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Boone and Crockett Oral History Project

OH 297-45 and OH 297-46

Interviewee: William Spencer

Interviewer: Dan Hall

Dan Hall: 26, we're at the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch outside of Dupuyer. This is Dan Hall, and today I'm going to be doing an oral history interview with William Spencer. Mr. Spencer, I'd like to start by asking you when and where were you born?

William Spencer: Near Grand Junction, Colorado. I was born literally at the ranch my father ran, it was a cow/calf operation, Hereford cattle, and I was actually born on the ranch without benefit of hospitalization. That was on the 24th of July, 1917.

DH: Where did you receive your education?

WS: I rode a horse each way about six miles to a little country school for the first seven years of my life. Then I went to a suburb of San Diego, California, National City, and spent my last two years of high school at the Sweetwater Union high school, and came back to Colorado, attended a junior college, Mesa College, in Grand Junction, Colorado for two years, then moved to Colorado Springs, and received my degree at Colorado College, in 1939.

DH: Where would you say that your interest in wildlife and wildlife preservation began?

WS: From my earliest days. Our ranch was on the foothills of Grand Mesa and it was rife with wildlife, thousands of mule deer, there were still a few bears around, and I was reared in this operation. [I] started a business of hunting. My income for the first years of my life was a nickel a tail for every prairie dog I shot. Prairie dogs were a menace to the cattle. They would tear up the fields and be hazardous to the animals until, as a pest, it was my source of livelihood.

DH: When did you start big game hunting?

WS: I shot my first mule deer when I was seven.

DH: That's an early start. When did you first become involved with the Boone and Crockett organization?

WS: Well, I had heard about it, I had some friends who were members, and my recollection is I joined the Club in 1970.

DH: Who were the individuals who sponsored your membership?

WS: Uh, a little hazy, Jack Parker, who had been in a year, and he was an enthusiast, and I would imagine it was Parker who sponsored me. I don't recall who the other people were at the time. It's faded. [Chuckle]

DH: How did you feel when you had been asked to join the Boone and Crockett?

WS: Well, I was enthusiastic, I had of course read the Trefethen book. I was always a great admirer of everything that Teddy Roosevelt had done and stood for, and his accomplishments as a man, and his rationale, and after reading the Trefethen book, and with my back ground, I said, "This is the thing I would really like to be involved with and be a part of."

DH: Who were the officers of the Club when you joined? Do you remember?

WS: I can't remember. Jack Parker was the president at that time. No, no maybe he was not, I'm sorry, I've lost it in the history, I'd have to look at some records.

DH: Was Jack Parker a friend?

WS: Yeah, he'd been a friend for many, many years.

DH: How long have you known him?

WS: Oh, I must have known Jack for 40 years.

DH: And where did you first meet Jack?

WS: Probably in the course of a membership at Camp Fire Club. He was in General Electric Company. I was involved with Pratt and Whitney, and he ran the engine division of General Electric. It may have been business wise, but we really came together in terms of our joint memberships at clubs, golf clubs, and so forth.

DH: How did you view his role as president of the Boone and Crockett? [1980-1982]

WS: Oh, I think he was a good, solid president. I mean, he ran the operation very efficiently, the format didn't change very much, but he ran the meetings very well, he organized things very well, he's a very well organized gent.

DH: Have you found your- the companies that you work for to be supportive of your involvement with the Boone and Crockett?

WS: Very much so.

DH: Can you explain to me how they have been supportive?

WS: Well, it's just in terms of the opportunities I've had to talk to the organizations about sustainable wildlife, and the place that hunting and fair chase has in creating an appropriate means of the population in balance, and the total conservation efforts, I think they're generally very estimable. Once in a while, I would encounter somebody who didn't believe that shooting the animals was the thing to do but, based on the basic conservation approach, they endorsed it, heartily.

DH: Have you found it easy or difficult to try to establish corporate relationships through the Boone and Crockett?

WS: I'd say it was mixed, but generally, I would say on balance, the efforts were received.

DH: Can you give me an example of what you would call a good success story?

WS: Well, US West would be one of the principle ones. When I had the idea of acquiring a ranch to serve as a laboratory for the admixture of a "for profit" ranching operation and wildlife, US West gave us a grant of half a million dollars to go to work buying the ranch. I would think that would be the outstanding example.

DH: Are there any examples of missed opportunities that you can look back on and say, Boy, if I'd had that one, that would have really...

WS: Oh, I'm sure there are many. I don't recall any specific ones to mind at the moment.

DH: Are there other corporations that you have managed to open the door for the Boone and Crockett in addition to US West?

WS: In terms of substantial financial contribution, no. A number have, in a more modest way, made some contributions in money and individuals have helped carry the story of Boone and Crockett, which I think is a plus.

DH: How was the decision made that the ranch operation would be a "for profit" ranch operation?

WS: Well, this was my basic idea that if we couldn't have that as an example, it would be meaningless. We would gather information but for those hosts of people who run ranches it would be meaningless to say, "Well, sure, they [Boone and Crockett] ran a ranch, but they lost \$50,000 a year." This would be absolutely useless as a format to anybody who was on a ranch that was involved in making a living.

DH: When did you become president of the Boone and Crockett?

WS: I'd have to look at the record. Again, it's fuzzy in my memory. [1983-1984]

DH: Was there any particular reason why they'd asked you to take over the leadership?

WS: I was asked to. I assume that they felt that I could do the job. I have no other answer.

[Chuckle]

DH: What would you say was probably the crowning achievement of your presidency?

WS: Acquisition of this ranch.

DH: I'd like to get into more detail on this whole process of purchasing the ranch. Let's start with the beginning of why the Boone and Crockett felt it was necessary to purchase a ranch.

WS: Well, I'd have to tell you that this was not universally approved. I don't think there were a lot, but there were a number of members who felt that this was completely outside the "heritage" of what we were doing. As a matter of fact we had, for about 30 or 40 years, been a convivial organization that believed in work with other organizations who were in the conservation field [and] gave them small sums of money. The Club has never had any money, so the sort of a maximum contribution to the various organizations would be thirty or forty thousand dollars a year. It became obvious to me that the stature of the Boone and Crockett Club which, after all, was the grandfather of all conservation, was being lost in the knowledge of our contemporary society. The few people who knew about us were saying, "Yeah, those are a bunch of rich guys who shoot things and get their names in a book." It became very obvious to me that it was important to the organization to build back towards the heritage that was so rightfully B and C's.

DH: Were there other individuals who shared your feelings on that viewpoint?

WS: Oh, yeah, it was obviously the majority or we couldn't have gotten it done. But as I say, it was not a unanimous, enthusiastic approach.

DH: Were there key personnel that you can name that you can think of?

WS: Oh, the key man in doing it was John Hanes who actually handled the complicated business. We got this through a series of swaps and with another ranch and it wound up that John Hanes was the person who handled it chapter and verse.

DH: Were there any other people that were involved here at this end, here in Montana?

W S: Not of what I know.

DH: Why this particular ranch?

WS: Well, I spent a couple of summers looking for a ranch that would embody the characteristics of the admixture of wild animals, and with the possibility of having an operation

where those animals were present, and was also, a cattle raising area. I looked over the whole four corners area, around Colorado and New Mexico, and we actually started with a ranch which is south of us called the Salmon Ranch. Three or four of us came out and talked to the Salmon family. It would have been the perfect ranch because it's considerably larger than the one we now have. It's my recollection [that] it's about a 10,000 acre spread, but I think they wanted ten million dollars. This is obviously out of our ability to raise that kind of funds, and we thought it was over priced for the property to boot.

DH: So, as long as I understand this right, it was primarily a mixture of wildlife and cattle.

WS: Yeah, that's the whole idea to have a place that can serve as a laboratory and serve where we could have examinations, observe first hand with detailed analysis of the interaction of the two, and evolve some real history.

DH: Do you know if your neighbors or the surrounding people here in the Dupuyer area have any kind of reaction to the Boone and Crockett's presence?

WS: Well, I'm sure at first, we were regarded with great suspicion. Here were these guys coming in here and I know that the reactions of a lot of the people were [that] we were buying a place so that Boone and Crockett members could have a private place to shoot. Obviously, the first thing we did was [assure] that no Boone and Crockett member could shoot on the ranch.

DH: Is that well known locally now?

WS: Oh, through our efforts, our hope and hospitality to our neighbors, and God bless Bob and Kelly Peebles they're from the area and regarded as fellow citizens. Through their operations here and their interaction with the neighbors I would think that, with the possible exception of the discussion about the right of way of the road that goes through the ranch which may have raised some hackles, I think we're regarded as an excellent neighbor today.

DH: How did the Boone and Crockett select the Peebles? There must have been a number of people that were interested in [the position].

WS: Well, we had one manager who was here for about a year. It didn't work out. Through looking around we found Bob and Kelly. They were from a neighboring area and they expressed interest in it and [it was] probably the best decision we ever made.

DH: How would you characterize the relationship between the Boone and Crockett and the Blackfeet tribe?

WS: I think it's absolutely excellent. Well, as an example, when I was awarded the Sagamore Hill medal, here, a representative of the Blackfeet tribe came down and handed me some magic amulets, and draped a blanket over my shoulders for my continued good health and well-being.

DH: Has it always been a good relationship since the start?

WS: Well, I think there were some perceived strains at some time, but as they got to know that we were good neighbors, and we respected them, I think it's fine.

DH: In your opinion, what does the future hold for the relations between the Boone and Crockett and the Blackfeet tribe?

WS: I don't know why they shouldn't continue to be excellent.

DH: I want to talk a little bit about the Sagamore Hill award, and I'd like for you to give me a little background on the award itself.

WS: Well, it was the award for outstanding contributions to the Boone and Crockett Club, and it is in two areas: one is for a trophy, which is a specific name, and the other is for just general dedication and service to the organization. I believe there were two or three prior awards made to people for that service.

DH: How did you feel when you had learned that you'd been awarded the Sagamore?

WS: Well, it was probably one of the most thrilling moments of my life. You have this kind of recognizance and organization with the background history of the Club and my devotion to it [and] to receive this award was absolutely fantastic as far as I was concerned.

DH: Lowell Baier wrote a piece describing the dedication of the award and there was a sentence in there that I wanted to put to you: "For absolute insistence on the perpetuation of their original mission." How do you feel about that?

WS: Absolutely. The original mission was the conservation, that was the basis, and the hunting and fair chase was part of the credo of the people who formed Boone and Crockett. I believe it implicitly.

DH: Do you feel that at any time since you've been involved in the Boone and Crockett the organization has strayed from the original mission?

WS: Well, I think, "strayed", I won't accept that word. I think we have a number of very confident, energetic new members who have bought into the heritage we have and are working on this plan to reestablish the organization to the position it so rightfully deserves in the conservation field.

DH: Who were the individuals present during the award of the Sagamore medal?

WS: I'd have to get the list, there were 15 or 20 of the members.

DH: Your immediate family?

WS: Oh, no, I have no immediate family.

DH: Okay. Did you play a role in the Boone and Crockett's decision to move from Virginia to Montana?

WS: Yeah, I was very much involved in it. We were in a very unsatisfactory situation on the outskirts of Washington, and for a number of years we had been looking for a place to go. Our original thoughts were some place that was more centrally located where people from the East Coast, West Coast wouldn't have to go all the way across the continent. We looked at Denver, and Lowell Baier did an absolutely outstanding job. He'd spend literally weeks looking at various places in an attempt to identify the circumstances. Here we found that the old railroad station was available, and that the continuity of the contiguous relationship we had with, the University of Montana -- we had involved them and their professorial group in doing the studies on the ranch, had created the professorship, and this made a very logical connection. I think the old station is a perfect place to have a credible fixed location for Boone and Crockett, and visiting people can see, participate, understand Boone and Crockett instead of having cramped office spaces on the outskirts of Washington.

DH: You say that there were unsatisfactory conditions in Dumfries, can you explain a little more about that?

WS: Well, it was, it was cramped office space, there was no identification of Boone and Crockett or anything about it. It was just another office. It was inadequate and a "so-what" department.

DH: What personally did you do to try and assist with the moving process?

WS: Well, I was interested and active and for a long time I had been one of the people who felt that we should move. I guess that I was part of the discussion groups on a regular basis.

DH: Cody, Wyoming came in a second place according to Lowell. I understand there were some people in the organization that really wanted the organization to move to Cody, can you explain that to me?

WS: Well, local folks who were proud of their location, the museum there, and the heads and horns exhibit, and that propinquity gave a real reason so the enthusiasm of people for Cody as a place was very logical.

DH: What were your feelings about Cody?

WS: If we had found the right kind of set up I would have been perfectly happy.

DH: Have you ever done any travelling on behalf of the Boone and Crockett in an official capacity?

WS: No.

DH: Never have?

WS: No.

DH: How about meeting with politicians in official capacity for Boone and Crockett?

WS: I don't think I've ever formally done any of that.

DH: Is there a role for the Boone and Crockett to be entering into the political arena?

WS: Well, we are in a very specific [area], but our goal is to demonstrate by virtue of the professorship, by the studies we make, that we can contribute to the understanding of the need for an exploding population, and a finite amount of wildlife, to evolve the systems, the criteria, and the operations that these can be preserved.

DH: How did the Boone and Crockett come to the decision to enter into association with the University of Montana?

WS: Well, it was a logical follow on, because, again of the close association here, and the fact that the university has a very active department (professors who are interested in this), and the propinquity when we talked to them about their interests and the professors professed a great interest in looking at this intermixture and working the problem. And night followed day.

DH: This research that's conducted here at the ranch, is that published and distributed to the scientific community, or is it more targeted towards the ranchers in the vicinity?

WS: No, it's both. The studies are through the professorship, and through the writings of what we've been able to do, and the research that continues to go on here will be available to everybody. It certainly is of interest to the ranchers. I think that is normal when you are struggling for a livelihood on a ranch and you see wild animals come and graze on your property, you have a feeling you're being put upon. But we have operated profitably here at the ranch, and we have hundreds of animals as you know, and they occupy the ranch during the heavy snow conditions in the high country.

DH: I'd like to talk a little bit [about] your feelings and impressions of the principles of fair chase that the Boone and Crockett puts forth.

WS: I respect all of them, I feel that, in terms of rewards, that you cannot take a trophy that's within an enclosure. I feel that this doesn't mandate any smirch on a person who goes to one of

those big game ranches and hunts in a sportsman-like manner. But clearly, those trophies could not be available for the records book because you couldn't define something that would [allow] a ranch of 40,000 acres to qualify but [an area] that was 300 acres wouldn't.

DH: Would you say your principles of fair chase were firmly in place before you began your association with the Boone and Crockett?

WS: Well, I grew up, as I say, in an area where the mule deer were very big in numbers but I don't know that I ever sat down and looked through the principles of fair chase. I always felt it was mandated to obey the laws, to hunt appropriately, properly licensed, not use lighting or any of these things. I never had a helicopter, so (laughing), I don't know whether I would have used the helicopter to find a trophy or not.

DH: Have you done a lot of hunting with other members of the Boone and Crockett?

WS: Several of them, yeah.

DH: Can you describe to me a couple of experiences?

WS: Well, I hunted down in Texas with John McCamish, I hunted with Jack Parker of course and that's all that comes to mind at the moment. I had one partner for many years, I guess we went on half a dozen sheep hunts together, who's not a member. But if he were available to travel anywhere, I'm sure that he would embrace all of those things because he's a sportsman of the highest caliber.

DH: You've led efforts to try to save the Sonoran Desert Pronghorn, can we talk a little about that, where you first became involved in that effort?

WS: Well, I'm hazy on the details, but the case for the pronghorn, is very logical and this is something that fitted into all the parameters of the conservation aspects the Club stands for: something that obviously was appropriate for interest and activities on the part of the Club.

[Side 2]

DH: (This is the second side of our interview with Mr. Spencer.) Bill, you were also involved with fundraising efforts to try to protect the Siberian Tiger. How did you get involved in that effort?

WS: I don't know how, or who identified it, how it came about. I just know it was presented as one of the things that was appropriate for the rationale of the organization. I'm not clear in my memory on the details at all.

DH: How did you secure funding for your effort? For example, you were trying to fund game wardens to protect the Siberian Tiger, how did you go about raising money for such an operation?

WS: Well, what we did was make some modest contributions within our ability for a contribution from the Club, and there were efforts of some of the individuals to raise funds from other sources. I did not actively participate in that.

DH: I want to jump back to the National Heads and Horns Collection. Were you involved in the resurrection of that exhibit getting back up and running?

WS: Yeah, I was part of the group. A group of us worked, I was not in any sense of the word at the forefront of it, but as a project which was so logical for the Boone and Crockett exhibit to be associated with, that operation just made all the sense in the world.

DH: When did this occur?

WS: Oh, it's been about, I think about 4 or 5 years. We reached the decision to do it [and] financed the operation at the museum.

DH: Were you involved with any other conservation organizations?

WS: Yeah, I'm a director of The Conservation Fund, I was a director of the Nature Conservancy for a couple of terms. I spend a good bit of time with The Conservation Fund, a really, really neat thing that they're doing, [and] the way they're going about it. Did you know the president of The Conservation Fund is a professional member of Boone and Crockett?

DH: No, I didn't know that.

WS: Pat Noonan.

DH: How does your membership and involvement with these other organizations fit with the activities with the Boone and Crockett?

WS: Absolutely no conflict.

DH: Are these organizations mutually supportive of each other?

WS: Yeah. There's competition, of course, for the funds and the properties, and so forth, but yes. The Conservation Fund, as a matter of fact, came out of the Nature Conservancy.

DH: How did that come about?

WS: Well, it was originally my understanding that it was first started as a fundraising entity to aid in the Conservancy's own efforts as The Conservation Fund, and it has gradually assumed its current independent status.

DH: In your role as director of the Nature Conservancy, were you active in the acquisition of the Pine Butte?

WS: I had no active part in it. I never got specifically involved in any of the major projects. I participated as a director. I, of course, worked on the projects they had in a general way, but I was never a key figure in any of the acquisitions that they made.

DH: The reason that I'm asking is there's a parallel here between what Nature Conservancy is attempting at Pine Butte, and what the Boone and Crockett is attempting here at the Teddy Roosevelt Ranch. They're different, but they are similar.

WS: Well, they're similar in that they're conservation efforts. The difference is that we allow the general public and everybody within the rules and regulations, and within the appropriate limits of the population, we allow hunting. There is no hunting on the Pine Butte reservation of any sort.

DH: Can we talk a little bit about the road access issue. Were you aware of this situation when you purchased the ranch?

WS: It was probably there, but it didn't loom as a "go -no go" situation.

DH: Can you give me a little background on the situation as it evolved?

WS: Well, this access road was created in an historical way and it was obviously a problem with all of the traffic that could go back and forth across there as far as the wildlife on the ranch.

DH: So you say it, mainly it was a wildlife concern that led the Boone and Crockett to sit up and take note of the road?

WS: Yeah, and the fact that it was a real intrusion on the otherwise managed tract of property.

DH: Has the physical layout or the design of the ranch itself changed since the Boone and Crockett's acquisition?

WS: No, it's the same.

DH: Do you know any of the history of this place?

WS: I have, but again, the owners and so forth are lost in the history.

DH: Do you think the records book that the Boone and Crockett publishes might encourage people to poach animals?

WS: Well, you get a person whose greed surpasses all of the things the Club stands for. We

know people who, to have a record in the Boone and Crockett book is sort of number one in their lives. And there are people who would do that [poach], of course. Sure, you get anything that recognizes a trophy acquisition and you get the bad guys that will do it. There are a few living examples of it.

DH: Is there anything that the Boone and Crockett can do to discourage that kind of activity?

WS: We review every trophy, and there has to be attestations, a lot of details about where it was taken, the circumstances, and a certificate that it was taken in fair chase. But, thieves rob banks. [Chuckle]

DH: Have you personally taken a trophy?

WS: I have a sheep, a stone sheep, that is listed and a big horn which would quality, but I've not entered it.

DH: Where did you take the animal?

WS: It was up in northern British Columbia.

DH: How long ago was this?

WS: Oh, I spent about 20 years concentrating, really concentrating, on sheep hunting and I collected three and one quarter slams over that time, and this stone sheep happens to be the best of the sheep I got.

DH: Explain to me what you mean by "three and one quarter slams."

WS: Well, a grand slam of North American Sheep is there are four sheep that are identified as being specific types. The dall sheep which is the white sheep up in the Yukon Territory and Alaska. Then as you come down, there's the stone sheep which is also a thin horned sheep. They get mixed up with their cousins and occasionally they look more like a bighorn than a thin horn. Then you come down, sort of about the middle of British Columbia, and [find] the Rocky Mountain bighorn, and they exist down through area, Montana, Wyoming, and there are some in Colorado. Then down in Arizona and through Mexico and on the Baja California Peninsula is the desert bighorn. When you get one of each of those you have a grand slam of North American sheep.

DH: So how do you get three and a quarter?

WS: Well, I have three of all of them, and four desert bighorns.

DH: Okay. [Chuckles] I understand now. Where did your interest in sheep come from?

WS: I guess it started when I was in Baja and I had an opportunity to go on a desert bighorn hunt. They're rather low, but they're very severe mountains, and I guess that's when the bug bit me. Then I went on a trip in British Columbia and I was hopelessly struck.

DH: Are there other organizations that you belong to that are dedicated to the bighorn sheep?

WS: Not that I'm a member of, no. There are several organizations though that are sheep organizations, but I'm not a member of them.

DH: How do you personally feel about people who are anti-hunters?

WS: Well, I think everybody has their right to believe that hunting may be inappropriate, but there are people who obviously don't understand that appropriate hunting creates the balance of nature. Lack of that understanding is simply not a sensible thing. If you look to the fees that hunters pay it's a very, very big number in license fees and so forth that goes towards the continued protection and continuation of the hunting world.

DH: Is this an arena where the Boone and Crockett can move into and have an effect?

WS: Well, this is the demonstration. That's what our professorship [does] and in areas like this we can bring a sensible, middle ground approach to it. This is one of the things we want to do.

DH: What have you personally done with this issue of anti-hunting?

WS: Only in so far as that I've never taken a stump to do anything about it, but in any kind of conversation or discussion, why, I make my views known as vigorously as possible.

DH: Are you aware of any past research activities that the Boone and Crockett has helped fund or support?

WS: Oh they're myriad, but with our very limited financial resources. The Conservation Committee has looked into these things and we have, over the years, contributed to causes that upon examination we believed were worthwhile. But again, our limited finances have not made us a big player in any of those areas.

DH: Are there any research activities that you can recall that stand out as a shining example of a good fit with the Boone and Crockett?

WS: On Isle Royal the wolf and moose population on that island is one of them, and we've gone through the whole series of the ups and downs when we supported that effort for many, many years.

DH: That's an interesting research program there, can you tell me a little bit about that?

WS: Well, it had been a hands-on observation of the waxing and waning of the population. Conclusions can be drawn from this kind of a close observation of wild animals and their survival, or the diminishing of their numbers, over a period of time.

DH: Would you imagine the Boone and Crockett continuing these kinds of studies in other parts of the country?

WS: Oh, I don't know why not. Obviously our specific efforts are made around the professorship and what we can specifically do rather than our sole business which for so many years was distributing these peanuts of funds to worthwhile causes. We hope to be a mover and shaker ourselves.

DH: I want to talk about that. You've been referring to this as peanuts, and as small change, but in the conservation community there are people who couldn't have done what they have done without the Boone and Crockett.

WS: That's right. But it's not big money. Thirty or forty thousand bucks in total, that's kind of the annual level of contribution.

DH: How would you characterize the relationship with the State of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks with the operation of the ranch here?

WS: Oh, my feeling is that it is absolutely first class - "enthusiastic" is how I would [characterize it] from my knowledge of it.

DH: Do they have any interest here in watching firsthand what is attempted here?

WS: Oh, they're here and spend time here on a pretty regular basis.

DH: So would you say that the Boone and Crockett made the proper choice then for the location of the ranch?

WS: Yeah, yeah, I think it's perfect. I think it points up one of the greatest hazards of wildlife that we have these days, and that is this whole front of which we're a part -- there's fifty miles of this front with these big ranches that over a period of time, if we can't find a way to get easements or something of this sort, sooner or later one or more of these ranches is going to be broken up into ranchettes or somebody is going to create a summer hotel, a vacation spot, and the animals won't have any place to go. This is just as important in the preservation of wildlife as any of the critical water situations on the east coast which received so much publicity. This received very little. This is something we've got to find a way to try to do, or else those animals will have no place to go. They can't stay up in the high country in the winter.

DH: That's true. Are there any issues associated with the ranch here that I haven't touched on that you want to talk about?

WS: No, none that I know of. I think we're regarded, aside from this road situation, as being good neighbors, that we're constructive people to rub elbows with, and that we're accepted.

DH: Is there a role that the Boone and Crockett can play to keep what you were just describing from happening - the subdivisions, the hotels?

WS: Well, we've explored the possibilities of easements, and the easement on a property is something that is difficult for residual heirs and so forth. I think if we can raise enough funding, we can. Through Bob Peebles we've had contact with the ranchers here, and a number of them, if you could compensate them appropriately, would grant us an easement. Not "grant us" an easement, grant an easement. This is little known, but this is one of the critical conservation problems in our country today as far as all of the animals off the Lewis and Clark and Bob Marshall wildernesses.

DH: Is the Boone and Crockett actively engaged in some kind of a public relations effort to try to get the story out?

WS: We probably haven't done it to the degree we could or should. As a matter of fact, it's going to be a principle topic at this meeting.

DH: How do you feel about the Boone and Crockett's Associates program?

WS: Well, to the degree that people get the material that we send out, that they understand the ethos of the Boone and Crockett Club and can expand through a grassroots operation the things we stand for, and to bulwark it, I think it's a terrific idea.

DH: Does the Associates program accomplish everything that you feel that it should be?

WS: Oh, no, nothing ever does. You know to have ten million dollars or a hundred million dollars is better, but it's a real plus in my opinion.

DH: Then what about the, I can't think of the phrase here, the professional association with the wildlife management?

WS: It can do nothing but good.

DH: I've heard some people say that that is a card that the Boone and Crockett plays to curry favor among its political appointees. Is that true?

WS: Well, it's a world of political movement, and the degree to which through politicians who have a lot of power, (those politicians who share in the ethos of Boone and Crockett,) are valuable consorts in our major thrusts.

DH: Is the Boone and Crockett as diverse as it could be?

WS: I'm not sure I understand the question.

DH: In terms of its personnel, the people that make up the Boone and Crockett, a mix of people that come from all walks of life.

WS: I think that we're remarkably diverse.

DH: Has it always been that way?

WS: I think there's been a good bit of diversity. We had an era, which happily is mostly behind us, [with] a bunch of members who just wanted the Boone and Crockett name on their agenda for having taken trophies, a lot of trophy hunters. They're part of the "screw the conservation efforts, I want something, I want to be recognized as having taking a Boone and Crockett trophy." But happily I think that all of those are no longer members.

DH: Wouldn't it be easier to educate these people in the relationship between conservation and the trophy animal?

WS: Yeah, but there has to be a certain amount of volunteerism, and this is what's happening out here now. We've got a bunch of people who are knocking the walls down - this new breed of member who believes in what we've always hoped for and what we're trying to be again, which is, of course the "grandfather of conservation". We need to re-establish [Boone and Crockett's] stature.

DH: You talk about the spirit of volunteerism, I want to touch on you personally, and what you do for different organizations. It's pretty obvious you've done a lot. Can you just give me a brief run down of the organizations that you've been involved with and what they do?

WS: There, there two principal ones. My colleagues -- because if I hadn't gotten a college education, (I had a scholarship to Colorado College,) I couldn't have done any of the things that I've been able to do. I owe them an undying debt of gratitude. The other thing -- shortly after I went to New York I was in the in the cavalry and got whacked in the head with a horse's hoof. It turned into bone cancer in my head, and I stayed in the University hospital from November through April. I was told I was going to die. The surgeons kept removing pieces from my skull, I lived, and I got patched up afterwards, so the New York University Medical Center is an organization to which I'm particularly grateful. I was the head of the New York blood program because blood was so badly needed. I organized the corporations in New York City to run blood drives, and I've been very active there. I was the president of the Berkshire Farm for Boys for many years. This is an organization that takes boys that have been in trouble with the law, puts them in an environment where they are retrained, counseled, studied, and then sent back to try to carry those lessons into their lives. I'm still the chairman emeritus of the Berkshire Farm for Boys.

DH: How did you end up in New York City?

WS: Long story, it shouldn't be part of this, but I had really taken a job to work for a natural gas company down in Pueblo, Colorado. I had never had a holiday in my life and decided, when I graduated, that I was literally going to do nothing until I went to work that fall. Some maiden ladies, school teachers, from the Grand Junction high school, wanted to see the World's Fair. I had gotten to know them when I was down at Mesa College, and they asked me if I would drive them to New York to see the World's Fair. I said, "Sure". The Treasurer at Colorado College was an old Wall Street man (he was also our hockey coach), and he said, "Bill, three or four weeks with some middle aged maiden ladies might get a little dull, let me write some letters to some of my old acquaintances in Wall Street." So, I drove them to New York, I spent a day at the World's Fair, put a nickel in the Lexington Avenue subway, got out in front of Trinity church, looked down Wall Street, and said, "This is for me." I spent the rest of the time looking for a job, I got one, and I've been in New York ever since.

DH: You may say that the question doesn't really go along with this, but obviously with your association with New York, and your long time spent there, and your love for wildlife, the two seem rather incongruous at first glance.

WS: Well, for the first ten years I was there, I was struggling so hard to stay alive, that I didn't have time to do anything. Got a break, started hunting, and all of it re-engulfed me.

DH: 'Til that ten year period there, then, you were not hunting, or fishing, or any kind of active actively doing anything?

WS: I was trying to stay alive.

DH: Do you remember that first hunt you took then when after you had taken your little break from hunting?

WS: Well, it was that sheep down in Baja California, and that was almost coincidental with a fishing expedition down there.

DH: Who were you on that trip with?

WS: Some friends from the old Richfield Company.

DH: Have you ever sponsored other people to join the Boone and Crockett?

WS: Oh, a number of them. Absolutely.

DH: How do you feel about sponsoring people for membership?

WS: Well, who I know from personal experience that believe in the credo and respond to the question "would they be active." I would like to get fifty more people in here. [Chuckles]

DH: My understanding is that membership is limited.

WS: Yeah.

DH: Is there a stiff competition when there is a new member being nominated?

WS: No. It's very interesting. Membership is a hundred, and we stayed just a few under that. People retire, go out, and [with] new members coming in, there's turnover that keeps us right at par.

DH: The Boone and Crockett actively encourages people to serve on committees.

WS: Absolutely.

DH: Where did that come from?

WS: Well activism is a thing we've got to have, we've got to have. You don't just join to say "I'm a member of Boone and Crockett." We quiz people. "If you're elected a member, would you work?"

DH: How do you determine if they'd be an active member?

WS: Sometimes they lie to you and sometimes they don't.

DH: Are there any Boone and Crockett members that have been successful in their role as a committee member or a committee chairman or

WS: Well, you look at what [George] Bettas is doing, you look at what Paul [Webster] has done

DH: What has Bettas done?

WS: He's the guy that does the associates, he's completely redone the associate's newsletter and Paul Webster on the financial side, they're just a bunch of movers and shakers.

DH: Was this same interest in having activism present in the Boone and Crockett when you joined in '70?

WS: No, it was the Boone and Crockett Club, it had its history, got together a couple of times a year, had a big annual dinner, spent a lot of the day talking about the projects we should try to aid and abet with our limited financial resources. That was about it.

DH: How did this change come about?

WS: Well, we bought the ranch and got into this program of starting to the renaissance of the Boone and Crockett that started back in 1897. That's the source of all the activism we've got today.

[Tape 2]

DH: Saturday June 26, this is tape number two of our interview with Bill Spencer, and Bill we were on the subject of activism in the Boone and Crockett. I'd asked you to hold that thought, and now I don't know what that thought was. [Laughter]

WS: Well, like you say, I'm so absolutely delighted and exhilarated with the activism and the way that people are really dedicating energy and time to the different aspects of it, to bring about this renaissance of the organization.

DH: Was it easy to get these active members into the organization?

WS: Well, as I said, the power of the idea that [with every] responsible new member we'd have that conversation with them: "If you were elected a member, would you be willing to work?" As I said, some people lie, and some people really perform. We've got a bunch of performers out there.

DH: Whose decision was this to go after the active people?

WS: Well, I guess it was a lot of us that believed that the organization could be reactivated.

DH: Were there any hard feelings amongst other members that maybe weren't so active?

WS: Well, as I say, this change, the acquisition of the ranch and what we're doing was not a unanimous operation, and we lost members. I think it was because they didn't buy in, or they didn't feel comfortable being asked to really work, or whatever.

DH: How did the Boone and Crockett come up with Hal Salwasser?

WS: Well, they decided that the interest [within] the University, would it be appropriate to name a professor at the University. We started looking around for a person that we thought could articulate and demonstrate what we were all about. Hal was one of the people [interviewed], and happily we made the best decision we could possibly make.

DH: That is was. On this topic of the Boone and Crockett's relationship with the University and research, is there anything in that area that I might have missed that you want to talk about?

WS: No, I think, and this is something that we need to tread very lightly, we have to think lots very carefully that in our search for supporters and financial support, and the University looking for support, that we are not used inappropriately as a tool to raise funds that might come to Boone and Crockett for our own efforts. We have to walk this line very carefully.

DH: I'm still not clear on how the Boone and Crockett attempts to disseminate this information to ranchers.

WS: Well, I don't know that we have any formal thing, I think it's been done here locally. I think this is something that these reports by these students who are doing the studies will be released and sent to organizations. Obviously the lone farmer who doesn't do anything except read the western paper won't get it, but it will be available through farm organizations.

DH: Okay, to take it a further step back, then, on the topic of the relationship that the Boone and Crockett enjoys with the Blackfeet Tribe, is there anything in there that I've missed or anything that you want to add to that conversation?

WS: No, no, I think that's something that in this total of being a good neighbor, we have to continue to be conscious of.

DH: Is Curly Bear a good friend?

WS: I would say so, yes. I think he's a very good friend. I fell in love with him.

DH: How long have you known Curly Bear?

WS: I met him here, and that was my initial acquaintance with him, and I haven't seen him since. I've written him. I haven't heard from him but I loved his stories that he told us that day and night. It was very entertaining and he's a very good man.

DH: I did want to ask, are you aware of the discussions that the Boone and Crockett is having with the National Park Service concerning the Sagamore Hill gun collection?

WS: Yeah.

DH: Can you explain to me what's going on there?

WS: Well, I guess all of us just believed that the collected guns out at Sagamore Hill were property of Boone and Crockett. When we had the new headquarters, obviously one of the things that came to mind was getting that collection in the headquarters. Then a legal examination found that, in fact, some of the guns had disappeared and, in fact, some of them had been deeded to other organizations. So it wasn't, as we just took for granted, that they were ours.

DH: Is there an active role played by the Boone and Crockett trying to resolve the issues

involved there?

WS: Being worked right at this moment.

DH: The current president, Steve Adams, strikes me as a rather young fellow. Is he the kind of president that this organization needs at this point in time?

WS: Well, Steve has been remarkable. He has worked at this presidency almost as if it were a full time job. He's the caliber and type of person that we certainly need to follow in his footsteps.

DH: Are there past presidents of the organization that stand out in your mind as men who really did a good job?

WS: Well, I think all of the presidents here to a greater or lesser degree have worked the problem. Some of them have had rather serious mandates in their personal careers that limited their time for the Club, but other than that they're interests are certainly sincere, but Steve has been an outstanding mover.

DH: What about prior to Steve?

WS: Well, as I say, more or less, based on their time.

DH: Are there other members of the Boone and Crockett that stand out in your mind as really a shining example of what the Boone and Crockett is all about?

WS: Well, we've mentioned these committee chairs, and I think any one of them is really busting their butts.

DH: Talking about the parallel drawn between the individual person and the mission statement of the Boone and Crockett, are there shining examples of -

WS: I think these committee chairs are the perfect example.

DH: Okay. Going back a couple more steps then to conversation we've had earlier about your opening corporate doors for the Boone and Crockett, is there anything that I might have missed there that you want to bring into that or want to add to that?

WS: No, no I don't think so.

DH: Okay. What about when we talked in the beginning about your start in hunting, and your original involvement with, or your original awareness of conservation and hunting ethics, is there anything that you want to touch on that again?

WS: No, just it's grown as I've become interested in hunting, and became aware of

improprieties, the fair chase, and what constitute the sportsman approach to collecting trophies.

DH: That pretty much runs through the list of questions then that I had prepared for this interview. Is there anything that I've missed that you want to bring up or you feel needs to be added?

WS: No, I think the only thing I would say, I'm so delighted with the current membership, with the enthusiasm, with the work that's going on, and I can predict that unless we stumble badly, with this kind of energy and talent, that in ten years we will again be recognized as a key force in the environmental field. And with this problem, that I said before, of an exploding population and finite natural resources -- you have extremes on both ends. What we hope to be is a high level, sane purveyor of the problems that are intrinsically involved in this.

DH: So true.

WS: I think if we do, if we can have some effect the organization will be well served.

DH: Bill, I'd like to thank you for the interview.

WS: Thank you.

END