something you can tell us about your childhood or days in school where there might have been parents or friends or teachers who got you interested in the outdoors.

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MP: I—I can't say really that there was anybody when I was—when I was a kid that, hell, I didn't know what conservation was nor did anybody that I was associated with. But I—I have an uncle who—who really I think probably got me interested in the outdoors, mostly by forcing me to spend all my time out in it. He was a—he was a farmer in Arizona and I—I went to work with him many days, hung out on the tractor. I would often stand out there on the back of the plow of the tractor while he went down the field and I might do that for ten hours and get off and have lunch in the shade of the tractor. And—and I—I guess that was really where I started learning to pay attention to the things that were going on around me and being observant of, you know, little things

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like, you know, that roadrunner that's there every day when you come out and he must live there and, you know, and—and really watching the sun move across the sky and watching the clouds move in and move across the—and being outside. And that's what he did, he—he was—he was a farmer who worked for somebody else out there and he's actually doing much better now. He's—he's been retired for so—some twenty years and some—one day somebody told him that what he actually did in his garden was organic gardening and that there's a demand for that and he goes and sells truckloads. But my Uncle Ray—my uncle Raynardo, if—if anybody really introduced me and got me interested in being interested in

being in the outdoors it would be my uncle Ray. But it—and I—as I—like I had told you when we spoke before that conservation wasn't

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something that any of my folks thought about, you know, they thought about putting groceries on the table and getting the kids to school. So not really any—any kind of not—for example, you know, like myself today with my son, you know, where I whisper in his ear at night, you know, save the world, not anybody like that.

DT: You had said at one point that your parents did teach you something about right and wrong and stuff like that...

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MP: Well yeah...

DT: ...that contributed...

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MP: Yeah, I—I recall telling you that and I—I—I'd like to think that we all feel that way, you know, like if nothing else our parents taught us the difference between right and wrong. And—and I—I had told you that I didn't—I've never really thought of—of the things that I do as conservation efforts. It's—it's I think more it's, you know, trying to figure out what is the right thing and—and—and trying to promote that and trying to do—trying to do what's right and I don't—I don't know that we're always successful at that. But I don't—I've never—I don't think I ever sat down and—and said, oh I think I'm going to be a conservationist when I grow up or, you know, went and checked out

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any books from the library, you know, that were going to teach me how to be a conservationist. I—I think that we have to look at—at our actions in everything that we do and particularly, you know, as our actions become more significant to more people, we need to think about what—what kind of a impacts our—our actions are going to have. And I—I guess in a nutshell to me that's what—what conservation is—is about, is trying to do the right thing for the—for the greatest good for—and not just for—for people but for yellow breasted chats and I think that's who we're hearing up there. No, mockingbird.

DT: I understood that from some of your early days of adulthood you acted as a river guide where you interpreted what was seen along the river or (inaudible)

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MP: I—yeah, mocking—I can. I—well it's something I just really fell into. I went—well I—I guess I must have been eighteen, nineteen years old, I went out to West Virginia to—to go do some hiking, we were going to go hike a stretch of the Appalachian trail which we did. We did a little—a little hiking in Virginia and West Virginia and that was in the fall and we were getting ready to leave and a job opportunity presented itself at a state park there in West Virginia and basically as a caretaker at a state park and my friend and I ended up spending the winter there. Over the course of the winter, we met some of the local river guides and the next thing I knew I was—I was hired on as a river guide on the—on the Cheat River in West Virginia. And I spent a couple of years out

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there working on the Cheat and the New and the Gauley and I—I, you know, I developed a fondness for paddling canoes. And a couple of seasons there I worked skiing, I worked the slopes out there in the winter and I'm not really a cold person, I'm, you know, I—I've—I've always figured folks that live in that type of climate just do it because they don't know any

better. But—and—and I—it just occurred to me one day that, well my old home river, you know, that there were—I could probably, you know, work at this sort of stuff back on the Rio Grande and that's what I did is I came out here one—one winter to continue working on the river through the winter. And...

DT: What year was this?

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MP: Nine—I believe it was '78, 1978. We came down here and started working for an outfit here in—in Lajitas that would—at the time was called Texas Canoe Trails. And the oh maybe a—a month or so after I got here, the manager of the operation bailed out on them and I became the manager by default. And—and I've really never had a—a desire to leave here since I came, this has been home since then. And—and really I think to some extent, I've—the Rio Grande has always been home to me and—and my family was from down river around Eagle Pass. I just didn't know what chunk of the Rio Grande I was going to land on and—and this is it—this is—this is where I'm at.

DT: When you work with clients on the river as a guide, what would you try and tell them?

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MP: You know, it—it really depends a lot on—on the clients, on what their interests are. But what I found for a—a long time was—was really that my best thing was to—to try to bring them out and see what they could show me and see what they could teach me. And I found a lot of times that the folks who were attracted to those sorts of activities, they were there because they—they had an interest in this sort of stuff. And many of them had a lot to teach me and—and that really is—is probably what happened for many years was that I just absorbed what I could from the folks I was taking down the river and—and then passed it on again when I could. You know, I—I developed in birding and botany and fisheries and hanging out on the river. I really I guess I was—I was compelled to try

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to learn as much as I could about—about the river. And one of the things that really—two things that have bothered me on the river is one, when somebody asks me a question and I don't know what the answer is, that really bothers me. And the only thing that bothers me more is to hear somebody make one up, you know. And so that's really motivated me to—to try to learn more and more about and I'm always finding some other aspect, you know, that—of the riparian zone that I don't—I don't know anything about.

DT: Is there something in particular that draws people to this stretch of the Rio Grande, the ecology or some part of the (inaudible).

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MP: The, of course one of the big attractions is the national park itself, just the mere fact that it's been—this area has been designated a national park draws a lot of visitors down here. But then if you—if you look at the Chihuahuan Desert—the Chihuahuan Desert as a whole, you know, the—the focus of the Chihuahuan Desert is the Rio Grande. This is one of the most significant parts of—of the Chihuahuan Desert. It's the lifeblood of—of the desert and everything that lives out here at some point gets drawn to the river including the people.

DT: You were telling me earlier a story about the river and about some of the non-native plants. Can you talk about that?

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MP: I—I can, you know, one of the things that I've—that is really finally starting to pay off

for me after—after more than twenty years of working on the river here and—and you know, and there are some things that you really can't notice until you've spent a long period of time out here and you start seeing changes, you know, long term changes, short term changes, really depending on how you look at it. My life is a sp—sp—spec of time, but we have seen—we have seen invasive species move into the river corridor, both plants and animals. You know, we've got—we have to types of cane out here, our—our native and our non-native. We have tamarisks you know which, of course, are a big problem...

DT: Salt Cedar?

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MP: ...salt cedar suck up a lot of water and, you know, or don't—kind of limit the habitat, they don't really create a very diverse habitat. And I—I talked to you about the beaver here. We have beaver in the river that are, as I mentioned, the—the Mexican bank beaver, this is Mexico's last population of beaver here and now we have nutria moving in and these are things that you see happening over a long period of time—I—you know.

The—the example you were asking about is the nutria, you know, which I—I started documenting down in the lower canyons back in 1990. And I would get out and patrol the river and the only place I would see them would be down in the lower stretches of the

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river down around Sanderson Canyon. And—and then one year I saw them a little further up, you know, and—and then some years later I noticed them in Boquillas Canyon and a couple of years ago they showed up at Rio Grande Village in the Gambusia Pond there at Rio Grande Village which is, you know, when the red flag started going up for everybody. And, you know, a year and half ago Mariscal Canyon was nutria free and now they're as far upstream as—as Lajitas. But, excuse me, I—I think the, you know, the exotics that are moving in are not really the problem, they're just a symptom of the problem—they're a symptom of the problem. If—you know we have a—we have two similar critters living in this river here, the nutria and the beaver. They're—they have some things in common, mostly other than their tail they look alike, they're both big

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giant rats and they're competing for habitat. But if you look at—at what their actual habitat is, you know, a beaver's—they like swift moving streams, they don't mind turning them into—damming them into ponds but particularly this beaver, the Mexican bank beaver, doesn't build dams. It, you know, it lives in the current. And the nutria is a—a critter from slow moving swamp waters. And I think that as—as we start altering the river and creating conditions that are more suitable for nutria and providing an advantage to the nutria, then we're going to see them displacing the beaver. The—the same is true for, you know, this is a *trachemys gaigeae*, this is a Big Ben slider. You know, it's a turtle that is indigenous to this stretch of river here, it's a river turtle. And

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now we have a *trachemys elegans* which is a pond turtle, you know, that is—is moving in and displacing it from its habitat. Same way with a—a tamarisk, you know, the tamarisk given an opportunity to move in and establish themselves will—will take over. What has kept them from doing that is, you know, these periodic flash floods that we would get down the river that scour the riverbed and take all the young tamis [tamarisks or salt cedars]. And—and as we start depriving the river of those types of events then—then the—the exotics starts establishing themselves. You know, you—we have that—the common river

cane and the giant river cane, the—the native and the exotic and one of them responds better to fire. And when you have ranchers across the river coming and set a match to the cane, the donax [*arundo donax*] is what comes back, you know, the exotic. So I don't know how far I've strayed off of your question but I—I think that's—that's something that a lot of times we don't have a change—a lot of people don't have a chance to—to see this—the broad long term picture of what's going on in this river. And I think that's one of the things I've been really fortunate in—in—about is having that opportunity to sit out here for years and—and watch things change on the river.

DT: Well as a river guide and more recently as a District Ranger, it seems like you've seen a lot of changes that are maybe influenced by changes in the river. Talk about how the water flow has changed.

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MP: Yeah, dadgum, how far back do you want me to go, you know.

DT: [inaudible]

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MP: I—I the down—the downhill slide started with—with Elephant Butte, you know, when we—when we started converting the Rio Grande from a—from a river into an irrigation canal, you know, when we—when we started altering its natural flow regime and, you know, rather than having those—those monsoon season flash floods that would come through here, they held that water back and let it out incrementally for irrigating in the spring and—and really started turning the river from a river into a—into a ditch—into an irrigation canal and really started altering what was happening in this basin. That change really is—is—is most apparent up river from here, you know, up stream from us. We have the confluence of the Conchos and the Rio Grande and if you—if you were to

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go up river from the confluence, that area between Presidio and Fort Quitman just downstream of El Paso, that stretch of river that has been deprived of—of the flows that it needs, you would—you would see a—a severely altered river corridor. You know, if—you have to really know what a—a river's job is to—to see how we've started affecting its ability to do its job. A—a, you know, a river is not just a ditch for water. They—one of the things they do is move sediment, you know, move sediment, keep channels clear and provide habitat for—for aquatic life, invertebrates. And what's happened with the—with Elephant Butte is they've held all that water back as well as all of the sediments

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and—that was needed to scour that—that channel clear. And so if you—if you start looking at that stretch of river, those hundred and some miles between Quitman and Presidio, you know a river channel should really be the lowest body in the area, that, you know, that's—that's where water goes is to the lowest point and flows through there. But what has happened over the years is those side drainages have flashed and dumped sediments into the river channel but the river channel itself hasn't had the flows that it needs to flush those sediments through. And so the river bed has actually built itself up twenty some feet higher than it should be. And so now on those occasions, and you know I hear so much talk about—from folks about it, oh we should get our water from New Mexico, they owe us water. And I agree except that we have destroyed the mechanism for getting it down here. If we—man you've got me rolling now. If we—if we did get those waters from New Mexico they would never get here because we don't have a viable river channel anymore. It would

just spill out into the desert and grow

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more tamarisk. It's a serious problem that I think people are just now really starting to—to appreciate. We have—we deprived that channel of—of water for so many years that we no longer have a river channel there. Now what was your question?

DT: Just trying to find out if we could track back some of the problems in the river to the changes in the water that flow through the river and not just changes that might be along the banks or the corridor. It sounds like a lot of it's because of diversions for (inaudible)

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MP: It's a—it's just a greater and greater demand for water. That's—that is a—well we—I think anybody who's—who's read a paper recently knows that that is going to be the big problem in the next decade is water and we're certainly looking at our share of those problems here. I, you know, I could—I guess I could go on for hours on my observations on what's been happening here on the river but I can—I can tell you if you look behind me right now, it's easy for you to see, you know, where—where the river does—is supposed to get to. I would say that this river averages half of its flow from ten years ago. The—the average flow has—has been cut by half in the last decade easily.

DT: [inaudible]

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MP: Well, we have had some drought conditions the last few years but more than anything it's a—it's greater demand on—on the waters of the basin and—and really unwise use of those waters.

DT: And this is just on the American side or do you see diversions from the Mexican side too?

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MP: It's—it's on both sides actually, you know. Everybody wants their share of the water. And—and this is a concept that—that I've struggled with for years, you know. I—I'm always hearing people talk about water rights and their rights to the water. And—and my thought has always been, well what about the river's rights, you know, was the river at the table when you start divvying this stuff up? How much did you allow for the river, what belongs to the river? And the reality is that if everybody pulled out what they think are—are—are their water rights, there wouldn't be anything in the river. And—and I don't—I don't know that—I don't know that we really have an understanding, you

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know, on a personal level, you know, about what that would cost us to—to kill this river, you know, what is the cost going to be and can we—can we get it back? You know, we have looked at—we have looked at doing some restoration work on this stretch of river, I've been involved in a—in an organization that—whose focus was looking at restoration of—of that stretch of river between Quitman and—and Presidio. And...

DT: Is that the stretch called the forgotten river?

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MP: The forgotten river. And that—I—I can't tell you how that pleases me to hear you say that, the forgotten river, you know, which really speaks to what I was telling you about earlier, you know, how—now that mockingbird's really cranking away, huh. Those little things that, you know, will come back that you'll hear over and over again, you know, and I can tell you where that—where that ph—phrase first came to be was at one of our

meetings at the Indian hot springs, you know, when we were all soaking in the springs and—and trying to figure out what we were going to do for this stretch of river and we came up with some good ideas. You know, the first of all being that we needed to identify all the stakeholders and, you know, get some kind of organization, some kind

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of structure going. And, you know, after a couple of days of really just brainstorming and beer drinking, we—we decided we needed to figure out what we were going to call this organization. And I—I felt like—I have felt that for a long time that the reason all this happened up there is because there is a lack of witnesses, you know. That area is very sparsely populated and it's—it was easy to pull that off there because there was nobody there to see it happen. And I—and I thought well, we should—we should call this the Forgotten River Action Committee. And—and we really stuck with that. I think it's kind of changed now, it's the Forgotten River Advisory Committee and—but it pleases me to hear you use that—that—that phrase but not near as much as—as it did for me to walk into a—into the conference in—in Juarez last year and where—where Bruce Babbitt and his counterpart from Mexico were Julio Carreras were there and two lame duck secretaries that, you know, weren't going to do much for us except acknowledge

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that there was a problem, which they did. But—but to sit down out there in—in the room and see this banner behind the two secretaries that said, First Symposium on the Forgotten River, and—and I thought, boy, you know, we really—all of us, we really need to just keep spitting things out and—and making ourselves heard because you—you never know how far it'll get and that was—in just a little over a year, you know, we'd gone from something that was spit out in the middle of the night and around a—a group of folks at the hot springs to a banner that was hung on the wall behind the two secretaries.

DT: When you had them come to your meetings, did you talk much about another issue with the water and the river and that's pollution?

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MP: You—you can't—you—they go hand in hand, you can't separate the two. It's—it's the Q's, quantity and quality, you know. The—it, you know, some folks say that dilution is a solution to pollution. And if you're going to dilute it you'd better add more water to it, you know, and—and that is really what happens as the river levels go down, you know, the contaminants in it are—are more concentrated. I th—you know, we need to address the—the other side of that too, point source pollution, make sure that we're keeping those things out of the river as much as we can. But we also have to realize that the less water there is in the river the—the greater the concentration of “polymoly uglies”.

DT: What are some of the sources of the pollution that they're working on?

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MP: Boy, that—that I'm working on, man that makes it sound like I'm doing something, you know, which really I guess the main thing is—is being aware of what the—the sources of pollution are and then trying to find the folks that might have some influence or might be able to do something about it. But, yeah, a lot of it is the industry—industry in Juarez and El Paso. Some of it has been the sewage from Ojinaga which they, you know, they've got a new plant in place now that I think came about in—in large part to—to the efforts of some—some folks that were involved with the—with these restoration projects upriver. And of course agriculture, you know, organochlorine pesticides that are

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still used in Mexico and sometimes still in the United States, you know. A few years ago we went out here in the park and we—we—we did a collection of prey species for peregrines, you know, to see what the levels of organochlorine pesticides were in them. We're about to do that again here soon. We've just received some funding to do another study but...

DT: This is DDT and (?)

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MP: Right—right—right.

DT: What did you find?

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MP: Some—still some pretty high levels in—in some of the prey species that we were getting which were rough wing swallows, phoebes, dove, boy what else did we get out there? You know, there were the others that, you know, were just too hard for me to get with a shotgun. How can you get a white-throated swift, you know? But the swifts I'm sure are pretty contaminated as well. But, you know, that didn't tell us that, you know, those contaminants are coming out of right here. What it did tell us is that, you know, the prey species are carrying pesticides and those guys travel all over into Mexico and beyond so, you know, that doesn't necessarily mean that—that those contaminants are all coming out of right here. However, some stuff has been done locally with some of the farming communities upstream here at Presidio and Redford and. So agriculture is one of—one of the sources of contaminants and then the cities, the sewage treatment plants and the human waste is another industry.

DW: As a boy, was there a time in your own life where you were actually able to dive underwater, get some in your mouth and come up with something other than a severe giardia infection? How long has it been since this was a river you could really frolic in and not get sick from?

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MP: Last week. I, you know, I—this river has a much worse reputation that it deserves, particularly through here, you know. And there are—the, you know, the—there are some problems with this river but this river is really coming, you know, give it enough time and distance I think that there is a lot of healing that—that can happen. And this is one of the more isolated chunks of river left in the country, particularly when you get down into the lower canyons, you know. The river has—has tumbled and aerated itself for a few hundred miles and—and there aren't any large cities. There—there aren't any, you know, large industrial sites or mines or agriculture. And I think that's one of the—one of the values of this chunk of river from—from Redford all the way down to the lower end

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of the park boundary is that it—it is an area where through no effort from anybody on this planet, the river has—has had a—some time to heal itself and we should—we should continue to—to provide it with an opportunity to do that. And we should keep enough water in there so it can do that. You know, I know the Park's official position is that we do not recommend that anybody swim in the river and I certainly don't make my coffee out of it like I used to ten years ago, you know, at camp. But I think the—the river is not nearly as polluted or as—as bad here as—as folks think of the Rio Grande. You know,

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some years ago it was put on the list of ten most endangered rivers. And—and you have to

understand that a lot of what they were looking at was those areas downstream around Presidio and Harlingen and Brownsville and Laredo and the heavily populated areas of the Rio Grande Valley where there is a tremendous amount of agriculture. That's not to say, I don't want to downplay the problems that we have here, but I swim in the river all the time, not always intentionally and—and my kids swim in the river.

DT: Can you tell us about some of the times you've had on the river?

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MP: That—weather, that's easy. Weather has always provided the—the most memorable, the most significant trips I've been on, you know. I—I think that's something that we protect ourselves from too much these days is, you know, we just don't get out and get caught in a storm anymore. And certainly all of the trips that come to mind involved, you know, a horrendous rise coming down stream of major flash or a big hailstorm or, you—a, you know, a wind that I had to tie myself down to the ground to keep from blowing me away and there've been many of those. But, yeah, all of the most memorable trips have involved some significant meteorological phenomenons.

DT: Can you tell the stories of some of the ones that stand out in your mind?

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MP: I—I can tell you about that, it was—it was a pretty funny deal but. It was in Mariscal Canyon and I was—I was working then locating peregrine aeries and doing some monitoring. And I was basically what we did is you know we located the aeries and recorded reproductive activity at the end of the season. But I was in Mariscal Canyon on a gravel bar and you know if you get in these steep narrow canyons, you've got really a pretty small view of the sky above you and—and I looked up and I saw these big black

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sagging clouds that, you know, I've learned over the years mean hail. And I thought, oh hail, I need to get out of here. And I—I grabbed up my gear and—and started paddling out of the canyon to get to a reasonable campsite, my concern being that where I was, if I had a major rise, there was nowhere for me to go, I was going to get washed downstream. So I—I went on down to the break in the canyon to cross canyon and I did have—I had a brand new Panama hat that I got from one of those mail order outfits, you know. And it was—it was a—it was not really a hat, it was personal protective equipment, you know, it was shade. And I got out to the canyon and the hail started just as I hit camp and—and I

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jumped out and was going to try to pitch a tent and the tent got shredded as I was hanging onto it and the wind was blowing it. And I just rolled some rocks on it and the hail started coming down, big hail, it hurt, big chunks of hail. And I ran to my canoe and rolled it upside down and crawled under my canoe and was hanging onto my canoe for a few minutes when the wind yanked it away out of my hands and just jerked it out. And fortunately it was tied and, you know it came to the end of its rope and—and fell down into the water and—but the hail was rough. So I—I slid down into the water to get away

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from the hail and I—I—I crawled down in there and I held this Panama hat over my nose so I could breath, which didn't keep my knuckles from getting beat to a pulp. I got—my knuckles got bloodied by the hail. But I hung on to some cane at the rivers edge and I—I got down into the water and I held the hat over my nose. And it just beat down—it beat down for a little over an hour that it just came down. And there was another group

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camped just upstream of me, one of the Far Flung trips there. And after about an hour it started to slow down and something large bumped into me and it was a cooler. Somebody's cooler came floating—bumped up into me and I grabbed onto it and pulled it up out and it—it quit hailing and my brand new hat was beat. It was just shredded as well as everything else in camp. And I went—I came out and started to survey the damage. I went and checked on the other group and a couple of them had taken some pretty good licks and their tents were all shredded. And, you know, the—their cooler was full of water that had floated into where I was at. Anyway, it was—the river was covered with—with solid hailstones, it was white with hailstones. And shortly after that the

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waterfall started. You know, anytime you get a really big rain the waterfalls are spectacular in the canyons and, you know, we all came out and—and marveled at these waterfalls while we rubbed our bruises and picked up our stuff. And we—we salvaged what we could of a meal, I got my stuff, their stuff. I climbed out and, you know, the river was too big now and the dirt road at the takeout would not be accessible so I changed everybody's take-out point further down stream and we took on out. Pretty

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impressive storm, but the—the funny thing really was afterwards, you know, two months afterwards. Now that hat I'd just paid fifty dollars for, the first trip, I had it just a few hours and one of the guys on the trip, he sa—you know, I told him where I ordered it and he said, just sent it back to them, maybe they'll replace it. And he said, just tell them what happened and—and see if they'll send you another one. And I—I did, I—I shipped

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it off to them and they sent me another hat. But, oh about a—a—two months later I got their catalog again in the mail and it had this little blurb in there that said, this hat is a favorite of a ranger in the Big Ben country and they were right, it was. But there—there are—all of the really great stories, if you talk to any of the river guides involved weather, you know. Me and a—a—a friend of mine that works with us, a volunteer that I can't say enough about, Mr. Steve McAllister, he's—he's worked as a volunteer for my operation for years and we spent the night back to back huddled against each other in Mariscal because there was nothing else we could do. The wind was howling so bad, it was—it was howling so bad that I literally had my sleeping bag sucked off my body, the

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wind got down in there and sucked my sleeping back off. And we basically just weighted everything down and got it around us and sat on it and put our backs to each other. And in the morning we had a sand dune built up around us, a sand dune. Got a soft shell? Let him go, don't hold him.

DT: You also mentioned flash floods being something...

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MP: Flash floods, big flash floods. And, of course, there was one associated with that—with that trip but, yeah I think that's what—that's what anybody who's boating out here lives for is, you know, the big rise that...

DT: Can you tell us about a memorable big rise.

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MP: Oh gosh, I can. I mean, there, gosh there've been—of course, fewer of them it seems

like these years. But I had—I got backed up against the wall in St. Helena Canyon at—at Camp Misery just below the rock slide where we had to keep pulling our boats up all night long as the river was rising until we literally got backed up against the wall and the river finally started to recede. And then we—we found ourselves in the mor—in the morning with our boats left high and dry, you know, forty yards from the river where they'd been left straighted up on the bank. I wouldn't tell you anything embarrassing like if my boat had ever floated away or anything in one of those rises which, you know, it never has and I would deny it if anybody told you that it did. But, yeah, weather makes

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for the more interesting trips.

(misc.)

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MP: You had—sorry about that—you had asked me something about a...

(misc.)

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MP: ...I've noticed so many things. See that black phoebe down there? See my eyes aren't that good. Do you see that black phoebe there?

DT: My eyes are worse.

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MP: Right there. Now when it's a mile and a half away and they say, how can you tell it's a phoebe, and if you watch—watch when it lands, watch its tail, did you see that? That little slap you know, and I—I just—I'd noticed that a long time ago, both the (?) and the black phoebe will do that, you know. The second they land, their tail goes bloop and so, you know, you can look off way over there and see this little bird and you can't tell anything about it and I tell someone, oh there's a phoebe and they either think I'm a liar or I'm magic, you know. And—but it's—it's just being observant, just really being observant.

DT: Can you tell us about some of the other things you've observed about the birds?

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MP: Oh there are...

DT: Red Tailed Hawks?

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MP: ...I think—that—and that's something that I—I've always felt bad for folks. I get them out on the river and—and I'll have someone out there and I realize that they're not really seeing anything. It bothers me, it makes me sad, you know, that there are so many things going on around them and—and they don't—they don't see them. But when you get a bored as I do out here, you start observing more and more truly insignificant stuff. But you were asking about a—the—the passive mimicry with the—with the zone tails and the turkey vultures. And you know I—I like bird watching and—and everybody likes raptors because they're big and cool, you know. And zone tails is something that I

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used to see as a kid in Arizona. And they—they—they weren't very common, at least I didn't think they were very common, I seldom saw one. And years ago, a fellow that you may or may not have talked to yet, Hal Flanders, Hal's another one of my heroes. Have you talked to Hal? He's one of my heroes, you'll love him, he's a great guy and he's a great birder, taught me a lot of stuff about birds. But he told me about passive mimicry in the zone tail that—that mimics the turkey vulture as—to create a hunting advantage. You

know you have a—you have a bird of prey that—that flies amongst a bunch of scavengers. And—and so therefore is not seen as a threat to wildlife on the ground and it's a great trick . And they have a very similar silhouette. If you looked at just the silhouette which is often all you see, you can't tell them apart. It's not until you see the

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bald head of the turkey vulture or that strike on the zone tail. And so when—when Hal pointed that out to me I started seeing far more zone tails than I'd ever seen before. I—you know, get twenty or thirty turkey vultures and you look up there and, sure enough, one of them is a zone tail, or two of them. And—and then I recall being down in the lower canyons and there's a line down there. You know, there are these invisible lines besides the dotted ones that we put on maps, you know. There are these other invisible lines out there, you know, these biological zones and you get down into the lower end of the lower canyons and the black vulture becomes more common than the turkey vulture.

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And I don't know if you're familiar with the black vulture but it has a kind of a—a wider—a broader wing, a shorter, rounder tail, a more pointed head silhouette. The hilo—silhouette is quite different and I got down there and was looking at a—some—some black vultures and then I—I looked and one of them had a white stripe across its tail. And it was a black hawk, not a zone tail, but a black hawk and that was first time that I realized that a black hawk has the same silhouette as a black vulture. And here was this black hawk doing the same thing that a—that a zone tail is known for doing with the

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turkey vultures. And I thought that was pretty interesting but it—it really got my attention when some years later I was down in Chiapas working on the—on the Rio Usumacinta on the Mexico, Guatemala border. And, gosh, we could talk another hour about Mexican rivers. But down there they have another vulture, the king vulture, beautiful bird—beautiful bird, you know, with the—it's a white—it's a white vulture

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with a little black on its tail and some black wing tips and—really a pretty—pretty vulture. They've also got a hawk down there, lots of hawks, roadside hawks and gray hawks, and there's the white hawk. And I remembered seeing a white hawk take off from an old tree snag and when it took off I thought, wow he's got a silhouette like a king vulture. And I started looking at these—these flocks of king vultures flying and sure enough, there was a white hawk flying amongst them and it had the same silhouette. And—and I don't know which one of those guys thought of that first or how it came

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about but it's, you know, it's a—I think it's an incredible part of the evolutionary process that, you know, never mind the fact that these vultures lost all of their feathers so that they wouldn't pick up so many bugs when they stick their heads into those carcasses, you know. And I've often wondered that even about the—because that's what you have to do, you have to think about things and wonder, you know, that's what you got to do. And I've looked at a, you know, the—the—our national symbol, you know, the bald eagle which isn't really bald, you know. And I've thought, well maybe he's on his way to becoming bald because he's really just another scavenger and maybe this is the part

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where he loses the pigment in his feathers and in another four or five thousands years he'll

actually lose the feathers and before you know it, the bald eagle will really be a bald eagle because it's another scavenger that sticks his head into a—into carcasses and, you know, it would—it would be to its benefit if it didn't have all those head feathers for picking up parasites and whatnot, so. I'm curious, I'm wondering if the bald eagle will really go bald here before too long.

DT: We all do eventually. You mentioned some predatory birds. I was wondering if you could talk about any predatory mammals? I understand that this part of the country has black bears and mountain lions. Have you ever seen them? Do you have any experience with them?

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MP: Yeah I have, I've seen—I've seen both of them. My real experiences with black bear in this part of the world came from across the river in the Sierra del Carmens and I don't know if—if I had told you this but I—I outfitted horse trips into the Carmens for about ten years. And I think that's where I met—yeah, that is where I met Dan McNamara, I took him on a pack trip up into the Carmens. And I was—I was pretty selective about who I took up there and Dan met all the criteria so he got to go. But the Carmens, the Maderas have a lot of black bear. And one—one particular trip I counted eleven different bears that we saw on a trip. And, you know, we have—working at the park there at Big Bend we have

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these—these exchange students that come over and work in the park from—from Mexico, from the University in Chihuahua or Saltillo from PROFAUNA, probably one of the greatest conservation organizations in North America and Julio Carrera, you should speak to Julio Carrera one day. But Julio Carrera, god, see another hero of mine. He—he has cranked out more conservationists from Mexico, he's like a little factory for conservationists that he's got going at PROFAUNA. But he sent two students down here,

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Galileo Portis and, man, I had his name on the tip of my tongue a second ago, we just called him El Loso, El Loso de la Corn and the falcon and the bear, you know, because that's what they were both down here doing and one of them really had these falcon-like features and the other one looked like a little bear. And Marc Antonio Herron was his name, Marc Antonio Herron. He asked me about going into the Carmens to do a bear survey. And I was real interested in that. I told him I'd seen a lot of them and we did—just did a very cursory survey of the bear population over there. Basically what we did is we set up track traps.

We—we did these transects, you know, bait stations a mile apart

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and we would clear out a track area where when they came into the bait they would leave tracks and we'd make plaster casts of their tracks and measure them and see if it was the same bear or a different bear. And the conclusion we came to was that, and I don't know if this is a scientific term or not, but there—there were chingos of bears in (?), chingos of them, saturated—the—that habitat was saturated, you know. And that was just, you know, a very rough estimate that we'd come up with, is that there were more god dang bears than you could shake a stick at over there. And two years later we started seeing

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bears showing up again in the park and...

DT: On the American side?

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MP: ...on the Texas side and I think that's one of the—one of the great stories of the—of the national parks and the testament to the benefits of setting areas aside like this, that after having been extra—extirpated and gone for forty years, forty some years, that the black bear made a comeback to Big Bend, you know. They crowded themselves out of the Madera until they started finding their way back into the Chisos. And, of course, this year with the program we've had over there monitoring their activity and tracking them, we've seen that many of them have gone back across the river. We're not sure why, what conditions have changed or it's just, you know, something seasonal, the drought or maybe, you know, they're looking for a new grou...

End of reel 2148

DT: We left off talking about predators. You were telling us about black bear. Maybe you can mention some of your hopes for the Mexican wolf.

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MP: Well we can but only if we can talk about the white-footed mouse as well, you know. I—I think—that—that's one of the problems that we see in wildlife management in general is that everybody, and I love this term, everybody wants to focus on the—the charismatic mega fauna, you know. You don't see many folks going out and studying sparrows but everybody wants to know all they can about peregrine falcons because they're big and cool and fast, you know. And, you know, I had a friend of mine who—who did a lot of research on mice here years ago, you know, which are every bit as significant as bears, you know, and mountain lions. But we always want to focus on the

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charismatic megafauna, the really cool, gnarly, growly big stuff that every—you know. But I—I've—and I have been involved in some of the studies that—here in the park, not as a researcher but providing logistical support and help with the, you know, there was a study years back done with mountain lions in the park and...

DT: What did you learn there?

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MP: One of the things that—that we were looking at was dispersal, you know, dispersal of these young males, you know, two year old males and—and dispersal of the lion population in general and what was going on out there. And what—what sparked this work off like all works, you know, are, you know, a reaction to some—something that

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happened. That's usually what motivates us is, you know, we react to things we don't act to them. And some kid up in the Chisos, I believe it was—it must have been '87—'86 or '87 got drug off by his—his scalp by a lion and actually had his scalp pulled back. And it was a, you know, not common but it—there was a lion mauling in the park. And so immediately there was some—some money made available to study the lion population and how we can prevent these future incidents. And—and that's really what we looked at was the dispersal and, of course, one of the things that we found was that, like everything

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else out here, their dispersal is directly connected to water. And the water has a direct relationship to the amount of rain that we're getting. And so as—we saw that as a—a—the—we went into periods of drought and water sources dried up and became scarcer, they—they started concentrating more and more on these mountain islands. And mountain islands and deserts seas, you should write that down and read that book, 'Mountain Islands

and Desert Seas', Frederick Gehlbach. But there's no more—I think the title explains the whole book but—and that's what we have out here in the Chihuahuan Desert are these—these remnant mountain islands in this sea of Chihuahuan Desert. And as the water sources would start to dry up, the lions move in to where the

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prey base is. You know, all the—the little skunks and deer and raccoon and everything, they're going to go to where they've still got food to eat. And so as—as the prey base starts becoming more concentrated in these greener, cooler elevations where we're still getting some water, then the predators come in and become concentrated in those areas as

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well. And—and that's when we would start seeing an increase in lion visitor interactions, you know. It's—they get more of them in there, they're more concentrated. And—and then the other thing we were looking at was what type of lion, you know, was most likely to have an encounter with a—a human and, you know, who'd you have to worry about the most? Well the answer was really pretty simple, you know, the—the—the same folks you have to worry about in Houston is those young dumb kids, you know, that, you know, dispersal age males, two year old teenagers, young thugs, you know, that haven't got enough sense to—to fend for themselves yet so they're opportunistic. And that, you

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know, that was who presented problems in the—to visitors in the lion population. And you get a—a two year old dispersal age male, you know, that hasn't really honed his hunting skills and you can tell them. You know, we were tracking a lot of these guys and we had collars on them and you could always tell these young dumb kid lions because they smelled like skunks because skunks were one of the easiest things for them to get, you know—you know. Until you learn to hunt deer you'll have to settle for skunk and—

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and suffer the consequences. So they always smelled like skunks. And I'm sure that Tony Ruth who did the work learned far more than that but those are some of the things that I picked up from that study was that, you know, as—as we get into periods of drought, the prey base and—and the predators are going to become more concentrated and so we're going to have more lions in a smaller area and probably have more visitor lion interactions. DT: I understand that mountain lions have sort of a peculiar status in Texas, that they—it's not a protected species. Do you think that's adequate protection for them?

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MP: It's no protection for them, it's no protection for them. You know, well without getting too much into disagreements I had with some of the ranching community, I think, you know, a lot of times when—when we fail at what we're trying to do, we need to find something or somebody we can blame. And, you know, if you're not for some reason you weren't able to keep track of all of your—your cows, well they were probably carried off by an eagle, everybody knows that, because I've seen eagles carrying cows off, haven't you? Or a lion, you know, or something. I—but also in all fairness, I have to say that I really see some of those old attitudes changing. You know, I'm—I—I really am an

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optimist and I really like to—to—to see the good in folks and—and that's something that I've seen happening is that the—some of these attitudes are changing. I—I know some of the kids that have grown up and just inherited some of the huge ranches here in west

Texas, you know. And their ideas are not the same as their parents. They think differently. I think they're, you know, they're a little more conscientious about what—what's going on out there. I think that all of us, I mean, twenty years ago you couldn't get a kid in elementary school that could pass a spelling test if you threw the word environment out at him, you know, because it wasn't a part of our daily vocabulary. And I think as, you know, as time has gone on we're—we're all taking a greater interest in

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the environment and in conservation, we're all more aware of it. I like to think that we're all a little more aware including the kids of—of folks who may have been involved in some industries that—some consumptive industries that, you know, didn't necessarily share those beliefs or concerns two decades ago. I read a lot of stuff that's—that's coming out of the west, these like some of the new ranching techniques that are being looked at by the—the Malpais Borderlands Groups in the Boothill of—of New Mexico and. Unlike—unlike some—some of the folks that I hang out with and—that—that think of

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themselves of environmentalists, we all like to think of ourselves as environmentalists, I—I really have tried to keep an—an open mind and look at the other guy's point of view and that—that comes down to a—some of these attitudes about predators and ranching, etc.

DT: Can you say how attitudes might have changed with regard to the Mexican wolf?

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MP: People, you know, people are scared of wolves, you know, and the—they just have this—this evil connotation to them, you know. And the other thing is that—that the ranching community who I think is—who has the greatest problem with wolf reintroduction, they see them as a threat to their livelihood, but I think also the idea of—of reintroductions is, you know, that—that means regulations and government intervention and—particularly here in—in west Texas. I don't think people are ready to

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talk about reintroducing the Mexican wolf. And—and I also think that there are really are very few places left in this part of the world where—that are suitable for—for Mexican wolves. The—there is some habitat out here an—but I think that we are on the fringes of it. You know, if the—I mentioned earlier Mountain Islands, Mountain Islands and Desert Seas from—the title from Gehlbach's book. If—I think if you look at that—at that concept, the Chisos are really—they're a suburb of the Madera, you know, they're just—they're on the fringes there and if there—if there was any good wolf habitat left out here, I would say the heart of it would be in the Madera, (?), the (?) and—and we have to remember that that's what we're talking about, Mexican wolves. This is a

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wolf that was predominantly from Mexico and this habitat in the United States was on its fringes, up in New Mexico and Arizona, you know, southern Arizona and New Mexico and up here into the Big Bend country and perhaps the Davis Mountains but—but the heart of its range is in Mexico. I think that's why they were called Mexican wolves. And I don't see a wolf reintroduction as being much of an issue in Texas because we don't have the habitat for it. However, there is some habitat across the river and I—I

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wouldn't—if—if they were—if they were ever brought in across the river into Mexico, I wouldn't be surprised to—to see some wolves appear back in the Big Bend country very

much like the black bear did. You know, if—if you have—if you have some adequate habitat, I would, you know I—I remember years ago talking to Phil (?) and we were talking about this area had changed, you know, and just looking at historic documents

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and—and Phil—Phil made this comment to me. He said, this—this ecosystem would be complete, he said, if you could walk out there on the—the Dagger Flats and—and watch a—a prairie falcon flying above you and look down and see a Mexican wolf eating on the carcass of a desert big horn that broke it's leg in a bolson tortoise hole, you know. And—and he's right, you know, that was—those—that was something that you might have seen here a hundred years ago that isn't going to happen now. I have my own thoughts too though about reintroductions and I don't know that they're always appropriate. I think—I think the best thing is to provide conditions that are suitable and then see what happens rather than try to bring something in. And...

DT: You had mentioned your interested in getting Wild and Scenic Designation. Maybe you can talk about trying to create the habitat where some of these animals can survive.

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MP: The—what we've got here is some conditions that—that, again, through nothing that we have done have provided a refuge, some little chunks of wildness that are still left out here, or at least as close to wildness to as you can get along the river corridor. This—this whole stretch of river from—from Big Bend Ranch State Park down through the lower canyons is—is in pretty good shape. And that's not because we have worked to keep it that way, it's because it's not been economically feasible for us to come in and trash it, that's why. We don't have the access to it, there's not good agricultural land along it. The same way with Madera (?), you know, I—I was a very strong supporter, I

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worked hard and pushed for establishing that area as a protected area. And one of the reasons for that was not because I saw it turning into anything like a park here, but you have to—you have to be able to—to see potential threats to an area. And, for example, the Madera (?) lies just across the river from us. It is a—a huge range with lots of pristine forest in it, lots of—some of us call it forest, other folks would call it lumber, you know. And—and so you start looking at—at the—this combination of—of—of conditions, of circumstances. The (?) mine at (?) closed but there's still a bridge there and that bridge goes across the river and it goes to the railhead in Marathon and right

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across the river you had this huge source of lumber, you know. It's—the habitat for those bears that came back and repopulated the Big Bend. And I—I think that there are probably not very many people who realized what kind of risk the Madera (?) were at from lumbering. All—all it would have taken was for somebody to realize the potential, hey here's a big mountain and here's a railhead and here's the road. And, you know, if—I—I don't doubt that if the Maderas hadn't been designated as protected before NAFTA came in place, that we would—I have no doubt we would be seeing big logging trucks headed to Marathon today, you know. So, how in the hell did I got on this?

DT: We're talking about protection of land.

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MP: Protection of lands, tha—and that is the thing is you have to—you have to recognize what the threats are and then try to figure out what kind of protection would be adequate.

And right now I'm working on this—on this management plan for the wild and scenic river. There's an interesting situation there is that, you know, the—this river was designated wild and scenic in 1978. And the parks service was—was mandated to establish a management plan for it within three years, which they did, a management plan that really amounted to nothing. In Texas, private ownership is to what is called the gradient boundary. I don't know if you know what that means, but if you don't it's okay because nobody else does either. What the heck is the gradient boundary? That guy

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down there is fishing on about the gradient boundary. The gradient boundary is a point halfway between where the water is and the high water mark, that's the gradient boundary, somewhere in between there. And that's what Texas recognizes as being private property. When they established the management plan for the wild and scenic river, they said, okay, the boundary will be the gradient boundary, that's what the wild and scenic is. And the Sierra Club took issue with that. They said, that provides no protection for the wild and scenic and they threatened to sue and the plan was not

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accepted. It was rejected as being inadequate, it didn't provide adequate protection for the wild and scenic. So there was no management plan. 1982—and this was happening on lots of rivers, 1982 the wild and scenic rivers act was amended. Congress said, you must have a boundary for wild and scenic rivers. If you don't, the default boundary is one-quarter mile. That just slipped through and that is what the boundary of the wild and scenic is right now, is a quarter mile. And I am in the middle of this big fight right now,

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you know. That is not my role, I'm just a god dang ranger, you know. But really right now in the park, I am the only one with—with enough background on the river to—to really put this management plan together. As far as the management plan goes, that's not a problem. It's the boundary that we're getting hung up on. It's a strange deal here in—in—Texas is a big private property rights state, you know. People want to own things here. Across the river, Mexico says that the river is public domain and the river is—extends twen—twenty meters back from the high water mark is federal property. If you

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look at the high water mark over there twenty meters back. In Texas they say that—I'm sorry it's—the—the boundary is the gradient boundary, right about where (?) is standing, it's halfway between the water and the high water mark. What I am trying to sell folks on right now, my idea of what the wild and scenic river boundary is, what it should be, is I—I say let's be honest about this, what is the river? If you walk down there to the waters edge, are you at the edge of the river? I would say no, I'd say that you're standing smack dab in the middle of the river because the river is not just the water, it is

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everything that the river brought in. All of that was brought in by the river and all that can be taken away by the river. You know, a very simplified version of what I think should be the boundary for the river is that area where you would not want to leave your Lexus parked for a year because it may not be there when you come back. And so my position is that everything that would not be here if not for the river and could not exist without the river, is the river. That's the riparian zone, the—all of the riparian

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vegetation, the sediments that are unlike any of the soils back there because they were brought in by the river, the cobbles, all of that is the river. And I have—I've talked to a number of the land owners and what I—what I tell them is that what the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is really all about is recognizing what is in fact the river, you know, and—and giving it back to the river.

DT: Can we talk about another aspect of protection. The park seems to have this sort of conflicting duty. On the one hand, they're supposed to protect these resources but they're also supposed to provide access. How do you find a balance between those two?

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MP: It's—the reality is there—that there is no balance. You know, this—that point has already gone to the Supreme Court, I don't know if you're aware of this. This was, I believe it was sometime in the '80s, it was NRA versus Department of Interior and that was some folks who maintained that, you know, we were mandated to provide for their enjoyment and what they enjoy doing is going out and plugging stuff with their guns and that we should be allowing them to do that in the national parks. It went to the Supreme Court. It's—and the Supreme Court found that—that their interpretation of the Organic Act was that those two do conflict in that the parks services number one mission is to protect the resources, not to provide for the use thereof because they do conflict. Now that—that was a legal finding but it's—and land managers have hated that because it—it—it makes our job in the park service more difficult. You—to—to have support for an

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outfit like the national park service, you have to—have to provide access. You—you gain support by—by letting folks in and enjoying the parks. The—the Organic Act, which says that, you know, you will provide for the enjoyment and protect forever and ever, it was kind of a seesaw and it allowed park managers to go whichever way they needed to at—at the time, whatever would work then, you know. I think that taking that—a hardcore stance like that and saying no, our number one priority is to protect the resource loses us support, you know. A lot of people I think if they can't come in and

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enjoy the resource then they're not in favor of supporting. Fortunately there are some folks who—who think that yes, we should protect the—the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge because it's worth something to me to know it's there even though I'm never going to see it and I'll never experience it. I think there's some value in having it. Well that—that attitude is—is not that common and certainly not common enough to—to keep the park service afloat if we—if we shut people out of them. What—what I worry about is—in the parks, is incremental development, just, you know, a little at a time. I tell folks

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that, often I tell them that our—our job in the parks service is to do nothing. That's our job, you know, and make sure that nothing happens. But—and I think, I told you earlier, I—I really—I try to think the best about folks and I think that really people want to be successful at their job, whatever their job is, you know. And one of the ways that we measure success in our society is by what you do or what you accomplish, what you can point to, not what you didn't do, you know, or what you left alone, but what you

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accomplished. Whether that means building, you know, a new structural fire building at the headquarters or expanding the visitors center or building a new entrance station because

that's how we measure—that's how we're used to measuring success is by what we've done and left behind. And that's not our job in the parks service. Our job in the parks service is to do nothing and some folks would tell you that I work too hard at that.

DT: Let's talk about some of your work outside of the park. You've been active in some civic efforts and I thought you could tell us about the efforts to slow or divert the interest in mining.

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MP: I can—humate—carbonaceous shale or coal, that's what you're asking me about. Yeah, because I don't—there is no such thing as humate, I think we talked about that earlier. And there—there was this—this proposal some years back to start up a mining operation out here for this black low-grade carbonaceous shale coal product that they call humate.

They've also called it dinosoil and dinopeat and they've come up with all sorts of—leonardite, all sorts of names for it but it's still, you know, carbonaceous coal product, low-grade. And this is a—a monster that has reared its—its head many times over the years, you know, and usually folks haven't worried about it. The comment around here was, the only thing they're mining is investors. They're just going to try to get people's money and then run off with it, which has happened in the past. Well this time it really started looking like that was not going to be the case, you know, there were these plans to

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bring a bunch of trucks in and the tractors and set up the plants and they were going to start. This—what they call humate is sold as a soil conditioner. That's, you know, it's supposed to—I don't, you know, help crop production, maybe even grow hair on your head, I don't know. But that's the other thing is that, you know, none of these claims of what this product can do have ever been really substantiated. It's, you know, yes there is some value, anytime you put any kind of mulch or carbon into—into your garden, you know, that allows for a little more oxygen etc., well you're garden will do a little better

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but. And what happened is that I think they really scared the heck out of folks talking about the number of trucks that were going to be rolling through here. I guess I got—I got involved because some friends of mine were suddenly concerned that, you know, these trucks were going to be rolling in front of their house and they had no idea what they could do to stop this. And we had a meeting and we, you know, over the years I've met a lot of wonderful folks that have some experience in these sorts of things and I told them well I would make some calls. And—and the next thing I knew we had—had us some kind of an organization it was going to stop this mining and...

DT: What year is this?

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MP: Hell, what year is this? I guess it must have been 1988—no 1998, excuse me, boy times flies, 1998, 1998 and '99. But we looked into it and yeah, there were a bunch of leases that they'd made and there were plans to fire up and start hauling this stuff out. And I really—I'm a very strong believer in—in letting people do what they're going to do providing they do it by the rules. You—you know, I—and I—it bothered me that a—a lot of folks were—started thinking that—that I was totally opposed to mining or any kind of economic development in the area and I—because I'm not. I really believe that you can't put all of your eggs in one basket, you have to have a balance and we have

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some mining that happens here now for bentonite. And I—I don't—I think a mistake we're making in this community right now is—is just putting too much emphasis on tourism, you know. And I think do we really want our kids to grow up and wait tables and make beds, you know. That's a problem that you're seeing lots of other places, Aspen, Jackson Hole and that's a—an entirely different issue, community development. And so I—I think that we should be open to other types of industries. Fortunately these days with the internet, there are a lot of non-consumptive types of jobs that, you know, you can bring in that don't have such an impact on your quality of life. But—but my

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point throughout this whole mining issue was that if you're going to do it, do it by the rules, you know. There are already regulations in place. Those regulations are—were—are there to protect the people in those communities. And—and that was what I really felt like wasn't happening. I felt that these folks were going to try to sk—skirt around these—these rules. And as I—I mentioned earlier, in Texas only kind of—the only things that are regulated are uranium, coal, and oil and—by the Texas Railroad

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Commission. And as I started learning out what the regulations were I thought, well I can live with this, we should all be able to live with this if they do it by the ru—rules. Not that it's desirable, I didn't think mining that sort of stuff was desirable but we could—it was certainly something that we could live with if they did it by the rules and they weren't going to do that. And I—I've—I've met, as I told you, some great folks over the years that have much more expertise in this sort of stuff. And I contacted my folk—my friends at the Center for Policy Studies and I don't know if you all have talked to Mary Kelly or Mr. Lowerre, they're great folks, more heroes of mine. And they gave me

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lots of good advise and some legal advise and some advise on—on getting organized. And we filed and intent to sue everybody in the world, you know, which is basically I—I guess how you do these sorts of things, it's the old shotgun approach, you know. And I think I had mentioned to you it kind of put me in a tricky position because this organization that I put together filed an intent to sue.

DT: What is the group called?

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MP: The Big Bend's Citizens Alliance, which is now in the business of organizing little league or anything else that comes up. And that was the whole—that was the whole idea, was to get some folks together, organized as a group that could speak with one voice for that issue or any other issue that comes up in the area. We're armed and ready with

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dollars. But that was basically our approach was going to be to hold their feet to the fire. If you're going to do this, you're going to follow the rules and if, you know, if these agencies that—that are supposed to regulate you don't hold you accountable and make you follow the rules, we'll sue them. And that was Texas Railroad Commission and Governor George Bush and my boss, Bruce Babbitt, you know, which I had forgot that he not only runs the—the National Park Service under the Department of Interior but also, you know, the BLM and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, oh and—and this other outfit called the Office on Surface Mining. And so I got called on the carpet by the

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superintendent, our former superintendent, one day. And he had this intent to sue on his desk and he—he said, well I understand you're planning on suing your employer and it—it—although the other side of that was that I really felt like the park service should have gotten more involved in this issue from the beginning. I felt like we were being pretty gutless about this. We were looking at activity that was going to directly impact the park service. Of course later, our superintendent told me, you know, that he was just waiting until we really needed him and then he would have stepped into the frame, but—which might have been a smart thing to do.

(misc.)

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MP: I was going to—you—you wanted to know about...

(misc.)

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MP: No, not just yet.

DT: Tell me about the incident you mentioned earlier about watching a mountain turn into a river. What did you mean by that?

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MP: Oh, well I'll—I'll—I'll tell you. I mentioned to you at the beginning, you know, that I—I lived in Arizona for awhile and my uncle was a...

(misc.)

DT: Maybe just tell us about the instance of a mountain turning into a river, that's a wonderful image.

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MP: Well, this was something that I observed happening very slowly when I was younger. I—I was living in Arizona out by Marana, just southwest of Tucson. And I—I told you my uncle was a farmer there. And as I grew older he got me working out there on the farms, I drove tractors, you sit on a tractor and you watch the world go by for

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eleven or twelve hours. And we had a—out—like I say, out in Marana, I—we had—one of the fields was out behind this place called Twin Peaks. And we lived out on Twin Peaks Road. Twin Peaks Road is still there but the twin peaks aren't. There were twin peaks. When I was a young child there were two peaks there and—and then there was the Sanderio Road, the highway that went on to Tucson and then the Santa Cruz River. And over by the Santa Cruz River near the highway was a Portland cement plant. And I remember as a young child watching them cut a road up one of those peaks and the road wound around the peak, you know, it was kind of a spiraling road. And the dump trucks

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would go up that road and you could see clouds of dust up there. And after a while, I started noticing that the top of this peak was kind of getting a—a flat top to it, you know. And I really watched one of those twin peaks whittled down over the years, over a number of years, whittled down to, you know. When I—when I left there maybe when I was a freshman, the left of the twin peaks was about halfway down, half its size and the trucks kept rolling and they would go across over to the Portland cement plant. They were turning this peak, they were turning this mountain into cement. And—and then

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back in—in, oh it must have been '84 that I got my pilot's license and I did my solo flight out

of Alpine. And I needed to do a—a—a three point five mile trip for my solo. And I chose to go to—to Marana, to Arizona, I still had a brother over there and I was going to fly into Avra Valley Airport and I did. I flew out of Alpine, went to Arizona and I—I came over where one of the twin peaks used to be and I circled over the cement plant and I

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looked and there was this huge canal down there back behind the cement plant. And what it was, was—it was central Arizona project, you know, where they pumped water from over the divide, from the Colorado over the divide into the Phoenix and Tucson area to meet the growing demands for water. And I—I circled it and flew over it a ways and I was amazed that the other peak was pretty much gone. And I got into some conversation with some old friends there and I asked them about what's that big canal, what's the, you know, that huge ditch back there? And they told me it was the central Arizona project,

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that it was a river. And this guy said, yeah, he said, that's what they've been doing with that cement for the last twenty years is they've been building this ditch. And, it rattled me, you know, it really did, it—to think that—and I'm a young man, you know, and in my life they cut this mountain away and turned it into a concrete ditch and turned it into a river. And that—that—that one incident has provided a lot of inspiration.

DT: For what?

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MP: Let's just break.

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MP: And—and one of the things that bothered me was how fast it happened. Like I said, I'm a young man. And in my very short life we did that, you know. It was a—tore me up that—it made me think what we could do in the next generation, you know.

DT: You were saying some of this became clear to you because you were able to fly over things. Can you tell us another story about things that become apparent from the air?

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MP: Well I—I told you I do like—I do like flying. And some of my friends have told me that it's not really in line with the other things that I like to do, you know, because I—I really like fooling around with horses and I like hiking, but I like airplanes. And—I—I—'cause I like the perspective it gives you. You get to see the big picture, you get to get above the world and look down in it. And we had an incident which really is what kind of got me rolling with the—the stuff on the forgotten river stretch up there that really opened my eyes to it was that I received a call from International Boundary and Water

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Commission, I believe it was in—in 1992. And I got a call from them, just as a courtesy call, telling me that there were 900 CFS [cubic feet per second] coming downstream and, you know, we—we should expect it. And I spread the word amongst the boating community, everybody was tickled, they were going to get to see some high water. And we were—we were waiting for it, we were all but sitting in our boats waiting for the wall of water to come. And it—it didn't—it didn't come. And I—I did have a—I started getting calls—calls from folks, you know, asking me who my source was and accusing me of making stuff up.

And I

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called—I called IBWC [International Boundary and Water Commission] up again and they

confirmed that, yes that water was coming and that we should have it here. And I—I decided to go look for it and I did. I had—at that time, I had a—I was partners in a little 172 with a fellow down here, Michael Davidson was in on that plane and me and I flew up river, I followed the river up to see what was happening with this water. And for me, it was the first time I had really seen that area from that perspective. I flew upriver from Presidio, over Candelaria and I—I—I started seeing the—the tamarisk getting pretty thick. And then I started seeing that the river was

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backing up into the desert. And we had a—we had a—some—a DME [Distance Measuring Equipment] in the plane for measuring distance. And I started flying across some of these flats of water out there that were two and three miles wide where the river had backed out of its banks. The river had flowed out of its banks and was spilling out into the desert and growing more tamarisk. And—and that was for more than fifty miles. We're talking about a body of water that was greater than Amistad, you know, this water that was spilling out. And I shot a lot of photos, I shot some slides and—of the water spilling out, I still have them.

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They were—they were the focus of a number of presentations that we did. Even—even our superintendent, our former superintendent in the park took my slides and went down stream and talked to folks about some of the problems we were looking at up here. And I talked to—to the boaters here. And at that time, I didn't really understand what it was that—that was happening with the riverbed up there. I just knew that a lot of water was being released and it wasn't making it down here. I—my feeling was, oh the tamis have

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choked it off. Well I didn't, it—it took my talking to a—a geomorphologist who explained to me, you know, that the—the riverbed had been built up by sediments and the river was coming in there and over spilling its banks and flowing out into the desert. And that it was not only going to take water but it was going to take large chunks of water with huge sediment loads to clear that plug out of there. And so it really—that flight really made me aware of—of what we had done to the Rio Grande upstream of us and has really driven a lot of the things that I've been involved in over the recent years.

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Now—and again, I—I'm—I am optimistic about things and folks have asked me, you know, if we can—if this is something that can be fixed. And I—I think that it can be. Some—some things that I've found encouraging is we sat down really and put the—the pencil to the paper and tried to figure out what kind of cost we were talking about here. And we had some people sitting at the table with us who had a better idea about these sorts of things and they were talking millions of dollars which to me was unattainable and I thought this could never happen here. But I—I the sun really shown down on me last year one day when I heard that congress had appropriated, I—I don't remember the exact

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figure but I think it was like 3.5 billion dollars to restore the Everglades, you know. And when I heard that I thought, well we're talking peanuts here. If they can do that for the Everglades, surely we can—we can put some money into restoring the Rio Grande.

DT: Talk about the Rio Grande and maybe some issues beyond that. Among all these environmental issues, what do you think are some of the most important issues that are

facing us?

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MP: Boy the—the three big ones I think are overpopulation and then the problems associated with that are water quantity and quality and air, you know, those—those basic elements of life is air and water and too many people consuming them. Water is going to be the—the big issue here in the next decade. I have no do—it already is—it already is the single most important issue in the state of Texas today. Just, there aren't enough folks that are aware of that yet. You know, sitting on this advisory board, this Texas Rivers Conservation Advisory Board, we've also been kept up on the whole Senate Bill One process. And when I read and—and hear what's going on with that it just—it—it's

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frightening. The—you know, when they start talking about inter-basin transfers and putting straws into other people's aquifers and—it's pretty frightening stuff. I think that we're going to see people marketing water like they were doing oil in the Permian Basin twenty years ago. A lot of folks haven't snapped to that yet but we're already paying more for water than we are for oil.

DT: What sort of advice would you give young people who are coming up on how to confront these issues, whether it's water problems or population or air quality?

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MP : Man, that's a—a tough question. I—I—I guess first I would say is to—to be informed. How in the heck can you solve a problem if you don't know what it is, you know? The—you've got to keep yourself informed. You've got to know what the issues are and—and what's going on around you that is going to—going to adversely affect not just your life but everybody else's. And the other is I—I think really all of us should—should really try to focus on the common good to—rather than just to look at what's best for us but—because what's best for everybody else in the end is going to be best for us.

DT: Can you mention a place that is special to you?

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MP: So far, I'm really partial to the planet earth, I—I think. But I—I haven't had much experience elsewhere yet. I—I do have my—my favorite places but I—I think most of those favorite places were also tied to favorite times and I can't go back.

DT: Thank you for your time.

End of reel 2149

End of interview with Marcos Paredes.