TRANSCRIPT
INTERVIEWEE: Scott Royder
INTERVIEWER: David Todd
DATE: December 3, 2021
LOCATION: Austin, Texas, remotely recorded
TRANSCRIBER: Trint, David Todd
SOURCE MEDIA: MP3 audio file
REEL: 4083
FILE:
MountainLion_Royder_Scott_3December2021_AustinTX_Reel4083_NoiseFiltered&SignalBoosted.mp3

Google Voice [00:00:01] This call is now being recorded.

David Todd [00:00:04] This is David Todd.

Scott Royder [00:00:06] Hey, David, it's Scott.

David Todd [00:00:08] Scott. Great to hear your voice.

Scott Royder [00:00:12] How are you?

David Todd [00:00:13] I'm fine. I'm fine.

Scott Royder [00:00:15] That's awesome.

David Todd [00:00:16] It's been way too long since I've gotten the chance to talk to you.

Scott Royder [00:00:19] I'll say. We've done, it's been fun catching up with people and talking. You know, this has inspired a number of conversations and a lot of research.

David Todd [00:00:32] Oh, well, good. Well, I hope this wasn't too much of a, you know, a wild trip for you to go back down memory lane.

Scott Royder [00:00:43] No I intended to look this up.

David Todd [00:00:43] But, you know, I am wondering what you did and I want to hear more about it.

Scott Royder [00:00:48] Sure. I mean, it's been on my mind, and I have some people on my list that I'm going to try to find, but it's, I always enjoy talking to Ken, you know, and he's been very helpful to remind me of some of these things.

David Todd [00:01:08] Well, good, well, good.

David Todd [00:01:10] Well, tell me, are you in a good place to speak for a while?

Scott Royder [00:01:19] Yes, I think so. I mean, if you can hear me OK. I'm speaking through my cell phone and I can hear you fine.

David Todd [00:01:29] Okay.

Scott Royder [00:01:31] And I'm in a, I'm in my room in the place I'm renting, so I should be good.

David Todd [00:01:39] Okay. Well, I just want to make sure you got space and time for this.

David Todd [00:01:45] And were there any questions that you had before we launch into this?

Scott Royder [00:01:50] Uh, not really. For a little while I was having a, we were having a hard time finding some of the stuff on the question list, but Ken helped me find it. And it's funny that, you know, we sort of went back and he was able to find some of the State Capitol Reports that reported on this stuff. And that was sort of my main source of, you know, reminding us of what the heck we did. So, yeah, no, it's, I think, you know, we should have a good handle on it. It's just that hopefully I can put, there's so much, you know, hopefully I can put it in words so that it'll be understandable.

David Todd [00:02:38] Oh, I think, I think you've got this. And thank you so much for being interested in this and helping us out.

Scott Royder [00:02:49] Yeah, it's a great project.

David Todd [00:02:51] Oh, well, thank you. You know, it's nice to hear everybody's, you know, first-person views. That's kind of our goal on doing this. In fact, towards that, I should probably give a little preface to what we're about. And, you know, just as an introduction to the interview today. And if you'll let me do that, then we can start with some questions in a moment.

Scott Royder [00:03:18] Okay.

David Todd [00:03:19] So I am going to ask your permission, Mr. Royder, to agree to record this interview for research and educational work, on behalf of the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and a website for Texas A&M University Press, and then for an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. And you would, of course, have all equal rights to use the recording as you see fit too. Great thanks, yes.

David Todd [00:04:00] Is that OK?

Scott Royder [00:04:02] Oh, yeah, very much. My pleasure to be with you.

David Todd [00:04:06] Great, thank you, Scott. Well, let me just introduce when and where, and, you know, what the basic topic is here.

David Todd [00:04:16] It is Friday, December 3rd, 2021. It's about 1:30 or so central time. My name is David Todd. I am representing the Conservation History Association of Texas. And I'm in Austin and we are conducting a remote interview with Scott Royder. And I believe he is in Austin. Is that correct?

Scott Royder [00:04:47] Yeah.

David Todd [00:04:47] Okay.

Scott Royder [00:04:48] Yes.

David Todd [00:04:50] And just as a little introduction to Scott Royder, he has been a grassroots activist, an events coordinator, a legislative lobbyist, among many other roles. And he has worked for years on issues pertaining to threatened and endangered lands, and for wildlife protection and recovery. And for a number of years, in the 1990s, he worked on staff for the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, for which he won the Chapter Conservation award. And one of the big projects he worked on at the time was the protection of the mountain lion in Texas. So today we'll talk about his life and career, to date, and especially get the chance, I hope, to focus on his work in mountain lion conservation and restoration.

Scott Royder [00:05:44] Great.

David Todd [00:05:46] So with that intro, we usually start these interviews by just asking about your childhood, and if there might have been some kind of experiences or people, or both, that might have gotten you excited and curious about working with animals and in this case, mountain lions in particular.

Scott Royder [00:06:10] Yeah, I grew up in Baytown, Texas, and along the Texas coast. And basically, you know, back in those days, our neighborhoods were our playground and we spent a whole lot of time outside. And you know, I was heavy into sports and things like that with my brother, and my, you know, the whole neighborhood. But I guess early on, you know, the things that got me interested in a little bit more than just my local neighborhood community was Lloyd Bridges and the TV series, Sea Hunt, that dealt with the underwater stories and the first sort of look at use of SCUBA equipment. And then, of course, around then, a little bit after that, Jacques Cousteau and all his TV programs.

Scott Royder [00:07:29] So I initially was very interested in marine ecology as far as that goes, and I thought that that's what I was going to be headed. But, you know, as things went, it didn't turn out that way, but, um, you know, not long into that period of time, I guess when I was around, well, actually earlier than that, my step granddad who lived in Austin was taking me out duck hunting in Lockhart on one of his relatives' farms. And so that was my first experience with sort of wandering around out, chasing around ducks and dove out on that property.

Scott Royder [00:08:21] And not too long after that, my dad helped bring over an Englishman from Liverpool, Bill Green, who was looking for a hunting buddy, and he ended up taking me deep into the Trinity bottomland, duck hunting for a lot of, you know, interesting episodes and adventures out and getting up early in the morning and taking a flat-bottomed boat in the pitch black and setting up decoys and getting ready for the ducks to come in. And mostly, you know, watching and experiencing what it was like to be in that kind of a place. So that, you know, sort of got me interested in wildlife and ecosystems as a whole.

Scott Royder [00:09:19] And then, you know, my activist sort of background may have come from my parents because back in the '60s, early '60s, in Baytown, not long after my dad took a job for Exxon after coming back from the Korean War, he got involved in the desegregation of public schools there in Baytown. And that was pretty rare for that, Baytown was, you know, if you look way back, Baytown was sort of a organizing point for the Ku Klux Klan. And so my dad was sort of, and my mom, were both stepping out a little bit and doing that in the '60s. My

dad went to the March on Washington, and so, you know, I was pretty young at the time to know exactly what was going on at the time.

Scott Royder [00:10:13] But the result of that was that I went to one of the first pilot projects at Harlem Elementary, where they bussed (I guess that was my fifth grade year), they bussed a number of white kids out to the other side of the tracks in the effort to experiment with segregated schools. And in fact, it was probably my most fond year of school, during my entire education, was that year where I was exposed to a much more progressive way of learning with people that, you know, that education which is beyond valuable.

Scott Royder [00:11:05] So anyway, that sort of, you know, where it came from, I think. And, you know, I'm trying to think it was, and then when I, when I, my dad and my granddad actually were former students at Texas A&M, and so a lot of my family, that's where we ended up at A&M. And at the time, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do, but I ended up with a bachelors in bio-environmental science. And, you know, initially, applying for jobs after graduating from A&M, I didn't really get much response. And I probably should have just gone traveling, and I ended up going to Winter Park to ski bum for a winter before coming back and doing a number of jobs to get by until I volunteered to help out Ken Kramer at the Sierra Club office.

Scott Royder [00:12:20] So I'm thinking, you know, that's when Ken started to encourage me to, you know, he just gave me different projects. I think I started off, you know, just helping him catalog his books and his library and the Sierra Club office. And that was in '82, I think, '83. So that's sort of where it started with the Sierra Club, and it didn't take long for him to give me a number of projects and to push me out there. And the learning curve was pretty, pretty quick.

Scott Royder [00:13:04] I think I started working on Matagorda Island issues initially with the article in the Lone Star Sierran about the need to get the cattle grazing off the Island, and we were successful in that over a long period of time. But it wasn't long before the Texas Legislature was coming in and Ken, I ended up helping Ken, I think, part-time for, I'm thinking, it was the '83 legislative session. It might have been '85. But that's when we started, I started helping with the Sierra Club and I think I came on staff not too long after that as the Conservation Director. And it was just Ken and myself, and I think Dan McNamara was helping us and of course, all the amazing attorneys that we worked with - Rick Lowerre, Mary Kelly, David Frederick, Stuart Henry, Myron Hess. I mean, it was a pretty strong network of expertise that we relied upon during those years. And I was really honored to have the opportunity to work with those guys. I really learned so much. So, I guess that's sort of where it started.

David Todd [00:14:32] That's a great background. I love the sort of mix of exposure to the outdoors with your relatives, you know, duck hunting and, and dove hunting. And then, and then this dose of activism through your mom and dad and their activities with integration. That makes perfect sense for the direction you took at the Sierra Club. And so you started there in '82 as a volunteer and then, just to bracket it, you, you worked through the mid '90s or how late were you there?

Scott Royder [00:15:14] Yeah, I think I worked for like 17 years, until '99, actually. And in '99, I took another job in Washington state and. And, you know, it was just time for a change, and I had met some hiking buddies. Actually, I met during my time at Winter Park, I met a friend and we started doing these expeditions into, you know, wilderness areas in Mexico, in Canada

and Utah. And so one of the reasons I moved to Washington in '99 was to be closer to those guys that we could go on more hiking trips. It didn't work out quite that way, but anyway, that was another experience that really opened my mind to being way down deep in some of these canyons, in Copper Canyon, Chihuahua, and the Escalante Canyon and then the Granby. It was a proposed wilderness watershed up in B.C., just north of Washington, along the Granby River, and we hiked on the watershed down about 40 miles. And I'm not sure that many people had done that because there were no trails. And it was, you know, being in that kind of a situation in grizzly habitat, yeah, you know, that's definitely life-changing. So that was one of the reasons I moved to Washington.

Scott Royder [00:16:47] Looking back, there were an number of other reasons, I think, that ended up having me move away from the Sierra Club. I think I was growing sort of away from it. And, oh, you know, there was, when George Bush beat Ann Richards in '94, a lot of things changed. And a lot of the conservation biologists that we relied heavily upon at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas offices, started to get pushed out and marginalized, and harassed. And when they got rid of the Texas Heritage Program, the database of all the endangered plants and things. So anyway, there was a number of things that happened during that time that made it much more difficult to continue doing the work we were doing.

David Todd [00:17:45] We should talk about that. I think that's really important. The whole, you know, natural resources division there, and the database, and the staff, and how they were treated.

David Todd [00:17:59] But let's, if you don't mind focusing on this, this one segment, I know it's, it's kind of limited because there were many other things you were doing before, and after, and at the same time. But this mountain lion episode is just so interesting.

Scott Royder [00:18:16] Yes.

David Todd [00:18:17] And I hope you can introduce us to a few of the issues about the lion itself, and then about its role in Texas. So, so maybe you could just kind of introduce people to the creature. Can you give a little background about it, its lifecycle, at least as far as you understand it.

Scott Royder [00:18:37] Yeah. You know, mountain lions and, you know, carnivores and predators as a whole, are very interesting component to the ecosystem, and a balancing component, you know. And, of course, that, you know, there was a number of things that got our attention. And things like predators seemed to be on the other end of an active prosecution that was, to us, scientifically unwarranted. So, especially since, you know, mountain lions were known as umbrella species, which basically meant that, you know, if you took care of mountain lions and their habitat, since they were at the top of the food chain, that you were taking care of everything else underneath that umbrella, you know, basically just all the, everything, that relied upon that ecosystem.

Scott Royder [00:19:38] And so, you know, that's why it was important once we saw that what was going on in the state, and it became apparent that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department was failing very badly to, and not only that, not only failing to protect them, and make sure there was a viable population in the state, but they were basically supporting age-old and archaic policies of predator control in ways that would suppress the population

enough to artificially build white-tailed deer and game animals so that hunters would have more to shoot at.

Scott Royder [00:20:22] And of course, you know, there was also the conflict between livestock owners and lions, which got politicians attention. But as we've learned, and even then we knew, that the impact of lions to other populations, to prey base, was actually beneficial and not detrimental. So, so, you know, back, back in the late '80s and I was talking to Ken about this, we were trying to remember exactly how this all came about, but I know, we knew, and Ken remembered, that we were trying to encourage the Parks and Wildlife Commission to pay more attention to lion and start monitoring their populations, because we really didn't know what was going on and we knew that there was high take, but nobody really knew. And, and since they were, basically, registered as a varmint, or an unregulated animal, that we were concerned about, and we knew that they were being taken at high levels, and were concerned about their viability.

Scott Royder [00:21:43] So we were encouraging, you know, I think at the earliest early '90 Parks and Wildlife Commission annual meeting, we had commented, and we asked them to start monitoring lion populations. And then it looked like in early '91, after Shannon Tompkins, the outdoor writer for the Houston Chronicle, wrote a story about three mountain lions being shot and killed, or trapped, in East Texas, of all places, where we thought they were extinct, we basically filed a petition to the Parks and Wildlife Department, asking them to protect lions as a non-game protected species. So that was asking them, you know, to rulemake in a way that would upgrade their status.

Scott Royder [00:22:40] And, and we had a pretty good grassroots campaign on that. We, they, Parks and Wildlife, got a lot of phone calls and we got their attention. We raised the issue pretty well. We had a lot of people working on that - Dede Armentrout over at the Audubon Society, and Janice Bezanson with Texas Committee on Natural Resources, and Alan Allen with the Sportsman's Conservationists of Texas. You know, we were all sort of lobbying the department to do more.

Scott Royder [00:23:15] And basically out of that filing of the petition, the department agreed to hold a mountain lion roundtable in Del Rio. And they were going to bring everybody together and talk about, you know, the lion and what, if anything, needed to be done. And as those things go, and have gone since then, it didn't amount to much more than sort of a department dog and pony show, where they basically, basically the outcome of it was to do nothing.

Scott Royder [00:23:55] But they did come out of that, is they agreed to do a study, a lion-collaring study, where they collared some lions in South Texas and in West Texas. And Louis Harveson was in charge of the South Texas study. And I think one of the Parks and Wildlife staff and trappers, Billy Pat McKinney, I believe, was in charge of the one in West Texas. And those were pretty short-term studies. The primary outcome of that was that most of the lions that they trap in both locations were killed so, about 70 percent mortality is what showed up in those two studies. So, um, you know, that was, you know, that showed us that Parks and Wildlife should have taken action right there, or at least should have taken further steps to at least monitor and protect lions.

Scott Royder [00:24:57] But the other thing that they said they were going to do, as a result of our petition, was to start collecting voluntary sightings information, which is mostly unverified, and most of the scientists, the lion scientists that we worked with at the time,

which were nationwide, high-level scientists - Harley Shaw, Maurice Hornocker, Kenny Logan and Linda Sweanor, and Howard Quigley, all the top lion experts across the country, and which we were also working with and consulting with, they were like, they always said that sightings information, voluntary sightings information, was very unreliable because most of the time it's not really a lion that gets seen by the public.

Scott Royder [00:25:49] So anyway, but Parks and Wildlife didn't care, and they ended up saying, "Well, it looks like the lion, based on these sightings information, and the kills, or the dead lions, that we see around the state, it looks like there's lions in almost every county and they're doing well, so we don't need to do anything.

Scott Royder [00:26:07] So, so anyway, I guess, at this point, in '93 is when we filed legislation that would have made the lion a game animal, much like white-tailed deer, where Parks and Wildlife is supposed to manage and, and know the population numbers, and set limits, or quotas, of take based on those numbers. And so, that legislation, even though we had good sponsors, and we had Senator Barrientos and Senator Carlos Truan and Chris Harris leading the way, and a number of others. And it did get referred to, I think, Senator Truan's Committee on International Relations, rather than going to the Senate Natural Resources, where I think that was chaired by Bill Sims, who was the sheep and goat raisers' lobbyist, which would have been dead on arrival, of course.

Scott Royder [00:27:20] So anyway, it got a hearing and we packed the room. And um, but, and it did get passed out by Truan at some point, but it never really made it to the floor of either house, and I don't think it got a hearing in the House. So it sort of died.

Scott Royder [00:27:40] But there were a number of other things that were going on that were not good for predators during that legislative session. It was not a good session for predators because of some of the other bills that passed and didn't passed.

Scott Royder [00:27:57] But as far as the lions go, from all of the '90s, the Sierra Club and other groups were trying to convince Parks and Wildlife to do more for the lions, and they continued to say, "No, the lions were doing fine." And I think the last, I think there was a letter from Andy Sansom, the executive director, to the Sierra Club, towards the end of the '90s, that basically said, "You know, we still think they're doing fine and we're not going to do anything.".

Scott Royder [00:28:35] And so, yeah, I think, you know, in 2000, Dede Armentrout had started working for the Mountain Lion Foundation, and she would, she hosted the biannual mountain lion conference in Texas. And all of the lion experts were there, and Parks and Wildlife did a presentation at that conference. And they put up on the screen, you know, a picture of Texas map and and it showed that lions had been reported to be in every county of the state. And there was basically just out-loud laughing by the people in the room that were, knew, knew more about lions that Parks and Wildlife seemed to know. And so, that's sort of where that ended as far as for me, and the Sierra Club's efforts. As far as I know, nobody else since that time has tried to do anything. And that's unfortunate because it hasn't gotten any better, and...

David Todd [00:29:45] Well, you know, you mentioned that Session, I guess this is in 1993, where y'all worked with Gonzalo Barrientos, and Carlos Truan, and Chris Harris to pass this legislation to create non-game status. It seemed like there was also an effort to lift the cap on bounties on predators, including mountain lions. Do you recall much about that?

Scott Royder [00:30:16] Yeah. In fact, we were able to find that because I didn't remember much about it, because it must have been a pretty horrible experience. So I think I put that away. But yes, I remembered, and Ken found some of our writing about that. And what happened, basically, was, I think, there was a bill introduced that lifted the five dollar cap on bounties for predators. I think it was mostly targeted toward coyotes, but mountain lions also fell under there. And, and it ended up passing and in fact Ann Richard signed the bill, which would raise the cap to fifteen dollars, I believe.

Scott Royder [00:31:10] And so, you know, that was the beginning. You know, that was '93. And, and you know, that was sort of a period of time where Ann Richard seemed to be trying to win Republican votes. And it was very concerning. But that was sort of the beginning, you know, a sign of where, you know, that just shocked us that she signed that bill. And, and basically, you know, I sort of did a quick look-up to see and there is, it looks like Guadalupe County did implement a $15 bounty, and there was an article in the San Antonio Express in 2001 or so that said that it had, had basically brought in 2000, since '95 when that bounty was, was put in place, that they had basically reported 2000 coyotes being killed in five years, where bounties were paid. So, as far as I know, bounties are still allowed in Texas.

Scott Royder [00:32:28] And, in fact, you know, there was also a bill to prohibit canned hunting in the state that did not pass. It made it through a house, I think. But it didn't pass. Though, as far as I know, canned hunting is still allowed in the state, as well as local wildlife-killing contests, which are pretty popular in the state, which is another thing that the Project Coyote folks have been working to stop in other states, is these wildlife killing contests, where they will hold a contest with big prize money, for the most carnage killed by, per hunter. And it's a 24-hour contest usually, and they are allowed to hunt during the middle of the night using infra-red, you know, equipment, and recorded predator calls, and machine guns or whatever they can. And they, you know, and they just, they kill just tons of animals that way.

Scott Royder [00:33:39] And Parks and Wildlife has been, you know, notified that this is not a good idea, but they are not stopping these things. So, you know, and I guess I should go ahead and say that, you know, there, let's see, which, the Harvesons, Louis Harveson and Patty Harvison has. He's moved on to do lion research in West Texas, in the Davis Mountains, and basically, trying to find the name of the Research Institute...

David Todd [00:34:23] Borderlands?

Scott Royder [00:34:25] Yeah, Borderlands Research Institute, that he's working for now. And they have done some really good work out there, working with landowners out there, and collaring some lions and doing some good research. And, you know, and that's posted on their web site. I think this was a 2016 study that showed that the mortality of lions that they were studying was still very high. And the big question that is still raised is, how are lions surviving in West Texas, because with mortality rates that high. It's a real question, like where are the lions coming from? How are they being able to sustain themselves with mortality rates at 50 percent, or close to 50 percent.

Scott Royder [00:35:20] And a lot of the studies have shown that lions really, to have a sustainable population, the mortality rate should not be higher than 15 to 30 percent. So as far as we know, right now, mortality rates for lions are still too high to sustain a population, and especially a healthy population. Because, you know, if lions are never able to live longer than five years of age, and then they normally are supposed to be living 10 years, 10 years of age,

then what? And that's been going on for 30 years and more. And what kind of damage are you doing to their genetic viability? And there's so many impacts that we don't even know that. So it's a real problem. It's still going on. And Texas Parks and Wildlife is really in violation of taking care of the Public Trust.

David Todd [00:36:18] You know, I'd be curious if, you know, you could help us understand, or at least speculate about, what the roots of the, this sort of attitude towards mountain lions, this sort of kill-at-all-costs, real antipathy towards them. Do you see the mountain lions as being a risk to livestock like sheep and goats and cattle? Is that one issue?

Scott Royder [00:36:46] Well, that's what was used or thought, at one point, I think, that, you know, they were also detrimental to maintaining, you know, prey populations and things like that. But we know the science is out now. We've got plenty of science to prove that that's not the case. In fact, in Harveson's recent study, none of the lions that they collared fed on any cattle in West Texas. Most of their prey was mule deer, white-tailed deer, and elk, and of course, javelinas and things like that.

Scott Royder [00:37:25] So, you know, and the same thing is showing up in studies in other states, that lions, in fact, are very beneficial to the ecosystem as a whole. I think there was an amazing study about, you know, in Yellowstone, I can't remember what year that was, but it was not long after the wolves had come back in, and they found that it cut, when the wolves came back in, the, the over-browsing problems went away. Basically, they were having trouble with over-browsing, especially along stream sides, and things like young cottonwoods, and things like that, were not being allowed to naturally grow and shade the stream banks and shades the stream, and so that the water was getting heated up. And there were huge impacts based on the fact that there were, you know, the wolves had been gone for so long, you know. And so it ended up being a water quality issue, you know?

Scott Royder [00:38:34] And so when the wolves came back and the lions came back, they kept the elk and deer moving, and they didn't hang out as much in those kinds of places, riparian habitat, you know. So cottonwoods were allowed to grow normally and things weren't being over-browsed. So, you know, the benefits of beavers and entire riparian ecosystems was, was huge.

Scott Royder [00:39:01] And so, you know, we have the science now - we know. So it's amazing that it's taken so long for these state agencies and, you know, federal agencies, to some extent, to, for their management policies to catch up with the science because, you know, it's just, it's time for this to happen. And this has been an issue that wildlife, I mean, conservationists have been working on for 30 years easily, to try to figure out a way where state agency, state wildlife agencies, will start doing more of an ecosystem, managing more and an ecosystem approach, rather than a game management approach. And so that's where we are today.

Scott Royder [00:39:49] And you know, we have a window right now with the new Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland, who is very well aware of, you know, this ecosystem kind of management. And so there's a more recent push right now to, to, I think it's called the Wildlife for All campaign, where they're trying to get Deb Haaland to, they filed a rulemaking petition actually, to convince her that wildlife agencies are required to meet certain criteria, even have public hearings, before the Pittman-Robertson grant funds are administered to the state. And most of the state wildlife agencies are very dependent on these federal funds that are granted

annually. And I think Texas actually gets more funding from this grant than any other state, even Alaska and California - $46 million in 2020.

Scott Royder [00:41:02] So, and these Pittman-Robertson funds are for wildlife restoration, and they're not just for game animals, it's supposed to be for wildlife as a whole. And it's supposed to protect the public trust. So this is, you know, this is an ongoing effort, and, and hopefully this, this, this will get the department's attention.

David Todd [00:41:31] Yeah, I can see that. Well, I'm still sort of confused about why there is this attitude, this approach towards mountain lions that seems to be sort of focused on, on eradicating them from what I can understand. And I thought maybe one of the reasons was that there, of course, the livestock we talked about before, but what about the effort to reintroduce desert bighorn sheep and, you know, the sort of endangered species conflicts with mountain lions, possible mountain lion, you know, conflicts? Do you think that that's part of this kind of reluctance to protect the mountain lion?

Scott Royder [00:42:20] I think that was just a small part of it. I think that was mainly, trying to think what the name of that wildlife management area is, just north of Big Bend National Park, where they were reintroduced. And then maybe it was Elephant Mountain as well, but they were had a program up there. And, you know, they were definitely doing predator control against lions for that program. Um, you know, I think it just sort of fit within the scope of the overall mentality that predators, you know, and this started back in the early 1900s, you know, basically. And you know, so it's sort of a mentality, sort of comes from I think, I think there's more to it. I think it's sort of a mentality about the dominator culture that is written about by Riaane Eisler, a lot, as opposed to the partnership society where, but, you know, and this is all during that time where our Native Americans were being wiped out as well.

Scott Royder [00:43:32] And, so, you know, it does sort of go back to, you know, way back, you know. So if you, if you look at where this mentality, it sort of started with the Doctrine of Discovery that was written back in 1493 and it was used to justify Columbus's coming over and taking over lands and wiping out the people that were on those lands, basically saying, if you're not a Christian, then we can steal your land and we can enslave you. And you know, we are in control. So, you know, I think and basically just declared that anything that wasn't a Christian was to be dominated.

Scott Royder [00:44:28] And so this is, this is basically what started, you know, this, this, this sort of dominator mentality, that anything that gets in the way of progress, or my ownership of the land, or my ability to become rich off of these resources, or to remove people and displace people and animals off of that property, is my right.

Scott Royder [00:45:02] And you know, it's, it's, it's something that's going to have to, you know, this is one of the primary problems that we're facing today, and probably the reason, one of the primary reasons, we're dealing with a climate emergency and this pandemic, is because of our arrogant attitude about how we're, we think we're supposed to dominate, you know, the planet.

Scott Royder [00:45:33] So, you know, predators just happen to be one of those, you know, one of those things that falls in the path. And the cattle culture has been one of those industries that has had a huge impact on the entire country.

Scott Royder [00:45:56] And, you know, I think people are starting to realize that, you know, we can't continue to do, to continue to move in this way. And there are a lot of people that, you know, particularly indigenous people, from day one, you know, have been talking about how we can't continue to do this. This is not sustainable.

Scott Royder [00:46:19] And, and so we have the, you know, we have a great opportunity here, and and we better change our ways. You know, if you step back far enough and look at these things, you'll see that there is another way. You know, there is a partnership way and that, you know, nature is going to have the final say.

Scott Royder [00:46:42] And nature has taught us that if we just watch and listen and observe. And we, you know, we'll see that there's a place for all of these divine beings. In fact, you know, really the truth of nature being that we are all divine, every relative, every relation, every being, and we should treat each other and everything that way, because we all have a place and nobody owns us. Nobody can own the land. You know, we really need to step back and have a totally different view of this planet and the divinity that we're all part of. And we haven't been acting that way for a long time.

David Todd [00:47:29] Well that's really interesting. Yes, I think, I think it helps because, you know, a lot of us probably would be inclined to look at the mountain lion, you know, in a sort of myopically, you know, just excluding all these other concerns and not really getting into the sort of philosophy and attitude, the whole sort of mentality, that you you're talking about.

David Todd [00:48:02] So, so something else that I thought might excuse the way mountain lions treated, since it's just not about animals, not non-human animals, but, but the maulings of people, I know there have been, not a lot, but, but there, there's certainly a significant number of them, especially if there's somebody that you know and care about, that have been hurt by lions, particularly out in Big Bend National Park. Was that ever cited as a reason to go after these lions and try to control them?

Scott Royder [00:48:40] Yeah, you know, what we know right now, I mean, there was a spree of incidents in Big Bend State or National Park. And you know, it was interesting that they sort of occurred, several of them, occurred within a shorter period of time than usual. And it got people's attention, and I think Harveson looked at that as well. But everything you know, it's still very when you look at, you know, the amount of deer that kill people every year in car crashes in relation, lion injury is, is very, very rare, still. And nothing that has, none of the science has indicated that predator control will change human interaction. It's more like, you know, there are more humans now, and lions, and less lion habitat and more interactions, because of our population, and people getting out in the wilderness in state parks and things like that.

Scott Royder [00:49:53] So, you know, there's definitely things you need to know when you're walking around in lion or grizzly habitat, you know. You don't, you know, there's, there's ways to behave. And most mostly, it's high levels of respect for your fellow, um, relatives. And you know, there's ways to behave in lion habitat. And in most cases, it's, and it's pretty rare.

Scott Royder [00:50:19] And in that, that period of time, also, we were having issues with, um, you know, because of the lack of Parks and Wildlife regulation and monitoring, I think mountain lion cubs, kittens, were being sold out of the want-ads, or the newspaper ads, at that time for a bit of time, and maybe still are. And people were getting more mountain lion kittens

as pets, and then in a year they'd become too big and they were releasing them in some cases. And these tame lions did not do well in the wild. Um, so, you know, there was a period of time where there was, that was an issue, too. And so and that may still be going on, even though I haven't heard much about that in the past and recently.

Scott Royder [00:51:10] But anyway, you know, these kind of things are what make, you know, ecosystems ecosystems. You know,, walking and hiking through grizzly habitat is a totally 'nother kind of experience, you know? And when I did take a trip to Africa as well and, you know, when you can't get out of your car because of, you know, all of the critters that are surrounding you, you know, it's, we're not the only folks in the game. So, you know, it definitely gives you perspective. And I know a lot of people, including myself, raised in cities and don't have exposure to those kind of places. So it can be a bit more surprising when you're going out to Big Bend National Park and you're hiking and you happen to run into something you've never run into before. So, you know, these kind of things, you know...

Scott Royder [00:52:21] And that was one of the things the Sierra Club was trying to do is to educate, I think, Summerlee Foundation helped us put out a packet of information during that, when we filed that legislation to help educate people like, you know, yes, there are mountain lions in the state. They used to be all over the country and they're not now, only in the western states. And this is why. And you know, these animals are to be respected, and they're a huge component of a healthy ecosystem, including West Texas. And, you know, so it's all part of the process of teaching people respect.

Scott Royder [00:53:01] And this is, you know, something that was taught in Native American communities from day one. You know, this was part of the education, you know. And this is not part of our education at public school, you know? And, you know, basically, we're taught to be competitive. We're taught to outcompete and we're taught to make as much money as we can, in, you know, in our public schools. And we're not taught about how important the energy systems of the ecosystem and how we play a part important role in that. We're just not taught about a lot of the things that are very important lessons that elders teach kids in, in our earlier cultures.

Scott Royder [00:53:51] So, yeah, so I, you know, it's, it's a, it's an evolution. I think what happened was things were, people knew what was going on early on, and then we devolved, in order for the dominator culture to be able to get a foothold and exploit and make as much money as they can off the planet.

Scott Royder [00:54:19] So, and now they're running, you know, the fossil fuel industry. You know that, there needs to be another form of energy found to get us through this period of time. So, you know, there's going to be a transition period and hopefully it'll be a peaceful transition period and not a catastrophic transition period. But one way or the other, you know, the planet Earth is going to have to restore balance, and we can either be part of that, or we can continue to dig our heels in and try to fight it. But it'd be a lot better if we all joined forces and quit killing things and started working together to stop this, this sixth extinction event that's going on and to try to save our future generations.

Scott Royder [00:55:21] Because, you know, that's, that's, you know, it's in the Public Trust doctrine is another really important aspect of this. And basically, there's plenty of court findings and court cases that continue to hold out the Public Trust doctrine, which says that we need to protect and preserve the environmental resources for future generations. And the future generations are the majority, you know. So that's the true majority is the people that

are yet to be born. And if we truly want to pass along, you know, a healthy place to live, then the status quo is not going to do it. We have to step back and we have to do things totally different.

David Todd [00:56:18] Well, and just to see if I understand this right, you know, a lot of this goes back to, to our attitudes of domination and arrogance. But say if you, if you wanted to zero in on the, the way this whole doctrine and mentality affects the mountain lion, what do you think is the most significant problem for them? Is it the killing, you know that that might be protected from game law protection, you know, as predator control or sport hunting. Or is it just the habitat loss and fragmentation in their home ecosystems?

Scott Royder [00:57:07] Yeah. I mean, what's interesting is that there is a, there is, based on the science now and what we know, and of course, these are things that the indigenous people knew all along (and now we have to have scientific proof in order for, for things to happen, I guess), but, you know, if you look at the ecosystem overall, and that's one of the other important things about mountain lions is that they have a 100-mile, 100-plus square mile range. A resident, a resident lion sort of protects his territory or her territory. And that they sort of are self-regulating. So they don't really ever, I mean, there'll be a period of time where dispersing young lions are dispersing and heading out for a new, a new place. But they, they pretty, they're pretty protective and they're pretty self-regulating. Same things with coyotes and wolves.

Scott Royder [00:58:14] And so, you know, I gues, you know, if, if, if I was talking to a rancher today who had sort of been raised and their parents had managed lions, you know, when they were kids, and, you know, they're just sort of doing it because that's the way it's always been done for 100 years. Well, now we know that, you know, really, a rancher, if he really wants to stabilize his predator prey populations for hunting on his ranch, he should want a really old resident lion living on his ranch, you know. He should want a lion to live ten years and live on, you know, be a resident lion, you know, and take care of this lion. And so that basically, there's a density on his ranch would be self-regulated without the expense of predator control, because we're finding that if you do take out a resident lion, then the younger lions will come in and compete for that territory, which will increase, possibly increase the population on your ranch and bring in younger lions that are more likely to take a sheep or, you know, something.

Scott Royder [00:59:37] So you know, we have the information now that shows that, hey, there's probably a better way to do this, and because the lions' range is so large that they most often encompass more than one ranch. So that's why it's so important for Parks and Wildlife to sort of be an entity that is helping, you know, or a group of a large group of landowners, you know, that are working together for a network, because, you know, basically the rewilding group, Dave Foreman, and Dr. Soule, and Barbara Dugelby, and those folks that have been for a long time talking about cores and corridors, right? You find the cores, the important core habitat, and then you connect it to the corridors, or you restore the corridors, so that those animals can move from core to core, and have genetic viability and maintain healthy populations.

Scott Royder [01:00:35] Because I think, as I recall, the, you know, a sustainable, the models show that, a sustainable lion population is five hundred breeding pairs for a hundred years, and I'm almost certain we don't have that in Texas. And, you know, for wolves, it's like, I think, 100, what is it, 100 breeding pairs for, I can't remember, but, you know, they sort of have the

science where they, you can get sort of an idea of what we're looking for and and it can be done.

Scott Royder [01:01:17] And whether it's Texas Parks and Wildlife who are taking the lead on this, or it's just the landowners who are working together, I mean, the potential for West Texas is, however, it's done, you know, just people working together to make sure that lions, there's a, there's a healthy source of lions and there's. And because right now based on Harveson's, you know, 2016 work, their, their question is how you know, how are these lions sustaining themselves? Are there just these super females that just keep breeding, you know, faster than the average, you know, breeding population? Or is there an unknown source in Mexico that is supplying lions to Texas? And that's one of the things they're looking into now. So, you know, there'll be more information coming on that, I guess.

Scott Royder [01:02:16] But, you know, it's sort of like, it's, it's such a great example of ecosystem management and lions are just sort of one of the indicator species. And you know, the larger carnivores tend to be keystone indicator, or umbrella species that you know are important components. And so if you manage well, or if you allow them to reach a balance, then those, those areas are probably going to be pretty healthy. You know, water quality in the stream, you know, there'd be less over-browsing issues, and just a general better health of ecoregions, you know?

David Todd [01:03:04] Yeah. Well, it's like that example you gave of reintroducing the wolves that helped the cottonwoods and the streams. Gosh, it's a powerful story.

Scott Royder [01:03:13] Yes.

David Todd [01:03:14] Well, so, you mentioned the Harveson's work on, on the mountain lions and how there just seem like almost impossibly high mortality rate. Can you talk a little bit about the predator control and sport hunting on mountain lions? Do you know much about that?

Scott Royder [01:03:35] Well, I know that, you know, the lions that they've lost in these studies were mostly lost to trappers. So I think predator control is the main sink, you know, where mountain lions disappear. I don't think sport hunting is a major, you know, it's definitely, because of all the other mortalities, it definitely has an impact and more of an impact than it would, if the predator control wasn't so high.

Scott Royder [01:04:12] But you know, you got to look at all these other impacts on the lion populations, you know, and there are, are there, you know, they, they are, they are, you know, they get hit by cars on the highway and you know, they, they get injured when they're trying to take down a big elk, you know.

Scott Royder [01:04:28] So, but, you know, right now, it appears, based on the South Texas study in the early '90s, the West Texas study in the early '90s, and then the recent, more recent Harveson studies, are showing that predator control is the major, you know, by private ranchers or private trappers, are the major mortality rate in Texas. Yes.

David Todd [01:05:03] Well, that helps. And, you know, just a moment ago, you were talking about these, these ideas of trying to work together to, to ensure, you know, good monitoring and protection of the cats. Could you talk a little bit about some of the affiliations you've had? I

think you worked with the Border Cats Working Group and then another project, the Mountain Lion Tracking Survey project, and I was curious if you could discuss some of that.

Scott Royder [01:05:36] Yeah, yeah. Basically, Harley Shaw, who wrote the book Soul Among Lions, one of the better books about lions, he was, he worked for Arizona Fish and Game, and he was one of the experts that we relied on. And I say he came to that 2000 lion conference in Texas. But he, for a while, was holding these mountain lion surveys in Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and his, his, he was looking at ways that we could monitor and assess population dynamics based on spot, doing annual tracking surveys. So Fort Huachuca had these roads and if you got up early in the morning, you could, and he was an expert trapper, I mean, he could look at mountain lion tracks and, and, and find, you know, their kill sites, and he can sort of tell the story of what was going on in that particular area with that lion. How big it was - male, female, all that stuff.

Scott Royder [01:06:52] So anyway, it was amazing to follow him around on these roads. And he did this annually for a while, and I would, I happened to go to one of these. And I think Ken Zarker actually went with me out there to, (who we recently lost) went out there too. And it was just an amazing educational time where I was able to spend time with Harley and get to know him. And, and there were discussions around the campfire about, you know, because he was concerned at the time that, you know, we were collaring too many lions, and unnecessarily, and we already knew what we needed to know, and that kind of thing. So that was one of the reasons he was looking at alternative methods to assess populations, because it was expensive and it is expensive to collar lions and follow them around.

Scott Royder [01:07:49] So the other, the Border, Border Group was, was a group that was spurred by Dave Foreman and they came out of the wildlands concept, Dr. Soule and those guys that were talking about. Mostly it started, I think, in the sky island areas in New Mexico and things, where they were looking at biologically assessing and mapping, GIS mapping, the sky islands and then finding the corridors, the main corridors, that were connecting those core areas, those core wilderness areas, to, to each other, so that, you know, the genetic viability of the larger carnivores could be connected and not isolated, because that was one of the problems with some of the larger carnivores is that they were getting isolated by habitat destruction and stuff like that, so that they, their genetic viability was being hampered, like the Florida lion population, and like, I think Harveson mentioned, that the South Texas lion population may be fairly isolated, if it even still exists. I don't know.

Scott Royder [01:09:02] But basically, this group was put together. It included some jaguar and ocelot and jaguarundi scientists from Mexico. And we had a number of meetings in different locations where we were discussing what could be done to, to assess our cat populations. And I think we even did a canoe trip where we floated Boquillas Canyon with all these scientists looking for jaguarundi tracks, and that was, and I think we did find some jaguarundi tracks.

Scott Royder [01:09:50] So, you know, basically, being able to know that the presence of some of these endangered cats is important these days, you know, especially when you have proposed projects that are going to come in and, like a border wall or a strip mine, that are going to come into these border areas where these cats are already threatened. But unless you have this information, and it's not easy to find, because they're so rare and secretive that it's difficult to properly assess damage due to a strip mine or a border wall and that kind of thing. So, um, unfortunately, a lot of that science and a lot of that information is ignored when some of these projects are approved, which happened a lot with Dos Republica, the strip mine near

Eagle Pass, in jaguarundi and ocelot habitat, which we stopped for a while because we did have a jaguarundi sighting in the area. But I think that, you know, they didn't give up, and I think it ended up as some of that strip mine coming to fruition.

Scott Royder [01:11:10] But yeah, that Border Working Group, I don't think it's currently working now. But I do know that the Rewilding Institute is alive and well, and they're working on this public trust petition and a number of other things. They have a podcast and, and Foremanis still at it. We've lost Dr. Michael Soule, not too long ago, but there are a number of people that are still working on the cores and corridors idea. And at one point, Texas was very much a part of that because we, with especially West Texas connected to the southern Rocky Mountains, and on into Mexico, being, you know, and thinking of the Continental Divide as sort of being the backbone, you know, from Canada all the way to Mexico, of a super large corridor that, you know, feeds a lot of populations and that these, these wildlife depend on to survive. So it's still a very important idea.

Scott Royder [01:12:19] And I, we had hoped that the Parks and Wildlife Department would have jumped on that opportunity and that idea, for the betterment of our ecology, you know, but you know that just, they just didn't seem to be interested in that kind of stuff.

David Todd [01:12:40] Well, and along those lines, you mentioned this in passing a few moments ago, but maybe you could just go into this in a little more detail - this, this whole question of what the public trust doctrine is and what it requires. And my understanding, I guess, from what you were saying before, is that there's this duty for the states to protect and restore wildlife. That the wildlife is sort of held in trust for the citizens. Is that fair?

Scott Royder [01:13:15] Yeah, that's right. You know, and there's Dr. Adrian Treves has done some really amazing work. He's with the University of Wisconsin, I think. He published some work. One of the things I looked at recently was predators and the public trust. You know, he wrote a really good scientific paper, raising questions and ideas and, and, and going back and talking about the history, especially in the courts, the supreme courts of the states and the U.S. Supreme Court, where time and time again the Supreme Court sided with the public trust, with the beneficiaries of the public trust.

Scott Royder [01:14:00] And in fact, I was going, if you don't mind. I was going to read this quote that he put in his document from President Roosevelt that he wrote back in 1916. And basically, I'll just read, "defenders of the short-sighted men who in their greed and selfishness will, if permitted, grab our country of half its charm by their reckless extermination of all useful and beautiful wild things sometimes seek to champion them by saying that, 'the game belongs to the people.' So it does, and not merely to the people now alive, but to the unborn people, the 'greatest good for the greater number' applied to the number within the womb of time, compared to which those now alive form but an insignificant fraction. Our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us to restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of all natural resources are especially democratic in spirit, purpose and method." And that was written in 1916 by Roosevelt.

Scott Royder [01:15:32] And, you know, it basically follows what indigenous people have always been saying. You know, the seventh generation protects, you know, everything is for the seventh generation. And and in fact, a lot of these state agencies have within their their code, their, their parks and wildlife code, this public trust language. And, and in fact, as I referred to earlier, the Pittman-Robertson grant money that is portioned out to all of the state

agencies, has that language in it as well. This money is supposed to be used not just for game animals and fish, fish and game, it's to be used for all wildlife, the preservation of all wildlife for future generations.

Scott Royder [01:16:25] So, you know, the, the directive is there, but there's been no enforcement. And that's what this group is working on, Project, the Wildlands, I mean the Rewilding Institute and these guys are working on with this petition to Deb Haaland. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, is trying to fill that gap for enforcement, so that, you know, basically every year before these grant moneys are given out, that these states have to meet criteria to prove that they are not depleting the, the trust, they are not taking out, you know, wolf populations or trying to exterminate wolf populations, and that these fish and game commissions, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, are balanced.

Scott Royder [01:17:22] You know, the appointments made are balanced appointments with people that represent the public trust. And right now, if you look at the Parks and Wildlife Commission, it is not balanced. I don't think Parks and Wildlife, if this petition, if Deb Haaland approved this petition, Parks and Wildlife would not be getting their 46 million dollars because they are failing the public trust right now. And I think it's a good effort.

Scott Royder [01:17:53] And I think, you know, the other thing that this petition is asking Deb Haaland to do, is that public hearings be held before this money is allocated so that, you know, people will be given the opportunity to talk about, you know, the public trust. So that would give, you know, federal oversight to make sure that the state agencies were taking care of the public trust because you know that basically, it's what we're talking about here, as far as you know, stepping back and transitioning in order that our future generations will have a healthy place to live. And that is in question right now from a number of different standpoints.

Scott Royder [01:18:44] And you know, for each one of us, you know, we need to really look closely at what we're doing every day. Are we, are we enabling the status quo? Are we enabling, you know, where is our energy going? Where's our money going? Where's our votes going? Are we just enabling the status quo, because the status quo is killing us. And so these are the kind of questions that if we step back far enough, you know, and look at the overall picture and where we're currently headed, it's really important to think about our future generations, not just human, but all of our relations.

Scott Royder [01:19:29] And so, and there are a number of, you know, and this is another thing, you know, if you really step back and you realize that you're living on stolen land, you know, as kids, we were taught when we made a mistake, or when we accidentally stole something from somebody, that we corrected that mistake, that we gave it back, that we restored relations. And that's something we also have an opportunity to do right now, because for myself, you know, recognizing the fact that I live and I grew up and I was born on [Somi Se'k, the homelands of] Karankawa and Esto'k Gna (Carrizo/Comecrudo) people that took care of this property thousands and thousands of years before it was owned by anyone. And they have an earth knowledge, they have the wisdom about this place that I don't have, that I was never taught. And they are here, today, and they're willing to, you know, they're available, and you know, these are the kind of places where we need to step back to, in order to to re-learn and get these teachings that we didn't get. And they are talking a lot about future generations and they are very concerned about this.

David Todd [01:20:53] Yeah, you know, that's something I was hoping you could drill down on. I know you've worked for a number of years with indigenous peoples, and I think some of

your collaboration with them included the Native People's Alliance with Friends and Allies, the Indigenous Environmental Network, the International Indian Treaty Council. I'm sure there are others, but I was curious if you could just kind of emphasize what you've learned about nature and conservation from working with these groups.

Scott Royder [01:21:23] Yeah. You know, some of this stuff I didn't realize until I looked back after, you know, but towards the end of my Sierra Club career, some of these things started popping up and I didn't even recognize it at the time.

Scott Royder [01:21:39] I had been appointed to the Sierra Club's Committee, National Committee, for Endangered Species, and also their National Committee on Wilderness. And I think the first meeting I went to in San Francisco of the Endangered Species Committee, we talked about the Makah whaling issue, right? You remember, where, you know, a number of groups were taking sides, because the Makah Nation wanted to get, were seeking a permit, to take a gray whale from their hunting, you know, to implement their hunting treaty where they were guaranteed their hunting rights. And they were wanting to get a permit to take a whale for, for their traditional uses.

Scott Royder [01:22:32] And a lot of environmental groups came out against that, and it was an issue that was discussed at the Sierra Club meeting that then I went to the first time. And Sierra Club chose to be neutral on it. They didn't take a position at the time. And then not too long after that, before I left the Sierra Club, I went to the first, and last, Wilderness Society meeting, or Wilderness Committee meeting, National Wilderness Committee for the Sierra Club. And they talked, they were talking about, you know, a sort of a campaign, a wilderness campaign, to push the importance of wilderness, and they were going to use the Lewis and Clark anniversary to, you know, to emphasize wilderness. And you know, at the time I was like, "Wait a minute, have you talked to the Native American people about this site?" And you know, I basically was like, I was sort of marginalized out of that meeting. And in fact, I didn't even finish the meeting because I just was sort of ignored.

Scott Royder [01:23:44] And, you know, I didn't think a whole lot about it because I ended up, you know, moving on after that. But when I went to Washington, the job that I went up there to take didn't work out because I was dealing with some of the same thing for that forest group that I started working for. So I just sort of sat in the woods for a winter and then the next fall, fall of 2000, or August 2000, I got a call from a friend that I worked with in Austin - Todd Mayne - who I'd worked with on a local city council campaign with those guys. And Todd called me and said, hey, he was a field operator, a field organizer for the Nader/LaDuke 2000 presidential campaign, and they needed a coordinator for Washington state. So I took that job not knowing what I was truly getting into, but I was, I ran the campaign in Washington state for Nader/LaDuke in 2000. Luckily, we had a huge volunteer grassroots, you know, campaign that, that, that was amazing and took most of the lead on that.

Scott Royder [01:25:15] But during that time, basically, the Nader campaign got the idea that they were going to hold a huge super rally, and Seattle was the second super rally that they were going to hold in the KeyArena, which is a huge arena, and they were planning on filling it, because they had just had one in Portland and they filled the arena there. And Nader spoke, and a number of other people were part of that program. Jim Hightower sometimes would go to those. Michael Moore, Winona LaDuke running as vice president.

Scott Royder [01:25:56] But during that time I was sort of in charge of getting, filling up the KeyArena in like three weeks. So I was sort of in charge of also putting stage management,

putting people on stage. And I, and I thought that we needed to open the whole thing with a Native American elder, a prayer, an opening. That's what they did a lot with their, every time they met. And so I searched around and I found a Suquamish elder, Uncle Harold Belmont, who did that often and, and basically he agreed to do the opening prayer. And then I also met, and I was able to put Reverend Robert Jeffrey with the New Hope Baptist Church, a Baptist activist preacher, much like Martin Luther King, to speak, as one of the speakers.

Scott Royder [01:27:02] So that started a relationship. And Uncle Harold was in a wheelchair. And I ended up being sort of his driver to certain events, and one of the places he wanted me to drive him to was a public hearing about the Makah whaling permit. And so I found myself at this public hearing where they were discussing this permit. And on one side of the room were all the traditional Native American activists. And on the other side of this room were the environmental activists. And I was sitting right next to Uncle Harold and watching this happen.

Scott Royder [01:27:42] And, and that was sort of the beginning of where my whole brain took a big switch and turned around, because what I was seeing was something I hadn't seen before. And, and I was seeing that the environmental activists were insulting a lot of the traditional elders when they were talking about the traditional uses and their treaty rights. And it changed my way of thinking.

Scott Royder [01:28:12] And when I also worked, I spent a good bit of time working with Reverend Jeffrey as well, on other issues that he was working on related to civil rights. And so I had an education there.

Scott Royder [01:28:26] And then I ended up going to, and helping with, gatherings in International Indian Treaty Council, which sort of grew out of the American Indian Movement and the Indigenous Environmental Network and the Indigenous Women's Network. And I spent time with those guys and several of those gatherings in Canada, in different places. And, and I met a lot of the indigenous activists during that time. And so I became more familiar with traditional way. And, and, you know, the fact that the reality of living on stolen land and, and, and the pain and suffering, you know, because Uncle Harold was a healer and I would go around with Uncle Harold. He would end up, you know, having to do healings and things for people that were still dealing with the trauma of the Holocaust. You know, and so I started looking at the fact that, you know, this American Holocaust where 100 million people were wiped out in order to, you know, create this war economy basically is what we're dealing with.

Scott Royder [01:29:45] You know, it is still very real and it hasn't been recognized at all. And it hasn't been resolved and there's been no reconciliation. And you know, in my view, because we have not recognized the American Holocaust, and we have not even attempted to reconcile and repair those relations that it gives our government, who Martin Luther King said was the greatest purveyor of violence. It still is. And it gives our government the, you know, the, I guess, it just, you know, it gives them the permission in a way to continue to genocidal policies in other countries and other nations, and their occupying interfering ways.

Scott Royder [01:30:38] And so overall, you know, I could start seeing the bigger picture based on sort of these experiences I had. And I was also able to meet, and be with, and spend time with some of these amazing teachers like John Trudell, who became, you know, someone that I was able to spend time with. And, and so, these teachings were, you know, the teachings

that I wish that I would have had all my life, you know, and I just felt very fortunate and very honored to have this opportunity.

Scott Royder [01:31:16] So but you know, it's been an interesting pathway because when I started bringing up these concerns to my, you know, past environmental colleagues or conservation colleagues, they didn't really want to talk about this stuff, you know, and they didn't want to talk to me anymore. So, you know, I sort of, and I still am in a way living between two worlds where, you know, it's I'm trying to find a place. At one point, I thought I was going to sort of be a mediator that would bring, you know, indigenous activists and conservation / environmental activists together, because I saw that, you know, that especially at the Makah hearing, you know, that was one of the things I did.

Scott Royder [01:32:00] I got up and I stood up and I said, you know, the federal agencies on the stage, and the indigenous people on one side of the room, and the conservationists on the other side of the room and the indigenous people are fighting over the caretaking of these amazing whales. And you know, the federal agency didn't really care that much as much as the people on the floor that were fighting, you know. And in fact, you know, the people on the floor, because the indigenous had all this amazing knowledge about whales and the ocean. And the conservationists had all these networks, the legal networks and, you know, political networks and those kinds of things, things like that you know. And so the people on the floor cared so much more about the whales than the federal agency people that were there to decide whether to give a permit or not.

Scott Royder [01:32:59] And so, you know, that's one of the things that I said, "Like, look, man, we should be working together on this stuff and not fighting." But that's what I kept running into quite often, is when I would try to pull these two groups together, the indigenous people were willing to meet, but the conservation community was not willing to meet. And the only thing I could figure was that they felt there was some kind of issue that we needed to work through related to our living on stolen lands and not knowing what to do about it, and not, and, you know, feeling the guilt of benefiting from the Holocaust and not being able to do anything about it.

Scott Royder [01:33:47] And I think that presently we have the opportunity now, and I think it's starting to happen, where people are starting to work together a little bit more to talk about these things, with Black Lives Matter and all that stuff. So, you know, as we found out back in the '60s and '70s when the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement started joining forces, you know, that was a very powerful force. And that's why the government tried so hard to break all that up. And so, you know...

David Todd [01:34:25] I like this idea of you being a mediator and a bridge because it does seem like there are a lot of shared concerns between the, or there should be, between the Native American and conservation communities.

David Todd [01:34:36] And, you know, one other kind of whole body of knowledge that I think you have learned about and I'd love it if you could share with us, is this, I guess it's, it's a sort of a, you know, a principle from from China and it's this idea of "wu wei", which I'm probably going to garble, but as I understood it, it recognizes the value of doing nothing and I think, you know, our conservation mentality is often about intervening and trying to, you know, manage things and maybe, maybe not always doing wildlife a good turn. And I was hoping that you could explain about how wu wei works, and what it means, and how perhaps it relates to mountain lions.

Scott Royder [01:35:32] Yeah, that was another really important component of my reeducation. You know, I got somehow lucky enough to, in like '98, I think, I happened to meet Dr. Jingyu Gu, who was teaching a Taji class on one of the creeks up there in Hyde Park, Austin. Now he's on Shoal Creek. But I started learning a little bit about Taiji and Qigong and the Tao, and it was all integrating together with all the stuff that I had been relearning. And basically, you know, the wu wei is, it's basically no-action action. Dr. King talked about it. He had an Operation Breadbasket going on where he was encouraging people not to cooperate. Gandhi talked about this and did this satyagraha method of non-cooperation. And it is a type of no-action action where basically, and it's an old school, I mean, ancient, ancient way that the Taoists always practiced. Is, is, you know, making sure you're doing no harm. Stop, step back. And, you know, letting nature be, letting nature be nature, you know? And, and if it works out in a lot of different ways and it has to do, because it's because the Tao is about natural ways, about nature, and you know, there's been a number of teachings in that regard, like I've said, Dr. King and Gandhi.

Scott Royder [01:37:29] And it's sort of like an invisible power, which relates to chi and our subtle energy, our subtle power with Tao and Taichi and Qigong. They all teach you how to move and think about and feel. So and, and you know, basically when you look at the, you know, the physics of this energy, you know, 99 percent of everything is invisible. So, you know, I started thinking about, you know, how do we protect ourselves? How do we keep ourselves from being targets? And how can we do this work in the most powerful, most effective way, where we use our power, invisible energy, our wu wei energy, our no-action action. And it's about non-cooperation. It's about, you know, boycotting, not buying, not giving them our energy, not giving them our money, making sure that our energy, our money, our votes are going to peacemaking and not war-making. And that's what, that would mean would be getting off the fossil fuel war-making grid, energy grid and making sure that we were investing in peace and not war-making.

Scott Royder [01:38:55] So one of the people that I ended up running, you know, falling into, during this time was a guy in Japan. What was his name? Masanobu Fukuoka, who wrote the book, "One-Straw Revolution", and he wrote about, and he practiced, something that he called, "natural farming", which was basically, you know, letting nature decide where, you know, where, like he would basically just seed seed, throw out seeds and see, you know, what would grow. And he didn't like doing farming by row. He didn't plow. He didn't fill his rice fields with water. He just sort of let nature be the primary determinant of how his farm was to grow. And he talked a lot about wu wei in this book, One-Straw Revolution, that I think was written in '78. And you know, he basically said that, you know, you know, he would resist the futile, as he wrote in here, it's like he would resist the futile human urge to impose being onto nothing and structure onto formlessness. So basically, he was trying to just stay out of the way. But you know, but assist nature in what it already was doing, and what it would do.

Scott Royder [01:40:45] And so it's the same thing with, you know, mountain lion ecosystem management. When I had the opportunity to help manage a 20-acre property out near Lake Travis for the Indigenous Women's Network Alma de Mujer retreat center, one of the first things I did was just sit there and watch for a long time, just sit there and watch and see what flowers came up, what grew. I got Bill Carr to come out and do an assessment of the plants and, you know, find out, you know what, what the place, you know, was saying. You know, and if you're quiet enough and you sit there, you sort of get an idea of what you can do to help. Or, and what not to do, you know?

Scott Royder [01:41:33] And it was right on the edge of the golden-cheeked warbler preserve, you know, so I was like, okay, it's obvious that, you know, we could improve the situation for the golden-cheeked warblers, you know, by, you know, helping juniper get old and grow and helping, you know, the things that the warblers, you know, because the warblers also are sort of an indicator keystone species, too. Because if you take care of the warblers here in the Hill Country, then you take care of the old-growth oak and juniper forest. And that's a whole 'nother story, you know, that's very interesting. You know, the war against juniper here in the Hill Country was another one of those situations where juniper was targeted for eradication. And they were important components of the Hill Country ecosystem, very important and still are. And so there's some new information out about that. Lisa O'Donnell and Elisabeth McGreevy wrote a book recently about the importance of that ecosystem. And of course, the preserves, the Balcones Preserves are here because of that, in order to protect that type of ecosystem.

Scott Royder [01:42:52] So, yeah, I mean. It's basically humans, probably in most cases are over-managing, obviously, where there's invasive species and missing our native species that we can help reseed and replant and those kind of things. But you know, their, nature naturally has successional stages, you know, younger growth to old growth, and we have tended to take out all the elders in some of these places. So, you know, if you take out all the elders, the trees, and the mountain lions and you know, you seriously affect the balance of that whole area, the whole system. You're taking out the wisdom, you know, of nature and, and, and there, you know, always used to be a really tight connection between you and the elders in the old, in the old communities and old cultures. And that's something that has really, we need to go back to, and that's something that we've gotten away from. But most people don't get to spend time with their elders to know the importance of that kind of education.

David Todd [01:44:15] Sure. You know, just something suddenly caught my ear, and maybe this could be one of the last questions I could trouble with. And that is that when you were ou at the Alma de Mujer sanctuary and you were you talking about, this is sort of practice of being still and being quiet and sort of becoming aware of what's around you, whether it's the golden-cheeked warblers or the junipers or, you know, whatever parts of the ecosystem, you know, that might be nearby. And, and I was hoping you could talk about this, this sort of ability to sense nature and sense even the ghost cat, you know, these really reclusive animals like the mountain lion, and how you've managed to sort of connect in that way.

Scott Royder [01:45:11] Right on, that's awesome, yeah, that's, that's one of my best lessons, you know, I think. And it's something that I, I realized when I was young and running around the neighborhood barefooted and not realizing that until later. And of course, you know, you always have to, in most cases, have to be disconnected in order to realize that, you know, and then reconnect in order to feel the difference. And, you know, living in cities and being busy and running around and being in a hurry, it's very difficult to slow down enough to get in the presence of your subtle energy, to feel your subtle energy, your power, your creative, feminine, you know, energy.

Scott Royder [01:46:05] So and one of the things I guess I was lucky to do when I went out to Washington was I was caretaking a 20-acre forested piece of property for a friend. And it was during the pandemic and even before that. But I had the opportunity to do a lot of my Qigong practice and integrate all of these teachings and spend the time, you know, barefooted, in the dirt, in the sunshine and really again using my body and the Qigong and Taiji to focus on my feelings, you know, this feminine, you know, sensual energy that I was taught all my life to suppress. And, you know, a lot of that has a bigger picture relation to, you know, the

dominator society coming in and repressing the feminine, our feminine power. So once you do sit down and and sit long enough and feel the sunshine and feel the stuff, you really feel it without any distractions, then you realize that, you start hearing, you start hearing the forest. And you know, it'll pretty much tell you what you need to know, you know.

Scott Royder [01:47:40] So I spend a lot of time writing this stuff down and, and looking at it. And, you know, it was all making sense. It was all coming around and it was, you know, the things I was reading, the things I had learned, were all verifications of, you know, the fact that, you know, we need to be connected to nature. We need to be totally grounded. And you know, our bodies are made, and even our bare feet, were made with the Taichi talks about the energy meridian and these points, like on the bottom of your feet that were made to absorb the negative ions that are free and unlimited that come off of the Earth. And if you stand barefooted on the Earth for 20 minutes, your energy grounds with the energy. You sort of resonate.

Scott Royder [01:48:39] And, and that's sort of how you really want to start your day, is in resonance and respect, because once you get to that place, if you can do that in the mornings or however you do it in your morning prayer practice, then you, you feel the divinity and you remember who you are. You remember that you're divine. You remember that the tree next to you is just as divine. And you remember that all our relations are divine. And so why are we treating anybody or any of our relations anything less than with the highest level of respect for divinity? Because, you know, if we did, we'd solve all of these problems. You know, we, we wouldn't need weapons. You know, we wouldn't need force. We wouldn't, you know, we would have a peace economy. And you know, we would, we would be pursuing this free energy that the Earth and the Sun give us.

Scott Royder [01:49:41] And there may be another way of looking at a way to provide energy for people that we haven't been looking at, that Tesla was getting into and was learning about before they shut him down, so, you know, in order for somebody to, to make a lot of money off of the types of energy that we would have to pay for.

Scott Royder [01:50:08] So, you know, if you go back far enough, and you, and you get to remember who you are by knowing that you're a divine being, then that's a good way to start your, your day and, and then you see that there's no room, there's no more room for killing, especially in the face of a planet emergency. We do not have time to continue to harm people and to continue to interfere and occupy and do all the things. We need to spend every bit of, every bit of our energy trying to take care of our future generations because we already see how hot things are going to get. I got as hot as I wanted to get last summer and um, and that was in Washington. One hundred and ten degrees, where I couldn't sleep at night. It was too hot to sleep. So, you know, and I know a lot of people are suffering a lot worse than that.

Scott Royder [01:51:11] So that's the other thing is like reconnecting to the people that were here first, finding out where they are, finding out what they're up to and partnering up with them to restore and repair relations.

David Todd [01:51:29] Well, that's a, that's a really good way to put it. And I just love this sort of overarching idea of sort of repairing relations and, you know, you're clearly trying to span all these different kinds of understanding of, you know, the mountain lion and the natural world and the people around us and the natives who came before us and the, you know, folks from other cultures.

David Todd [01:51:52] Good on you. Thank you so much, Scott.

Scott Royder [01:51:56] Yeah.

David Todd [01:51:57] You tie together a lot of disparate things. And so thank you so much for your time today for doing this. I hope our paths cross soon. But in the meantime, take care of yourself. Okay?

Scott Royder [01:52:12] You too. Thank you so much.

David Todd [01:52:14] All right. Let's talk soon. Take care.

Scott Royder [01:52:16] Okay. All right now. Bye.