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Oral History Number: 459-007

Interviewee: Stewart Brandborg

Interviewer: Bill LaCroix

Date of Interview: December 5, 2013

Project: Bill LaCroix Interviews with Stewart Brandborg Oral History Project

Bill LaCroix: We think it's December 5, 2013, going over—

Stewart Brandborg: A memorandum from Stewart Brandborg and members of the Wilderness Society council, October 27, 1959. This was written in a period when members of the governing council of the Society had raised significant reservations about the Society's continuing to invest its resources almost totally in the campaign for the 1956 wilderness bill. The memo, in my reflection, came at a crucial period when the stirrings of concern with people as dedicated to wilderness as Harvey Broom surfaced, and people asked is this what we should be doing in the Society? It was roughly 3 years after the introduction of the bill; we had established the bill as one of the major goals of the then-developing conservation movement. With the massive mailings of the House and Senate documents, I refer to the early drafts of the bill, the explanatory statements of Congressman John Saylor of Pennsylvania and Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota. There had been literally hundreds of thousands of these congressional documents put into the mail under the franking privileges of the members of Congress. The major lists of the conservation organizations, the 300,000+ donors to the Wildlife Federation, contributions to the National Wildlife Federation stamps, the memberships of National Audubon, National Parks, the Wilderness Society, and the many other groups – hundreds of thousands of these had gone out in successive mailings. The first hearings, printed at the expense of the Society, but put into franked envelopes, postage free envelopes, of the senatorial and House sponsors, mailing hundreds of thousands of these documents on each of several occasions by this time in 1959.

So the wilderness bill had become a prominent mission in the minds of conservationists all over the nation. Members of organizations, many of the state groups had been saturated with these mailings, the calls to action that were carried in the comments of House and Senate sponsors, a real comprehensive program had been implemented to reach people of a very broad segment of the conservation movement.

The memo that I have written reflects the stress that Zahniser and I and others who saw the necessity of having a national policy for wilderness preservation and a program to implement it as contained in the wilderness bill were measuring as people within the inner circle of the Society began to raise questions: Is this what we really want to be doing as a Wilderness

Society, as opposed to broad educational programs about wilderness? Now much of this concern was postured by the worry that had been built up in the minds of people about the tax law that, in its various interpretations, was placing in front of us the possibility of losing 501-C3 tax-exempt status, as what were classified under Internal Revenue Service regulations as educational organizations.

[Break in audio]

SB: The memorandum is written in 1959 at a point in the history of the evolving conservation movement when the leaders had become greatly burdened by the concerns about their tax-exempt status under the 501-C3 regulation, which covered the citizen movement. The receipt from members of dues and other supportive payments, that gave the donor the benefit of tax-exempt status – the loss of this status meant to these organizations, potentially, the major part of their income. It wouldn't seem at that time a \$5.00 annual dues payment to the Wilderness Society would have been that meaningful to members, but the thousand payments, the grants from foundations – conservative as they were – were jeopardized by this possibility. Beginning in the mid-50s, the national groups had weighed this hazard in all dimensions and, to a degree, had become heavily pre-occupied by this worry. It manifested itself in the form of the self-imposed question: If we lobbied before the Congress, if we present testimony, heartfelt conviction, before a committee of the Congress, can this be considered influencing Congress in a way that would make us vulnerable to the charge that we are violating our tax-exempt status?

This ran as an epidemic through the national organizations. This took a toll of state and regional organizations, even local organizations, to the point where many outfits said, "Oh, we can't communicate with Congress. We don't want to be caught influencing Congress." A tremendous sacrifice of the vitally important participation of citizen groups in guiding and testifying before the Congress, communicating to the Congress, and communicating to their members, saying, "Let Congress know how important this legislation is to your interest in protecting wilderness, wildlife, in fighting the polluters." Whatever the legislation gave a basis for was thus jeopardized by this intimidating tactic of raising and waving the red flag – your tax-exempt status is in jeopardy.

This had gone through the conservation movement at the national level and was the constant focus of discussion – albeit much off the public record. And organizations like the Citizens' Committee for Natural Resources, the Emergency Committee on Natural Resources, were formed by leaders of national groups and became the vehicles of the calls for action when final legislation was before the Congress. The calls that were sent to the memberships of these organizations saying, "Here is a piece of legislation that should be given your overt support.

Please write, please phone, please send a telegram to your congressman in support or in opposition to a given measure.”

This was a form of paralysis that took a heavy toll on the participatory process that was so vital to fulfillment of the missions of these national organizations. And some of the groups simply withdrew from active advocacy before the Congress. Some withdrew from the fully democratic process of going before the committees of the Congress to testify [because of] this fear of loss of tax-exempt status under the 501-C3 regulation. My memo of this date – October 27, 1959 – was written at a point when much of the hesitation of the Wilderness Society council was based on the anxiety about losing tax-exempt status of the Society.

In this memo, in every dimension I was talking to the importance of the Society’s advocacy for the wilderness bill. We had introduced it – the Society had – and led the effort. And don’t let it appear that there was vast numbers of instigators. Zahniser was the instigator; he was the persuader; he was the salesman. There was no other organization that had picked up the leadership that he gave to the national campaign for the wilderness bill. He was the strategist; he was the guy who put people up to every effort that was made in the initial stages, and it was a Society project. Had the Society withdrawn there would not have been a wilderness bill. From his sitting at his home dining room table writing it on an 8 ½ x 11 tablet, to the refinements he took it through with the best wilderness friends he could find in Washington D.C. and in the wilderness movement – that included some trusted people like Richard Griffith, of the refuge branch of the Fish and Wildlife Service – [and] people from the Congress: Benton Stong, who became a wheel horse in the effort, the aid of Senator McGovern on Committee of Interior and Insular Affairs in the Senate – these individuals had read and offered vital suggestions to the strengthening of the bill – but otherwise it was a Zahniser project. The fact that it emanated from this source, was introduced by Saylor and Humphrey, in the House and Senate respectively, delivered in their hands by Zahniser, raised a question, I think. When Zahniser lobbied directly with members of Congress, he assumed the title and affiliation of the Citizens’ Committee or the Trustees for Conservation. [He] spoke as though he were the representative of those organizations, leaving the name of the Wilderness Society out of that direct role and that sponsorship; but no question, it was a Wilderness Society product in that it emanated solely from Zahniser with the kind of consulting support that I have alluded to.

So this memo was written with the purpose of reassuring members of the governing council that having launched the wilderness bill, our name as the principle force behind it among cooperating national groups, we were identified easily by the Internal Revenue Service as being a passive member of supporting groups. The trail went back to the Wilderness Society – the trails, I should make that plural – and the integral role that Zahny and the rest of us had made in pushing the bill, getting sponsors on the Hill, getting the support of people at the field level,

express to members of Congress in so many words, "Our organization recommends that your sponsor this vitally important legislation." The tracks were many and they led back to the Wilderness Society.

Well, this letter is couched in terms – and I was a master in doing it – to let the faint of heart in our circle not stampede in the wrong direction because of their awareness that we were the primary leaders for the bill. And although these other organizations would be claimed as our sponsors when we worked the Hill; although the mailings that called for action might be sponsored by the Citizens' Committee or the Emergency Committee for Conservation, the composure, the printing, the money that was made available to us came from sources that had been brought together by the Society. In some instances, the Robert Marshall Wilderness Fund donated directly to the printing costs of the hundreds of thousands of mailers that were sent to the citizens. So this memo was couched in terms to not talk in those blunt terms to reveal the fact that the Society in reality was the chief push behind the wilderness bill. If the Wilderness Society went out of business, the campaign for the wilderness bill would fall into the ditch. It would not be pursued with all that the Wilderness Society – Zahniser, myself, Michael Nadel – put into it. It was our consuming project. If I worked on membership, which I did in my first years, the Society and I had great success in the membership campaigns because since introduction the conservation-minded citizens had been flooded by these repetitive congressional documents from Saylor, Humphrey, and other sponsors providing the bill, providing the summaries of their intent, and providing background information on why a wilderness law was necessary if these priceless lands of the three public land jurisdictions were to be preserved in perpetuity.

So I have emphasized that my wording of the memorandum carefully avoids attribution to the Society and to us, but what I'm telling my fellow members of the council – I had joined the governing council in 1956 – was, in effect, we have launched this national campaign with all of this work over 3 years, and for God's sakes, we can't desert the boat now and push it out into the iceberg-laden cold waters of the Arctic and expect it to reach port again. It's gone. If the Wilderness Society quits, it's gone. We started it and will have to stick with it and some of these people, beloved as they were to me – Olaus in his sweet commitment to wilderness above all would say, "Sometimes, I wonder if we should just go out and reach people." And of course like the hungry trout coming out of the depths of the pool to get the fly on the surface, I would say, "Well, this is our mechanism. This is our cause. This is our flag."

And indeed it was. You were not going to prevent incursions, erosions, of these little pieces of wilderness designated in the National Forest, much less the vast acreages in the other jurisdictions that didn't carry the name wilderness; but through attrition and normal intrusion of highway development were going to be lost. So this was the first opportunity we had to

designate those areas for the purest purpose of wilderness preservation. And this memo was my coming out of the corner as a 3 year member of the wilderness council saying, "For God's sake, how stupid could we be if we abandon our campaign, or lessen it, or in any way got out of the damned leadership role." It was a total preoccupation of the Society, and as I've said, the whole thing would have gone down the drain if the Society – this massive organization of 6 or 7 people at 2144 P Street [including] Zahniser, Stewart Brandborg, finally, as Associate Executive Director, Michael Nadel, and 3 or 4 clerical staff and one editor [named] Anya Smith, who assisted Howard Zahniser until Zahniser fired her – [had abandoned it].

Again, I was telling these people on the council, "What the hell do you mean to suggest that we give up the wilderness bill? We've launched it, we're tied to it, and it will go deader than a mackerel if we pull out of it."

[pause]

We launched into a description of my departure from the National Wildlife Federation. Charles Callison, my beloved boss [who was] Conservation Director – I was Assistant Conservation Director – brought [me] in from Moscow, Idaho, where I was the Northern Area Big-Game Biologist, covering the country supposedly from the Salmon River to the Canadian line to work in this Washington setting. Well, [that was] one hell of an adjustment for a field man to come into Charles Callison's operation of covering the Hill and producing educational materials for the Wildlife Federation. I gravitated to the Hill, [but] I was damn poor of a producer of educational materials but did my damndest.

Anyway, the Federation got into great internal fights with Callison leading the effort to broaden the programs into areas of public land, the important part citizens play in sustaining that, water pollution, air pollution, overhaul of laws that relate to the public estate, always working toward better conservation programs. That involved me in that I was second to Callison and I was a zealot opponent of big dams in the Clearwater of Idaho, Bruce Eddy and Penny Cliffs, and had been and would be in the future the same on the proposals for divesting the public land agencies of their grazing lands. Those things were my meat – I gravitated to them. Callison was zealous in his own way. Quiet, cool, calm and collected, but a great effective leader, he left when the going got tough within the board of the National Wildlife Federation assemblage of pretty weak officers and members, in terms of their ultimate understanding of and dedication to the great measures that were then beginning to go through Congress in all areas of public lands. They had responded to Callison.

Ernest Swift joined the Federation as a former Assistant Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. I believe I partially instigated that by suggesting to Carl D. Schumacher, a senior member and founder of the Wildlife Federation, that Swift might be a good leader of our outfit.

He went to work on it within the board and got Swift into the position of Executive Director. Swift became very jealous of Callison; Swift, in his own right, had leadership capabilities, but Callison became the target of his destructive tactics. Callison decided to go to Audubon and having been so tightly associated with Callison, I could see that my success in the Wildlife Federation had been dimmed, if that's an adequate word.

I went to Howard Zahniser and let him know. By this time, 1960, I had become very close to Zahniser on assignment by Callison to work for the wilderness bill. A lot of that time, many days invested in Capitol Hill contacts with House and Senate members in their offices, a great opportunity to travel with and be influenced by Howard Zahniser. So I found myself having this great relationship with Zahniser, suggesting that I go to work for him, and he was his usual cool, calm, collected self and said, "Why don't you call Harvey?" Harvey being Harvey Broom, the president [of the Wilderness Society], who resided in Knoxville, Tennessee. Well, I talked to Harvey and he says, "Do you know enough about fundraising to pay for your salary (which was \$8,000)?" I said, "Oh yeah, no problem there, I'm an old hand at direct mail." Of course I wasn't. I'd been with this Wildlife Federation where they mailed hundreds of thousands of solicitations and had a master list in excess of 300,000, but I had been exposed and I used that. And I indeed went to work for the Wilderness Society, and I indeed did, with the help of a great friend at the National Wildlife Federation, the Assistant Business Manager Robert Bridges, who would meet me in Dupont Circle to criticize and prop up and amend my direct mail pieces, and I got into direct mail to the conservation organizations, all of which had been inundated by these mailings from the Congress for the wilderness bill. And I could rave on in my mailings about the high purpose of the Society and using the list of the other conservationists I had a field day. So, it was Harvey's agreement and of course I had been a member of the council for 3 years, 4 years by that time, and I then had a chance to move into this big office of the Wilderness Society with its supporting staff of 3 or 4 able ladies who were principle support staff, Zahniser, and Michael Nadel.

So that's how I got in. And it was after 3 years in my immersion in the wilderness bill, as well as my direct mail efforts to bring in the money, that I spoke to the council, beseeching them to not consider giving up the great campaign for Zahniser's wilderness bill.

BL: Wait, can I ask you a question?

SB: You bet.

BL: So this time when you were getting out of the Wildlife Federation and going into the Wilderness Society was when you felt you were overloaded and Bruce Eddy and Penny Cliffs were coming up for initial funds. And Bruce Eddy got through. Speak a little bit to that.

SB: I had developed a relationship with the old, aged, member of Congress, Clarence Cannon, who was the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. As the, perhaps only, conservation organization opponent, [I] had gone to his subcommittee, I believe on public works projects like the big dams all over the West, and testified about Bruce Eddy. And this would be up in the House chambers – a big room – with old Clarence sitting there, once in a while one member but otherwise only the stenographer taking the testimony. I would read my statement and tell how harmful these two dams would be to these beautiful mountain valleys with their abundance of elk, deer, small mammals, and the anadromous fish – steelhead and salmon – that had made their way up through the Columbia and Snake Rivers, to the Clearwater tributaries. But my ace-in-the-hole was the representative from the Missouri Conservation Organization, the state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation, one Ed Stegner. Ed Stegner, as head of that state conservation organization, communicated with Clarence Cannon – this omnipotent, aged old guy – kill the money for these two dams.

And when I got involved in getting the hell out of the Wildlife Federation [and] transferring to the Society, my new duties of making money at the Society, I didn't fortify Clarence at the critical time when those were up for appropriations, and the Bruce Eddy initial engineering funds got through. I will ever live with that dereliction – my failure – to throw the book at Bruce Eddy.

Penny Cliffs, Senator Dworshak of Idaho was pushing on this. Everytime I testified before Congress, that old guy would be there, or would inundate the committee with supportive testimonials from Idaho. Clarence Cannon scratched those in favor of what Ed Stegner and I stood for in saying, "Scratch them." So I will forever forget not blocking that. [There was a] small possibility I couldn't have stopped it, but it had worked in 2 or 3 congresses, I don't know why it wouldn't have worked in that time of 1960 or '61.

BL: So, Dworshak would bring in people like Mayor Curtis of Orofino. He was the main proponent, right?

SB: Mayor Curtis of Orofino and above all, people that represented Potlatch Forest, the big, big mill at Lewiston that is still there.

BL: They got a big boondoggle of the logs that were stripped out of there.

SB: Yeah, logging those valleys.

BL: You mind if I pursue it just for a second? Did you know Curtis?

SB: Yes.

BL: What kind of guy was he?

SB: A small town mayor. [He was] arrogant in my presence and totally dismissive of the voices of the game department. The first hearing in Orofino, Idaho of the Corps of Engineers for the projects, I believe the only field hearing, I was working for the game department as Northern Idaho Big Game Biologist in Moscow, and I rallied friends and the department, including the director, who was terribly nervous. He showed up the day of the hearing and I got into his hotel room, presumably to brief him on how bad it was, and he was changing his pants. I don't know why he changed his pants. But he was shaking so hard he could hardly get his leg into the britches. Well, Ross Leonard was his name, and he did testify. Not as strongly as I wanted, but he pointed to the impacts of these 500 high barriers to anadromous fish and to the loss of this critical valley bottom winter range to the elk, deer, and other mammalian populations.

BL: So, what kind of things would Curtis say? The reason I'm asking is that I pulled up some documents from the archives that just got digitized and I just want to fill out his character a little bit.

SB: Well he was recognizing the boon to his city, Orofino, where he was mayor; the boon to the logging industry of getting this timber, which had to be clear-cut or almost; the economy of the region – I guess more or less the typical line of jargon – unparalleled prosperity if we go ahead – and put hundreds of millions of dollars into these two structures.

BL: Was he going to cash in in any way?

SB: I can't help but believe he cashed in heavily for his advocacy, but I don't have evidence of that.

BL: Well, one more question. Did you ever hear him say anything bigoted or racist?

SB: I don't recall of any.

BL: Okay, that's all I got.

SB: Callison turned me loose to do anything I could. I raved and ranted at the meetings of the Federation about those but I was junior, but they quickly passed resolutions opposing them. Callison gave me free reign to do whatever I could to sink it. And I worked the public works committee. I remember going to the Senate Public Works Committee, where Richard Neuberger was a member and the sponsor of Bruce Eddy and Penny Cliffs Dam, Henry Dworshak, Senator from Idaho, was the principle push. And Neuberger, being a conservationist and a great man of liberal principle, saw this young guy in there rattling off his testimony, and he became my friend and straight man. So he would ask questions – how big the fish were, what they were, the steelhead and chinook that ran up these two irreplaceable rivers – and details about the elk herd. The elk of course had been within my area of responsibility. I hadn't

had more than a few trips over them flying the Lochsa and the Selway before I moved to Washington for the job of Assistant Conservation Director. Was that in 1950 or '51?

Anyway, I arrived loaded for bear and Morton was my partner. He would help me reach members, Wildlife Federation state affiliate people, who had influence on members of the Public Works Committee, particularly Missouri, where we have the Chairman, Clarence Cannon, whom I spoke of. And Clarence Cannon got this information from his Conservation Federation of Missouri. They would lobby him and he saved my bacon year in and year out by denying them the money. Dworshak would get it stuck in the Senate bill, but when it came to House or Senate conference, old Clarence would knock it out. Dworshak got to the point of just detesting me and the record will show he was damn near abusive, because here was this string bean of a guy from Idaho, he would go at me and Neuberger would be there to provoke good questions and responses and the details.

Neuberger was a great conservationist. He died suddenly, but really took me in hand, tutored me for presentations to some degree. He had an irreplaceable aid by the name of Lloyd Tupling, who later on became the Washington representative of the Sierra Club. Lloyd was my direct mentor in those years. Lloyd was a great conservationist, a smooth legislative operative, and whether working for the Sierra Club or Neuberger, a source of council and direction for me as a new member of the conservation lobby in Washington.

I was damn glad to be in Washington, pleased with the opportunity, humbled by the size and hierarchical structure of the Congress, given the best overview exposure to it by Charles Callison, my boss at the Wildlife Federation. My trips from the National Wildlife Federation office in a former Safeway store, Tacoma Park, the Federation had taken over this space and it harbored the direct mail operation and the record-keeping related to the funding – massive programs – of the Federation that were unequaled any place in the conservation movement. The Federation had millions; outfits like the Wilderness Society were working with \$10,000 or \$15,000. The Federation was phenomenal in that it discovered the conservation stance, send them out and ask for a dollar. They built this tremendous master list. Zahniser persuaded Callison that the Federation, who worked to make it available for the first Senate franked envelope mailings of the wilderness bill and the explanatory information.

BL: What's a franked envelope?

SB: That was a boondoggle of ultimate...

Unknown speaker: They're pre-stamped. Does that mean that Congress paid for the mailing?

SB: Yes.

Unknown speaker: I went by the National Wildlife Federation [in Washington] and my impression was...I mean, a massive stone building. When I saw their front door, I thought, "Friends of the Bitterroot could run an operation for ten years at least just with the cost of their front door." They have money. Big money.

SB: Well, I was there and that really is what afflicted them when we got out. It got to be big money and they were on 16th Street. That wasn't big enough, they built a gargantuan structure out in Virginia.

Unknown speaker: I didn't even see the big building then.

SB: No. I had a little office in that building, but the size of my office reflected my loss of influence when Callison migrated. I was not in a position to guide that outfit into any tough confrontations on behalf of wildlife or conservation in general.

[End of Interview]