

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Andy Sansom

INTERVIEWER: David Todd

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Zoom [00:00:01] This meeting is being recorded.

David Todd [00:00:05] Okay. Well, good afternoon. I am David Todd. And I have the privilege of being here with Andy Sansom. And with his permission, we intend on recording this interview for research and educational work on behalf of a non-profit group, the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and a website for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for preservation at an archive at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

David Todd [00:00:38] And he would keep all rights to use the recording as he sees fit. It is his to use.

David Todd [00:00:45] And I just want to make sure that's okay with you.

Andy Sansom [00:00:48] Absolutely.

David Todd [00:00:49] Great. Okay.

David Todd [00:00:51] Well, let's get started.

David Todd [00:00:53] It is Monday, July 31st. It's about 2:40 p.m. Central Time. As I said, I'm David Todd and I'm representing the Conservation History Association of Texas, and I am in Austin and we are conducting a remote audio interview with Dr. Andy Sansom, who is in Austin, I believe at this time.

David Todd [00:01:17] Dr. Sansom has played many, many roles in Texas conservation over the years. He has served as executive director of the Nature Conservancy of Texas, as Director of Texas Parks and Wildlife, as a professor of practice in the Department of Geography at Texas State University, as head of the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, and as an instigator in the founding of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation. He's also served as a trustee of the Hershey Foundation, Bat Conservation International, National Audubon Society and other groups. And he is a prolific author with five books, I think at last count, to his name.

Andy Sansom [00:02:00] Nine.

David Todd [00:02:01] Nine!

David Todd [00:02:03] And in addition, many articles for Texas Monthly, Texas Observer of Texas Highways, Texas Parks and Wildlife and other journals and magazines.

David Todd [00:02:13] So today we'll be talking about Mr. Santorum's life and career so far, and especially focus on what he might tell us iconic animals and the story of their protection and restoration in the state. Our list is long. It includes such creatures as the Atlantic tarpon, the bison, black-capped vireo, golden-cheeked warbler, white-tailed deer, desert bighorn sheep, horned lizard, Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, Mexican free-tailed bat, mountain lion, pronghorned antelope, red snapper, shrimp, and whooping crane. And we may even talk about people, but it's a very long list.

David Todd [00:02:56] And I just wanted to thank him for taking the time to talk about some of these things.

Andy Sansom [00:03:00] Thank you, David.

David Todd [00:03:02] Well, it's a pleasure. So I thought we would do this roughly vertically or just to give some rhyme or reason to it.

David Todd [00:03:14] Tarpon have declined since the 1940s. They used to be a very popular sport fish. And I think in 1991, Texas Parks and Wildlife took some steps to try to bring it back by instituting a catch and release plan for them. And I think there have been other efforts to study them as well. But I was wondering if you might give us some idea of what might be behind the tarpon's decline and what you think have been some of the effective efforts to protect it.

Andy Sansom [00:03:50] Well. You know, I'm certainly no expert, but I grew up in the middle of some of the finest tarpon fishing, really, in the Gulf, which was at the mouth of the Brazos. And I remember going down there on weekends and seeing numerous boats catching big fish. And by the time I got to Parks and Wildlife, that fishery had disappeared.

Andy Sansom [00:04:17] Curiously, the only place that I've ever caught a tarpon on the Texas coast is in the saltwater canals leading in to the Dow Chemical property. And I remember fishing there with, actually with Governor Ann Richards. And we caught several tarpon, but they were very, very small comparatively.

Andy Sansom [00:04:42] Interestingly, one of the most, the coolest things about that experience was that, you know, tarpon tail-walk. And I think that's one of the reasons why they have traditionally been such a prized species. And even when they're 12 to 15 inches long, they still do that. They get right up on top of the water when they're hooked and they walk around on their tails. So it's a cool sport, fish.

Andy Sansom [00:05:14] I have caught large tarpon, but in the Florida Keys.

Andy Sansom [00:05:19] You know, I got to think that a major cause of the decline, particularly in waters like the Brazos and Galveston Bay, is pollution. At the time that I was growing up, many of the wastewater treatment plants, I mean, the wastewater from the chemical plants were discharged directly into the Brazos.

David Todd [00:05:56] And so there might have been some sort of toxics or just low dissolved oxygen or something?

Andy Sansom [00:06:01] All of the above.

David Todd [00:06:03] I see.

Andy Sansom [00:06:04] I don't, it's hard for me to imagine, and once again, I'm not an expert, but it's hard for me to imagine that they were, that the decline, which was precipitous, was completely caused by overfishing, because, you know...

Andy Sansom [00:06:22] Another interesting tidbit about tarpon is that probably the most famous tarpon fisherman on the Texas coast was Franklin Roosevelt, who fished for tarpon off of Matagorda Island. And there are photographs of Roosevelt on the back of his presidential boat, in the Tarpon Inn, in Port O'Connor, fishing offshore for tarpon.

David Todd [00:07:00] Boy, celebrities!

Andy Sansom [00:07:02] Yeah.

David Todd [00:07:04] So it Parks and Wildlife instituted this effort to try to protect the population through what I guess was unusual at the time I mean, to have this catch-and-release. How did that happen?

Andy Sansom [00:07:20] Well, I think one of the factors and this would sort of apply to other sports fish species as well, saltwater, was the rise of the, what was then called the Gulf Coast Conservation Association, now called the CCA, which became a major force in protecting sport fisheries. It was founded by a Houstonian named Walter Fondren, who was a tough character. I mean, he was. But he was forceful and he was on the right side of the line. And so we had tremendous support from the leading sport fish organizations for coastal fisheries.

David Todd [00:08:11] I see. So there was a constituency that supported those kind of changes, even if it was a change in the culture and the tradition of, you know, bringing the fish up and hanging it off the dock.

Andy Sansom [00:08:24] Exactly.

David Todd [00:08:26] Interesting. Okay. Well, I think that's that's given us some good insight into tarpon.

David Todd [00:08:37] I would suggest we go on, talk a little bit about bison, because I know you had a really deep involvement in the rescue of the remnants of the south bison herd that was, I guess, at the JA Ranch, and finding a way to save them and put them on public lands. Can you talk about that?

Andy Sansom [00:08:58] Sure. The JA Ranch was owned, is owned, and by the way, it's not, it's a fraction of the size of the original JA. The original ranch included what is now Caprock Canyon State Park, which ironically, is where the bison are. But the JA is owned by the heirs of Goodnight's partner, whose name was Adair. And interestingly, the, probably great-granddaughter of Adair was married for a while to former Senator Teel Bivins from Amarillo.

Andy Sansom [00:09:46] And they, like the King Ranch, reached a point where they felt they, the family had become large, and so they reached a point where they decided that they needed a corporate manager. And this is common in ranches where, after several generations, you know, there's a number of descendants who share ownership, and it becomes very difficult for any one of them to be in charge. And so the King Ranch did that 25 years ago.

Andy Sansom [00:10:30] And the new corporate manager had absolutely no, and this is not a criticism, but he had no emotional attachment to the bison. He was not a descendant of Adair. And these animals can be extremely destructive. The first time I went to see them was in an airplane because we didn't know exactly where they were. And so the only way to find them was to fly. And I remember the herd being disturbed by the airplane and took off running as a group. And they went through a barbed wire fence and it looked like a boat wake because it just completely tore the fence out. And I'm sure those kind of management challenges caused the corporate manager to say, you know, "Enough of this."

Andy Sansom [00:11:29] A little anecdote: the legend is that Goodnight's wife, Mary, said, "Charlie, you're going to kill them all. And so we need to save some of them." And I think that there's enough proof of that, that she did have an involvement in it. But you can also find in the museums of the Panhandle ads that Goodnight published that advertised cattle and bison crossbreeding. So I think that he definitely had profit in mind as well as any desire to to save the last of the southern plains bison.

Andy Sansom [00:12:22] And in fact, and I don't want to be rambling on too much, but the corporate manager called me and said, "You guys want these bison?" And of course, I immediately was absolutely fascinated and compelled to pull it off, though the the old wildlife biologists were not happy because you couldn't hunt them. I mean, they weren't, they really didn't understand why we would do that.

Andy Sansom [00:13:00] However, the regional director up there at the time was a man named Roy Welch. And I assigned Roy to be in charge of the project. And you can find, if you Google up Roy Welch, there's a famous interview with him on NBC News about the bison, while he's now deceased. But he was very innovative. And the coolest thing that he did, because these animals required vaccination, they required DNA tests, I mean, they required a whole bunch of hands-on management, is that he engaged Temple Grandin (do you recognize that name?) to design the pens at Caprock Canyon State Park. And one of Grandin's graduate students actually worked there on the project. And so they designed a set of pens to to get their hands on their bison for DNA and vaccination purposes. And Roy was the one that that made all that happen.

Andy Sansom [00:14:15] A couple of things: after I left Parks and Wildlife, the bison were released from a 300-acre pasture that had a fence around it, like Trump's wall along the border. And they were released into the park. And that also was controversial because there was a feeling that they would get out and the neighbors would complain or they would interact with visitors. But it's been very, very successful.

Andy Sansom [00:14:50] And I can't tell you what the numbers are, but my recollection was that we were we acquired about 42 animals. Some of them had to be taken out of the herd because we discovered cattle DNA in them. We did find some other pure southern plains bison that were owned by Ted Turner and did some exchanges with him so we could diversify the genetics. But now I think there may be as many as 200 of them. I mean, they've really been successful.

Andy Sansom [00:15:26] And the neatest story that I have to tell you about it was that after the original resistance on behalf of some of your old-line staff, when I wrote the book on Southern Plains bison, I spent several days up at Caprock and in that area, and one of the biologists that worked on the project was named Danny Swepson. And he took me around and

there's a museum up there that had a lot of stuff on Goodnight, and I spent some time there with him. And when I said goodbye to him to drive back to Lubbock, to fly home, he said to me, "That is the most significant thing that I did in my career at Parks and Wildlife".

Andy Sansom [00:16:12] So, I think that by the time it was over, that even the most hardcore guys felt like they had done something very significant, which made me feel really good.

David Todd [00:16:28] Boy, a real change of heart, it sounds like.

Andy Sansom [00:16:31] Right?

David Todd [00:16:33] Okay.

Andy Sansom [00:16:34] In your letter, you mentioned Wolfgang Frey.

David Todd [00:16:38] Yes sir.

Andy Sansom [00:16:39] Who is that? I tried to Google him up, and I mean, I didn't recognize that name.

David Todd [00:16:47] So I've seen his name. I think he was affiliated with the World Wildlife Fund, and he apparently was an early one to realize that the herd of bison at the JA Ranch was linked to the south bison herd of the 19th century school. And I think he may have contacted Parks and Wildlife and encouraged some kind of response. But, you know, it sounds like maybe the Bivins and the Adair family was more involved.

Andy Sansom [00:17:24] It would have been before my time, because I would have known about it.

David Todd [00:17:27] Okay. All right. Yeah.

David Todd [00:17:31] Well, let's talk about another thing that was pretty iconic, I think, during your period at Parks and Wildlife. And that's the whole controversy over these two endangered songbirds, the golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo, which as small as the birds were, they had an outsized impact on, you know, the habitat of the central Texas region and also about attitudes about private lands. And I thought maybe you'd have some insights you could share.

Andy Sansom [00:18:03] Well, you know, the story of those two birds is really, really meaningful in the context of how growth has proceeded here in central Texas. I guess the thing that we remember the most is that the leadership of the City of Austin, which at that time I believe was the current mayor, Kirk Watson, understood that if the city was going to grow, it was going to have to mitigate the habitat loss for the particularly the golden-cheeked warbler, but also the black-capped vireo.

Andy Sansom [00:18:41] And so, the acquisition of what is now the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge and other lands owned by the Nature Conservancy and the City of Austin is unprecedented. I mean, I don't know there's anything else like that elsewhere in the country, and it becomes more meaningful every day as the Hill Country seems to be disappearing before our eyes.

Andy Sansom [00:19:09] It's interesting. It's still, it still has some controversy attached to it. I don't know whether you noticed this during this legislative session, but the legislature tried to pass and it may have passed, I just didn't track it that closely, a law that would prohibit cities like Austin from prohibiting the cutting of mature cedar. You know, the legislature has over the past several sessions becomes increasingly dominant, attempting to dominate local government and keep local governments from enacting policies which limit growth. And one of those was an attempt to stop Austin and other cities from prohibiting the cutting of mature cedar.

David Todd [00:20:22] That's interesting. So these, it seems like these controversies never entirely go away, I mean, from the era of the eighties and nineties through the current day.

Andy Sansom [00:20:33] The cities, not solely for black-capped vireo and golden-cheeked warbler, but the cities of San Antonio and Austin, counties of Bexar and Travis and Hayes, have spent more money protecting wildlife habitat, watersheds and recharge areas over the Edwards than the entire state and federal government combined over the last 20 years or so, through county and city bond issues.

David Todd [00:21:05] Boy, that's pretty stark.

Andy Sansom [00:21:07] Yes.

David Todd [00:21:08] And I guess some of this is through self-imposed bond referenda?

Andy Sansom [00:21:15] All local bond elections - all of which have passed by overwhelming majorities. And they're not solely about the birds. They're also about watersheds or recharge areas, but they tend to overlap.

David Todd [00:21:36] So, when we broke off, we were talking about warblers and vireos. And if you'd like, we could move on. There's again another thorny subject that I think you can add a lot of insight to, and that's this ongoing dilemma of how to regulate deer hunting and breeding and selling and trading, which has come up with some pretty innovative ways of doing it. I mean, this, the local management associations seem to have been very successful and popular. But then there have been, of course, these ongoing controversies over high fences and breeding operations and, of course, the Chronic Wasting Disease. So, I was hoping that that maybe you can enlighten us about some of the highlights that you've seen in your era.

Andy Sansom [00:22:33] Well, when I got to Parks and Wildlife, the wildlife division was still trapping and transporting white tails. There was a time in Texas where, in many parts of the state, white-tailed deer had become virtually extinct. And so over the years, what the department did to recover, help the species recover, was to trap them in places where they were plentiful and then take them to areas for reintroduction. And literally in 1990, when I got to Parks and Wildlife, they were still doing that.

Andy Sansom [00:23:18] Now one of the most interesting pieces of fallout from that is you may remember that, rightly or wrongly, my predecessor was basically asked to leave as the executive director over trapping and transporting because what had happened, an offshoot of that, was that influential people would have the Department bring animals to their ranches. And that became a scandal. And when we get to antelope, I'll refer back to that. But that was an unintended consequence of it.

Andy Sansom [00:24:13] But I can tell you that I had only been in the job about three months after this scandal had occurred, and there were articles in Texas Monthly and all kinds of publications, and I got a call from Gib Lewis, who is a close friend of mine today, who was Speaker of the House, and he said, "I bought me a new ranch up at lamb passes. Ain't got no deer, you know. Can you get me some deer?" And I said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, that seems like to me to be a sure-fire way to get my name and our name in the paper, and I don't want my name in the paper."

Andy Sansom [00:24:51] And he was not happy. But, but, that was just the way the practice at the time.

Andy Sansom [00:25:06] Another component that you mentioned was the widespread use of high fences. And at the time, just the presence of high fences was very controversial. I have to tell you that today, most of the really knowledgeable range scientists are in favor of high fences, and the reason is, is because of free-ranging exotics. The Hershey Ranch, which you visited, has a very large population of axis deer which compete and are causing problems with the habitat. The only reason they're there is because there's no high fence. And so the attitudes toward fencing have really fairly dramatically changed. And I think it's largely because of the tremendous explosion in population of free-ranging exotics, particularly in the Hill Country.

Andy Sansom [00:26:24] The other thing, since those days, it is apparent is that in many parts of the state, white-tailed deer are now, at best, adversely affecting habitat and at worst, an ecological problem simply because of overpopulation. And for that reason alone, among others, we established the managed lands deer permit, which allows for landowners to hunt outside the seasons, oftentimes more deer than the license allows. But in exchange they have to adhere to fairly strict management guidelines on their properties. But that has caused an upgrade in the quality of the whitetail herds, but also a reduction in critical areas in population.

Andy Sansom [00:27:27] And of course, the other thing that has occurred since the early nineties is the widespread use of deer breeding. And if you asked me if I was in favor of it, I would say, "No". But at the same time, it is a widespread practice and some would argue, many would argue that the fact that landowners are increasingly managing and depending on white-tailed deer as a source of income has been good for the habitat. And that is true.

Andy Sansom [00:28:13] I have been, I had close friends who have ranches where deer from other locations have been introduced in order to improve the genetics, and that doesn't always require breeding pens. They can, you know, animals can be released into the herd for the purpose of increasing genetic diversity. And I've seen that. I've seen the benefits of that.

Andy Sansom [00:28:52] The danger that I've seen, particularly with this ongoing controversy over Chronic Wasting Disease is that there are people who believe that white-tailed deer no longer should be managed as wildlife, but should be managed by the Agriculture Department. In fact, my recollection is, and you can check me on this, that when Rick Perry was Secretary of Agriculture, he advocated that whitetail should be managed by Department of Agriculture, not Parks and Wildlife, because they're increasingly managed like livestock.

Andy Sansom [00:29:40] Here's all kinds of, you know, I, once again, I use Hershey as an example, we have a managed lands deer permit and we start hunting 1st of October, and we hunt through February. We do a very, very accurate census before the season begins and the Department gives us a quota, which we've never met. But the primary activity which allows the harvest to be relatively robust is youth hunting? And that's a good thing. I believe really strongly in, frankly, in having kids experience the outdoors in any number of ways. But hunting is one of them.

Andy Sansom [00:30:41] We also, for the first time this past season, had a hunt for women who work in conservation organizations but have never hunted. And all the guides were women, and all of these women shot a deer for the first time, and they taught them how to butcher them, and all of that.

Andy Sansom [00:31:03] So, the need for a healthier harvest than perhaps we'd seen in years past, has brought issues like youth hunting and other ways of introducing, you know, people who haven't hunted to the outdoors has becoming an important part of harvesting.

David Todd [00:31:29] That's interesting. So I guess a two-fold benefit. On the one hand, you get the deer down to a manageable size that's not going to harm the habitat, but also that you're exposing young people and maybe groups of folks that haven't had that experience before and might appreciate it?

Andy Sansom [00:31:45] Right, Right.

David Todd [00:31:46] Well, that's really innovative. That's great.

David Todd [00:31:51] Well, let's talk about sheep, and not the usual kind of sheep, but maybe desert bighorn sheep. It sounds like during your tenure, there was a pretty robust effort to restock the bighorn populations in Texas. Can you tell us how that came about?

Andy Sansom [00:32:12] Yeah. The transactions that resulted in the import of desert bighorn sheep were like, we would trade wild turkey to Nevada for bighorn sheep. I mean, I'm making that up. But you had to enter into a transaction with a state that had a healthy population of bighorns that resulted in a like-kind of exchange. And so I went up to the Nevada Wildlife Commission to get the first sheep. And I was told by the staff that it had all been worked out, that my presence at the Commission meeting was strictly pro forma and it was all greased.

Andy Sansom [00:33:07] And they met in Las Vegas. And so I peered at this Nevada Commission meeting and showed a slide presentation of where we were going to put them and talked about how important it was for us to restore them, and this and that.

Andy Sansom [00:33:25] And there were 250 people there to oppose it. And I didn't even, I wasn't even able to make my plane coming home because I had to sit there most of the day and listen to all these people get up there and say that the Commission should not approve the export of sheep to Texas because they would all end up on private land and then the public would have no access to them.

Andy Sansom [00:33:54] And so I would get up there and say, you know, we believe that if private landowners have some economic benefit from managing wildlife, that number one, that population will ultimately increase, but also the habitat is improved because they have to do it.

Andy Sansom [00:34:15] Well, at the end of the day, the Commission chairman let each one of the commissioners comment. And every single one of them, but one, was dead opposed to sending the sheep to Texas.

Andy Sansom [00:34:29] And there was a lady on the Commission that was like that a Ken Kramer of Nevada. She was the head of the Sierra Club in Nevada, and she had been appointed to the Commission. And so when it came to her, she said, "You know, I've heard all day about how great it is that we have all this public land in Nevada, and how bad it is that they have all that private land in Texas." And she said, "The last time I checked, we had eight nuclear waste dumps, 52 strip mines, and the rest of our state is overgrazed. And I recommend we get those sheep down to Texas as quickly as possible so they'll survive."

Andy Sansom [00:35:15] Well, they didn't do it. But over the next year or so, the Commission changed. And there was a woman appointed to it who was a member of the Bighorn Sheep Society. And the Bighorn Sheep Society, including people like Clayton Williams, interestingly, were very, very supportive.

Andy Sansom [00:35:34] And so, the first sheep actually went to the Sierra Diablo Wildlife Management area, which is above Van Horn.

Andy Sansom [00:35:46] And I was able to issue the first permit to hunt a sheep in Texas that I think had been granted in the 20th century. And so it was important enough that Governor Clements, who was still in office, so he came over to draw the permit. And we had one of those cages, you know, that you rolled around and people had their, you know, their names in there. And so Governor Clements reaches in this thing and pulls out a card and he goes, "William P. Clements". Oh.

Andy Sansom [00:36:27] But, it was, we required at every ranch that got sheep also have a public hunter. So they could sell one, but they would have to also, for every one they sell, they would have to grant a public hunt.

David Todd [00:36:53] I guess that is a fine line you've had to walk throughout your career, is this public / private land dividing line.

David Todd [00:37:05] So, one of the animals I thought would be wonderful to hear your thoughts about is not anything is as big as a sheep, but is much loved nevertheless. And that's the horned lizard. I guess there's three of them in Texas, but they adorn license plates. And, you know, a lot of kids grew up catching them. But they, it seems like they grew rare maybe in the late sixties, early seventies. And I was wondering if you can talk a little bit about why that might have happened and any efforts to try to bring them back, or to use the the lizard's decline as a way to bring attention to conservation.

Andy Sansom [00:37:50] Well, you know, I think all of that has happened to some degree. I mean, I agree, as you know, on the Texas coast, but I had relatives in the Hill Country. And in fact, we would spend some time every summer at Hunt. And I guess the thing that I remember most about, you know, visiting the Hunt area in the 1950s, was that we would always catch horned toads. I mean, it was just part of the tradition.

Andy Sansom [00:38:22] And today, you know, they've virtually disappeared.

Andy Sansom [00:38:27] The prevailing view, I think, is fire ants. There may be other predators, but I think the fire ant has been the most disruptive.

Andy Sansom [00:38:43] The guy that knows most of most about it is the San Antonio Zoo. And his name is Andy Gluesenkamp. And he is reintroducing them. I know that, I'm sure you know Matt and Peggy Winkler, they just had horned toads reintroduced on their property.

Andy Sansom [00:39:04] And I've recently had some encounters with him. I'd like to know more about, for example, what qualifies a ranch to get them? Do you have to show that you're doing your best to exterminate fire ants? I mean, what are the criteria?

Andy Sansom [00:39:28] But, you know, there's very few species of animal that are more iconic to Texas (it's like the armadillo) than the horned toads. The first wildlife license plate that we sold had a horned toad on it.

David Todd [00:39:51] Well, you know, this may be a chance to talk about, just as an aside, your effort through the years to educate people and I guess these license plates that were, you know, embellished with the picture of a little horny toad helped do that. People saw them and I guess they raised some revenue. How did that idea come to mind?

Andy Sansom [00:40:20] Well, it basically came to mind because we just had no money for non-game species. It's not necessarily that we were prohibited in spending money on non-game species, but it was politically very difficult, because all of the funding for fish and wildlife came from the sale of licenses or taxes on ammunition or fishing gear. And so one of the biggest issues that we faced, and I'm going to have a comment about that when we get to Old Tunnel, was the ability to expand funds for non-game wildlife. And so that first license plate was an attempt to generate revenue that we otherwise would not have in order to be able to spend it on species like the horned toad.

David Todd [00:41:24] That's fascinating. Creative thing to try.

David Todd [00:41:30] So, while we're on reptiles, how about a little conversation about Kemp's ridley sea turtles? I think that, you know, over the years, these sea turtles have become very rare and strandings hit a peak when you were at Parks and Wildlife in 1994. And I think that you and the agency worked hard to try to protect them. And I was hoping that you might be able to talk about some of the measures that were taken.

Andy Sansom [00:42:01] Well, you know, the, if there were ever an example of the critical role played by non-profits or volunteers, it was in Kemp's Ridley turtle, because you had people who, not for pay, would spend time on the beaches, and my recollection is, literally collecting eggs and hatching them in facilities and then reintroducing them because of the predators and other things were very, very hard on baby turtles, you know, coming from the nest.

Andy Sansom [00:42:51] And I remember visiting a lab at A&M Galveston where they were hatching turtles and then taking them back down to South Padre.

Andy Sansom [00:43:02] But a lot of that was made possible by people that were just determined and not being paid to save them.

Andy Sansom [00:43:17] I'm trying to remember the name of that one, that one woman, the turtle lady.

David Todd [00:43:22] Oh, Ila Loetscher, maybe?

Andy Sansom [00:43:23] Yeah. Yeah.

David Todd [00:43:25] I think that's what they called her - "the turtle lady".

Andy Sansom [00:43:28] Yeah.

David Todd [00:43:28] Yeah.

Andy Sansom [00:43:30] Well, you know, she was, you know, she was one of the reasons why, you know, there's still some turtles.

Andy Sansom [00:43:41] We also put measures in to protect them. I mean, there's no cars allowed on Matagorda Island on the beach. There are parts of South Padre where I don't think you can drive. So.

David Todd [00:44:08] What about some of the shrimping regulations, or would you like to talk about that maybe later? I understand that bycatch had traditionally been a problem.

Andy Sansom [00:44:18] Huge problem. The biggest, and I think my recollection is that we spent a lot of time and effort and money trying to determine shrimp nets that would exclude bycatch.

Andy Sansom [00:44:35] But the other thing that I think was the most significant thing that happened to the shrimp industry was limited entry. You know, I wish I still had it. I feel a little bit bad that I turned it, I gave it back to the department. But I, I used to have, framed on my wall, the very first shrimp license that we bought. Because once we capped the number of shrimp boats, then we created a market underneath that where the only way you could get a shrimp license was to buy one from somebody else. And organizations like CCA raised money to buy people out of the industry. And that wouldn't have worked had you not capped the total number of licenses.

Andy Sansom [00:45:34] And my recollection was that the industry itself, with some exceptions, was supportive of that because it did not require them, I mean, they could still, those who held licenses could still shrimp. It didn't take them out of the business, but it created a market where in fact their licenses became fairly valuable.

David Todd [00:46:17] That's interesting. So I guess with the cap on the number of shrimp trawlers out there, this piece of paper, this permit, license, you know, took on value that the shrimper might be able to sell to either CCA or to somebody might want to come into the fishery.

Andy Sansom [00:46:39] Right. And I've been very discouraged that that worked so well, that I've been really discouraged that, for example, we haven't been able to use that same approach in groundwater. The only place where we're doing it is in the Edwards, where they've capped the total amount of groundwater that can be taken but allowed for a market to take place.

Andy Sansom [00:47:13] So, you could either buy people out of groundwater pumping or buy permits. But that won't work unless you cap. The common term for it is cap-and-trade. But it should be used in other natural resource concerns as well, and particularly groundwater.

David Todd [00:47:40] I see. So it's a way to harness the market to push things in a sort of environmentally good way.

Andy Sansom [00:47:47] Right.

David Todd [00:47:49] Okay.

David Todd [00:47:50] Well, earlier when we were talking, you mentioned the Old Tunnel site. And I think that this was related to some of your work to bring back or protect an important colony of a Mexican free-tailed bats. And I was hoping that you could lay out what happened there.

Andy Sansom [00:48:14] Well, two pieces of background. One, I spent one semester in graduate school at Texas Tech. So I had to leave because I would have been drafted and sent to Vietnam if I did not. So I couldn't stay. But I did have one semester and I had a wonderful, wonderful professor who had a very strong impact on my life, with whom I had one of these independent studies.

Andy Sansom [00:48:50] And he called me into his office and he said, (now, David, this was in 1969), he said, "I want you to find photographs and write the history of every railroad tunnel in Texas."

Andy Sansom [00:49:12] And I said, "Oh, my God. I can't imagine!"

Andy Sansom [00:49:17] Well, it turns out there was only like five. And one of them was Old Tunnel. And some classmates of mine at Tech and I drove down there in the spring of '69 and actually trespassed on the property. The rancher was not happy. He came out and caught us and threatened us with arrest if we didn't get off his property.

Andy Sansom [00:49:48] The other thing is that, by way of background, is that bats have been an important part of my life from the time I went to work for the Nature Conservancy and began negotiations to purchase Bracken back in 1983. And next June, I am scheduled for the second time to become chairman of Bat Conservation International. So bats are a huge part of my life.

Andy Sansom [00:50:26] And I worked with a ranch broker when I was in the acquisition job at Parks and Wildlife to work on properties, including Chinati and other ranches, mostly in West Texas. And he called me one time and he told me that they were going to put a subdivision in around Old Tunnel: that the rancher had sold the property and it was going to be developed into a subdivision. And the tunnel was a liability. And so basically my recollection is that what I did was I negotiated a part gift and part sale in order to acquire enough land to protect the tunnel.

Andy Sansom [00:51:16] The irony is, and I certainly have no complaints about what happened, but that was also part of an initiative that I helped with to begin to acquire properties for non-game species. And another example was Candy Abshier Wildlife

Management Area, which is down below Anahuac which has migrating songbirds. So Old Tunnel became one of the tracts that we bought solely for protection of non-game species. And I guess after I left, you know, they decided to make it a state park. And so, but it was originally acquired as a non-game wildlife management area.

David Todd [00:52:12] So I think that one of the continuing ...

Andy Sansom [00:52:19] Wait. I got one other thing.

David Todd [00:52:20] Yes, please go ahead.

Andy Sansom [00:52:21] Two of the other railroad tunnels were on the railroad from Plainview to Estelline up on the Panhandle, one of which collapsed. But I ended up acquiring that abandoned railway as a trail. So I actually acquired another. And it has a large bat population.

Andy Sansom [00:52:45] In fact, when I first visited it back in the sixties, it was still, the railroad was still running.

Andy Sansom [00:52:52] But today it's called the Caprock Canyons State Trailway and it does have an active bat cave.

David Todd [00:53:01] Well, that must be a great attraction for folks visiting Caprock Canyon. That's great.

Andy Sansom [00:53:07] It's like 60 miles long. I mean, it's a long trail.

David Todd [00:53:11] And a shady place to be when it's sunny.

Andy Sansom [00:53:16] Right. Right.

David Todd [00:53:16] Well, so I'm intrigued, like I think a lot of Texans are by the dilemma that we find ourselves in with the mountain lion, kind of an outlier, in that evidently pretty much no regulation, unlike other states that have endangered species protections, or where they have, you know, some sort of game status for the animal. And I was hoping you could sort of give us a little bit of background about why Texas is kind of an outlier and what the efforts have been to try to shift things.

Andy Sansom [00:53:49] Well, back in, you know, '91 or so, Wayne Pacelle (you recognize that name?).

David Todd [00:53:57] No sir.

Andy Sansom [00:53:59] He is the head of the Humane Society of the United States. He became harshly critical of Texas for not protecting mountain lions. So, the issue was made front page actually by humane interests back in the early nineties.

Andy Sansom [00:54:23] So, I called wildlife biologists in and I said, "You know, what do we know about these things?" And the answer was nothing. You mean there's no research? Nope. There was absolutely no attempt to even understand the health of, or not, of mountain lion populations in Texas.

Andy Sansom [00:54:48] And so, I called a meeting. Most of the focus was in the wool-growing area, which was like around Devil's River, that area, which was a big wool-growing region until the wool subsidies were removed by the federal government. And you don't see quite as many wool-bearing sheep being raised.

Andy Sansom [00:55:21] But the mountain lions were particularly problematic for sheep.

Andy Sansom [00:55:26] And so, I held a conference, I guess, in, probably, in Eagle Pass, in which we just invited people to come in and try to figure out what people knew about them and what people's views were.

Andy Sansom [00:55:49] And we had protesters. Among them was Clayton Williams. I mean, the local people out there were furious that we would even have a meeting to discuss mountain lions. And Terry [Hershey] was on the board at that time. And I still have this beautiful painting that she gave me of two mountain lions because it was my first big crisis. I mean, it was, and basically, we, you know, our hands were tied. There wasn't a whole lot we were able to do because there was no support, either in the legislature or on the Commission, other than people like Terry.

Andy Sansom [00:56:36] An interesting thing happened at that meeting, and that was that one of the Pacelle's underlings was an attractive woman. And I noticed before the meeting was over that she had formed some kind of friendship with Clayton Williams, even though they were literally at complete odds.

Andy Sansom [00:57:05] Today, I think largely because of two things, number one, there has been...

Andy Sansom [00:57:13] Oh, by the way, in trying to figure out what was known about mountain lions, we did collect information relative to sightings. And I believe in the early nineties we determined that mountain lions had been sighted in every county, including Harris County. I don't think that's true today.

Andy Sansom [00:57:39] But the two things that I think have changed the game ... Three.

Andy Sansom [00:57:46] One is Louis Harveson, out at Sul Ross, has done some research in South Texas that has pretty much proven that mountain lions are in decline.

Andy Sansom [00:57:59] By the way, we did, at one point in time, collar mountain lions in Big Bend, at the Big Bend Ranch. So we had a natural place to study them all of a sudden. And we found them ranging as far away as northern New Mexico. I mean, so they tended to really move.

Andy Sansom [00:58:22] The second factor was the production of "Deep in the Heart", which has some of the most compelling mountain lion footage, you know, that's ever been filmed.

Andy Sansom [00:58:39] And then the third factor is the current chairman of the Commission, Beaver Aplin, the owner of Buc-ee's, who is brave. I mean, he's probably as influential with people like Governor Abbott as anybody in Texas. And he's not bound by, you know, traditional beliefs. He's open-minded, and so he has created a commission to study what should be done relative to mountain lions. And he's appointed Joseph Fitzsimons, who is

a rancher and former chairman, to be the chairman of it. And among the people on it are Ben Masters, who produced the film, and Pamela Harte, who's led efforts to protect mountain lions in West Texas. So I think the third major factor is you have a chairman that is not not bound by tradition. And he's actually been out looking for mountain lions himself with biologists and others. So he's personally interested in making some improvement.

Andy Sansom [01:00:00] And that's not a criticism of former chairs. It's just that you have, all of a sudden, you have a guy that just is willing to stick his neck out.

David Todd [01:00:12] I guess it takes a lot of courage to change traditions like that.

Andy Sansom [01:00:17] Yeah.

Andy Sansom [01:00:19] Well, let me tell you how strong it was. There was a a rancher out on the Devil's River that used to come to Commission meetings and severely criticize the department because when, you know, he or other lion hunters were chasing mountain lions and they would end up on our wildlife management areas. They believed that they should be able to enter the wildlife management area and kill the lion. And, of course, we would not permit that. And he was harshly critical of the department for not allowing lion hunters to chase lions into Wildlife Management Areas and hunt them.

Andy Sansom [01:01:03] So not to get too far, but, remember, I told you that our big reintroduction of bighorn sheep was in the Sierra Diablo, the Diablo Mountains, north of Van Horn. And I had a, we had an employee out there who was, who used very poor judgment. And he was coming out of the Wildlife Management Area one evening, going home. And there was no public road to the Diablo. You had to go through private ranches to get there. And so when he got to the gate, it was locked. So he gets out and he gets in the back of his truck and he gets a pair of bolt cutters and he cuts the lock. And did he go up to the rancher's house and say, "I'm sorry, sir, I couldn't get out, so I cut the lock, I'll replace it tomorrow." No, he just drove on home.

Andy Sansom [01:02:03] And the rancher's house was in sight of the gate. And so the rancher went and got a lawyer, and he enjoined us from entering the area. And that's where we were putting bighorn sheep. So it was one of the most precious sites that we had.

Andy Sansom [01:02:22] And I was delegated to go out and negotiate with him. It was when I was the land acquisition guy. And so I'm sitting in his kitchen. His name is Topper Frank, and I'm sitting in his kitchen and he is wearing me out. I mean, he is a tough, tough negotiator.

Andy Sansom [01:02:41] And finally, about mid-morning, he says to me, "Why don't we take a break and I'll show you around the ranch headquarters?"

Andy Sansom [01:02:49] And I was like, "God, I thought you'd never ask." I mean, I was really getting beat up.

Andy Sansom [01:02:55] So, he and I and his wife went out. And we started walking around and he said, "You know, this is the corral where we break our horses. And this is the barn where we store our tractors."

Andy Sansom [01:03:06] And he goes over and he opens this shed, and a full-grown female mountain lion jumped on me. And about the time I hit the ground thinking, you know, "This is

it," I noticed that she was purring and she had been declawed. And I still, and his wife was along because the whole thing was a setup and she actually took a photograph of it, which I have somewhere.

Andy Sansom [01:03:34] But I thought that's the most extreme negotiating tactic that anybody has ever used on me. And Topper was a, he was a lion hunter. And what he would do is whenever he would kill a lion that had cubs, he would typically keep a cub and raise it for the purpose of training his dogs.

Andy Sansom [01:03:58] So, he would drive out in the desert, and the lion would lope along behind his truck. And he'd get about two miles from the house, and he would stop and open up this big dog kennel on the back of the truck, and that lion would jump in it. And then he would radio back to the ranch to release the dogs, and so that's how they would train the dogs to track the lions.

Andy Sansom [01:04:25] We became, Nona and I became very good friends with these people, in spite of the fact that we had almost nothing in common. But we went out there one year to attend a Labor Day picnic at their ranch in which they invited all their neighbors. And at that point he had a little male lion that was about the size of a Labrador retriever. And that little lion would get in that tall grass outside the house and all you could see was his ears. And these children, and I'm talking about six or seven years old, would be running around in the yard and that little lion would jump out and knock them down, and they'd laugh and he'd get back in the grass and wait for the next one.

Andy Sansom [01:05:15] He would look in our window at night and kind of growl at us.

Andy Sansom [01:05:23] I think somewhere we have a picture of April [Sansom] holding that little lion in her lap.

David Todd [01:05:31] I hope that little lion was well-fed.

Andy Sansom [01:05:33] Yeah. He lived in a tree in the front yard.

Andy Sansom [01:05:43] Topper Frank! He finally decided that the government was getting too close. So he sold that ranch and moved to Argentina and I haven't had any contact with him in probably 20 or 25 years.

David Todd [01:06:01] What an adventure.

David Todd [01:06:04] So, while we're talking about West Texas, please tell us a little bit about the pronghorn antelope. I understand there's been efforts to protect them over the years, reintroduce them, understand them. Is there anything that you might want to share with us?

Andy Sansom [01:06:23] Yeah, a couple of things.

Andy Sansom [01:06:24] The pronghorns were one of the reasons why the whole trapping and transport scandal blew up, because there was a very influential man, whose name I can't recall at the moment, but he had a ranch outside of Stephenville. And he was influential enough that he got the department to move a bunch of antelope to that ranch. And, according

to the biologists, they had said they would not survive there because they knew that it was not appropriate habitat. And in fact, the animals died.

Andy Sansom [01:07:10] And they ended up being photographs of the dead antelope in the Texas Monthly. And that was one of the reasons why that scandal became so acute.

Andy Sansom [01:07:24] The other thing that was ironic about it was that we were getting them in New Mexico, and putting them into Wildlife Management Areas or cooperating ranches in like Marfa area, that high steppes-type plateau, which is ideal habitat.

Andy Sansom [01:07:47] And the head of the Wildlife Division at that time was a man named [01:07:51] Charles Allen. And he was very, very disliked by the employees. I mean, I didn't have much to do with him, but when I did encounter him, he was rude, he was arrogant. And so you could see how the employees disliked him.

Andy Sansom [01:08:21] Furthermore, when they would do these trapping out operations, which were largely done by helicopter. So, you would you would fly out over a herd of antelope and then use a device that basically had a charge, like a gun, to fire a net from the air. And it would capture some number of antelope. And then they would land the helicopter and secure them and move them by trailer into Texas.

Andy Sansom [01:08:56] Well, Charles insisted on doing that himself, even though he was the executive head of the division. He would sit in the passenger seat of the helicopter and track the antelope.

Andy Sansom [01:09:08] And on one of those trips, they brought antelope illegally into Texas. And I think the illegality occurred because you had to have a federal permit to transport animals across state lines. And that's still true today. And he, they did not get a permit, and they were charged. He was charged. And I've always believed, and that was one of the other things that ended up being controversial with respect to trafficking and transport. But I always suspected that the employees set him up. I have no proof of that. But they were gleeful when he was fired.

David Todd [01:10:04] A mutiny.

Andy Sansom [01:10:06] I don't have any basis for saying this other than observation. But I have noticed in my travels, particularly between West Texas, New Mexico and Southern Colorado, that at least from observation, the antelope have declined. I used to see them every single time I drove up through northern New Mexico. It's rare. But that's only personal observation.

David Todd [01:10:41] And any speculation about why they might be in decline?

Andy Sansom [01:10:46] No.

David Todd [01:10:55] Maybe we can switch to another part of this very big state and talk about a sport fish. I guess it was often a commercial fish in the past - the red snapper.

Andy Sansom [01:11:08] Right.

David Todd [01:11:10] And some of the efforts, I think while you were at Parks and Wildlife, to develop an artificial reef plan and to set a minimum catch size and introduce, I think maybe worked on fishing quotas. A lot was done. Is there anything you'd like to talk about there?

Andy Sansom [01:11:30] Well, you know, the main controls on snapper are federal because much of the fishing occurs in federal waters. And so we, to a great extent, followed the federal government - worked very well with them.

Andy Sansom [01:11:47] I think the biggest thing we did was that the idea of the artificial reef was opposed by coastal fisheries at that time. And it was clear from the research that snapper depended on, you know, because where people caught them was on the oil rigs. I mean, that's where you'd fish for them. And so it's real clear that the reef structures were a critical part of restoring the species. And so I think the biggest thing we did was to overcome resistance and begin to establish artificial reefs, and the first of them were down off of Brownsville.

Andy Sansom [01:12:36] And, of course, along with more traditional game regulations like size limits and total numbers and that sort of thing.

Andy Sansom [01:12:46] And once again, that wouldn't have happened without the support of the Coastal Conservation Association.

David Todd [01:13:01] You touched on this earlier, so this may be going over old ground, but if you had anything else to say about efforts to manage the bay and near-shore shrimp fishery, it'd be interesting to hear what you have to say of course.

Andy Sansom [01:13:21] Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but I do not think we actually bay shrimp any longer? So that would have been the biggest thing.

Andy Sansom [01:13:39] But the second thing I can tell you that was a huge issue for me in shrimping was the introduction of exotic shrimp in aquaculture. I was sitting in my office one day, and a game warden came in and said that there was a shrimp farm raising these Pacific shrimp down around Port Isabel, and that their employees had entered into some kind of pay dispute with the owners of the shrimp farm and they'd actually begun, as a matter of spite, releasing these Pacific shrimp into the Laguna Madre.

Andy Sansom [01:14:29] And of course, the fear of that was that they potentially carried all kinds of exotic diseases and other things that would harm our domestic shrimp.

Andy Sansom [01:14:42] And so I basically said, "Get a bulldozer and get down there and close the outfall."

Andy Sansom [01:14:49] And they said, "No, you can't do that."

Andy Sansom [01:14:51] I said, "Yes, we can."

Andy Sansom [01:14:54] And so without any authorization or anything, game wardens got, hired a bulldozer, and went to the shrimp farm and closed the outfall.

Andy Sansom [01:15:03] And the reaction to that was universally positive, except that I actually went down to visit the farm sometime later. And the employees were afraid of me. I

never will forget going in there and having been introduced as the executive director, and the reaction was, "Holy shit, this is the guy that bulldozed it closed."

Andy Sansom [01:15:36] But aquaculture was one of the probably the biggest we felt, was one of the biggest threats to our domestic shrimp because of the introduction of exotic species and disease and all the other things.

David Todd [01:15:57] So, one of the really iconic species, of course, in Texas is this very elegant bird, the whooping crane. And I think it's fascinating to see how you've had 50 years of involvement with that bird. I mean, from the work that you did while at the Department of the Interior to recent comments when the Aransas Project was trying to protect those cranes. And I was hoping you could mention a few highlights for us today.

Andy Sansom [01:16:32] Well, I probably told you this before, so forgive me if I did, but, you know, I started out as a speechwriter to the Secretary of Interior. And I was really unsuccessful, primarily because I kept trying to get my own views into the speeches. And he and I became good friends, but it just wasn't a good fit.

Andy Sansom [01:16:58] And so, I remained as a special assistant to him and he would assign me to various projects. And Bob Armstrong, whom I was thrilled had been elected actually begin to lease offshore oil tracts off Matagorda.

Andy Sansom [01:17:17] And two communities went through the roof. One was the Pentagon, because the island was at that time a base of the Strategic Air Command. And two, was the Audubon Society, because it was known that Matagorda included a significant part of the wintering ground for the whooping cranes.

Andy Sansom [01:17:37] And so, Don Kennard had done a series of studies of natural areas in Texas through the University of Texas, and one of them was on Matagorda Island and I had read it. And Matagorda Island was off-limits. You couldn't go there. But having read that study, when the Secretary called me in and asked me what I knew about this place, I had enough to sound intelligent. And so he said, "I want you to go down there and make your own analysis of the situation and give me your recommendations."

Andy Sansom [01:18:21] Well, I found the number one expert in the Department on whooping cranes, which is a Ph.D. at Patuxent, where at the time they were raising them domestically to try to reintroduce them. And he and I went down there. And the day I arrived on the island, a planeload of generals flew in from Vietnam to hunt white-tailed deer and quail. And that's basically what they were doing down there.

Andy Sansom [01:18:46] And so, I wrote the whole thing up. But there was some evidence that the hunting activity, while not directly threatening whoopers, it was clearly prohibiting the expansion of their habitat.

Andy Sansom [01:19:05] And so I wrote it all up and recommended that the base be closed and become a National Wildlife Refuge. And he agreed with me.

Andy Sansom [01:19:15] And so, I delivered a letter to the Secretary of Defense on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in 1972. And the Secretary of Defense was named William Schlessinger, and he was a birdwatcher. And so we figured, you know this, he's going to like this.

Andy Sansom [01:19:32] Well, they didn't even reply to us.

Andy Sansom [01:19:35] And so, the day before the Christmas holidays, as promised, I got the Audubon Society to lay off and let us have a chance at this, but told them that if we didn't get any response out of Defense that I would share the document. And so I handed it over to a fellow named Charles Callison, who was the executive director of Audubon. And within 24 hours, I got a call from 60 Minutes.

Andy Sansom [01:20:07] And I thought, "Holy shit, I'm in too deep." And so I refused to talk to them.

Andy Sansom [01:20:12] But they did the story over the Christmas holidays. And I'll never forget that, I lived in Virginia at the time, and I would buy myself a Washington Post and read it on the bus on the way in to work. And so I bought my Post from a newsstand. I got on the bus and I opened the paper.

Andy Sansom [01:20:32] And the entire bottom fold was a photograph of the whooping cranes.

Andy Sansom [01:20:37] And so I thought. I remember being number one, exhilarated.

Andy Sansom [01:20:42] But number two is like, "I'm doomed".

Andy Sansom [01:20:46] And they reprinted the whole story. I was essentially let go.

Andy Sansom [01:20:53] And there was a great muckraking member of the U.S. Senate at that time, whose name was William Proxmire, from Wisconsin. And Proxmire took my study and did his own investigation, which confirmed everything that I had written and in October of that year, '73 (by this time I had finally going back to work), and the base was closed and declared a National Wildlife Refuge.

Andy Sansom [01:21:33] What continued to have whoopers become a major part of my life, was that when I was working for the Nature Conservancy, Toddie Lee Wynne, who owned the only remaining private land on Matagorda - 13,000 acres, at the lower end, where there were a lot of whoopers, had some premonition that he wasn't going to live forever.

Andy Sansom [01:22:03] And you can imagine what a ranch of that size, literally in the Gulf of Mexico, how much it would cost to run it. And I think he was just unwilling to leave that burden to his children, not to mention the disputes that would occur over it.

Andy Sansom [01:22:27] I mean, and so, one of my closest allies and supporters over the years was a wonderful man named Tim Hixon, and Hixon was a friend of Mr. Wynne's. And so we flew up to Dallas together and ended up buying the last 13,000 acres and which is now part of the refuge so that the entire island is protected.

Andy Sansom [01:22:55] Mr. Wynne walked out within a year after that to get his paper in Turtle Creek in Dallas and died on the street. Had a heart attack.

Andy Sansom [01:23:07] The irony, one of the ironies of that, was that by this time the administration was pretty conservative. This was, you know, this was Reagan era. And the

Secretary of Interior was a guy named Jim Watt. And Watt was not a fan of National Wildlife Refuges. And so he wanted from the very beginning to give the island to Texas as a Wildlife Management Area. And the opposition from the environmental community nationally was intense.

Andy Sansom [01:23:48] And so, Clements and Watt ultimately reached a compromise, where that part of the island which is the former base is both a National Wildlife Refuge and a State Park and Wildlife Management Area. So it's managed by the state, but it is part of the National Wildlife Refuge system. The Wynne Ranch, on the other hand, was not subject to that agreement. So it's actually managed by the feds. But the entire island is in the refuge system.

Andy Sansom [01:24:24] And happily, the whoopers have expanded northward up toward Port O'Connor. At one time, they were largely in the South Rockport area, but now they're all the way up.

David Todd [01:24:46] So, one last chapter with the whooping crane, which I think may bring together your concern for that island and the birds, and then, of course, your long service with the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment. I think you wrote very persuasively about the need for those cranes to have a reliable source of water. And I was hoping that you could sort of give us some context to why a crane needs water from the Hill Country to flow into their bays.

Andy Sansom [01:25:23] Well, you know, all of the things that whooping cranes eat when they're here for the winter arise in brackish water from marshes that has a consistent blend of fresh and saltwater - primarily crabs. And thanks to Jim Blackburn, you know, that issue came to a head in the Aransas Project.

Andy Sansom [01:25:52] But let me tell you, my firm belief is we still, the whooping cranes are the classic, what we used to call "charismatic megafauna". And what they basically did in the Aransas project was to bring attention to the fact that we still, to this day, do almost nothing to protect freshwater inflows into our bays and estuaries. I mean, we've got laws on the books, but the state has never really enforced them. And it's only because of litigation like the Aransas Project, that any progress has been made at all.

Andy Sansom [01:26:37] And I think one of the proudest things that we did at the Meadows Center was to host Jim and the head of the GBRA at the time, which was the defendant in the lawsuit, and they signed an agreement there at Spring Lake to try to bring some measure of support to maintain freshwater inflows, largely to protect the whoopers.

David Todd [01:27:12] I guess it's all a negotiation. You have been in the middle of those for years.

David Todd [01:27:20] You know, one of the things I thought we might end on is that you have worked hard to try to share your love and interest in the outdoors and wildlife with, you know, your reading public and with the general public at large. And I was thinking about a number of the projects that you initiated while you were at Parks and Wildlife, such as the Texas Wildlife Expo and Great Coastal Birding Trail and Passport to Texas radio program. You know, what was driving you there and how did you come up with these ideas, or at least, you know, help foster them at the agency?

Andy Sansom [01:28:04] Probably, from a business standpoint, the fact that hunting particularly has been in precipitous decline for many years. And so, when you looked at the revenue that supported wildlife conservation in Texas, it was declining. And so part of it was an effort to try to increase participation.

Andy Sansom [01:28:34] But from a more emotional standpoint, we know that if children, or even adults, enjoy being outside, then they're going to contribute their funding and they're going to be political supporters of conservation.

Andy Sansom [01:28:55] And so, the bottom line is also, we know it's good for them - that kids who spend time outdoors are going to be better off emotionally and mentally for that experience. And there's proven research to demonstrate that. So it's good for people.

Andy Sansom [01:29:21] And finally, it's something everyone can do. I mean, you know, people are accountants or lawyers or schoolteachers or whatever. But no matter what you do in your life, you can find a way to take some time during the course of a year and introduce a child to the outdoors. So it's something everyone can do.

Andy Sansom [01:29:56] I had another thought on that, but it flew out of my head.

David Todd [01:30:03] Like a bird.

Andy Sansom [01:30:05] Like a bird.

David Todd [01:30:06] Well, you've been very generous with your time today. Before we sign off, I was hoping that you knew there's a little opening here if there's something you wanted to share that we hadn't touched on, you know, that would be valuable?

Andy Sansom [01:30:28] Well, that that brings back the thought I had, and that is, I think one of the most urgent issues that we face today is a lack of understanding by urban people, who are now the vast majority of our citizens, in the importance or the benefits of well-stewarded private lands. This Legislature, this session, completely refused to provide funding for conservation easements, both from the standpoint of some very strong right-wing pressure that easements were some sort of involuntary control on private landowners.

Andy Sansom [01:31:24] But they were successful because the increasingly urban legislature is not did not understand the value, in terms of wildlife habitat, watershed protection, aquifer recharge, that in Texas, I used to say that if the state gave me the entire state budget, I mean, everything, to buy land with for parks and wildlife management areas, it would only change the amount of land in public ownership by maybe 1%.

Andy Sansom [01:31:59] We got to have people understand that private citizens are doing the bulk of this job and we need to support them, because we can't buy it all. We can't buy enough land to save everything. And that's, that's becoming a more critical issue every day in a state that is still probably about 95% privately owned.

Andy Sansom [01:32:29] And the thing that's ironic about it is that if you look at the records of the state, the biological surveys that were done between, say, 1885 and 1905, it was worse than it is today. Now we've lost some species, we've lost some biodiversity, but the overall health of the landscape is better than it was in the last part of the 19th century, when all of the

timber in East Texas had been cut and the state was horribly overgrazed, particularly in the Hill Country.

Andy Sansom [01:33:04] And it is because of landowners understanding that taking good care of their property made economic sense. And it's in better condition than it was over 100 years ago.

Andy Sansom [01:33:22] But yet people don't recognize that.

Andy Sansom [01:33:28] So I probably will spend, I've got another book that I'm toying with and it's on that subject.

David Todd [01:33:39] You've got a reader.

Andy Sansom [01:33:42] And I can't wait to see yours. I hope it's going to be in the Meadows / A&M series.

David Todd [01:33:50] I think your book will probably beat me to the presses.

David Todd [01:33:53] But in any case, thank you so much, Andy.

Andy Sansom [01:33:58] Thank you.

David Todd [01:34:00] I always learn a lot. I just enjoy being with you. So thank you.

Andy Sansom [01:34:04] It's the same for me and you please give my best to Wendy.

David Todd [01:34:07] I will do it. You bet.

Andy Sansom [01:34:09] I look forward to the next time.

David Todd [01:34:11] Okay. Take care.

Andy Sansom [01:34:12] Take care, David. Have a nice evening.

David Todd [01:34:15] You too.