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Oral History Number: 459-001

Interviewee: Stewart Brandborg

Interviewer: Bill LaCroix

Date of Interview: November 19, 2013

Project: Bill LaCroix Interviews with Stewart Brandborg Oral History Project

Bill LaCroix: Who was Michael Nadel?

Stewart Brandborg: He was assistant director of the Wilderness Society; Nadel was Howard Zahniser's assistant at the Wilderness Society.

BL: What happened to him?

SB: He stayed right there through thick and thin, through my service at the Wilderness Society.

BL: Which dams were those?

SB: None in particular. I am going through this notebook of filings on some of the dam proposals in California. It's a wildlife stamp album, National Wildlife Federation leather-bound notebook, which includes the statements of Olaus Murie in 1958. One of an inspirational sort titled "Inspiration in Wilderness."

These are old documents to which I am not going to offer much comment. Here is one of the Desolation Valley Wild Area and the proposed SMUD development. One comment after another, many from the Wilderness Society. And then here is a listing of the gross acreages in the wilderness preservation system by states. All of value.

BL: There is another one.

SB: Olaus Murie proposing the Tracy Arms Wilderness in California. Here is a statement of July, '58, from Zahniser relating to the Wilderness Bill and the hearings being conducted by Senator James Murray, May 23, 1958; statement of the chief of the Forest Service; here are the remarks of Zahniser before the Thoreau Society...I think he was President. It says so on this statement. July 13, 1957; Here is a news release: "Deliberate Preservation of Wilderness Deserved," by Zahniser; Here is a press release of the McClatchy Paper saying that the passage of the wilderness bill is threatened; a mailer of trustees for conservation; a copy of the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs meeting of August 31 – September 1 of 1957; and a letter from my dad; communication with Carl Anfank of the Western Outdoor Clubs, July 1, '57...the wilderness bill years; I shouldn't even open some of these.

You know it takes me through the history of the long fight. Every day brings new measure of the impact of John's absence. 1974, I think I refer in this notebook in a carbon copy to the passage of John Saylor. Here is a memo from Mike Fromme, November 25, 1974; [these are] tributes to the great work of John Saylor, the first introducer of the first wilderness bill in the House of Representatives, and Mike Fromme's eulogy.

BL: Was it '57 when it was first introduced?

SB: '56. Here is my wire note delivered by mail on 10.31.1973, my expression to Mrs. Saylor of sadness at the passing of John. "His selfless efforts on behalf of conservation causes were unequalled among those whom we have worked over the years. Through his leadership in making government respond to the needs of people, we have given renewed hope and faith in the troubled period of those in this country who care so deeply about our land."

This is John Saylor's obit and congressional record. There is a note in this notebook – this is written on the inside cover – wilderness bill enactment, 1964. These are the final work copies used by S.M. Brandborg after Zahniser's death, May '64, in steering the bill through House sub-committee, full committee, to House, Senate conference. House bills...

BL: As I recall, there's several iterations of the bill markup that you have your handwritten notes on in there. There was the committee, the reconciliation committee, the conference committee, the House committee markup. We haven't found the Senate committee markup. When me and Larry were here last week that's what we started on.

SB: Here's an explanation of the Wilderness Act as approved by the House committee. Well, I worked like a dog when it came to preparation of the conferees guidelines. In short, I took a copy of the Senate Act and gave priorities...in some place, there's a copy of that bill with the notations in red, blue, green, black. The brightest color saying "hold these, fight for these"; the next color saying "these are important, get them if you can"; three, "okay, hold them"; fourth"; if you need to let this go, let it go, it's good trading stock." So that was my contribution. We had Saylor as a House conferee. We had Frank Church and two or three members of the Senate committee. Those members were fortified as much as I could get them as they went to conference to resolve the differences. The big give was on the 19 year extension of the mining law, which, after passage, was carried in the law on the national forest mineral rich lands. Not much damage was inflicted by that provision. The other big one that we fought was the area by area inclusion and the Aspinall demand was that only national forest, wilderness, and wild areas would be included in the initial passage. The primitive areas not yet administratively pacified with the forest service would have to go through local hearings at the forest level, sent up the chain through the Secretary of Agriculture to the President, the bureau of the budget and finally to Congress. And each primitive area would have to be reviewed for its potential

values as wilderness. This involved the laborious process that was applied to all of the National Forest areas, to say nothing of the de facto areas which we identified not in the early years, but as time passed, and importantly to every National Park system area and National Wildlife Refuge unit. So suddenly with the passage I was confronted with this great celebration, but wait, only nine million acres were part of the system. All of the rest have to come through this process. So that forced me, initially in a trip from Montana to Arizona, with Frontier Airlines season ticket that cost \$100, stopping at every community, calling ahead to say "I work for the Wilderness Society, I'm going to be there tomorrow, can I meet with some of you?" So we'd set these meetings up and it was at those that I sat with them, and said "You know, this wonderful accomplishment is yet to be fulfilled. We have a great accomplishment, but these primitive areas have to come within this laborious process. And that will depend on your circle, to bring folks together who love wilderness and will take it through the hearings and the strong public education that has to be done, showing strong public support. And some of your states have congressional delegations that have been actively opposing the bill and they will fight every proposal that comes out. And so, you are the leadership circle, let's build that, let's enlarge it to include wilderness-minded people who will fight for the inclusion of these priceless lands in our wilderness system. So that was what I did. And in that first trip I discovered the wonderful responsiveness; one guy in Tucson, Arizona, where my trip ended, Ted Steele, he was one who took this very seriously. He ran this resort facility, a block square inn, I think he called it the Arizona Inn, where affluent people sought to retire and lived a special, sheltered life behind these walls that surrounded the whole city block. And he welcomed me and put me up. Ted was, in the most complimentary way, a true wild-man and was dedicated to the protection of birds and bird life. I think in his true heart he didn't want to see any living creature killed. I had come out of the Wildlife Federation, where it was sportsmen rah-rah-rah. But that didn't deter me. I had matured to that stage, where I now am. So I'm for the living creatures.

But at that point Ted Steele was a wonderful discovery and he said we are going to do this in Arizona. He was a true zealot that lasted through the years.

Here is this copy to which I allude. We cannot lose it. It's flagged. It's HR 909-70, Committee Print No. 2. On the top of the page, it says "Marked to show it needed strengthening amendments," with my initials in the top corner, and that is what went into the committees with my allies John Saylor from the House and Frank Church and others from the Senate. This is a memorialized document; we should give it more than...

BL: More than putting back into the notebook?

SB: Yeah, this is the guts of the wilderness fight. And then here's a copy of the Wilderness Act handbook, which I produced at the Wilderness Society after passage in my attempt to guide

citizens in bringing the law into bearing to add areas to the system. Here is a copy of Olaus's "Wild Country as a National Asset." An outstanding scholar, a philosophical statement that always nurtured my spirit and love for this man and the resource.

BL: Can I make a suggestion? Can we pull out that Olaus one and put it on top of this Olaus one.

SB: Anything you want to do. We've got more of these. I'd like to leave one here, but we've got more of them. You are about to kick into a reverential treatment of Olaus, and by God that's due.

BL: I'm all about that, but that's me personally.

SB: That's you personally and me personally, but I'll aid and abet.

BL: This came out of the garden shed, and it's Wilderness Society...you said it was your trainings in...

SB: This is training. That's rich stuff, that's my legacy. I was not enamored with monumentalizing Stewart Monroe Brandborg. Certainly, like anybody else, I was pleased with the opportunity to pick up and carry the banner for wilderness. But I realized that all of the fine, philosophical roots and dimensions of my beloved, admired, sanctified Howard Zahniser, Olaus, Harvey, those pivotal people, were not going to carry the American people into the political action that we had to have, the social awareness, the awareness of everyday people, into the arena of wilderness preservation. That stuff had to be taken to people of heart and substance who would carry the battle. I saw that as my role; not trying to write anything that wasn't directed toward the struggle to get wilderness, wild land, preserved in perpetuity. So, I relieved myself of sitting down and scrawling out whatever I could dig out that might be called eloquence. I said, "Clear the decks! We've got tens of thousands of people out there that need to be helped in their lifetimes in recognizing the preservation of wilderness is central to their being, their fulfillment." And that's what I concentrated on. I did not fill the tomes, even the newspapers, with my rich, indelible, and I'm saying this sarcastically, philosophical insights. I thought that wasn't what we needed. We needed to show people how they could get in the fight to save the wilderness. Does that make that clear?

BL: Clear as a bell.

SB: Some of that literature bored me; people frothing at the mouth. Yet it had such a vital place.

Well, what provokes that outburst is "Citizen Training, Part 2." We are in a new notebook here, a blue one. "Alaska Plan" is on the outside binder. "The Wilderness Society is eminently qualified to provide leadership for and training of Alaskan citizen conservationists and other

citizens who are desirous of preserving public lands of Alaska in one of the 'four systems,' including native peoples wishing to administer their own lands in a wilderness condition. There is need to develop a program of advising native groups on how best to achieve sound land programs that are compatible with their interest in protecting the fragile environments of their land. The program would be geared to advising native groups on how best to achieve this goal in the face of conflicting demands and pressures on the land and rapid change in a social sense." And it goes on, second paragraph: "It is important to remember public lands transferred to native groups will be privately owned. It's the work plan objective to train and advise citizen conservationists and native group representatives on how to conduct field studies and democratic and people processes." This is my cornball prose, I believe.

Now, I can hardly remember doing this stuff. But here is the Alaska work plan, the legal actions. And it's my scrawling.

Here is "Publications and Public Information Projects." It's a section: "Following our ten projects, which, if funded fully, would ensure that we save Alaska...." That's pure cornball Brandborg, that verbosity. "That would enable us to get important coverage in the actions in the nation's press, in magazines and on radio and television, they would attract the attention of decision makers in the executive and legislative branches..."

And this is 10.20.74, the Alaska Campaign. Names of the proposed Alaska film... "Walk the Pipeline," it says. And here's another... this is the "Alaska Opportunity." Radio spots, TV, lecture tours, appropriate literatures, guide for Alaska...

Here's a note from January 20, 1975, from Harry Cranmill, "Here's some more stuff for Alaska Plan." And this is the Alaska work plan, "supporting projects, formation of an Alaskan coalition...to enlist the aid of diverse national conservation organizations, in order to spread an share workload and projects, project an image of clout to decision makers...the purpose of the organization will be to share the workload on Alaska dedication and allied issues in such a fashion that will be aware of what others are doing and be in a framework of common, agreed upon objectives." Now I don't remember if I did that, but it's the whole legislative strategy, grant and aid program, building local citizen leadership...

Here is a piece, it carries the date of February 11, from Edward Zahniser, initialed "E.Z."

Okay, that does that notebook.

Edward was working with Dick Olsen, who led the effort to get me out of the society. I canned him, and my great friend, who was his friend, Frank Barry was the vice-president and I think ultimately president of the society, apprised me of the fact that Dick Olsen was detracting from my work.

[Break in audio]

SB: I made a horrible misrepresentation to Larry in your presence. He went ahead to the Wilderness Society and said, "What are you interested in doing with Brandborg and this pile of stuff?" And what he told me what he'd done, I said "Jesus, Larry, I don't want to give them much of anything." Now, that's not appropriate for me, but it's young people replacing people that didn't have wilderness in their hearts and between you and Larry, I've got 200 times more confidence in your willingness to do something with it.

BL: Oh, we will.

SB: I said, "Call them off." But Larry said, "We're here, Brandborg's here." And I didn't mean to give that impression. Did you?

BL: I didn't really think of it in that way. I was just thinking, in the spirit of philanthropy, we're doing the work. Send some money this way - you can't do it for free forever. And it's the 50th anniversary, I'm sure he's thinking maybe there's something in there that they've got.

SB: Let's get ahold of Larry.

BL: I'll talk to him tonight. (Referring to a document) That should be of interest because its '64. That was the year that it passed. And I think that was after it was passed.

SB: Yes it was, because I was out here with my kids in the bus and they had the signing, and I was west and I didn't get back until after September 3, when Lyndon Johnson held the signing. So I was the guy that had worked his butt off following Zahniser's passing in May, and I didn't even get to the signing. And I regretted that but here I was with four kids and a raccoon, maybe, I know a dog or two out in Montana.

BL: So you were at the...

SB: Cheff Ranch, or in the Bitterroot. The meeting was at the Cheff Ranch up on Flathead and I was home in the Bitterroot at Hamilton, enjoying the company of my dad.

BL: So is there anything in here worth looking at?

SB: Oh, yeah, I could dig up some recall. If you want to give it to me...

BL: It was already passed by August 10?

SB: Yes, exactly.

BL: They'd already taken the vote and you were out of the house...

SB: Out of the house...

BL: So what would be of interest in this thing is if there's anything in here that spoke of what you or the members were thinking at the time.

SB: You know the executive committee, with the exception of Harvey Broom, was not central to my strategy. What I recognized early on, that I was it. I had some wonderful staff members but I was running the show, and I had to be lying awake at night figuring out strategy. Harvey Broom was immeasurably important in my mental machinations, judgmental readings, and I probably overdid it bouncing them off of him. I was the guy that had to keep the boat directed in the right way.

BL: Was that true when Howard Zahniser was head too?

SB: No, Zahny was master of the ship. But Olaus was out in Moose, totally dedicated, but he was out in Moose. Zahny was in the fight day to day. And the same with Sig Olsen. Sig was not as close to Zahny, nor was Olaus. I think Harvey was perhaps...was Harvey chairman of the executive committee? I think he was. Harvey was a sustaining link. Olaus was invaluable but he wasn't a strategist. He would do anything anytime, but he was out in Moose.

These are Michael Nadel's handwritten notes about the meeting.

The Wilderness Society had the habit of rehashing everything from A-Z. The council, I mean, at its annual meetings. I became impatient of going over some things that were common understanding. So I divided some of those subjects up, as you will see in the minutes, and said "This is what we said about that." And wrote it, and then put it in the sections, and if somebody took off on that topic, I was prone to say "Refer to this particular citation in the book, so we don't repeat the conclusions we've already arrived at." They didn't like that too well, they liked to regurgitate and re-chew, but it did help. You could say, look at the conclusions.

BL: Would it be fair with meetings we have now were people like to orate?

SB: They got to get it out.

[End of Interview]