

An Interview with  
**James F. Keefe**

in  
Jefferson City, Missouri

**05 November 1997**

interviewed by Will Sarvis  
transcribed by Teresa Jones  
edited by Renae Farris



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## PREFACE

The interview was recorded on 3M type I (normal bias) audio cassettes, using a Marantz PMD-222 manual recorder (set on automatic recording level) and a Shure VP64 omnidirectional microphone attached to a tripod floor stand. There are occasional interfering background noises, such as a clock chiming, a lawn mower running and traffic sounds, but generally the audio quality is good throughout.

The following transcript represents a faithful rendering of the entire oral history interview. Minor stylistic alterations -- none of factual consequence -- have been made as part of a general transcription policy. Any use of brackets [ ] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Parentheses ( ) are used to indicate laughter or a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation. Quotation marks [“ ”] indicate speech depicting dialogue, or words highlighted for the usual special purposes (such as indicating irony). Double dashes [--] and ellipses [ . . . ] are also used as a stylistic method in an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, N. Renae Farris.



**[Tape meter, 001. Begin side one, tape one of two. Begin interview.]**

WS: For the record, I'll say my name is Will Sarvis. I'm with the State Historical Society of Missouri. Today is November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1997. I'm in Jefferson City, Missouri where I'm in the home of Mr. James F. Keefe, who worked for the Department of Conservation for many years.

JK: Thirty-six.

WS: Thirty-six years.

JK: Yeah. (chuckles)

WS: That's what I'd like to focus on, but I thought just to get started maybe if you'd give us a biographical sketch about where you were born and grew up and that kind of thing.

JK: Well, I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma [on] the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 1923. My father worked for the Brunswick Company as a sales manager and traveled a good deal. We moved around quite a bit, and lived in I think Baton Rouge and in Memphis, and then eventually into St. Louis. I was raised and grew up in the St. Louis area.

[I] served in the U.S. Air Force from St. Louis. All my duties were stateside. I was with a training outfit that trained crews for B-24 Liberator bombers. I was discharged from Mountain Home Army Air Base in Idaho in 1945.

I went to Indiana. My sister had died while I was in the service. My mother had been born in Bluffton, Indiana, and she wanted to go back there. So she and my stepfather moved to Bluffton and that's where I went after I got out of the service. I attended college at Perdue University and Indiana University. [I] worked for a newspaper up there in Indiana, [and] worked for the office of Price Administration for a

while. [I] decided if I was going to get serious about college, I'd better settle on someplace.

In 1945, with the big flood of veterans hitting the campuses of the colleges, housing was at a premium and I couldn't find... That's why I went to Perdue for one semester and Indiana U. another. I couldn't find anyplace to live there. I had married and had one kid, and needed *housing*, so I wrote all over the country to colleges, asking about housing for veterans. I had an invitation from New Mexico A and M at Las Cruces. I loaded my family up in the old '36 Pontiac and started chugging for Las Cruces, New Mexico from northern Indiana. I stopped off to visit a friend of mine who was going to school at Missouri University in Columbia. His wife had just left him and he had an apartment he was going to have to give up. So he said, "Why don't you just stay here and take over this apartment instead of going all the way to New Mexico?" (chuckling) So that's how I happened to land in Missouri. I stayed and took Bachelors in 1950 and a Masters of Arts in 1951 from the University of Missouri.

*Originally* I was planning on a teaching career with a major in Biology because that was my main interest. In my senior year, I took a course that was required of all Biology teachers called "Principles of Wildlife Conservation." It was taught by a Dr. Rudolf Bennitt, and I fell under his spell. He liked the idea that I had been a writer for air base newspapers and had worked on the newspaper up in Bluffton, Indiana. He said, "We need people with journalistic backgrounds in the wildlife field. Why don't you stay and take a Masters Degree, and I'll set up a curriculum for a person of your type." Which he did and I did. Just about the time I was ready to graduate, a position opened up with

the Missouri Department of Conservation for someone to write news releases for the Department. So I started working there in February 1951. In a year or two, I took over as Managing Editor of the Missouri Conservationist magazine, which at that time had a circulation of about 20,000.

**[Tape meter, 050]**

Not long after I took over Managing Editor of the magazine, my boss (who was [C.] Dan Saults, the Chief of the Information section) was promoted to Assistant Director and I was made Chief of the Information section. That put me in charge of all of the public functions of the Department. We had radio programs [and] speakers bureaus; we made motion pictures; we had exhibits at the various regional fairs and the State Fair; we had a photographic staff; we published various bulletins and brochures. And that's what I did for thirty-six years as head of that group. I took the Conservationist magazine from 20,000 to 470,000 circulation when I gave up editorship of it in 1985.

At that time, I left the Information section and was put on special status to write a history of the Department in anticipation of its fiftieth Anniversary in 1987. That's what I did the last two years I worked for the Department was research the early history of the Department and all of its programs and its personnel, and wrote that book, The First Fifty Years, which was a recognition of the Department's fifty years of non-political conservation in the state. I retired in 1987.

WS: So do they pretty much have, more or less, like a historic archives of all their old documents right there?

JK: Well, yes and no. I had been squirreling away material. I was the one who had a historical sense, I guess, for the Department. I had been squirreling away a lot of documents and things that were ordinarily going to be thrown away and it'd built up sort of a Department archives. Of course, they had the minutes of all of the Conservation Commission meetings from 1937 when the Department came into existence, up until the present. And those minutes became the nucleus of the book. Then I interviewed all of the old timers, too, to get the human slant on some of the events that had taken place in the Department. That fleshed out just the bare bones of the Department of Conservation Commissioners' minutes. They kept good records of the business affairs and the programs of the Department. But then there was a human side too which I got from the employees who had worked there all of those years.

WS: It would seem like the Information section would have a lot to do with the Education section.

JK: Well, in most states at that time, (and it's probably still true to some extent today) information and education were not really differentiated all that much. In many states, they talked about education, but what they were really talking about was what we considered information programs in Missouri. Missouri had always had a *separate* Conservation Education section that dealt primarily with the public schools, whereas the Information's job was with the public at large. So to that extent we reinforced one another, but we had separate missions, really, the Education [section and the Information section.] Now, it's changed since I retired and I'm really not as familiar with what's

going on there now. I don't know whether they are as closely involved with schools presently as they were in years past.

WS: Well, I would think working in the Information section you would have to gain a mastery of every division within the Department of Conservation.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

JK: Yes, and I think my special wildlife training that I had at the University of Missouri, made me unusually qualified for that sort of a job, because I could talk the language of the foresters; I could talk the language of the biologists. I *was* one of them, in essence. I do know that in other information programs around the country, information people were held with some suspicion by the technical people. That never existed with me. I got along well with them because I was one of them. I think it helped me in my job a heck of a lot. It helped me do a more effective job, too.

WS: Was the Information section there from the beginning of the Department of Conservation?

JK: Yes, there was an Information section of a sort even prior to the Conservation Commission's establishment. The old Fish and Game Department had had a conservation magazine back in the 1920s and it had kind of a checkered career. It was up and down, and it was *extinct* by 1929. But there was efforts made at making motion pictures and exhibits at the State Fair, and there were news releases issued. There was a very talented man by the name of Townsend Godsey who worked in that area. Townsend -- I can't remember the political things -- but in the old days, the old Fish and Game Department was heavily political. If an administration changed, why, people would go

out. Townsend Godsey was out there for a while, but they were hiring [him] as an individual on the side rather than as a department employee, because he was so talented! He made early motion pictures and did photography and news releases and stuff for the old Fish and Game Department. *[Thoughtful pause]* When [Wilbur] Buford took over the Fish and Game Department in the administration immediately preceding the setting up of the Conservation Commission, one of his first annual reports proudly announced that there had been a complete turnover in personnel in the department. Because it was so heavily political in those days. But with the advent of the Conservation Commission, you weren't allowed talk politics. Employees were not asked what their political affiliations were and you didn't discuss politics as a member of the department. In those days we didn't even distinguish it as a department. We were a conservation *commission*. Not just the four men, but the whole *staff* were part of the Conservation Commission. We referred to ourselves as employees of the *commission*, not of a department. That came later.

WS: Well, did you ever see any exceptions to that policy in terms of politics getting involved?

JK: I'm sure there were, but... *[pause]* I think over the years, Conservation Commissioners were *appointed* with the idea of straightening out some of the programs of the Conservation Department. That is, they'd come in with their set notion of the way things *ought* to be. And it didn't take them long until they got kind of educated (chuckling) and swung around and became one of the team themselves! In almost every case. I don't know of any *real serious* political tampering with the Conservation Commission. I can tell you an anecdote: Years ago the Department, in order to keep its finger on the pulse

and to keep itself accessible to the public, used to go around twice a year to public meetings that were called, where the public was invited to come in and *voice* their ideas to the Commission as a way [to let them know what] programs they'd like to see or comment on the Department programs.

**[Tape meter, 150]**

Well, over the years they got to be kind of love feasts where people would come to praise and we didn't *get* anything out of it, really. But that was finally abandoned because it just wasn't doing what we had hoped it would do, and that is the public expressing *itself* as to things they would *like* us to do. Most of the time, they came and said, "We *love* what you're doing!"

There was a legislator who came from an eastern part of the state who introduced a bill to take over the funding of the Conservation Department. Such bills always upset us; we got *scared!* We had always had the *belief* that our funds could not be used for any other purpose. It says so in the Constitution of the State. But it *doesn't* say that they stand *appropriated* as does the Highway Department's funds. So we would always have to go to the legislature through the appropriation process. The legislature would woo our requests around, but in the end, they'd give us what we asked for. This guy was trying to set that aside and make the legislature supreme over the expenditures of the Department. Well, he was defeated (his activities, that is, his bills were defeated), but the people back in his area hit that man so hard. For one thing, he wasn't re-elected. But they also got to him in other ways, apparently, because I remember I was at one of these last town hall meetings that we held, and he came to apologize for having *introduced* the bill.

(chuckles) Even though he was no longer was a legislator or anything else. They had gotten to him so hard that... You don't mess with the Conservation Commission and its money.

So, yeah, there were politics, and we ran scared all the time when such things would come up, but the Conservation Federation would bring a busload of people up to Jefferson City and they would walk the halls of the capitol and talk to their legislators and things just... Well, it got to be where it was a sure way to political oblivion was to try to mess with the Conservation Commission.

WS: Would you happen to remember what year it was that that legislator introduced that bill?

JK: It would have been... [pauses] I think in the late '50s. As I recall, it was in the late '50s. I don't want to get too particular here about this thing.

WS: Was that legislator from an urban area or rural area?

JK: No, he was from what you might consider a *sub*-urban area.

WS: Did you ever see a battle of wills between a director and a member of the Commission?

JK: Well, not personally, no. But I do know that I.T. Bode, the Department's first Director, had almost twenty years as the Director, [and he] had lost the support of the four man Commission, [and] that resulted in his eventually leaving the department. Now I don't know any particulars about that. But he got into some kind a hassle with the commissioners about something and huffily said, "I'll resign!" They said, "We'll accept!" (chuckles)

**[Tape meter, 200]**

So, yeah, there have been commissioners who were problem children to the Department and to the rest of the Commission and to the Directors as well. They would come with some kind of a pet project and... Or maybe it was just something about their way of doing things. There was a period with one commissioner -- and I don't know if I ought to name him for this purpose or not --

WS: It's up to you.

JK: -- who during his six year term, just *alienated everybody* in the Department, the Director and the rest of the Commission because of his attitude about things. I can't think of very many other Commissioners... Most of them were real decent guys. Like I said, some of them would come with preconceived notions of the way things ought to be done. But almost to a to a man, they came around to the way that the staff of the Department thought was best. We had professional staff and they were good people. The Commissioners, sooner or later, would come around and acknowledge that the staff probably was right! (chuckles) There have been a few times when they overruled the staff and then had to rescind something, because the staff turned out to be *right*. (chuckles) So that has happened.

WS: Well, they don't get paid?

JK: No. The commissioners? No, they're not paid. They get their expenses for serving, that is, for travel and lodging and meals and stuff like that. That's all they get. And it's a kind of a *plum* to people. They seek it, to serve on the Conservation Commission. It's kind of nice to be associated with an outfit that, you know, is so well liked and thought of.

Let me tell you an anecdote: There was an outdoor writer by the name of Jack Ehresman who was an editor for the Peoria, Illinois newspaper [the Peoria Journal-Star.] He walked into my office one day and he said, "I came over to look at your Department and contrast it with the Illinois Conservation people. You have either got one hell of a department or you have done *one* hell of a snow job!" And I said, "What do you mean, Jack?" And he said, "Well, I was prepared for you to tell me how wonderful you all were. But as I drove over here, I would stop at restaurants and filling stations and places and I would bring up the subject of the Conservation Department, and I never heard *one* derogatory statement from anybody! Most of them were *supportive!* I couldn't drive twenty *miles* in Illinois and get the same thing with the Illinois Department. Now what are you guys up to over here!?" (laughs)

**[Tape meter, 250]**

That flattered me, but it was true! It's true. We had public support.

Now, we didn't always have [it.] In some individual instances, we didn't have public support. The first "any deer" season -- that is where you're allowed to kill either sex deer -- was in 1951. That was the year I joined the department. I started in February of '51, and one of my jobs was to present the arguments for permitting the killing of doe deer. For years and years, here and elsewhere, you didn't kill does! (chuckles) That was [an] anathema. A sportsman would not shoot a doe; you shoot *bucks* [and] that's all. But our deer biologist felt it was time for us to begin establishing certain controls on the reproduction of deer in the state. So they opted for a *limited*, very extremely limited, killing of does. There was a great uproar! Various of the outdoor writers would take up

against us in their columns. In Taney County, Missouri -- which was one of the top counties for deer hunting at that time -- the county agent was leading the landowners in an opposition to the Conservation Department's idiocy in (chuckles) declaring open season on doe deer! They were going to close the whole damn county to deer hunters if we didn't rescind that notion. There was a lot of heat! But I think the *bulk* of the sportsmen said, "Well, they've been right so far. We'll go along and see what happens, grudgingly." Even some of our employees and conservation agents were largely opposed to this, too. They just thought that it was *wrong*.

Ha! I remember one conservation agent in a middle Missouri county. There had been a pretty damn good deer kill -- and a good deer kill in those days was 100 deer in a county -- and he said, "You've killed every damn deer in this county!" (After the season closed.) That night, *four* buck deer were killed on the highways in that county! (chuckling) So he says, "Well, *that* was the last of them!" (laughs) We stuck by our guns and we won the battle. People acknowledged we knew what the hell we were doing. And there's been almost no opposition to any of the regulations since then. That doesn't mean that there aren't *annoyances*. There are regulations that annoy sportsmen for one reason or another.

We had a fiasco here a year or so ago, on the selling of permits. When the Conservation Department's computer system broke down because it was overloaded with the... What did the department do? It called a meeting of people who sold permits. It called prominent sportsmen. It called prominent sporting goods dealers into a meeting in

Jefferson City and they said, “We flubbed up. What do you recommend we do to make this better next year?”

**[Tape meter 300]**

And they took the recommendations of these various groups, and things seemed to have smoothed out. But they recognized that they’d *goofed* because it was not a very good regulation putting a “first-come, first-serve” deadline on things and it resulting in a *tremendous rush* to buy permits which locked up the computer systems. So I think we’ve got that beat. But they did it with the recommendations of the people most involved: hunters, sporting goods dealers, and permit clerks. So I think they’re on the right track.

You notice I still tend to be a little proprietary! (laughs)

WS: Sure! It’s natural after thirty-six years

JK: After thirty-six years, yeah! Well, it’s *my* Department. (chuckles)

WS: Well, did you mostly stay based in Jefferson City or did you travel all over?

JK: Well, I traveled all over the state as a part of my job, yeah. I made it a point to attend meetings of the press associations around the state. I was not as intimately involved with the radio meetings, but I had a good man who was in the radio and that was [Herschel P.] “Woody” Bledsoe. He would attend the meetings of the radio station owners. I’d attend the press association meetings and so did the other guys who had taken my place as news release writers. So we not only attend those meetings, but we would drop in occasionally at a newspaper here or there and ask if they were getting our news releases alright. “Were they finding them useful?” “Could we do it *better*?” Try and keep the pipelines open both ways.

There was a time when the Springfield newspaper editor had an antipathy toward I.T. Bode. I don't know what started it, but he couldn't say anything good. If anything came up that he could put in the paper, he couldn't say anything *good* about the Department. And mostly it was because of I.T. Bode. Don Wooldridge, who was our chief photographer for many years, had lived and grown up in the Springfield area, and he knew the newspaper people there. He began making it a point to drop by and throw a leg over a corner of a desk or buy them a cup of coffee or something like that and discuss things.

**[tape meter, 350]**

If he was going out on a photo mission, he might shoot a roll of film for the Department and another roll of film he'd drop off for use of the newspaper. And in that way, [he] gradually won them over to where we have always *since* had the support of the Springfield newspaper. But it wasn't that they were opposed to the Department, they were opposed to I.T. Bode for some reason. Mr. Bode left in 1958 I think, '56 maybe. '56. From then on, why, we've had excellent relations with the Springfield newspaper. In *general*, we've had support of the press. I can't think of any newspapers at all that have been what I call real opposition to the Conservation Department or its programs. They've all been supportive.

**[Tape meter, 371; End side one, tape one of two]**

**[Tape meter, 011; Begin side two, tape one of two]**

WS: Well, in your travels around the state, and of course I think just in Jefferson City, you probably gained a pretty intimate knowledge of the sections of the state. I just wondered

if there were certain regions that were maybe more receptive to the Department of Conservation or some that were probably suspicious?

JK: Well, sure. The Department support has always come from the metropolitan areas, the main support. You get less support from rural Missouri. The reason being (I've always assumed) is that the big city hunter or fisherman appreciates *more* an opportunity to hunt and fish than the guys that *live* with it day in and day out in the country. They don't see the *need* for some of things the big city sportsmen is willing to support. There's always, *always*, been an opposition to the big city sportsman in the rural areas. It's just a fact of life. So I would say the deep Ozarks has been *much* less supportive of the Department, if not opposed in a lot of cases than suburbia or the city itself. North Missouri probably is more supportive of the Department than a lot of Southern Missouri.

WS: The Bootheel?

JK: The Bootheel is a kind of a strange place because the wildlife and forestry situation in the Bootheel is practically *nil*. The Bootheel is a big culture pan. It's only along the drainage ditches where they've grown up that you find much in the way of wildlife. Fishing is so-so. But the Department's made a real effort to *create* fishing and hunting opportunities by purchasing land and developing it for wildlife in the Bootheel region. They've created lakes that (chuckles) just are big *pools*, by throwing up an earth embankment and impounding some water in it where no lake ought to be, really. But it provides some fishing opportunities, at least of a *type*, for the people there. And they worked hard on waterfowl, which the Bootheel has *some* of, and developing that. We've got some big waterfowl areas in the Bootheel. Duck Creek and the Ben Cash Wildlife

Area are big waterfowl areas down there which provide an opportunity of sort there. It's tough to do something for the Bootheel otherwise, because of the very nature of the Bootheel itself. It's kind of ironic that it was one of the last bastions of wildlife up until the 1920s when they drained it and scoured it off and put it in soybeans and cotton and wiped out the wildlife. But the great swamp country down there at one time was the last bastion of wildlife in this state.

WS: A little while ago you mentioned Illinois, and I imagine you had some interaction with colleagues, so to speak, in the states all around Missouri. Would that be true?

**[Tape meter, 050]**

JK: Oh, yeah. There is an organization called the ACI, Association for Conservation Information, (it's had various names over the years) but it involves the education and primarily the information personnel of various fish and game and forestry departments of the United States and Canada. Missouri has been very active in that and a *leader* in that, working with the other state conservation, information and education people. (pause) We really don't have that much person to person contact unless it's individuals in neighboring states. We know one another, but we don't have that much activity together, like between Missouri and Iowa personnel, or in Kansas, or Illinois, Arkansas. It's largely a matter of individual personalities. I had a very good relationship as an individual with John Madson of Iowa, who worked for the Iowa Conservation Commission. He later left them [and] went to work for the Des Moines Register and Tribune and then for Western Winchester in Illinois. And [I] maintained that relationship. I had a good relationship with the information people in Arkansas. But it's

not so much a *formal* working between the two departments, but two individuals that share information and like one another, and things like that. I've had relationships with some of the Kansas people over the years. The present editor of the River Hills Traveler, Bob Todd, at one time worked for the Kansas Fish and Game Department, and we were close associates in that capacity and have remained friends since now he's publishing his own newspaper.

WS: How about federal agencies? Do you have much interaction with them?

JK: Oh, sure! I knew most of the information types with the National Forest in Missouri. [I] quail hunted with [Henry] Hank Debruin when he was Forest Supervisor in this area and we got along well.

**[Tape meter, 081. Brief interruption, tape recorder turned off.]**

Some years ago, there was a man by the name of [Charles C.] "Chuck" Isley, [Jr.] who was head of the chamber of commerce in Columbia, Missouri at one time.<sup>1</sup> He was retiring and moving to Florida and cleaning out his effects, and he came across six reels of eight millimeter movie footage that he had shot in the late 1930s. He was a reserve officer, and reserve officers were called up to help set up CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camps during the Depression. He was at the founding of a camp down near Berryman, Missouri, and [he] was an amateur photographer and shot motion pictures of the establishment of that CCC camp for the Forest Service in Berryman, Missouri. He had six reels following the activities of the group, and it was rather well done. He didn't know what to do with it and was going to get rid of it, and I said, "I'll take it! I'll take it."

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1950s.

I don't know what *I'm* going to do with it, but I'll take it." We checked the film out. This was in the '70s, I think, and that film stuff had been laying there since the '30s, and it had shrunk (the film). He didn't know what to do with it and gave it to me, and I took it and didn't know what the hell to do with it *either*, but I thought it was a *wonderful* historical document of showing these young men being inducted into the Cs, getting their shots, getting their uniforms, and doing the various work of setting up a camp.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

And then the work they did in the road building and various forest work.

**[Tape meter, 103. Tape recorder shut off.]**

Eight millimeter film was virtually useless because it had shrunk, and very few people were using eight millimeter film anymore [for] projection. So I sent this eight reels to a film place in California who are used to working with archival films and stuff. They somehow stretched this film and gave me a print in *sixteen millimeter*, which was useful. And I used it a couple of times. I went to... I think it was St. Louis University one time when there was an anniversary of the CCCs and I showed it to some of these old guys and they *recognized* themselves in it, guys that had *been* at this camp at Berryman or one very similar to it.

Then the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Forest Service came about and I thought, "Those guys would be interested in this thing." So I *loaned* them the film to use and never got it back! (laughs) I sent the original footage to the archives of the Forest Service in Washington D.C., but the sixteen millimeter print that I had for the

Department, I loaned to the Forest Service and they traded it around from one place to another and eventually it got lost.

But we've worked with Forest Service personnel and with the Fish and Wildlife personnel quite a lot over the years.

WS: Did you have anything to do with acquiring that film? I guess it was the T.J. Moss Tie Company? You know it's on video now with the Department of Conservation? I can't remember what they call it... Stamp of Character: [From Trees to Tracks]?

JK: No, that was produced after I left the Department.

WS: Oh, okay. I wonder if there are any other old-time films like that that the Department got?

JK: I don't know. It would have been after I left.

WS: Yeah. I was kind of curious how the Department might have gotten that, until I learned that they bought a lot of the old T.J. Moss land, I suppose.

JK: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

WS: Well, a little while ago you mentioned the Conservation Federation and I guess we could put them in sort of a group of organizations; sometimes they're called NGO, the Non-Government Organizations. And a little while earlier before we had the tape player on we were talking about the Sierra Club, too. Maybe you can describe some interaction that went on among those various groups and the Department.

JK: Well, the Conservation Federation has always been the guardian protecting the Conservation Department when political machinations were being used to get at something or other or to get the Department to be one way or another. It's always been

the strong right arm of the Department, really. Primarily that has been, over most of the life of the Department, one guy by the name of Ed Stegner and his board of directors. Ed's retired now. But anytime the Department was being attacked, it could turn to the Federation and the Conservation Federation of Missouri could do things the Department could not do itself. They would come to the aid of the Department. I think the Missouri Conservation Federation is one of the *biggest* such organizations in the country. And it has always been the most *effective* of the various member organizations of the National Wildlife Federation. Kind of went its own way, Missouri did, insofar as the national organization is concerned, because they were kind of like the tail wagging the dog!  
(laughs)

**[Tape meter, 150]**

They were one of the strongest organizations *in* the United States that the National Organization was made up of.

But they've been good, and we've had good relations with the Federation. Now, there were times... Mr. Bode, the first director, depended on the Federation a lot for support. The next director was Bill Towell, and Bill didn't get along with Ed Stegner. It was a personality thing, I think. Not that the department didn't get along with the Federation, but that the two heads of each organization didn't get along that great together. But after that, everybody got along good. The various directors and the commissioners have all been supportive of the Federation and its work. And it's not restricted to working for the Conservation Commission; it also works for DNR [Department of Natural Resources] or Parks or whatever. But they've been good.

The Sierra Club has been, probably, a problem child to the Department because of certain extreme positions its *parent* organization has taken, rather than the Missouri chapter of the Sierra Club. As a result, they're a little less warm toward one another. I don't know as the Sierra Club has ever really come out and *attacked* the Department, but there have been times when the Department hasn't felt too *comfortable* around the Sierra Club because of the positions they've taken.

And then there's the problem of internal approaches. There are people within the Conservation Department that are members of the Sierra Club, and are very sympathetic toward the Sierra Club's positions and goals. And there are people within the Department that *hate* the Sierra Club and think that they're a radical bunch of *clowns* that are *dangerous*. (chuckles) So you've got that! The Department's position has been "where we can work together, we'll do it!" And that's been it!

I don't know what other organizations... The Missouri Trappers Association has always been supported by the Conservation Department. And you know, in many parts of the country, trapping has come into attack. The commissioners have always upheld the right of people to trap; it's a part of game management and a use of a resource. And they've supported the trappers, and the trappers therefore eagerly support the Department.

(What other organizations...?) The bow hunters have always had *good* support from the Conservation Department, and [it has received] good support from the bow hunters. Now, in recent years, the sport of bow hunting is coming under attack from certain quarters around the country. We haven't had that problem in Missouri. And we

really haven't had that much of a problem with trapping in Missouri, other than a vocal individual or two. Which surprises me, because we've got an awful lot of support from people that in other parts of the country they're not getting that support. I think it all goes back to the Department trying to be a good neighbor.

**[Tape meter, 200]**

Speaking of being a good neighbor, one of the ways they did this in rural Missouri: Let's say a flood washes out a low water bridge. The Conservation Department might replace that bridge simply because they want to be good neighbors, but also they might want to get firefighting equipment through there. That's the rationale anyway. But the real thing is they're being good neighbors.

There's been a Clean Stream movement in the state. The Conservation Department has provided trucks to pick up the trash and haul it out. Conservationists are digging [trash] out of the stream beds and along the banks of our rivers to keep them clean and wholesome looking, and the Department has cooperated with them by making available trucks to haul the stuff away to dumps and so forth. Being good neighbors. And all of that pays off in support eventually. Like I said, they may not always understand what we're about, but they say, "We'll give you the benefit of the doubt because you've been right here, and here and here." It helps!

WS: Well, when it comes to something like the Conservation Federation, are all those people just volunteers? They're just interested in the topic of conservation?

JK: Oh, yeah! Yeah, yeah. The Federation? Yeah, it's made up of individuals and groups of sportsmen or conservationists or... You know, they've each got their interests: the Fly

Fishermen's Association, the Quail Hunters Association. But they all come together in the Federation, because the Federation is the spokesman in the legislative halls for their interests.

WS: So they're kind of a lobbying group in some ways?

JK: Oh, yeah! Yeah! The Federation's *primary* reason for being nowadays is to lobby for conservation in the state. And they do a pretty effective job of it, or have in the past anyway.

WS: Well, talking about lobbying: a little while ago you were talking about having to go in front of the General Assembly for appropriations or whatever -- is that pretty much the Director's role?

JK: Yeah, yeah. It's either the Director, or at some times in the past they've had an Assistant Director whose function that was. We had Osal Capps, who was a state forester for many years, and [he] was kind of a politically-oriented guy and he was very effective going over and dealing with legislators on behalf of Department programs and stuff like that. I don't know whether they have such a thing now or not. But like I say, I've been out of it for ten years and I'm not as intimate with the workings. But the Director is responsible for doing that sort of thing, but he may have an Assistant Director who's *better* at it than he is who does it.

WS: Well, you mentioned that one legislator that was out to sort of get the Department, but I wonder, in your memory, if you recall legislators that would be on the other side of that spectrum, that were maybe heroes for the Department of Conservation, that were particular friends?

JK: *Oh, yeah! [thoughtful pause]* I can't think of the guy's name.

WS: Senate or House?

JK: House. He was from Troy, Missouri, and...

WS: Oh, I should know who that is.

JK: He was a national turkey-calling champion. (What the hell's his name? The mind is the first thing to go.) But at any rate, he was elected and served very responsibly for his district, but also he was an active director in the Conservation Federation of Missouri and was in there to spike anti-conservation legislation.

WS: Do you remember his years of service in the legislature?

JK: No, not off hand. It would have been in the, oh, '70s, probably.

One of the "thorniest" problems the Department of Conservation Department ever had and one which brought a lot of enmity from rural areas was the idea of scenic rivers. These were proposed, and the Department was sympathetic to the idea, but wasn't about to take the *lead* in something like that, *knowing* all of the opposition that existed in *rural* areas. But there was a legislator... Again I can't remember his name. I think his name was Blackwell from the Hermann area.

WS: William Blackwell. Representative William Blackwell?

JK: Came in with the idea of bringing the scenic rivers people and the rural people together to some kind of a meaningful dialogue and not so much *heat*. He was not a success. He only served one term, as I remember. He was a Democrat from a largely Republican area

and didn't get re-elected.<sup>2</sup> But he was trying to put oil on troubled waters and represent... His sympathies, I think, were *really* with the scenic rivers people. (At least, I guess they interpreted [it] that [way.]) But the *anti*-scenic rivers people were *so* biased against *anything* that they weren't *willing* to sit down and discuss it! (chuckles)

WS: Was that mostly because they didn't want land control?

JK: Yeah. Land control, yeah.

WS: Well, that reminds me or makes me think of the free range. (chuckling) I'll bet you have something to say about that!

JK: Well, our department never took an active position, but it opposed free range from the standpoint of good forestry management. But it wasn't real vocal about it. And it died of its own accord in time. I guess the position of the Department was "there's no use stirring up trouble for yourself by *opposing* open range loud. And you know, it's just tacit that we don't think it's good forestry management, but..." Eventually it died of its own accord. [This is] sort of the same attitude the Department took on the Scenic Rivers Bill. We were sympathetic to the scenic rivers propositions, although I think that some of the proposals were a little... The Department felt [some of the proposals] were a little extreme and [the Department personnel] were much more likely to support something *less* stringent against the landowners' rights. But the landowners weren't willing to *hear* even *that*! (chuckling) They didn't want *anything*! So we just laid low and stayed away from it. Tried to shake it off our skirts.

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Blackwell was indeed a Democrat from Hermann, but he served three terms in the Missouri House of Representatives during the early to mid-1970s.

WS: Well, when you mentioned some of those proposals being extreme, would that be in the sense of being extremely restrictive?

JK: Mm-hmm, yeah. There was one proposal at one time that restricted what could be done in the line of *sight* of a stream. That's too much, you know, to a landowner; he couldn't take that. Now, if it's a line of sights up to the top of the bluff... But if it's your pasture bottomland or something, uh-uh! They wouldn't buy that! And I don't blame them! You know, there was somewhere there's some middle ground that could have been... But it got so *hot* -- I don't know if you ever knew this or not -- but one of the leaders of the scenic river proposals had his car bombed at his home.<sup>3</sup> Yeah!

WS: Is that right!? Where was that?

JK: St. Charles.

WS: *St. Charles!* Gee!

JK: Now, I don't think St. Charles people did it. I think people from further south did it, but it was that hot an issue at the time.

WS: Do you remember when that was about? The car bombing?

JK: No. It would have probably been in the '60s, I guess.

WS: Late '60s maybe?

JK: Yeah. And the guy withdrew. I mean, he resigned! What the hell was he going to do? He didn't want his *family* killed or something like that!

WS: Do you remember his name?

JK: No, I don't.

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<sup>3</sup> This happened to Roger W. Taylor in April of 1970.

WS: Now, he was just a citizen activist?

JK: Citizen activist, yeah. And he withdrew. And that was it! The feelings ran very high on that scenic rivers business.

Well, the Conservation did... I'll tell you some of the things they did [in] trying to win over the rural Missouri. In the early years of the Department, they had a big van, pick-up truck or something, or I guess a station wagon or something that they called the "Showboat." And they would go into *rural* Missouri (and I'm talking about the *deep* Ozarks) and show movies, entertainment, but conservation message entertainment. Because it had its own generator, and *much* of Missouri, Southern Missouri, at that time was not electrified. Well, they won a lot of *friendliness*, at least, on the part of people who were exposed to these Showboat messages.

**[Tape meter, 350]**

They did that for a number of years, until finally REA [Rural Electrification Administration] came in and *electrified* most of the state and it wasn't practical anymore to do that kind of thing. But that was one of their early attempts at winning people.

Primarily [the Department of Conservation's focus] in those days and in those areas [was] anti-fire... Trying to prevent forest fires and stuff. When I joined the Department in '51, on a spring day -- our offices were in downtown Jefferson City at that time, [at] the old Monroe Hotel -- I could open my windows and smell the smoke from forest fires down around the Lake of the Ozarks, forty-five, fifty miles away. They burned the *hell* out of things every spring and fall. Easter was a terrible time! But gradually, they won these people over and got the fires stopped.

[Tape meter, 368. End side two, tape one of two.]

[Tape meter, 001. Begin side one; tape two of two.]

WS: Well, when it came to that scenic rivers topic being so controversial, was that an individual river or just in general?

JK: There were a whole designated group of streams that would be part of the scenic rivers proposal, like the Gasconade, and Current, and the Eleven Point, and Jacks Fork, and St. Francis. There were *many* streams that had scenic possibilities that would have been a part of this proposal. There were several different proposals, but the one that really got them was the one about line of sight. They didn't want *any* scenic river proposal, first, and then second, *that* one was particularly bad. That was probably one of the hairiest times in the Department, trying to walk a line between these various interests. While we were supportive of the *idea* of scenic river protection, there had to be some concern for the landowners, too. That was the Department's position. Some of the proponents were pretty wild-eyed radicals and we had to try to stay on their good side, and stay on the good side of the people that were opposing it.

WS: Were you able to?

JK: Well, no. Not really, because those *real* die hard oppositionists tarred us, tarred the Department with a brush with the rest of them. That's not true of *all* of the opposition, but the most vehement and diehard group to this day think the Department was probably behind it and supporting it and aiding and abetting it. But the other groups knew better, and were more *moderate*. But it cost us a lot of support.

WS: Well, some of those scenic rivers are actually managed by federal agencies, aren't they?

JK: Well, portions of the Jacks Fork, and the Current and the Eleven Point are, yeah. That was a separate thing from the other scenic rivers bills. And that had its opposition. In fact, Stewart Udall -- who was Secretary of the Interior at the time that the proposals for the Current River and that -- he was being taken on a cruise of the river to show him. There were signs hung up in the trees, "No Scenic Rivers," you know, that he saw as he went down. We had Conservation officers riding shotgun to make sure that, you know, there weren't any *incidents* that got out of hand, with that much opposition on *that* particular stream (and the Current, Jacks Fork and Eleven Point). But since they flowed through so much federal land, it was a little different than going out to private land streams. And that got passed. A lot of opposition, but it finally got passed. It has gotten along fairly well. They have their headaches; they've had some problems over the wild horses down there, for example.

WS: I didn't know they had any!

JK: Well, people turn horses loose. And there is a small herd of wild horses down there that persist and kind of mess things up at times. The National Park Service wanted to get rid of them and they got congressmen to go to bat against them, and they're down there yet! They're going to be there for a while anyway! (laughs) And again, it's strange, the kind of people that are supporting the wild horses down there. They're not necessarily the kind of people that *live* in the vicinity. (laughs) They're guys from St. Louis!

WS: I wonder, would that have been Congressman [William D.] Burlison?

JK: [Bill] Emerson.

WS: Oh, *Emerson!*? And he actually supported the wild horses?

JK: Yeah.

WS: That's pretty recently then.

JK: Yes, he's died here just a couple of years ago. Jo Ann, that's his wife, she took his seat.

Yeah, it was Emerson.

WS: Well, another controversial topic I'm sure you remember a lot about would be the Meramec impoundment issue.

**[Tape meter, 050]**

JK: Well, yeah. (chuckles) And that was kind of an interesting one. One of the early scientific investigations of the Department was on the Meramec watershed in the late '30s. That early, you know. So we had an awful lot of data on it, and when the Meramec impoundment business came up --that was during the [Christopher] Bond administration, I think he was governor at that time -- and the Conservation Commission, the commissioners *themselves*, came out in opposition to that. And that strengthened Bond's hands, I think. He finally said, "Alright, we'll have a vote on it and see." Sentiment against the dams won out largely from suburbia again, I think, not in the Meramec Valley itself, (chuckles) but from suburbia, who used it as a playground. They wanted to keep it that way as a *river* rather than as an *impoundment*.

There were arguments within the Department both ways. I think some of our fisheries biologists probably were for the lake as providing a great deal more recreational opportunities than that river itself can. So there was that sentiment *within* the Department. But the Commissioners came out and said, "No! The stream is more *valuable* to the state than that *lake* would be."

WS: Would you identify them as the key players in that decision?

JK: Well, I don't rate them as key players, but I think that was a key *decision* that *tipped* things a lot. The players were... I can't remember the names of all of them; (I can't remember the names of any of them.) There was a lawyer in St. Louis who was very active in the Conservation Federation. Oh, shit, what's his name? Jim -- I remember that. But at any rate, he and -- I would suspect that -- Leo Drey may have been behind it. And a guy by the name of Roger... [*Long pause, thinking*]

WS: Leo Drey was against it?

JK: I suspect so, yeah. I don't know that for a fact, but I suspect so, because... What the hell? [*Suddenly remembering*] Roger Pryor was one of the big spokesmen against the dam in St. Louis.<sup>4</sup> I think Roger was bankrolled by Leo Drey for certain purposes.

Leo's an interesting man. One of the most ardent conservationists I guess this state has ever produced, and he's largely unsung because he always kept a low profile. But he went around and *bought up* a lot of land and turned it over to the Conservation Department -- for the most part, I think he's given some to Parks and that -- to protect certain natural features and things that he feels should be preserved for the people. He established an L-A-D Foundation to do this. And L-A-D is Leo A. Drey. There's a guy that really needs to be credited for a hell of a lot of useful stuff in this state. The people of the state don't even know him, but he's an important guy to them whether they know him or not.

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<sup>4</sup> Roger Pryor was an aide to David Wilson, the leader of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment, at the time of the Meramec Dam controversy. Pryor later became head of the Coalition himself.

But any rate, this Roger Pryor was one of the main players in the opposition to the dam, and this lawyer... What the hell was his name? [*Suddenly remembering*] Jim Gamble! Jim Gamble.

WS: Oh, I've heard that name.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

JK: Yeah. They were the players; the front men, you might say. But the Commission coming out and opposing it, gave them support like they could never have got otherwise, you know, and helped *immeasurably* in the defeat of that thing.

WS: So the Conservation Federation as a group was against it all?

JK: Oh, yeah, yeah! Yeah!

WS: Well, one thing that really surprised me was to learn that there was some opposition to that from Lake of the Ozark business people, [who were] just worried about competition. (laughs)

JK: Well, sure! They're bound to be. But see, I don't think they were allowed to *vote* on the issue. It was a restricted to a certain area there.

WS: Was it?

JK: Yeah. And it was suburbia of St. Louis that made the big difference, I think. Again, your support comes from the "have-nots" that want to enjoy these things, not the people who live there.

WS: I wonder how the *legality* of that played out, since that was an Army Corps project, wasn't it?

JK: Yeah. Well, it wasn't binding on anybody. It was an expression of the people's will. And the Corps, what could they do? You know, if they're smart they're going to heed that, and they finally withdrew from the thing. It had no real power other than the power of suggestion. (chuckles) The people expressed this will, now what are you going to do? (laughs)

WS: Talking about law and lawsuits, did the Department ever get involved in any? Did you have staff lawyers or that kind of thing?

JK: Well, yeah, they had a lawyer on retainer in the early years and then for many, many years, they've had a staff lawyer whose *primary* function has been to oversee land purchases and stuff like that. [He would] keep the Department clean as far as land stuff. I think that like most state departments, the Conservation Department is expected to look to the Attorney General's office for legal support when necessary. But the Department hasn't used it much. The very first thing, you know, when the Conservation Department started, they passed some regulations and they were challenged by the courts. It went all the way to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court upheld the Commission's powers. That pretty well set the course then. But it happened. They had trial cases right from the get-go.

One other one the Department was interested in, but not directly involved, was the Elder vs. Delcour case. That involved a man canoeing and wading through another man's property. And I forget who was who. I think Delcour was the fisherman and Elder was the property owner, or vice versa. It was a *friendly* suit. They both knew one another and were friendly, but anyway it went all the way to Supreme Court whether or

not a person had the right to wade and fish a stream that ran through some private property. There's never been any doubt that people have the right to travel by boat in rivers that are declared to be navigable by federal authorities. That means that certain points on the river are open to the public for commercial reasons or recreational. But what about going on upstream, beyond this declared navigable point? And that's what the *Elder vs. Delcour* case was all about.

**[Tape meter, 150]**

The Supreme Court of the state ruled that a stream imposed burdens on the landowner, and among those burdens was the right... They said the stream was a public highway, and a person had the right to pass unmolested over the bed of the stream or to make necessary stops within the flood plain or the high water mark of the stream for whatever purposes were necessary. Those were burdens that were imposed on the owner. Even though he may own the bed of the stream, it's still a public highway, and people may fish and wade and canoe through there. *That* was an important decision. I think that was 1954. For the sportsmen of the state, [it was a] very important decision.

Now, you've got to use that with certain circumspection. You get a prosecuting attorney in one county who may interpret that one way, and a prosecuting attorney in another county... There were some bloodlettings over that one, I'll tell you! There was a party from Kansas City that were forcefully at gun point driven off the stream at one time, while that case was pending in court.

WS: (chuckling) I'll be darned!

JK: Yeah, and people were either shot at or shot near, to frighten them while that thing was going. But it's kind of died down now, and it's accepted pretty generally that people have the right to do this, within reason.

WS: Well, those kinds of shootings, would that again be an Ozark phenomenon?

JK: It was southwest Missouri where that took place. I don't really consider it Ozarks. It was out to the western edge of the Ozarks. I think it was down in one of the southwestern counties down there, I think McDonald or somewhere. Jasper.

WS: Well, when you say that was a friendly lawsuit, do you think they arranged that...?

JK: It was a setup, yeah. It was a setup to get some law on the thing. And the Department was interested in it and, I think, appeared as a friend of the court in arguments.

WS: Just to provide information.

JK: Mm-hmm. But the information they provided was pro-sportsman. (both laugh) But that was a real hairy time, too. The landowners felt they were being imposed on, you know. It's always tough. They had [a] scenic river law in Tennessee and they have in one of the Carolinas, haven't they?

WS: I'm not sure.

JK: How about Virginia? Do you have any scenic river acts in Virginia?

WS: I think the New River might be, but I'm not sure.

JK: I know that other states have passed scenic rivers legislation.

WS: Oh, sure!

JK: [I'm] pretty sure Tennessee is one of them.

WS: Yeah.

JK: But it never has gotten much play in Missouri. I think it could pass, but what the hell for if you're going to force it down somebody's throat that is so *militant* against it that they'll bomb the cars and stuff like shooting? It's better to just let it lie. (chuckles)

[Tape meter, 200]

WS: Well, you mentioned with that Meramec thing that there were pro and con within the Department. I wonder if, you know... I don't know how to set this up in terms of a question, but if there were certain issues that you remember being the *most* internally divisive? And maybe that was it, I don't know.

JK: I don't think there was any internal *division*. But I'd say that there was the *opinion* that the lake would provide more recreation for more people than the river would. There's a question of "do you *want* that, or do you want to keep a river and keep a *limited* recreation?" There were pros and cons on both sides of it. But it wasn't really *divisive* within the Department. It was just that there were people that felt one way and people that felt the other, but it wasn't no big deal one way or the other. When the Commission said, "This is the way it's going to be," there were people within the Department supplying the Commission with the information to make that determination. (chuckles)

WS: A little while ago I asked you about certain legislators that may have been friends of the Department. I wonder if you remember certain *governors* that were particularly friendly to the Department? (chuckling) And maybe particularly *unfriendly*?

JK: Let me think. I *really* am not aware... It's like I say, I'm not a very political person, but I'm not aware of any governments that were anti-Department. For the most part, they

just kind of figured we were a separate branch of government out here and they went their own way. And that was alright, they went along.

I don't feel that there was any governor who set out to particularly control the Commission. Joe Teasdale probably came closest to that, but I don't think it was a conscious effort on his part, but he got to a point [where] a number of commissioners, most of them were kind of political henchmen of his. Who themselves turned out to be pretty decent commissioners. (chuckles) [W.] Robert Aylward and [J. Ernest] Dunn, [Jr.] were both Kansas City people involved in business and politics that were cronies of Governor Teasdale.<sup>5</sup> They stood fair to have a tremendous influence on the rest of the Commission and the Department, but they didn't. Aylward was a *champion* of trying to save and cleanup and prevent the further debasement of the Big River when that tailings dam broke and all those lead mining tailings flooded the Big River for miles.<sup>6</sup>

[Tape meter, 250]

He was one of the *strongest* activists on the Commission to get that cleaned up and [to] prevent anything further like that happening and [to] go after the people that caused it. (chuckles) This sort of thing. We've had good commissioners by and large. We've had some that were mediocre, at best. We had one that... (chuckles) Ben Cash of Kennett was a "good old boy" and a *hell* of a nice guy. He got to trout fishing down at Bennett Springs at one time, and the fishing was so *good* that he just couldn't *quit*. He had over his limit. Unfortunately, the conservation agent from St. Charles County had invited his

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<sup>5</sup> Both joined the Commission in August of 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Although the Big River had been contaminated by another tailings pond dam breakage earlier, the episode Mr. Keefe is probably referring to occurred in July of 1979. It impacted the river for twenty miles.

prosecuting attorney to go trout fishing with him down at Bennett Springs. And there they were, and here's Ben, Chairman of the Commission, catching too damn many fish. (laughs) So the agent arrested him. *Now*, put yourself in the agent's shoes. Here he is, he's got his prosecuting attorney with him, and the prosecuting attorney has the right to expect him to do certain things. (chuckling) On the other hand, his *job* might be on the line arresting the Chairman of the Conservation Commission for having too many fish. But old Ben just chuckled and paid his fine. He says, "It was just so good, I couldn't control myself!" (both laugh) [He] paid his fine [and] that was the last of it. He admitted it.

WS: Well, who's this commissioner now? I don't know the details, but they tell me he's kind of outspoken. It's not John Powell, is it?

JK: Well, John Powell is not on the Commission anymore. I think he just recently went off this past summer.

WS: Oh, okay.

JK: [He's a] very outspoken man. He served I don't know how many terms, at least two and maybe three terms, as a commissioner. But John Powell was very active in the Republican Party in Missouri. *[thoughtful pause]* I don't know who appointed John Powell. It could have gone all the way back to Bond. But any rate, John Powell was something of a source of embarrassment sometimes to some of the employees because of things he would say and do. [It] didn't bother John. He was his own man; he was going to go his way. But John was a conservationist, but he was also in the timber and lumber business. And he had the support of the timber industry in his positions, and they

sometimes would run counter to what other aspects of the Department and its programs might be. You understand, having been associated with the Forest Service, the sawdust industry.<sup>7</sup>

**[Tape meter, 300]**

But John had no use for the Sierra Club or that ilk, and was very outspoken. This kind of was damaging, or felt to be damaging by other employees who had to get *along* with these people in other contexts. He was one of the strong Conservation Commissioners; that is, made himself *known* and notorious, maybe. [Robert A.] Bob Brown, [Jr.] of St. Joseph was another one of the *strong* commissioners. [E. Sydney] Syd Stephens, of course, was. Who were some of the other ones? *[thoughtful pause]* [G.] Andy Runge was a very strong commissioner. Andy was a lawyer in Mexico, Missouri, and he came out of the Conservation Federation -- had been president of it -- and was a *real staunch* conservationist. Andy Runge, very strong. So much so they named this natural history area out here after him. It was recognition of the kind of man he was.

WS: What kind of changes took place -- or maybe there weren't any -- with the advent of the DNR?

JK: Well, there is a division within the Department as to whether or not the state parks ought not be under the Conservation Commission. The DNR would hate to get rid of parks, because that's their white hat, you know? Everything else they do is regulatory, black hats. (chuckles) So they'd like to hold on to the parks. There's a strong sentiment within the Department that think parks ought to be under the Conservation Department.

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<sup>7</sup> The interviewer, Will Sarvis, had been employed by the U.S. Forest Service in the past.

There's an equally strong sentiment that feels they *do not* want the state parks because of perceived opposition between sportsmen and [the] tree huggers, let's say, [whom] they equate with the park people. So, there's that schism within the Department. We have looked upon the DNR as a kind of poor cousin, because for many years they didn't have the budget that the Department enjoyed -- they do *now* -- and that they were *much* more *political* than the Conservation Department is. But we have worked with them. When we established the Natural Areas Program within the state, we took them on as full partners early on in the Natural Area Program of the state, which was a concept of the Conservation Department.

**[Tape meter, 358. End side one, tape two of two]**

**[Tape meter, 015. Begin side two, tape two of two]**

JK: There have been personnel within the DNR that the Conservation Commission found hard to deal with, that were anti-hunting and this sort of thing. And that caused some friction. Over the years, I think they've meshed pretty good. There was a big thought back in the '70s about the Water Patrol, whether that ought to be a separate agency or not, that that business ought not be a function of the Conservation Agents. But it was felt at the time that the Water Patrol was created, that the [state] constitution probably wouldn't allow us to take on that function. It wasn't part of the constitutional setup that created the Conservation Commission, and that it probably *shouldn't* be within the Department. And then *again*, there was opinions on both sides in that. I *guess* our agents and the Water Patrol get along okay together, although I feel the Water Patrol feels more of a kinship with the Highway Patrol than they do with the Conservation Agent. But the

agents cooperate with them and vice versa. They get along alright. But I *personally* believe that the Water Patrol and the parks probably ought to be within the Conservation Department. That's my personal belief, but like I say, there were a lot of guys within the Conservation Department that might agree that the Water Patrol could be within the Conservation Commission except for the constitutional provision.

But they don't want the parks at all! (chuckles) They *worry*, you know. When the Conservation Commission was created, parks was kind of an orphan out there, because under the old Fish and Game Department, they were a part of it. And when the Commission was created, nothing was said about the parks, and here they are hanging out to dry. Well, they created a Park Board that was composed of the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor, and the Conservation Commission Director. That was the Park Board, and Mr. Bode was uncomfortable with that. He was concerned with what he was *hired* to do rather than make decisions on the parks. And the parks were *heavily* politicized. Superintendents of parks and that were all political *gifts* of the Administration. Bode was very uncomfortable and didn't have a hell of a lot to say about running the parks, although he was one of the members of the original Park Board. Later that changed and parks are not near as politicized as they were, but still to some extent they are, I guess.

**[Tape meter, 050]**

And that's another reason why the Department kind of... We always felt we could do a better job running the parks than the DNR was doing. But it's not to be. It was brought up and actually proposed. When they were reorganizing state government in 1974, there

was a very strong proposal to put the parks *within* the Department, and the Department didn't fight it, but they didn't encourage it either. That was kind of the position they took. They felt it wasn't within the purview of the Department itself to say yea or nay. If the citizens wanted it that way, they would have taken it and run it. But the politicals didn't want to give the Conservation Commission any... Well, they didn't want to let go of that political perks.

WS: Mm-hmm, I see. Do you remember who was advancing that proposal to have it switched?

JK: No, I don't.

WS: You mentioned a little while ago the natural areas. Do you recall who was responsible for promoting that?

JK: Well, John [E.] Wylie and Rick Tomm,<sup>8</sup> and James "Jim" H. Wilson were the three, I guess, most responsible for the creation of that. And Allen Brohn, who was the Deputy Director of the Department. Those four were the strong people pushing that, and I was involved in it somewhat. We created this Natural Areas Program where lands were set aside, designated by the Commission as natural areas, and you're not going to *mess* with them. We're going to preserve this particular attribute of the area. That was established and running and then we went over to DNR and said, "You guys ought to be involved in this and we'll take you on as equal partners in it." And did. They were very active in it too, and still are. Well, of course, you know, as managers and overseers of a lot of thousands and thousands of acres of land, they've *got* natural area lands within their

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<sup>8</sup> Possibly this was Ronald E. Thoma.

ownership, you might say, so they really *belonged* in there as did the Forest Service and the University. But Allen Brohn and John Wylie are the two most important in the formation of that natural areas. Wylie's a forester by they way.

WS: Is that right? Well, I would imagine those areas are identified through botanical analysis or something like that?

JK: Well, some of them are botanical. Some of them are zoological areas; some of them are geological. What else is there? That's it, isn't it? (chuckles)

WS: (chuckling) Pretty much!

JK: Yeah, those three criteria. And then they have to be representative of a *type* of natural condition. And that was one of the things that had to be hammered out between DNR personnel and our personnel, setting up the criteria for what *makes* a natural area, and what *types* are we going to preserve, and how *much* of the type are we going to preserve. Our department was not as involved with the geological aspects of it as the DNR is. So we had less to say about that, but as far as the animal [and] avian... Well, all the zoological criteria was worked out mutually between the Department and... And the University was involved in this, too.

WS: So was that one of the motivations to include the DNR, to sort of broaden the base of expertise in determining some of those?

JK: Yeah, yeah. And because of their landownership, too, and the Forest Service with their landownership in the state, and the University with its landownership, *and* its expertise.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

WS: Sounds like a good program.

JK: Yeah, it's a good program and it's done well. I don't know whose brainchild it was; it was either Al's or Wylie's. I suspect Wylie, but Al was very sympathetic to it and was in the position to make sure it flew (as the Deputy Director) and [he] supported it, and was very deeply involved in it all the way.

WS: Did you ever have much interaction with the Prairie Foundation?

JK: Well, it was *founded* by the Department people.

WS: Was it *really*!? I didn't know that.

JK: Yeah. Not *formally*, but they were the ones *backing* it and guiding it along. Mostly in the person by the name of Don Christisen, who was one of our biologists. He was a prairie chicken biologist, and of course was interested in prairies. (chuckles) He was instrumental in getting the Prairie Foundation started, I guess, and shepherded it along over the years. Tom Toney, I guess, kind of succeeded him in that role. Andy Runge -- who was one of the strong commissioners -- was also very active in the Prairie Foundation, and *his* support lent it a lot of... Well, he could get some influential people involved and has done so. Because Andy, he's past president of the Prairie Foundation, too. (chuckles)

WS: Well, when you think back [over] all those years, I wonder if there's one area of conservation that stands out in your memory as the most troublesome. Like if it would be forestry, or mining, or wildlife or something like that?

JK: [*Thoughtful pause*] Well, I expect the scenic rivers hassle was probably the *worst* over the years. That was probably one of the toughest nuts that the whole Department had to

try to skirt its way through, the scenic rivers. I can't think of *anything* that was... And the Meramec Dam thing, which is kind of a corollary of the scenic rivers thing.

WS: Mm-hmm, yeah.

JK: *Within* the Department? [*Thoughtful pause*] I guess this is endemic, but you have the law enforcement as a strong arm of the Department. In Missouri -- which is not true in most other states -- you have Forestry. Usually Forestry is a separate outfit. And then you have your Fish and Wildlife group. Those three things, sometimes, are not too happy bedfellows for one reason or another. It's been a continuing struggle to keep those three main interests of the Department on the team. We've been fortunate in having *leaders* in those three departments that felt that way, that they ought to be functioning, you know, as a team. But that's something that has to be in the minds of administrators in Fish, Game and Forestry departments, is to keep them *all* going the same way and feeling the same way.

**[Tape meter, 150]**

But I've known departments where the law enforcement arm pretty much runs the department, and that's not good. That's not good. Our Forestry Division has *tended* to somewhat go its own way within the Department. It always gets brought back. Because George White (who was the first State Forester under the Conservation Commission) realized that if there was going to *be* any forestry program, it was going to have to be based on fish and wildlife. That's where the strength lay. So right from the get-go [he] sold and tried to sell the forestry programs as supportive of fish and wildlife. And I think the U.S. Forest Service did the same thing through the '30s. There were a hell of a lot of

them that got on the wildlife bandwagon, as you mentioned, because they realized that... Okay, you plant a tree, and then you stand around for seventy years and watch it grow. If you're going to have programs, they've got to be allied with things like fish and wildlife in order to keep interest and support there. And George White was *very savvy*. He was a forest service man. He said, "We're not just going to be concerned with forests as trees, but as fish and wildlife places. They're going to be watershed protectors for fisheries. They're going to be sources of deer and turkey and other game animals." And that's helped a hell of a lot. Foresters... You're not a forester, by chance?

WS: No.

JK: Foresters are different people from biologists. You've worked with them, and you know they are. Foresters are more concerned with dollar signs than a biologist. Biologists are kind of dreamers and they don't think about money. But foresters are much more practical people. And we've had some uneasy times within the Department because of that. You get [a] young guy out of college and he's oriented toward *timber production!* You know, "Let's get this stuff going and sold!" and you've got the biologist saying "Hey, hold on a minute. We want den trees for squirrels. Don't cut all those old cull trees out! Leave some for the *squirrels*." (chuckles) And you had that friction, you know, it's bound to be. But as I say, the guys who have been in charge have realized they've got to get along, and they've had good programs as a result of it. Sometimes Forestry didn't feel like the Information Section wasn't paying enough attention to *them*, it was all going to the Wildlife Division or Fisheries Division. And they would set up their own Information Program. (laughs) And so it goes.

WS: What are you the most proud of when you think back with your career?

JK: *My career?*

WS: Yeah.

JK: *[thoughtful pause]* Well, I'm proud that I was able to contribute to the overall programs of the Department and to help sell those programs, and keep support for those programs.

**[Tape meter, 200]**

I'm proud of the Missouri Conservationist magazine. I think of all the things -- and there've been many of them, as I've enumerated -- that the Department has done to win public support. I think the Conservationist magazine has done the most. It has won the most people and *kept* them won over the longest period of time, and I had a part in that. I'm proud of it. I look at the magazine today and it's prettier than it was when I was running it. But I was running it on a much smaller *budget* than they've got now-a-days! I would have been nice to have some of the fancy... I remember when we went to *two colors* in the magazine. And gee, what an event that was to print in two colors. Then finally, eventually we got to where we could print some stuff in *four colors*, and what a step that was! But, yeah, the public doesn't look at that sort of thing the way I do as an editor of the thing. They thought it was great when it was one color! They thought it was great when it was two colors! And now that it's four colors, well, great. Now that it's *bigger*, and more *lush* and more colors yet, why, it's still great! But I'm *proud* of that. I took it from 20,000 to 470,000 [in circulation.] And I would go to the Conservation Commission every year in February, because my magazine contract was due in April. I'd say, "Do you want to print this magazine for another year, another twelve months?"

“Absolutely,” they’d say, “It’s the best thing we do; whatever you need.” They’d give me the money and I’d do it. But I’d go every year and give them the option, and *never* did they fail to support it. And that made me proud. And I’ve had people... You know, I’m introduced to somebody and they say, “That name’s familiar to me.” “Well, I used to edit the Conservationist magazine.” “*That’s* where I’ve heard that name!” That gives you a feeling in the vitals. And *twelve* years I’ve been away from the magazine, and yet people remember me. People say, “I’m into this because of what you wrote in the magazine. You didn’t beat us over the head with it, but you inculcated in me” -- or in us, whoever is talking -- “a mindset toward this is *right* behavior with respect to the resources and this is *bad*.” And that makes me feel good. As I say, I started college wanting to be a teacher, and I think I was a teacher through the work that I did with the Conservation Commission and through the magazine and with the other publications that I helped get started. I feel good about that. I’ve done my best. I feel good about writing that history of the Department. I think that with all of its shortcomings as a historian might look at it, it’s still going to be what people are referring to in the years to come. I’ve made a mark that’s going to last for quite a while, anyway, after I’m gone, with that book.

WS: Personally, I’m glad you stopped over in Missouri on your way to New Mexico.

(both laugh heartily)

[Tape meter, 250]

JK: Yeah, it's kind of funny. I went to a meeting down in Tucson some years ago. And I thought, "I'm going to go by Las Cruces to see what I missed." And *gee*, beautiful campus! Great place! I thought, "My! I missed all this. Well, okay." (laughs)

WS: On the other hand, all the desert there is quite a bit different ecosystem than what you had here.

JK: Well, oh, yeah. Yeah. Of course, Las Cruces is very close... I think it's within like thirty miles of El Paso, so you have a big city nearby of a sort, but I have no regrets that I stayed in Missouri instead of going on. And Missouri's always been my home. As I've said, I was raised in St. Louis.

My family was not outdoors people. We didn't even own a car, so we didn't get out to hunt or fish or anything like that. I didn't do any hunting or fishing until I started working for the Conservation Department. I took up fly fishing, *deliberately*, as something in the field. [I] used to go around and fish the farm ponds around mid-Missouri here [and] strike terror in the hearts of the green sunfish and the little streams I could wade, and [I] squirrel hunted a little bit. I've killed two deer with the flintlock rifles that I've made, [of] which I'm proud. I haven't killed a deer since 1976; that was the last year I seriously deer hunted. I go every year, but I go out and sit and look at the woods. I take a little radio with me and listen to the football game and when it's over, I come home and that's the end of my deer season. (laughs) No deer is dumb enough to stumble over my gun barrel, so I don't have to mess with that. I don't hunt or fish much anymore, either one. I'm still into shooting and [I] enjoy that, with muzzleloading rifles and shotguns. But I'm not an avid outdoorsman or sportsman. Last week, I took a hike

out to the Scrivner Wildlife Area (which is one of the Department's newer areas in Cole County here) and just hiked around the trails there. [I] had my shotgun with me in case I saw a squirrel; I might or might not shoot at it. Fortunately for both of us, I didn't see any, but had a good time just hiking around and enjoying the day.

WS: Well, Mr. Keefe, I've kept you quite a while. I appreciate all the information.

JK: Well, I don't know what kind of information it is, but you're welcome to it.

WS: I'd like to give you a chance to make any closing remarks if you like.

JK: Well, I thank you for... It's flattering to be asked to contribute to this thing. I hope it is something that will be useful to you. Want me to tell you a funny story that *didn't* get in the book?

WS: Sure.

JK: Arthur Clark was the first Chief of Fish and Game in Missouri. He was a divorced fellow from the east. He went pheasant hunting up in the Dakotas one year, and while he was pheasant hunting up there he had a heart attack and died. I think it was probably Mel Steen who later -- he was with the federal Fish and Wildlife Service, and I think he was hunting with Arthur Clark -- and he notified us. We, the Department, notified his ex-wife and she didn't have anything to do with it. So they sent a couple of biologists up there to do something with the body. They put it in a car and drove it from North Dakota over to Minneapolis, which was the closest crematorium. They cremated Arthur's body. They were staying in a hotel there in North Dakota, and they had just redone the floors in the lobby. This guy came in with this box of Arthur's ashes and somebody made the comment, "You'd think that people would be more careful about these floors. It's got all

kinds of grit on these floors!” And Arthur’s ashes were leaking out of the box! (laughs)  
So the next day they took the box over to the Missouri River, near where one of the big  
dams is now, and strewed Arthur Clark’s ashes on the Missouri River. And that was their  
salute to their boss. And that’s what happened to Arthur Clark! (chuckles) That didn’t  
get in the book, the fact that they were dribbling his ashes all over the hotel lobby!  
(chuckles)

WS: Well, alright. [I’ll] shut this down here.

**[Tape meter, 330. End of side two, tape two of two. End of interview.]**