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INTERVIEWEE: Will Harte

INTERVIEWER: David Todd

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David Todd [00:00:02] So, with your permission, Mr. Harte, we are planning on recording this interview for research and educational work on behalf of the Conservation History Association of Texas, which is a non-profit based in Austin, and for a book and a website for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History, which is at the University of Texas in Austin.

David Todd [00:00:31] And I'd like to just stress that while those are our plans, that you have all rights to use this recording as you see fit as well. It is yours.

David Todd [00:00:42] So I wanted to make sure that's a good arrangement for you.

Will Harte [00:00:46] Yes.

David Todd [00:00:47] Okay.

Will Harte [00:00:48] That's fine.

David Todd [00:00:48] Well, thank you. Well, let's get started.

David Todd [00:00:50] It is Tuesday, October 11th, 2022. It's about 2:35 Central Time. My name is David Todd. I am representing the Conservation History Association of Texas, and we are conducting an on-site interview with Will Harte at his ranch and home outside of Fort Davis, Texas.

David Todd [00:01:15] And as a very brief introduction, missing lots of facets of his life, but I think he can be described, at least in part, as a land steward and as a philanthropist, as a trustee for several conservation non-profits, as a wildlife advocate and as a film producer. Again, that's just skimming the surface, but perhaps that gives a flavor of his life.

David Todd [00:01:47] Today, we'll be talking about his life and career and focus on his work in conservation, particularly wildlife issues.

David Todd [00:01:57] And I thought that we might start by just asking you about your childhood and if there might have been some formative experiences back then that later led you into this interest in conservation and wildlife.

Will Harte [00:02:15] Well, early memories are of my father, who worked six days a week, and on the seventh day he didn't rest, he went out to the garden, in Corpus Christi and listened to Texaco opera on KTRH, and planted crotons, that was his favorite plant. And so I just watched that. He was composting. He was doing all the things that people who knew what they were doing did back then. And that was how I spent his time. And it was fun to watch the

plants grow. He had a small variety of other plants I can't place. The crotons were the great tropical plant that worked great for Corpus Christi. And I watched that.

Will Harte [00:03:09] The family had ranches. My dad and uncle had inherited from their father half interest in a ranch up near Amarillo on the Canadian River. A ranch I only saw when I was about 60, I guess. Beautiful place, incredible place. But they traded out of that for properties in West Texas and Brewster County, specifically the Rosillos ranch, which was, I think, about 78,000 acres, encompassing half, north half of the Rosillos Mountain, neighboring the Terlingua Ranch, one of the biggest development disasters in Texas. And then they bought another couple of ranches, one right at Marathon, and one halfway between Marathon and Fort Stockton.

Will Harte [00:04:13] My father, because we were in Corpus Christi wanted something a little bit closer than a nine-hour drive. And so actually a third ranch, the last ranch, was bought near Fort Stockton. Bought a ranch outside of Laredo, I guess I was about 11 or 12 when that happened. So that's the place I knew best, although I had been to Rosillos on several occasions when they head round-up in the wintertime, and a couple of times in the summer. But it was the Cerrito Prieto Ranch in Webb County, just south of Encinal. I spent a lot of time there and Dad, when he went there, because there were no crotons or gardens, would typically work and I'd go out. I'd either have a friend there. He had a very good friend that liked to go and who was obviously his age. And I would hunt quail and that's all I, that's the only hunting I ever did. Dad did not hunt.

Will Harte [00:05:22] But it was a, it was a fun time for me. It was hot and dry and but it was just fun to be outdoors. I enjoyed it very much. It was where I came to know that kind of life well enough to know that was something I wanted to do.

Will Harte [00:05:45] So, that's a pretty big leap from crotons to cactus, but that's kind of how it worked for me.

David Todd [00:05:55] And, when you say that kind of life is it, is it the rural life that you're away from the cities? Is it like sort of a negative thing - you're not in the city? Or is there something positive that draws you to being in this rural area?

Will Harte [00:06:14] Well, being alone was very positive for me. I liked the solitude. I didn't mind it at all. There wasn't a desk involved, which my academic career demonstrated. I was allergic to sitting at a desk. So it's just fun. I don't mind manual labor at all. In fact, I do it every day now. So to me it was very pleasurable.

David Todd [00:06:47] So, was your, you mentioned your father and your uncle as being interested and involved in these things, and your grandfather, for that matter, in these rural places. Did your mom share that kind of interest or did she have other pursuits?

Will Harte [00:07:04] Mother was from Hanover, New Hampshire. Her father was the dean of the Tuck School at Dartmouth. And, so, no, she didn't have any concept of rural living as we know it in Texas. Rural living would be a farm three miles from a village of 300 people. That would be the sticks for her. So she had no concept of it. I think she did okay with it. But it was, it was, it wasn't home for her. She loved her New England roots. And so Dad did too. Dad went to Dartmouth. So he was very well acquainted with that. So they were, Dad was split somewhere between Texas and New England. And Mother was, you know, I think I always wanted to get back to New England.

David Todd [00:07:59] Well so, we talked some about your childhood and it sounds like the experience was in part being alone, but also you enjoyed hunting quail. Is that right?

Will Harte [00:08:19] Well, that was, we did that. The gentleman was Dr. Gardner. He was my father's friend, and he liked to do that. But that was the only hunting I did. Mostly I'd, when I was there, I'd find some little thing to do and. Who knows? It might have been the cowboys were going out to fix a fence or something, but it was typically, well, work-related, and the hunting, of course, wasn't, but that was enjoyable to me. We sometimes shot enough for dinner, and that meant, it was just very pleasurable to be out walking. So it's not terribly dissimilar from what I do now, although I didn't carry a gun. I don't carry a gun. I just go out and do the work. And I enjoy the great outdoors.

David Todd [00:09:12] OK. Well, I'm sort of getting a picture of this circle of people and where it took you. As you grew up, of course, you went to school. I think you went to Texas A&M.

Will Harte [00:09:25] Right.

David Todd [00:09:27] And I was curious if there are any classmates or teachers that sort of lit a fire for you to be interested in this life that you've taken or if that was not a significant part of your life - I think you said earlier he didn't really care for desk work.

Will Harte [00:09:48] Yeah, probably. There were two instructors or, I guess, professors. In high school, I had Gene Funk who had a course on marine science which was my favorite course. Obviously, there's not room for a desk. It's all aquarium. And it involved going to the, you know, the Nueces Bay or Port Aransas area and picking up samples of this or that. And so that was a lot of fun for me. I didn't really, not much of the science adhered to me, but I enjoyed that sort of work.

Will Harte [00:10:29] And at A&M, a man named Wayne Hamilton had worked for B. Johnson, one of the King Ranch heirs, and decided to become a professor. And he was quite good. He and Charlie Scifres who was, I think, head of whatever Agrilife was - Texas Extension. He became that. Charlie was great and we, they had at that time owned the ranch, the Sarita ranch became a place where prescribed burning was really studied and done quite a bit. I think we made, made Charlie's book, which is called, "Brush Control", I think. But anyway, those three people were, I was very strongly interested in ranching and the science part, I guess, it rubbed off. I just liked being there.

David Todd [00:11:32] Sure.

Will Harte [00:11:33] But, there was a detour. I might as well bring that up. I dropped out of college after one semester. I clearly was not prepared for any of the coursework. And a friend of mine from high school, older brother had just gotten back from Vietnam. So that was December of '69, 1970. And he was an interesting guy, but I mean, much older than me, ten, 12 years older. And he said, "I'm going to Australia". And I said, "Well, I might as well, I'm not doing anything here". And my father was thrilled, kept me out of the house.

Will Harte [00:12:21] And so, we, actually I met him in San Francisco. I took a bus from Corpus to San Francisco. But there's a book in there somewhere. Got on a ship. And three weeks later I was in Sydney. And I, actually there were some friends from Corpus Christi who

had moved there - oil business. They were a high school classmate of mine. And, anyway, I saw them for a while, but then I picked up the Queensland Country Life magazine, and jackaroo opening in Charters Towers. It was a 300,000-acre ranch and I got on the train and went to Townsville. Then I took a bus to Charters Towers and I called the people, and they came and got me. They were about 60 miles south on the Cape River.

[00:13:19] And I spent about seven months there and it was just me and the family - older man, probably seventies, younger son, maybe 40, who was just crazy as a bessie bug. And he was my boss. And there was another kid. I think he was from Santa Barbara, but those people came through there, probably three or four people in that other position. And the three of us, we rode every day. And you, you'd stay out for a week or ten days at a time, and camp. It was the dry part of the year when I first got there, and you know, you'd move cattle by setting fires and stuff like that. You'd shoot wild cattle. You'd sleep downwind of the dung fire in your makeshift swag bag.

Will Harte [00:14:11] And, it was fun. I mean, I didn't learn a thing from Robert Rawlinson, the son, and I wish I'd known his father better. He was a very, very interesting man. The wife and other child, the daughter. Old man Bob, had Robert and then he had his daughter, I can't remember. But his wife and the daughter would go to London. They went twice during the seven months. So they were pretty high class. They had a grass tennis court, two-story house, the classic Australian set-up.

Will Harte [00:14:48] But it's tough country, really, really tough. And polled Herefords. And they had a 30-foot Southern Cross windmill just like the one I'm looking at out the window. That's why that's there. But it was fun for me.

Will Harte [00:15:06] And, you know, again, I was by myself, in a house full of strangers. And so I was at a separate house, a cabin. But, you know, just, it held my attention.

Will Harte [00:15:21] So I come back and have to do a few semesters at South West Texas to get back into A&M. I get back in. And there's Wayne Hamilton. He's left the Chaparrosa ranch at Uvalde, or La Pryor, I guess. And just fell in with Wayne and Charlie Siphres. Just good guys. And then my dad and uncle hired a ranch manager my junior year. I think there's a message in there somewhere.

Will Harte [00:16:00] And, I actually just started sticking my toe in the oil and gas business. So that was a sharp turn. But it was one that was probably good for me and certainly good for the family that I didn't, you know, just take that job without having worked somewhere else first, until I owned it and then it didn't matter. All the mistakes were mine: I got to pay for them.

David Todd [00:16:32] So that's definitely one kind of education. The hard knocks, trial and error.

David Todd [00:16:40] Well, you know, one thing that intrigues me about your trip to Australia is that it seems like a experience out of a previous time in the States: that that the tracts were bigger, the country was wilder, the people were fewer.

Will Harte [00:17:00] Oh yeah.

David Todd [00:17:01] Did you feel that, that it was like going back in time?

Will Harte [00:17:04] Fifties. Yeah. And I grew up, you know, well, I remember five or six years I lived in San Angelo, so. And I went there two weeks ago. And it's still just in a bubble. It's a great little town. But Australia was totally different than it is now. I've been back twice since then, and just shocked and dismayed at how they, you know, they're, they've accepted and are practicing the worst part of our American culture, in my opinion. But it was fun.

David Todd [00:17:48] Well. So speaking of culture, you know, some of us pick up things of, you know, from our circle of friends and family or teachers, but then some of it, I guess, is just from, you know, the magazines and books and TV shows and movies. And I was curious if any of that was significant for you or it was more your own individual experience.

Will Harte [00:18:17] About Australia?

David Todd [00:18:18] No, no. Not Australia, but just as you learned about the world and maybe about conservation in particular.

Will Harte [00:18:27] Well, I'd seen conservation first-hand. So I mean, I lived with that. And so that was an easy thing over many years of observing to understand. And it's, I guess, I really don't know how to answer that, that question. Help me one more time.

David Todd [00:18:51] Well, so for some folks, and I guess this is maybe more true for people who have spent a lot of time in the city, and they have to use their imagination. They have to, and it has to be prodded by a book or a magazine or a TV show that makes them, sort of transports them to the world of nature and imbues them with this idea that, hey, it needs to be protected and restored and treasured.

David Todd [00:19:19] But for other people, that is their life. They don't need the cultural stimulus, you know. And I was wondering where you fall, because, you know, you have your maternal grandfather, you know, a very educated guy. Your father's in the newspaper business. You know, they're all about reading and writing and...

Will Harte [00:19:38] Right.

David Todd [00:19:39] You could have gone that way or else. You know, growing up and visiting these big ranches, it seems like...

Will Harte [00:19:46] Well, there was a family business. I had an older brother who ran the Stanford Daily and then the Daily Texan, and, you know, so he was tracked that way. And again, I was allergic to wooden furniture, so I didn't really want to be that. And I took another thing that I'd been exposed to. My parents, well, let's say, my family, didn't buy ranches to make a living. And they did that, I think, because they enjoyed it. And I guess they thought it was a good investment as just a real estate investment that they enjoyed the use of. And so that kind of may have had a very big impact on my ethic, which is, "land first". And I never felt that I had to beat a profit out of a piece of land. You know, I had never observed that happening. And so it's almost too easy for me to do what I do where I am right now.

Will Harte [00:20:57] Actually, uh, I would have picked a different place, maybe in Arkansas, where I could run, you know, a cow to two acres instead of a cow to 150 acres. And then a lot less work, going to look for when they walk through the fence. But that's...

David Todd [00:21:24] So, I guess, if I'm following you here, the two big influences for you are some individuals like Wayne Hamilton, or your dad, or your uncle, or just the experience of being by yourself on these huge, and somewhat wild, pieces of land, but not so much, you know, Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom, or Silent Spring, or Jacques Cousteau's, you know, TV show about the Calypso. Those things were not as influential.

Will Harte [00:22:05] Oh, they're fun. But, you know, to, to imagine that. But I never imagined myself in that sort of situation.

Will Harte [00:22:12] When I left South Texas, I'd wanted no power lines, no pipelines, no pavement, no trains, no windmills, no solar farms. And this thing popped up, and it didn't take me more than 2 seconds to run out here. Pam and I'd ridden bicycles by this. We have friends in Fort Davis. In fact, the broker on the deal lives there, and he called me about it.

Will Harte [00:22:36] But, I'm just saying that I wanted away from all that. I didn't want anything that, I didn't want any intensive management. I didn't want, I wanted it to be itself. And part of the pleasure and satisfaction I get out of this place is watching this, in a few brief years, transformation.

Will Harte [00:22:58] So, I'm not a scientist, not a cowboy. I go through all things I'm not and just say that, left to its own devices, it's an amazing thing to watch healing take place, even though it's a thousand years from recovering the topsoil that's now in the Gulf of Mexico. But just, I'm very fortunate to be in this position. And I guess I'd be fortunate if I wanted to beat it to death with cattle too, because I'd have that option. But I don't want to have that option or that necessity that ... I tried it and it's, you go backwards, and by the time you figure it out, you've lost ten years of recovery or whatever.

David Todd [00:23:58] So let's talk a little bit more about the ranch. I think you, I think you've sort of talked about your willingness to just let nature take its course and let things evolve and heal at their own pace in their own way.

Will Harte [00:24:26] Right.

David Todd [00:24:26] Now there's some folks like Allan Savory.

Will Harte [00:24:28] Oh my God!

David Todd [00:24:29] Or, others who want to...

Will Harte [00:24:31] Beat it to death.

David Todd [00:24:32] You know, intensively graze it and rotate. And there is that that sort of attitude. But what do you think about that and how it compares with your attitude?

Will Harte [00:24:44] Well, there are several Savory circles that, when I had a plane, I would fly over on my way to my south Texas ranch that are now idle. I have friends in San Angelo that do it. It's almost a 48-hour cycle with a hot wire. And now they've abandoned the ranch, I mean, the cattle.

Will Harte [00:25:05] You know, it's just a, almost many different routes to the same destination. I know what this property needs. It needs grazing. And I have a wonderful

neighbor who does it - who mows the land for me. I know that's the proper way to recycle the nutrients and the cellulose or whatever that's being grown here.

Will Harte [00:25:34] But in order for me to do it at the quickest pace, I don't want to have, I don't want to buy the asset that does the lawn mowing. I want nature to bring the rains and I'll do a little bit of aeration. I've got my Lawson aerator out there. I did it and it didn't rain for three years. So all the scars healed that would have absorbed the water. So, you know, it's just, it's two steps forward, one step back, even if you're really good at it. And I've just found that this, I think this technique will pay off. I think that I'll have, when Pam and I sell this place, it will be is an outstanding property.

Will Harte [00:26:20] What the person does, I don't care. But it's you know, hiring the lawn mower was the smartest thing I ever did.

David Todd [00:26:29] And so the lawn mower are the cattle that live on your neighbor's place.

Will Harte [00:26:33] You know, I just say, "Open the gate", and he brings them in. And we march them one direction, and he's on both sides of me, and they go out the other side when I tell him to. This has all been grazed, all the way to the highway, anything you walked through where you've seen Pam's. But I'm just saying how I look at it. And he's thrilled. I mean, you know, he's got 44 miles north to south on that ranch. And anything he can do to keep cattle in one place with lots of grass and in this case, lots of rain and sun and even more grass, he's happy and I'm happy.

Will Harte [00:27:07] But there is a process and I guess I would equate mine with the bison process, as I understand it, which was just keep moving, follow the green. And you can't do that, you know, shifting pastures 300 head, I can't. The pasture sizes ... this place had goats and sheep on it too, I'm sure, at some time. It just takes too much manpower. And as Pam pointed out, it rains on the south side, and it doesn't rain on the north. Well, it's only five miles, ten miles away.

Will Harte [00:27:42] But that's, I don't want to deal with that, you know, those components. And so I have a great guy. And he just, I say, "You got to move". They get moved that day and it takes all the worry out of me. But I'm achieving my goal, which I think is building the forage base and hopefully building a little bit of soil with root decomposition or whatever happens underground.

David Todd [00:28:15] And, how do you decide how long these cattle should be here before they move back onto your neighbors' place?

Will Harte [00:28:21] Well, I just watch the height. I mean, what are they grazing? I mean, is it, if it's raining while they're there and it's kind of a dead heat, I just let them sit. He's, he's, they're, right now, he's a month past the original target date and he may be there another month because we have so much grass. And it won't hurt me at all. I mean, if I'm pulling him out of a pasture and it's got, you know, six or eight inches of height on the grass. You know, I can look across the road at someone else's place and it's right down to dirt because they didn't have anywhere to go. I just, I didn't like to be boxed into that corner.

David Todd [00:29:03] And, how do you, I'm wondering if you can give us an idea (and this may be too much in the weeds), but do you have exclosures where you can see what the grass

would be if it wasn't being grazed? Or how do you gauge that, that timing question when it's time to move on?

Will Harte [00:29:19] Just looking at it. I don't, I don't do any science. I just look at it and say, "Okay, it's time to go". And I'm erring on the side of just leaving it the hell alone. But the pastures where he was in April are just fantastic now. They were grazed just right. The rains came. They're grown up. It'll be there next April when he shows up. And he'll have dry grass and he'll just start moving again, I hope. He's real happy. But I just try to leave enough to know that if I had to stick some cattle in there in April, which is when it starts warming up and there's no prospect of rain, there be grass.

David Todd [00:30:04] And do you look at grass just as kind of a fungible or are you looking at, you know, how much buffalo grass you have and, you know, little bluestem, and, you know...

Will Harte [00:30:16] I think of those for itself, if you go out the road, you'll count on the side of the road, ten feet off the road, you could count ten or 15 species of grass - eight annuals and I mean, eight perennials and a couple of annuals too. But I don't do that. I know the seed stock was here. And that was what Steve Nelle was saying, he was saying, he said, "You know, you just look out there. Can you believe how many different kinds of grass you have?" Because when I got here, it was, you know, obviously they'd worked hard to take it up from rocks, but it was just wasn't apparent, that you had this many different varieties of grass. And that just makes me happy.

David Todd [00:30:59] Do you have any problems with KR bluestem or stuff that's non-native?

Will Harte [00:31:04] Yeah, it's all over the highway. When I got here, it's first thing, I called the ... I won't use names. I called somebody, I said, "You know, you do a lot of scientific research out here. I can tell you that if you don't, if we don't stop this, it will invade in every pasture", just like Corpus Christi, or where I was just outside of Austin. Oh, my God, near Dripping Springs - pastures that had been native grass, you know, midgrass, solid KR, anything on highway, Interstate 37, south of San Antonio. It's wall-to-wall. And that was a, KR, we think we know who brought that over. And all these experimental things like bringing aoudad in, and stuff. It's just makes me crazy. But no, it's on our right of way and it really pops up north of here as you head downhill toward Kent, both sides.

Will Harte [00:32:07] And, unfortunately, the neighbors on both sides don't have much other grass, so it's going to, it's going to cross the fence. It doesn't. It seems to be cold-tolerant. Nothing seems to bother it. I don't have a lot of it here. Very lucky, but it's there. And I don't know what to do about it. I don't think anybody does.

David Todd [00:32:27] And, you talked a lot about how you managed this place you've got, and it seems like part of it is rest and then there's some grazing. Are you using any fire? Burning it?

Will Harte [00:32:40] Well, I brought that from South Texas. Yeah, we burned a lot. I just drive into the ranch here sometimes and just throw matches out and foreman knew I was on the property.

Will Harte [00:32:51] Very dangerous here. We've got sides of hills that Pam I were just commenting a couple of days ago, are coming back from a fire that happened five years ago. They're facing south and west. Most sun. Most heat. They're hillsides - most difficult. Everything that, you know, it's probably the one that is the poster child for no fires, but they're horrible.

Will Harte [00:33:18] And when we got here, three months after we got here ... Well let me tell the whole story. A month after we got here, nine below zero, 72 hours. Broke every pipe, water pipe on the ranch. I wondered, what the hell am I doing here? And then in April, the fire broke out at Marfa, and within ten days it was at the Observatory, and moving around in that area. And the main road here on the ranch was a firebreak. Everything where we're sitting right now was fire side. And the other side of the road 50 feet away was, you know, they're trying to hold that country. And that took years to heal.

Will Harte [00:33:57] But the part I just mentioned, that was a very small fire in '17 and just now healed.

Will Harte [00:34:07] So, thin soils, vague weather patterns. In the previous three years to this one averaged seven inches a year, and this year we're 20 to 23. So everything's wonderful now.

Will Harte [00:34:24] But, what I've been trying to do is balance that. When you asked about the grazing, just leave plenty, get them off, leave plenty because you may be grazing, that may be all you have next year. And I guess with no cattle, I shouldn't worry about that. But I just think the cycle, it's so erratic. You can get rains in June, as we did two years ago, but not really much after. We still get the same seven inches. What did it look like? Here we go - 15.

Will Harte [00:34:56] And so, I just, I just like to leave enough where I don't have to think the next year. It's there. Go get it.

David Todd [00:35:03] Well, so the. The brief grazing and then the long rest periods make a lot of intuitive sense about how that helps recover, you know, land that's, that's been used pretty hard. Can you talk a little bit about why fire would be beneficial? Because it does seem like a pretty extreme effect, at least for a while.

Will Harte [00:35:28] Well, I'm not sure. We did it in South Texas because it was in vogue. We had buffel grass and of course, off Highway 83, which was my west boundary, it came in in the country. So you'd knock it down and you're pretty sure you're going to get a rain in the spring and it bounces right back. But up here it can sit dormant for months and months. In 2011, the big fire, we had three inches of rain, total. 2012, we had five inches of rain, total. 2013 we had eight inches. So in three years we'd had 16 inches.

Will Harte [00:36:08] And then, in 2014, we got 20, you know, the same idea. But the seed stock, you know, it may be lying on the ground the first year or two, but after that, if it's not germinated, it's gone. So you just, it's that one step forward, two step back. Sometimes it's three steps back. And that's when I mentioned these hillsides. But the reason I put out taking brush out and opened up these front pastures, I call them high meadows, is that I can maintain them. And when I drag that aerator across it, if you get a little bit of rain, it goes in. And if it's hard-packed and burned off, it just runs. You know, very little of the water that that hits this ground goes in. It just starts running because the topography and lack of any kind of topsoil, gravel and clay, and I don't know what else.

David Todd [00:37:12] Well, speaking of the soils, you know, we discussed a little bit about the amount of forage and the type of grasses. But I guess underpinning all this is, is what kind of soils you have. And I was hoping you could talk a little bit about the history of this land out here and why there's maybe less topsoil than there used to be. And what does that mean for your options now?

Will Harte [00:37:42] Well, it was sheep and goats and cattle. I mean, let's start with cattle. And they just hang around the watering holes. And if they're poorly watered and unfenced. They just stay by the water and, you know, just beat a place to death. I've been on a neighbor's place where the concrete water trough is 12 inches off the ground. Hell a galvanized pipe on one end and rocks on the other. But that gives you some idea of, you know, a lot of hoof action around the trough, but it's just indicative of the fact that it's gone and you can't hold it.

Will Harte [00:38:18] And, that's the problem I had with fire. Once the roots are thin and shallow, and if there's nothing to slow that water down, it just pulls more soil off. Each burn exposes more dormant or dead root. And that's what you get. Seeds gone, everything.

Will Harte [00:38:35] So to me, it's all about controlling water flow and using it, utilizing it, whenever it shows up.

David Todd [00:38:51] Well. So are there things that you try to do to anticipate that if you get some of these pretty, I mean when you get rain, it can be pretty intense out here.

Will Harte [00:39:03] Last night!

David Todd [00:39:05] Yeah. Do you do you think that having swales or contour plowing or something to try to hold what's here, or permaculture ideas, do you do any of that?

Will Harte [00:39:15] I haven't, simply because of the scale, but also because it just, it, you're turning up gravel, and your soil temperature is 250 degrees. And it's just really hard in the summertime. It's really hard to make anything germinate. Or if it does germinate after a shower and then it's 150 degrees two weeks later, it's over.

Will Harte [00:39:37] So I don't do that. I do push-up dams in this creek and that doesn't do much except for wildlife. But I'm saying that's the only manipulation I've done.

Will Harte [00:39:52] It's just it's really hard to get anything to grow on your soil. And it's mainly due to all the rock - the temperature. Gravel, I guess, is a better word for it.

David Todd [00:40:09] Well, you mentioned these push-up dams that may benefit the wildlife here. And we chatted a little bit about the cattle and the sheep and goats that have been here in years past. Can you talk some about the aoudad and the elk and the javelina that are here and how you view those and how you manage them?

Will Harte [00:40:33] Feral hogs are a real problem. They will travel across a hill and they will move a rock that weighs more than they do. And they, they rip the rocks out of the ground looking for roots, which obviously causes a great deal of erosion. They tear through fences. They live in our, the lawn around the headquarters. And we're constantly fixing fence. They're a problem.

Will Harte [00:41:00] My answer is there are not enough bullets or enough time to kill them. I'm hoping that there is a poison, some sort of this asphyxiation product that I think Australians are using that we're trying to get, but they're the worst.

Will Harte [00:41:16] Aoudad, our aoudad population is equal to the combined population of elk and deer. That's a bad sign. They dominate feeders, they dominate troughs. They're very aggressive and hard to kill. And so, again, like the hogs, not enough time, not enough bullets, and not enough people interested in killing one. And I'm not interested guiding a hunt. So they're a real problem. And they were introduced by the Parks and Wildlife Department as a hunting option for Texans. And that's, you know, kind of the, "let's see if it works" deal. And boy, did it work. They're everywhere. They're a real problem for all, particularly the cattle, cattlemen in my neighborhood and people actually ranching the cattle.

Will Harte [00:42:18] Elk are fantastic, and they're here. And if you're staying here tonight, you hear them bugling in the evening and tomorrow morning. And they're just about through.

Will Harte [00:42:30] Deer: we had the largest typical mule deer, killed in Texas in 2013. Two of my friends just went out and ran into it. We don't feed. And that's something I did heavily in South Texas. We would kill 100 does a year, on an 11,000-acre high-fenced property and. Looking back, I it. What was I thinking? Well, it was, you know. Lots of money.

Will Harte [00:42:59] But we don't we don't lease any hunting here. We sell hunts to charities, Parks and Wildlife got one and TWA got the other this year.

Will Harte [00:43:12] But it's just, to me, that's kind of the fun of it, to see these animals prospering just on their own. I mean, really 21 inches in three years, and they still were big last year. They looked great. So maybe the aoudad competing with them, cutting their numbers down, makes them healthier. I doubt it. I'm trying to think of something good about the aoudad.

David Todd [00:43:39] Well. So some people who value their deer point to mountain lions as a competitor.

Will Harte [00:43:51] Sure.

David Todd [00:43:52] And as you know, a predator that will see that deer as prey and take it out, and then you won't be able to sell the rights to hunt that deer.

Will Harte [00:44:01] Mhmm.

David Todd [00:44:01] And, I was wondering how you think through that predator / prey and the role of mountain lions.

Will Harte [00:44:09] It's, it's natural. I don't know how else to put it. I mean, those same people, if I say, "Well, you know, sharks eat those fish you like to go hunting for in your boat, but you understand the reason for not killing all the sharks." And they kind of nod. And they get that.

Will Harte [00:44:27] But, for some reason, they're just sure that that mountain lion is going to kill that deer that they've been bringing to the feeder every day, 365 days a year. So a lion

knows exactly where it is and can run down there and kill it. But that's probably not the first one they're going to choose. They're going to chase something smaller and weaker. I think that's how it works. And we all know the science. We all know how this works.

Will Harte [00:44:49] But, for some reason, because of the money in deer, we raise them like chickens, more or less in parking lots.

Will Harte [00:44:59] And, they're not a game animal.

Will Harte [00:45:03] And, the lion should be a game animal. And it's treated as if it were a rodent. This is pretty unscientific, and wrong, in my opinion.

Will Harte [00:45:17] We need an apex predator. We've got the trophic cascade book, you know, all those things, we can read them and understand them. And then you look at lions, and I need to kill that goddamn lion. Well, you really don't.

Will Harte [00:45:28] You know, we released a lion here. I'm sure Pam told you that. And as I said to Pam before we did it, I said, "The neighbors don't know us well enough to hate us, but they will when this is over. We'd just been here a year. But it was here. It was, they have a 24-hour delay on the tracking. So we followed it. But it was right out in this front pasture with her cows who were calving.

Will Harte [00:45:54] And, you just, you know, you just got to scratch your head, people want to eliminate an apex predator, or treat it like a rodent and trap them. And it's just, it's horrible how they're treated.

David Todd [00:46:13] So, I think you said earlier that, that we know some of these things, like the trophic cascade, and yet there's this attitude that they, these apex predators aren't needed, and they should be treated as rodents. Why do you think there's that disconnect between what we know and what we do? Or what some people know, and what some people do.

Will Harte [00:46:35] Money.

David Todd [00:46:42] Money ...

Will Harte [00:46:43] For the landowner.

David Todd [00:46:46] For the deer harvester, for the outfitter?

Will Harte [00:46:47] Oh, yeah. You're selling deer, so if you're sure it's going to kill that your award-winning deer, that you're going to put in a 600-acre tract and wake somebody up at five in the morning, give them a coffee and drive in a circle and then shoot it, you don't want that to happen.

David Todd [00:47:12] Well, so do you see this kind of attitude about mountain lions, and apex predators, which I guess would include other animals like maybe the coyote in some circumstances.

Will Harte [00:47:28] Sure.

David Todd [00:47:28] Is that, is that pretty static or is it changing? Do you see it evolving at all?

Will Harte [00:47:34] Well, I think Pam is addressing that. There's, I guess the best word for me is, "ignorance". Nobody really, beyond just a very small group, let's say less than 5% of the state population, understands hunting, because there're not just not that many hunters and the money involved and so forth. And so they just they never think about, you know, trapping lions, trapping coyotes, just random killing.

Will Harte [00:48:02] But the education process is under way,, thanks to Pam. More people know about it, and I think they'll be alarmed by it. It's just that simple for me. But we'll find out.

David Todd [00:48:17] And so, when you think about how to change people's minds, what do you think the best route is? Do you tell them the science of, you know, as you mentioned before, the trophic cascade? Or do you try to approach them like on an ethical, you know, this is inhumane? Or what, how do you think about that?

Will Harte [00:48:46] We've wandered into the Venn diagram of education and worldview. Films, majesty, beauty, what they actually do. Because, I mean, if you're going to put everything in the context of a deer farm or a high-fenced ranch, which is, you know, the same thing to me. I had one. That's not that such a tiny proportion, not only of their range, habitat and habit. So I think it's just through film and print that you explain to people that they are a critical part of the food chain.

Will Harte [00:49:42] But then food chain is foreign to most people these days. You know, it's just that's the tragedy.

David Todd [00:49:51] And, the sort of foreign nature of the food chain is because...

Will Harte [00:49:58] They can't read or write. We may want to take that out of the story here. People are so poorly educated, they don't get into that. They don't get into even the most basic things that I think I got behind me in sixth grade. And I understood how things worked. People have no idea how things work. They think milk comes from the backside of a grocery store, the storeroom. They don't have any concept of the natural world.

Will Harte [00:50:29] But once they're, I mean, you go see "Deep in the Heart". God Almighty, you just want to sell your house and get in the car and just go drive around and look at Texas. I mean, it's just amazing the impact that those kinds of things have.

Will Harte [00:50:45] You watch "Wildlife Killing Contest", you think, what in the hell? How did that ever get to be legal? So it got to be legal because no one really understood it. Or the vast majority of people, 90% of the people, had no idea what's going on. I really didn't understand the extent to which they ... I knew about snake roundups - Freer. You know, that kind of stuff. But I had no idea the hundreds and hundreds of contests. So I'm in that group.

David Todd [00:51:16] Yeah, I am as well. Can you tell me a little bit about these wildlife killing contests, what they involve?

Will Harte [00:51:23] Well, they're just teams, generally, go out and whoever kills the biggest bobcat or the biggest this, or the biggest that, you win a prize. There are cash prizes. And camo companies and the rifle companies all contribute. They're big money.

Will Harte [00:51:48] Pam knows the numbers, but really big numbers.

Will Harte [00:51:51] And, that's just, somebody apparently went out and killed 95 foxes in Crane County. That's where Odessa is, or next door to Odessa. I didn't think there would be 95 coyotes, I mean, foxes, in the entire Permian Basin.

Will Harte [00:52:13] But you call them in and you shoot them. And you take them in, and then they throw them in a trailer and then they take it to the dump, or somebody skins them, illegally. Usually there's a process and that's sure ignored in most places. You've got to have Parks and Wildlife at every single event. And I don't know that they can be.

Will Harte [00:52:35] I mean, it's just slaughter. It's a real live video game right there, blowing something up.

David Todd [00:52:51] What do you think the appeal is to the folks that make a practice of doing this?

Will Harte [00:52:56] I have no idea. I can't relate to it. I have shot quail. I have shot dove. I never shot a deer or anything like that. It's too much work. I go to HEB and buy steak, and be back before you get that thing cleaned. You know, I'm being facetious, but it's just, it'd never, I could go look at it, but why kill it, you know? Then what? You've got some work.

David Todd [00:53:23] So, I think there's this, you said a couple of times, that some of these wildlife problems are because people just are not aware. They're not literate in some sense, you know, about the natural world or about reading and writing, literally. And I know that you've been involved with charter schools, and I thought maybe you could talk a little bit about why that seems to be a good option to you to try to not just talk to folks about the natural world, but about how the world in general works.

Will Harte [00:54:02] Well, education, in my opinion, is the only way to heal our problems. We have let several generations go, pass, whatever the word is, pass, graduate without even a sixth grade education. So, I mean, we've got to turn it around. And so I just, I believe strongly in education. I believe that the parents should be able to choose which school their child goes to. And I think parents know what's best for their kids. So it's not any more complicated than that.

Will Harte [00:54:42] I happen to be acquainted with some of the most fantastic schools in the United States - you know, classical, STEM, you know, just name it. And these are schools that 100% of their graduates matriculate to an accredited four-year college. That's what they all could do. These are not rich white kids in these charter schools. These are kids of the lowest economic strata, stratum. And they can all learn. So I just, I mean, it's that simple. I've seen it. I've watched it happen for the last 12 years. It's an amazing thing.

Will Harte [00:55:28] So, but education's the issue that if we don't solve it, we're, we're finished.

David Todd [00:55:39] And so, it sounds like the key thing with these charter schools is the factor of choice.

Will Harte [00:55:48] Right. And the fact that they do the job they say they're going to do. And if they don't, you move them out. You don't have a choice. You're stuck in a school that's going to turn out, you know, sixth grade level high school graduate who can't get a job. And there's just no excuse for that. So it's just real simple. Why are we forcing people to accept and use a failing educational program. And there are plenty of competitors. There are people who are really, really good at growing, you know, scalable charter school programs. And we need to turn them loose.

David Todd [00:56:39] Okay. Well, so you talked a little bit about the charter school movement, which I guess is for younger people. But I think your family has been involved in education at other levels. And I'm thinking here about the Harte Research Institute, and I think that there's the Harte Research Support Foundation that you've had a role in.

Will Harte [00:57:03] Right.

David Todd [00:57:03] And I was hoping that you could take us back to some of your first involvement. And I think that you knew Sylvia Earle?

Will Harte [00:57:17] I had, Sylvia Earle and I have a mutual friend. And that friend is, was in the Explorers Club. And there was a dinner, at NASA in Houston. And Sylvia Earle was going to speak about the oceans, and an astronaut was going to speak about outer space. And she parked me next to Sylvia Earle at the table. And I, you know, in classic fashion hadn't done any background. I just heard Sylvia Earle is great - I'll go.

Will Harte [00:57:50] Two days later I'm at a dinner. Turned to her, I said, "Do you know Bob Ballard?" God. And she and Bob don't get along, and that's not her deal. She's all science. And I went, and as I looked over to her, I saw about 40 people standing behind her, with books in their hand. And the book is "Sea Change", which is right here on the table and oh, hell, way to go, Will.

Will Harte [00:58:20] And, I read it and my father was at that time thinking about what sort of the gift he could make to the City of Corpus Christi, a place which had been very good to him. And, I gave him that book. I said, "You know, after I read it, I said you ought to read this because he is big on the ocean and Gulf of Mexico, bays and estuaries, habitat, blah, blah, blah.

Will Harte [00:58:48] And, they met in New York, where Dad spent a lot of time back then. And she was constantly traveling all over the world. And they became best friends. And she became the founding chairman of the advisory committee, I guess, what we call the advisory board. And she was just a magnet. Between Dad and Sylvia, every top environmental group got on that board. And we had, I had a good friend in San Antonio actually living in Monterey now as an American citizen, and he knew everybody in Mexico. And we had, you know, had the most outstanding people in U.S. and Mexico; of course, Cuba doesn't have any, but as a tri-national group, we nailed it. Now, I say, "we", they nailed it. But that was the deal. They just became best friends.

Will Harte [00:59:47] And, she's the reason, if someone called from the Harte Research Institute, they got their call returned, because they knew of her, and they heard about it and all that. You know, otherwise it would have been a little boil-up and then, you know, it's over.

But it had a great start. And they had great leadership and fantastic scientists and chairs and worked out pretty good.

Will Harte [01:00:21] So, indirectly, I led Dad to that conclusion. At least I led him to Sylvia because, you know, he could have put a different board together. You know, they'd still be, you know, working a very limited scope compared to what they are now.

David Todd [01:00:42] So, there are a couple of other organizations that I think you've been active with that again have this sort of conservation bent. One is the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation. Can you talk a little bit about what you think that foundation's goal is and what your role has been there, what your particular interest is?

Will Harte [01:01:05] I have, I'm going to blame management for this. It is the best managed foundation in history, and that's the leadership, Annie Brown. I mean: \$150 million. I mean, she has had parks built. I mean, she's just, it's extensive, the scope of the work that's been done there. But mainly it's creating parks. And now Lee Bass and Dan Friedkin have been extraordinarily generous and there are others. But those two, I mean, you could probably say that half the bills have been paid by those two or certainly half the funding, at least more than half the funding of parks.

Will Harte [01:01:54] And, that's really the key - more parks. People need to get outdoors. So it's access and it's location. It's protecting habitat, you know, estuary and coastal habitat. With the new park near Palacios. I can't think of the city right now. The new park outside of Fort Worth. And just it just goes on and on. But it's, it's been extremely successful and extremely well funded and cared for.

Will Harte [01:02:26] But I know Annie very well, and she's fantastic. And so I take no credit there. Now I've given a little bit of money. But I'm just saying it's all about a very small group who have worked very hard to make the dream of additional parks and facilities come true.

David Todd [01:02:54] So, is there a way to explain to somebody who's maybe an indoor person or an urban person, why parks are valuable? I think you talked earlier about how habitat is valuable for wildlife, but why are parks and access to those places valuable for people? We don't live in parks.

Will Harte [01:03:20] It's healing. I mean, to me, I just pinch myself every day. I'm doing some grunt work, manual labor or anything. Yeah. That's a pretty good life. I think a park can do that to a person. I think it is just taking that first step. And because we're so urban, it's, the need is greater than ever. And yet it seems to be, you know, further and further from reach. But it's not. I mean, the way the parks are, are situated and the new ones coming on. They're very close to highly, heavily populated urban areas, which is what you need. I don't know how to explain.

Will Harte [01:04:17] I just, my daughter was in an Outward Bound program at age 12. I lied about her age. She turned 13 while she was there, but, in New England. And there were some kids from Boston in this group and she went to summer camp in New England. So she was at a session at camp and then did that Outward Bound deal. There were kids that lived in Boston that had never seen the ocean. Now, how do you do that? They had never seen the ocean. They had never been outdoors. They were scared to death. A couple of them went home after a thunderstorm.

Will Harte [01:04:59] And so that, to me, best describes where we are. But obviously I have no idea how to follow on that. But I think you cure it by taking that second dose, but some people are cured with one and they can't get enough of it. I think parks are, I don't know the numbers of usage, of visitors, but I think nationally it's very high and maybe it's, you know, a single demographic, I don't know. But I think they're healing. They're fun, even if you're just walking in the woods.

David Todd [01:05:44] Well. So those seem like two different things: that, something that's healing that, you know, is good for your health and your mental outlook, and then something that's fun, or do you just equate the two - that if it's fun, does it make you feel better?

Will Harte [01:06:01] So, for me, it's fun.

David Todd [01:06:02] Good for your soul. Yeah, it's fun. And vice versa.

Will Harte [01:06:05] Yeah. We may be putting in a water line and maybe cleaning troughs, you know, maybe just pure manual labor. And, to me, it's fun.

Will Harte [01:06:17] But I think that, again, the health profile of our country is such that that first step is daunting. You may have to go at gunpoint. You know, you're just pretty damn sure you're not going to like it, but I don't know how else to put it. I think that they are healing adventures, for the most part, because it is visiting a different planet.

David Todd [01:06:55] A couple of other groups that you've been affiliated with that I think would be good to hear your thoughts about. One is the Texas Wildlife Association. I think you serve on the board or did?

Will Harte [01:07:10] I did briefly. A lot of things happened in the months before I moved out here. And, you know, it's 13 hours round trip and there was no Zoom. We had really bad satellite service and now we've got StarLink and it's fantastic, but that's three months old or whatever. So I didn't, the participation was more difficult, but it is an outstanding group of people.

Will Harte [01:07:39] And, you can black this out of the recording. You need to talk to Steve Lewis. If you don't know Steve Lewis, you need to meet Steve Lewis. He is Mr. Everybody, doing everything. In fact, there's a dinner next Wednesday night. Do you want to go with us? Honoring Carter Smith.

David Todd [01:08:02] That's a great person to honor.

Will Harte [01:08:04] You want to go? Kyle, Texas. We're going with a bunch of other people. Steve will be there. Steve's putting this on. He was one of the five founders of TWA. The rest of them were, I think, quite a bit older. But he never quit and it's branched out. Youth hunting: I participated in South Texas. Not here. Distance. We know you can get somebody out here easy, you know, south of San Antonio. But the educational programs: I'm just reading we have (I'm on several boards with Steve), well he can't be there because he's going to be meeting school busses at the East Foundation in South Texas. I know those school busses come from charter schools that Steve and I worked hard to get into San Antonio and elsewhere.

Will Harte [01:08:54] So, I'm just saying you need to know Steve. He's close with the Briscoe Foundation, Briscoe Library, or whatever, Briscoe Media, rancher, lawyer, banker, da, da, da,

and just a great guy and his vision, and he's on the foundation board of Parks and Wildlife. And he has a great vision.

David Todd [01:09:15] And what do you think the Wildlife Association is seeking to accomplish? And, you know, how did that Venn diagram that you mentioned before, where does your interest kind of overlap with TWA?

Will Harte [01:09:29] Well, again, it's kind of like it's a private park. We have, before COVID, we had 2 to 300 people spend at least one night here. You know, there were Wounded Warrior projects at first. We had our own program, in fact, and thank God that the facilities elsewhere were better and the need for it fell dramatically when we finally, you know, removed troops. But we think, Pam and I, we think the highest and best use of this property is putting people on it. That's very difficult. But we did a pretty good job.

Will Harte [01:10:08] And so, that's I think the Venn diagram of TWA is husbandry, management, being a good custodian. Now, I don't know that they push visitors that much, but most of the people I know are sharing types and they'll get kids out and they'll do, you know, youth hunt or something like that.

Will Harte [01:10:33] But, it's just been a group of people loving the same thing and trying to figure out how to spread the word. I mean, be the best work with it for me. You know, some places are 300 acres or, you know, there's no minimum. And so everybody's welcome to come and learn from us. And, you know, if you've got some neighbors that are interested from a, you know, some kind of cooperative there for either hunting or game management or, you know, wildlife viewing. You know, it's just, it's a, it's a community. Really special people.

David Todd [01:11:21] Okay. So another group that I caught sight of that you were involved with is the Texas Agricultural Land Trust and I'm just intrigued by their efforts to try to stem the tide on fragmentation and keep that that sort of culture going too...

Will Harte [01:11:41] Right.

David Todd [01:11:41] Of working lands and people on the landscape. And I was curious, you know, what is it about the Trust that appeals to you and how you got involved with that.

Will Harte [01:11:58] Well, I was invited to be a member of the board when they found it. So I was there. Blair Fitzsimmons founded it. Blair's just, she's like Pam, just get out of the way. Uh, and I just thought easements were great. I've been on AFT and AFT really didn't, they had lost the conservation easement. They'd forgotten about that because it's work. You got to raise money and do it. And they weren't interested in that.

Will Harte [01:12:29] So TALT is, and was, and did. And I think they're twice TNC now in terms of acreage.

Will Harte [01:12:37] But for instance, Steve Lewis - Claytie Williams was trying to negotiate an easement. And I think after six months of trying, he said, "Aw, the hell with it." And somehow he got in touch with TALT. Steve Lewis showed up. They had a deal in 48 hours. But, you know, it was red tape, and let us tell you how to do business versus you know what you're doing. You've been here 50 years, and you want to preserve it. Let's talk. And that's, it's just that simple.

Will Harte [01:13:12] And we have a TNC easement. We've never had a problem. It's and, you know, it's just Pam driving around, always Pam, with whoever the head is, at the preserve. And because obviously we're not doing much and we're restricted from doing things that we wouldn't want to do anyway. It's a simple thing. But it was all about negotiating something, as peers, not as you know, we're the TNC and we know what you ought to do and.

Will Harte [01:13:48] So, TALT's great and again Steve pops up. He just stepped down as chair there a couple of months ago. But it's just a common sense approach.

Will Harte [01:14:01] It's not a... Pam and I had a property under contract by the Observatory. And it really wasn't what I wanted. And I told the broker, a guy in Fort Davis, I said, "I don't like the places that they've chosen". And there was three tracts that are still, probably seven. But three of them, they had building sites. And they'd already chosen something or designated them. And I said, I don't want to do that. I want to put one over here in the hills away from everything. It'll be a green house, no power, no nothing. And I'll just like make do. "Oh no, you can't do that." I said, "I'll put it on stilts. When it's over, I'll remove it and pull the piers out of the ground." And no, "I'm sorry, you can't do that". And I'm going to work with these people? I don't think that's going to work out.

Will Harte [01:14:52] So, they actually did work out beautifully here, but it was just that whole attitude: "We know better". And TALT, I think, is one of those: "We know you know better. That's why we're talking." You want to preserve all the hard work that you've done, instead of flip it to a developer or whatever, because some of the properties are in very attractive locations and could easily have been built.

Will Harte [01:15:17] But it's just different people. It's always the people. So in this case, they are very different.

David Todd [01:15:24] And whether it's TNC or Texas Agricultural Land Trust, both are using this easement tool. What, is there anything you can say, especially for folks where that's a new idea, whether it's the habitat fragmentation problem or the easement as a response to that? Can you just talk a little bit about that? You know, whatever group is using that tool, what you think about it?

Will Harte [01:15:56] I'm not sure I understand that the easement is simply to preserve the property in its current state. And Keena did that here. She was on the TNC board, so it was a TNC deal. But that's her ethic. This property had been under contract with developers, and I'll give James King, the broker I've been mentioning before and give him a word here. He snatched victory out of the jaws of defeat. He came up with the price. It was \$100,000 more than the appraisal they had in their hand or something and got it. And so that was step one to preserve. And then Keena agreed to it and so forth.

Will Harte [01:16:44] So it's, it's just what you think about it. If you're there, you sit on it and, you know, around Kerrville and then cut it out into, you know, four acre tracts, it will have no meaning to you.

Will Harte [01:16:57] But if you love what you're doing, or you love a particular area, I think Ted Turner uses them, maybe he doesn't, I don't know. It doesn't matter. Right now, they're all in one piece, but it's just something you want to keep.

Will Harte [01:17:11] And James King got the TNC done. I can't think, Tom McIvor, I guess. He worked on him for years, he and Andy Sansom. James was on the ground here working for TNC. So, yeah, McIvor didn't want his beautiful Mount Livermore ranch, which we don't see any antennas on top of, or big houses, which is good. He wanted it to stay that way.

Will Harte [01:17:43] So, it's just, you know how you feel about the land. If you're there to knock a home by cutting it up, why it just obviously has no meaning to you. I hope I answered your question.

David Todd [01:18:07] Yes.

Will Harte [01:18:07] Maybe I've talked all the way around it.

David Todd [01:18:08] No, no. I think sometimes it's one of those topics that you can't explain to people who don't understand it. But it it seems almost instinctual to you.

Will Harte [01:18:18] But it's, it's almost like, well, that's the house I grew up in. Now, you can just about everybody'd probably say that, but not everybody can. But, I mean, it's that deep a feeling. I went to the house that I lived in San Angelo. I remembered everything. And it was a law office at that time. You know, someone had taken a house and. But I'm just saying, it's that personal, and it's, it's a feeling that we want it to stay this way.

Will Harte [01:18:49] And I've got TNC on one side. I got Bob Ayres up north. Bob's, it's in the foundation. I'm not worried about that. And I've got my neighbor next door, who mows my grass for me. And so I'm very happy with him and that. And they love their property and they might well put an easement. But I'm well insulated, and that's good for me. There's not enough water out here. I've got to say all the things I said I didn't want. I didn't know I wasn't going to get any water with the place. It's 800 feet deep. Five gallons a minute. Can you say storage? Yeah, so, but it's, it is what it is.

Will Harte [01:19:33] And, that would have been a hellacious development. I mean, it would have been a checkerboard and then ... It was Terlingua Ranch. We were next to it down there in Brewster County. What a mess. And TNC stopped that happening here. It's very pretty place. It would have sold. But it would have been, you know, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, until just trashed.

David Todd [01:20:06] So, I think we're sort of drawing to the close here. And I'm kind of going back in my mind thinking a little bit about some of the things you told us about with, you know, your upbringing and ranching and land and education and wildlife. And I am curious, through all this, you seem to have this sense of time that, you know, that we lost a generation of kids...

Will Harte [01:20:41] Oh God.

David Todd [01:20:42] That didn't have this exposure in education. And then you're also your patient about being willing to look at a piece of land and let it heal itself on its own pace. And I was curious, if you talk about how you view progress over time and how you deal with it. A lot of the time I think we have a semester-by-semester, or business-quarter-by-business-quarter. But the stuff you're talking about is generational. And I don't know if that's just me looking in at your life or if that's something that you think about.

Will Harte [01:21:22] Oh, I do. I. I worry about it. I look at the mess I'm leaving my kids and grandkids. And demographics are not in our favor. And they're not in the favor of any of the developed countries, and some of the underdeveloped may have the same problem. But for us to maintain this country, we need younger people and they're being imported right now or they're coming here.

Will Harte [01:22:04] And, I'll tell you, reading - two separate books, same author - it changed how I feel about that. But the key to making that happen, making their inclusion and participation happen in an orderly fashion is all about education. They can be educated. They came here for a better life. I'm not wild about the manner that they took, but they're here, they're not leaving.

Will Harte [01:22:38] And, I thought, you know, I can bitch about it all that I want to. But it made me realize that we really need to kick this education program in the ass and particularly expand choice, because choice is competition and competition is good. I can't think of anything it's not good for. It causes people to do their best, or get out of the business, I guess.

Will Harte [01:23:08] But that's, and that's where we are. And I've got some. I'm on a charter school group we have that is just fantastic. Steve Louis. Henry B. Gonzalez, the third, Victoria Rico, and I are the four trustees of that deal. We're the kind of the traffic control over the charter schools that have come to San Antonio. Bring them in and help us grow. We have a CEO who's an outstanding young man, just brand new one, replacing another outstanding one. And we have a meeting in two weeks.

Will Harte [01:23:51] And, I just want to say, you know, immigration never comes up for us. You know, we have really got to close this deal. Texas is not, it's the beginning. For many it's just the end. They're going to be here and we can't continue to have the kind of educational program that we've had. It wasn't working then, it isn't working now. And so we've got to ramp it up and make sure it works in the future. Keep all these kids and they have a job, have opportunity, have a family, buy a house.

Will Harte [01:24:28] So, we have... but that's, that's my education pitch. I just think it's, Pam looks for a window to jump out of when I start talking about it, but I can't help it. I mean, she's all for it, but she's heard it. I probably talk in my sleep.

David Todd [01:24:49] Yeah. Well, I appreciate you sharing that with me.

David Todd [01:24:54] Well, you talk about the future of the, you know, our own communities. What do you what do you think about the future of wildlife in general and then maybe some of these apex predators that I think you've been thinking about as well?

Will Harte [01:25:12] Well, fragmentation, which is the anti-TALT or whatever TALT's, you know, doing its best to forestall, preclude, I guess preclude, because it's permanent. That's, I think, the biggest threat.

Will Harte [01:25:28] But I think wildlife will have regional homes. It won't... you know, Central Texas, San Antonio, Austin, Houston Triangle, I'll just throw Dallas in there, it's just going to be tough - so densely populated.

Will Harte [01:25:48] But west Texas and far north Texas and some of the bigger ranches in south Texas, which are, to me, tremendous assets. East Ranch, Kleberg, I mean, the King

Ranch, Kenedy Ranch - fantastic. Two of them are coastal. Armstrong Ranch, Yturria Ranch, where people are caring for their property, and caring for the wildlife. I mean, those will be islands, but I think you can have much bigger reaches out here.

Will Harte [01:26:27] And all the more reason to focus on something like the lion, which is Davis Mountains and south Texas. Well, with south Texas, I don't know. It would be tough. There'll be some on the King Ranch and they won't talk about it and they won't care about it. And there'll be some out here on these bigger ranches and. You know. They don't do a damn thing. I just, you know, I don't worry about them.

Will Harte [01:26:53] But, I think that's the future. It's going to be spotty. And simply because family farms, family ranches are cut up.

Will Harte [01:27:08] Particularly with the lion - you know, 60 miles overnight, or 24 hours, whatever. It's kind of hard to protect.

David Todd [01:27:25] Okay. Well, covered a lot of ground. Told us a lot.

David Todd [01:27:34] Is there anything that we somehow gave short shrift to? Is there something you'd like to add?

Will Harte [01:27:40] No. It's, I would just say it again, it's all about education. I got here through the experiences I had as a young person, but we've met lots of kids at Sul Ross or at A&M, who just want that life, and all I can say to them is follow your dream. You may never be rich in a monetary way, but if you're out there doing what you love to do, you're ahead of at least about half the rest of the population. And it's a great way of life.

Will Harte [01:28:29] And, I just keep staring out my windows. It's hypnotic. So someone came and asked, "What's the deal with windmills?" I said, "I love them". And I wanted a 30-footer, and I got it.

David Todd [01:28:48] Great. Thank you.

Will Harte [01:28:51] Thank you. It was fun.

David Todd [01:28:53] Well, very interesting and super helpful. Thank you so much.

David Todd [01:28:58] I'm going to hit stop.

Will Harte [01:29:00] All right.

David Todd [01:29:01] Good.