

An Interview with
Coleman McSpadden
and **Dennis McSpadden**
at their office in
Van Buren, Missouri

31 March 1998

interviewed by Will Sarvis



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Missouri Environment a.c. 12

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PREFACE

Mr. Coleman McSpadden was born on November 14, 1925, in Van Buren, Missouri. His ancestry in the region goes back to the beginning of white settlement in the Missouri Ozarks. He was one of the early supporters of Park Service management of the Current and Jacks Fork rivers, and testified before Congress to this effect in 1961 and 1963. He has witnessed the several Ozark National Scenic Riverways superintendents who have come and gone, as well as the early land acquisition efforts. Subsequent Park Service restrictions on camping and other regulations have dissatisfied Mr. McSpadden and his son, Dennis McSpadden. The McSpaddens witnessed the recent wild horse controversy of the early and mid 1990s, and relate their perspective on it here.

I met the McSpaddens at their funeral home in Van Buren, Missouri. We sat in the office to conduct the session, with Mr. Coleman McSpadden present the entire time, and Mr. Dennis McSpadden contributing at intervals amidst the comings and goings of his other work. After the session I was treated to a tour of Mr. Dennis McSpadden's large and varied collection of fish gigs and other iron tools and implements.

The interview was recorded on Sony 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 floor stand. The audio quality is good.

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 editors, Will Sarvis and N. Renae Farris.

[Tape meter, 000. Begin side one, tape one of one. Begin interview.]

WS: I'm in Van Buren, Missouri, where I'm with Mr. Coleman McSpadden.¹ I thought, just before we got going on the Riverways, maybe I could get some basic autobiographical information from you. The first thing I wanted to ask was your birth date.

CM: I was born November the 14th, 1925, in Van Buren.

WS: Okay. Maybe you could tell me something about your family history, and how far back you can maybe trace your family.

CM: Well, my mother and father were born here in Van Buren; *their* mothers and fathers were born here in Van Buren. So the history of both sides of my family -- my maternal and my father's side -- probably 175 years we've lived here in Carter County. I guess I've lived in several different little houses in Van Buren. When we were young we moved around. But always lived in Van Buren itself. My mother and father were in business here many years. He was a Chevrolet dealer and had a Standard Oil agency.

My grandfather, R.L. [Robert Lee] Coleman (who I was named after) was in politics here for over fifty years. He served in the capacity of several different offices. You might say he held office in Carter County for just about every office that was available. At one time he owned about 1,700 acres of land which surrounded the Big Spring. He didn't own the Big Spring. He acquired that land, probably, for a little or nothing, as far as amount per acre is concerned. But he did amass that, and they had a summer home down there. They took a wagon and went down there to live for three or

¹ Mr. McSpadden may also be heard on C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 26, 27.

four months in the summertime.

So the history of our family -- both sides of my family, McSpaddens and the Coleman family -- go back a long time here.

WS: That 1,700 acres, was that before the industrial logging took place around here?

CM: It was *while* it was going on. My grandfather, R.L. Coleman, was a clerk for the Grandin Lumber and Mining Company down at Grandin, Missouri. That was in the early 1900s. He worked down there. We had the railroad here then. I forget just when it was, but he would go back and forth to Grandin by rail; the Frisco Railroad. I don't know how many years he stayed there, but he did work for them. He also was a legislator. He served in Jeff[erson] City as a representative for Carter County.² Quite a politician. He told me one time, "It took quite a bit of money to run a campaign, and some families were big families, and they all required shoes."

(Laughter)

But the history of this county -- we've always been a very poor county as far as the economics. We had very little industry.

[Brief telephone interruption; tape recorder momentarily off]

The main industry was probably logging, and it has been somewhat through the years; one of the main industries in this county. Logging and timber has employed many people. Very little farming in this hilly country. And, in fact, they're all pretty well gone, as we knew them back then, as a farm.

² A Democrat, Robert Lee Coleman was elected to serve as Carter County State Representative in 1888.

WS: I guess part of that 1,700 acres ended up as the Big Spring State Park.

CM: That's right.

WS: When did that come in? The '30s?

CM: It was in the '30s. I think it was dedicated back in the late '30s. They had a big delegation from Jeff City. They built a low water bridge, more or less out of wood, to ford the river there, for all the delegates to come across. The railroad was on the east side of the river.

[Tape meter, 050]

They let them all walk across this little wooden bridge.

[Brief interruption; tape recorder momentarily off]

WS: Okay, I guess the last thing we were talking about was the Big Spring State Park. So I guess you saw, really, a lot of the early recreation when you were a boy, growing up with the state parks and all.

CM: Yes. It was very well managed by the state of Missouri, the park system. It's been a very good park system. But we felt the three parks that were involved in this Riverways -- the Round Spring, Alley Spring, and the Big Spring (here) -- should be included in it. And the state of Missouri had to enact legislation, and it was with the help of our friend, [Walter T.] "Dunie" Bollinger, [Jr.]³, that we were able to get it in the state of Missouri. John Dalton was the governor then, I think, when all this was going on. He supported it, as far as I can remember. But they did enact the legislation that actually gave the three

³ Walter T. "Dunie" Bollinger, Jr. served as Carter County State Representative from 1953 through 1963.

parks to the federal government, along with a lot of opposition.

I think it's been a good thing. Some of the regulations have kind of hurt the Big Springs Park in particular, now. The one I'm speaking of is the one I live next to, here in Van Buren. They've got a lot of "No" signs in this park down here. And they shouldn't be there. In other words, the attitude of the people -- *my* thoughts are, if you're continually saying "No, you can't do this," it keeps the multitude of people [from] coming to visit your park.

Just recently I happened to be driving down 19 Highway with some friends of mine; my wife, and another couple. We drove over to what they call the Pulltight Campground, on Current River. A beautiful little campground. I looked at it. Now you can't drive to the spring itself, because it's there on the west side of the river. There wasn't a sign there in this park that indicated you couldn't this, you couldn't do that. It looked to me like seventy-five to a hundred camp sites, where the people could camp and observe the river and fish in it, without any restrictions. And they say it's awfully busy in the summertime.

DM: There is no camping on the river in Big Springs. They've removed all of that. They've got you camping in a field. No trees. There are no campers down there. The last Fourth of July, this KOA Campground or Deer Run Campground out here was so full that you couldn't throw a rock out there without hitting a person. Three people camped down at Big Springs. So they've got a problem.

CM: We've got a park superintendent up here now by the name of Ben Clary that you can talk

to. He is probably trying to help with a little public relations on this thing, as far as we know. Because we think that the park system is for everybody. I fully realize that you can't just turn a herd of cattle through. And some people get rather violent when they get too much booze, and things like that. But for a family camping trip -- and there's a lot of people that like to do that, with their kids -- we need to have areas where these people can go to without the fanfare of a Park Service employee harassing them about, "You can't do this, you can't do that."

[Tape meter, 100]

Back in the early history of this park, we felt that preservation of the Current River was a primary thing for us to do, to protect it from over-development. Having traveled quite extensively all over the world, I can say this: that Van Buren and the Current River -- you can't find one anywhere else like it. Anywhere. I've been all over the United States and Canada. And this is very unique. This river is spring-fed, starting from Montauk right on down to here. When I was a boy growing up I drank it every day, because I lived on the Current River. My dad was quite a fisherman. We liked to fish and hunt. It was pure. It was clean. It is remaining that way through the efforts of establishing this park. If it hadn't been preserved, we think it would have probably had cabins on every corner of it, and this and that. We think it's been good to do it.

Although some of the Park Service people, now, through the years -- and this park is twenty-five, thirty years old, now -- some of them haven't been very good public relations people with the public. And some of them are *very* good people with the public.

So I guess you've got to take the good with the bad. But we think it's been the right direction; or *I* do, and having lived here all my life. And our schools are benefiting from the people who come in here. They're spending their tax dollars here. It's been very good for us.

WS: As far as damming the rivers, I guess that went back to the 1938 Flood Control Act or something?

CM: Yes.

WS: Do you remember when you first starting hearing about the Army [Corps of Engineers]?

CM: I'm sure this was back in the '30s when my father and a group of men went to Little Rock opposing high dams on the Current River. They were successful in their opposition of it. The lower dam, at Harry's Root in Ripley County, would have inundated the Big Spring in high water. No question about it. Even though it [the Current River] does overflow its bank and inundates it now. But to back up over it with a lake would have been a different situation. So the people opposed it back then. There were not very many people there, but they had enough vocal opposition that they did stop it.

WS: The opposition and support for that, did that tend to be depending on whether you were upstream from the dam or downstream? Because I imagine you did have some people in favor of that dam.

CM: Oh! There was a *lot* of people in favor of it.

WS: Who were they?

CM: They were people like, (chuckles) "down the river," we'll say. They would have really

prospered from the lake down there.

WS: Like down in Doniphan?

CM: In Doniphan, yes. They all felt like it was a good thing.

WS: Now the Army Corps was going to build it, but wasn't the Rural Electrical Administration involved with it somehow? They were going to get the [hydroelectric] power of it, right?

CM: These were high power dams. They were going to get power out of it. No question about it.

WS: When did you first start getting involved -- like you were mentioning the Monument proposal, and then you had an alternate Forest Service bill with the first round of hearings in 1961.

[Tape meter, 150]

CM: We first began to get involved in this thing, I guess, through our friendship with some people who were involved with promoting it. Walter (Dunie) Bollinger. And, just kind of felt like it was the right thing to do, even though, personally, it was not very profitable for some of us. But we had our congressman, who was supportive of it, and took out after it in good shape.

There was a proposal to take in the Eleven Point River, in this first proposal. Congressman [Paul Caruthers] Jones (lived at Kennett) got that part of the thing obstructed from the bill. The [U. S.] Forest Service has complete control of the Eleven Point River now. And I guess they're doing a good job of it. I used to fish it a lot, but I

haven't been over there in several years.

WS: Do you remember how Congressman [Albert Sidney Johnson] Carnahan felt about all this?

CM: He waited until all the facts and figures were in. I'm not sure whether he was for it or opposed to it. I know that [Richard Howard] "Dick" Ichord, [II], who succeeded him in Congress, was one of the main backers of the legislation.

WS: Now, he campaigned against it, when he ran.

CM: Yes.

WS: Then changed his mind.

CM: Right. They took out after Mr. Ichord pretty hot and heavy; hung him in effigy up at Round Springs one time. There were pictures of it. I called him. I said, "I see where you've been hung." (Chuckles) Some of the people up there, the people of Shannon County, really took out after him.

WS: You often hear about how Ripley County was sort of a hotbed of opposition. And you mentioned Congressman Jones getting that excluded. Was there any explanation for that? Or were they any different, really, than Shannon or Carter County?

CM: We did have one good friend down there in Ripley County, Lester K. Wright⁴; Bob Griffin⁵; some of the people there. But the general public was opposed to it, in Ripley County. No question about it. I have no idea why, or where the source of it they got, but

4 For an interview with Mr. Wright, please see C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 52, 53.
5 Speaker of the Missouri House of Representatives in the 1980s through the mid-1990s.

they were opposed to it. We scheduled meetings with George Hartzog⁶ in Ripley County. We would try to get him and let him make a speech at any of these civic organizations, like a Rotary Club. We could never get him down there in Ripley County. Even up in Dent County we had quite a bit of [resistance]. Of course, they were right on the upper reaches of it. There wasn't very much support from Dent County. Below Montauk, here's quite a bit of the Current River in Dent County.

[Tape meter, 200]

WS: Now Mr. Davenport was the first superintendent [of the Ozark Scenic National Riverways]. Is that correct?

CM: Ted Davenport was his name.

WS: And then followed by Vernon Hennesay.⁷

CM: Vernon Hennesay.

WS: And then was it Dave Thompson?⁸

CM: Dave Thompson, yes.

WS: Do you remember who came after Dave Thompson?

DM: Randy Pope.

CM: Randy Pope was involved there somewhere. And Randall left here and went to Omaha to their regional office. And then I think Art Sullivan⁹ came after Randy Pope. Sullivan

6 Director of the U. S. National Park Service at that time.

7 For an interview with Mr. Hennesay, please see C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c.11.

8 An interview with Mr. Thompson may be found in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 49-50.

9 Interviewed in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 46-48.

was here for several years.

WS: He was here the longest, I believe.

CM: I think so.

DM: And did the most damage.

WS: Is that right?

CM: Well, there was very little progress in the park when Art Sullivan was superintendent.

DM: He was the one that took camping off of Current River. He thought it was offensive to people floating down the river to see a campsite on the river. So there is no camping on Current River in Big Spring State Park. In the summer times, whenever I was young, there were campsites from one end of it to the other down there.

CM: Very popular back then.

DM: It was a great family place. Now, they've got them stuck out in the old abandoned airport down there, is where their campground is now. You can't see the river. Pitiful.

WS: Who was your favorite superintendent?

CM: We liked Randy Pope. He was a nice man. We like Ben Clary now. I see him about every time I'm on the golf course, when he *can* get out there. I haven't been involved with him in the Park at all, in any capacity. Vernon Hennesay was a nice fellow too.

WS: I was kind of surprised to see those first superintendents come and go so quickly. Because, being the first national river and all, you would think they would want a steady influence.

CM: I've heard that comment back through the years. Most of them came here from areas of

the U.S. parks where there was a lot of development and had been established a long time. This was unique because of how many miles long and how many thousand acres involved. The logistics of operating the park was very difficult for some of them. I imagine some of them *asked* for a transfer. Because our school system was not rated as triple-A. That does affect some of the people living in the area who have been used to something else besides this.

WS: A little while ago when we had the tape player off you were telling me about these wild horses. Maybe you could tell that story again.

[Tape meter, 250]

CM: Well, I'd say that the wild horse issue was inaugurated by Art Sullivan. In fact, he was more or less a scapegoat in the end of it, because of so much public outcry of wanting them [the Park Service] to leave them [the horses] alone. They'd been here for forty or fifty years. I had somebody describe it to me. A "feral" horse is a horse who is doing, maybe, damage to the ecology and the ecosystem of the river. Well, I tried to find these horses several times, and I've never been able to find them.

DM: Dad, the thing about these horses all happened when Jim Smith¹⁰ had this trail ride up in Eminence. It became a very popular attraction for people who have horses. Up there the river is real narrow, and they crossed the river. Art Sullivan took offense to that. He thought if he could get rid of the "feral animals" (he called it) he could stop the trail ride, which started on private property, traversed a small section of the Park Service, and went

10 For an interview with Mr. Smith, please see C3966 Missouri Environment Project, a.c. 22, 23.

on. That was his main goal, was to get Jim Smith stopped. If you go up there and talk to Jim Smith at Eminence -- and they'll have 5,000 horses up there. 10,000; I don't know. When I was up there they had 5,000.

CM: It's a multi-million dollar business; the trail rides up there around Eminence. Every year it goes on. But that's where the opposition started. I guess if it hadn't been for Congressman Bill Emerson (he was so supportive of enabling legislation) and this Jim Smith, and an attorney by the name of [Douglas R.] Kennedy¹¹ -- they might have been successful in getting those horses out. They *did* get rid of some of the horses. No question about it.

WS: Did they shoot them?

CM: Well, we don't know.

DM: Trapped them.

CM: Trapped them and got them out of there; sold them, I guess. But Congressman Emerson introduced this legislation and it was passed. And recently, after the Congressman's death, it was enacted -- along with the participation of the state of Missouri, and the Park Service. These horses are in perpetuity, as far as being able to stay there.

DM: It's a wild herd. Tourists don't see them, because if you make any noise they're gone. They don't hurt the bank of the river. They don't hurt the field. They're just an asset to this area. People try to go up there and see them and can't find them, because they're very elusive.

11 An interview with Mr. Kennedy may be found in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 51.

[Tape meter, 300]

CM: Most of them are around what they call Shawnee Creek. Powder Mill is not far from Shawnee Creek, where the junction of the Jacks Fork and the Current River come together. There's an area there between the junction and Powder Mill, and Shawnee Creek comes in there. That's where those horses are. I think the local people at Eminence watch them pretty closely. They're the people who are interested in them.

WS: So even if people couldn't see those horses, I guess they just liked the idea of them being out there.

DM: Of something running free. They're free. They don't pay attention to the Park Service rules, you know.

CM: Evidently it backfired so *badly* on the Park Service wanting to get rid of them. Whenever they had this ride-in -- and I was there and watched it -- we had to have a street cleaning after they were here. There were thousands of people here in opposition to the Park Service's rule. They just more or less said, "If you're going to get rid of them you're going to be in trouble." And they *were* in trouble, right then.

WS: Was Congressman Emerson involved at that point?

DM: His office was.

CM: His office was, but then he *really* got involved with it after he saw the multitude of people who were in opposition to getting rid of them.

DM: He wasn't here that day.

CM: No, he wasn't here, but his office was here; his representatives. But after he realized the

opposition here, he jumped on it and got support in the Congress and passed this legislation. And it passed both houses, just bang-bang-bang. And I think Senator [Christopher “Kit”] Bond and [John] Ashcroft, they were in support of it also.

WS: I would imagine these horses don’t just stay on Park Service land. They must go over to national forest too, and...

DM: They go on private property, national forest, Park Service.

CM: They’re not confined. There are no fences there. So they’re back and forth on private property and public property all the time. In fact, this organization [the Missouri Wild Horse League] makes sure they have plenty of feed and hay and everything out for them, now.

[Tape meter, 349. End side one, tape one of one.]

[Tape meter, 000. Begin side two, tape one of one.]

WS: You mentioned there are no fences down there. That reminds me of a question. I wonder if either one of you remember when the open range ended in Carter County?

CM: Yes, I do.

WS: Do you remember the year? That was a county option law, right?

CM: I’m not sure about the year. But it passed the county option. It passed the state, first, with a clause to this bill (I understand) that the county had an option either to have it open or closed. And a lot of fellows ran hogs and cattle for years and years and years. They burnt off the woods. In fact, Carter County and Shannon County probably had the worst burn record in the state of Missouri. And now they’ve got the best no-burn record.

WS: I think the state law was in 1964 [1963, actually]. But when I looked through the old papers I couldn't find that anybody took notice of it at the time. I guess if I looked hard enough I could find when it was passed as a county option.

DM: It was in there, I imagine.

WS: Mid or late '60s, maybe.

DM: Yes.

WS: I guess most recently you've had a lawsuit that the [Missouri] Trappers Association filed against the Park Service, over the right to trap. Was that 1988, I believe? They filed that lawsuit?

CM: I really don't know about that, but I understand that they have been able to go ahead and trap. So, it's either in a state of appeal or -- the state of Missouri is granting them the right to trap, and the Park Service is going along with it. See, this bill enabling these parks and all the laws pertaining to fishing and hunting in these parks -- the Missouri Conservation Commission still has a right to go on these federal lands and regulate their hunting and fishing laws. So it's been unique in that way. The state of Missouri has lost no input as far as their hunting and fishing permits and regulations.

WS: I imagine that issue wasn't as controversial as the wild horses issue, then.

CM: No. No way. The wild horse issue (laughs) -- publicity-wise, somebody did a good job of getting it up there for the people to take. They formed their opinion pretty fast.

WS: Have there been any other controversial issues of that magnitude since the Riverways got started?

CM: Not that would match the horse thing.

DM: Not so much locally, but the reintroduction of these river otters has impacted the fish numbers in Current River. And they opened up trapping season on them, I think, last year. Some of the guys are really working on them. They [the otters] are non-selective, and any fish they catch is gone. The bleeding hearts in St. Louis were against trapping those pretty little otters. Well, they ought to be up on *their* river.

CM: We've always been, I guess, of the approach of, "This is our river, here." It's sort of like George Hartzog, who made a statement, "This is my park." And believe me, I was privy to some of the information. When they dedicated the Park, and President Nixon's daughter, Tricia, came down here and participated. An assistant secretary of the interior by the name of Nathaniel Reed was here for it. And something happened that George Hartzog resigned. That was a great blow to the park system when that man resigned. Because he was so well versed in what he did, and what he tried to do. I believe it was all a personality thing that happened there.

[Tape meter, 050]

I still entertain George Hartzog every year or two down here in my home. And his family, Helen and his boys. He still thinks of it as his park.

WS: I knew he liked this place a lot.

CM: Oh, he does. I think two or three or four years ago no one knew he was here. We had him in a cabin. He was writing a piece for his son, who is a minister. And at the time, he was trying to get some money. He was a minister on an Indian reservation out west.

George was trying to help him on this grant process. He stayed here and we entertained the boys.

But, whenever he left the park system -- and he was with them a long time. In fact, he had left them one time before, and was employed by Downtown St. Louis (I think is the name of it). It might have been about the same time the Jefferson Memorial Expansion was taking place. But then he came back into the park system. I think he came back on the insistence of Mr. [Stewart] Udall, knowing what a valuable man he was with the Park Service. I've never heard anybody say anything to him or about him.

WS: I understand Mr. [Bill] Bailey from over toward Eminence -- now he was, maybe, unusual in that he was local, but then he also had a long career with the Riverways.¹² Is that right?

CM: Yes. He did. He retired from them. Bill was one of the rangers on the park. He's still alive in Eminence. I see him occasionally. He has a grandson who works for the Park Service here.

WS: Now he had quite a lot of pull with Congressman Ichord, didn't he?

CM: Well, let's put it this way. Dick Ichord took care of his friends. A friend of Dick's or George Hartzog's was able to maybe secure a job. Bill did that. He worked for the Park Service. In fact, you'll look at a picture in here [a scrapbook of articles on the ONSR] floating down the river with Tricia Nixon. That was Bill Bailey paddling the boat. He was a very close friend of Dick Ichord's.

12 Mr. Bailey was interviewed in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Project, a.c. 24, 25.

WS: Would someone like Mr. Bailey be able to act as sort of a liaison between local people and the Park Service?

CM: Bill was very well acquainted with, let's say, all the people of Shannon County. He was born and raised in Shannon County. He knew how they thought, how they reacted to things. And I'm sure he was a good man to have there, so many years. I guess Bill's about eighty years old. He's had a couple of heart surgeries. As far as I know he's still hanging in there, doing pretty good.

WS: Would he be unique, or were there other people like that, who were native to the area?

CM: There are several people from Shannon County who have worked for the Park Service, and been very successful people with them, locally. But Bill, I think, was probably one of the foremost, most notable people who has worked for the Park and retired from it.

WS: Now when it came to state representatives, it seems to me like Mr. Bollinger was outstanding in his involvement with this, compared to the Shannon County, Reynolds County, Dent, or Texas County representatives. I wonder if there was a reason for that?

[Tape meter, 100]

CM: You had to know Dunie Bollinger. Dunie was a politician, first. He just loved it. That's what caused his death. He crashed his plane down here where the campground is in the Big Spring right now. But Dunie was a friend of Governor Warren Hearnes, and he was also a very close friend to Dick Ichord. He had the ability to talk to people. He was smart in many ways, as far as the way of politics is concerned. He kind of lived on it.

WS: Would you say Mr. Allen was able to beat him based on their opposite...?

- CM: Points of view, yes. Jim Allen defeated him in a race here. I'm sure that Bollinger's stand on the Park Service got him defeated. He was for it, and Jim Allen was against it. So we had local opposition to it. There's no question about it.
- WS: Once the Riverways got started, did you all take much of an interest in the Eleven Point, afterwards, with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act?
- CM: No, we never did. The Forest Service had that, and we didn't participate in any way in it. I did get Congressman Ichord involved in it one time. The Forest Service went in there and closed down an access area into the Turner's Mill area without public hearings on it. There's an old law in the state of Missouri, that if public funds are expended on a road -- like county or state funds -- in order to close that road you must have public hearings on it. The Forest Service closed this road going into this Turner's Mill area without any public hearings. And oh, it caused a great gnashing of the teeth of some of the people. We got Congressman Ichord involved in that. We got it open again. It cost the taxpayers, probably, \$150,000 to get it open -- because they had closed it, and then they had to come back and repair the roads, put in new culverts they had torn out. And they built a nice little parking area and access to the river.
- WS: What did you think about this scenic easements option for the acquisition of the Riverways?
- CM: The way I understand it, there was actually a scenic easement option; a fee title [option], where you outright sold your land to them with no options whatsoever; a life estate, where you could live on it the rest of your life, and at your death, or a member of your

family designated so, it would revert back to the U.S. The scenic easement, I thought, back in years gone by -- and I look at it today -- was the best way. If a man had a farm and he was able to exercise a scenic easement option on that, he could live on that farm and farm it the rest of his life. And that scenic easement was attached to the title of his property.

[Tape meter, 150]

So, I thought it was one of the best options out there, but a lot of people elected to sell their land. Of course, some of the areas, there were no options offered. It was just, “We’re going to buy your land, or we’re going to condemn it.”

One of the old stories that I always heard about -- and it’s a true story -- Bill Bailey was in a helicopter with a land officer. They landed up here on a farm, up at -- oh, it’s probably fifteen miles from Van Buren, north, on the west side of Current River. This fellow’s name was Warren Bland. They landed there. Warren Bland came down there. They talked to him. They said, “Mr. Bland? Would you like to take a helicopter ride? We’ll show you your farm and the river from the air.” He said, “You know, I’ve always wondered about these contraptions. Sure.” So he crawled in there and they took Warren Bland for about a two hour trip up and down the river. When they landed him right back to his house there, he said, “I sure want to thank you for this ride. But now you get the hell out of here and don’t you ever come back.”

(Laughs) So there’s an old fellow who lived on this land. They took his farm. And that was his attitude. I didn’t blame him. I didn’t blame a lot of the people who had

these farms in their family, and they took their farms. Some of them were well paid for them. Some of them weren't. It depended on how much acreage and stuff was involved in it. But there were hardships created there. Through the years there's been a lot of animosity toward the Park for that reason. But, we think in the future; in the history of this area, it's probably going to be one of the better things that ever happened to us.

WS: In terms of people getting a good price for their farm or not, I've heard some people speculate that that really had to do with if the farm was acquired earlier or later; that as time went on, the prices tended to get better. I don't know if that's true or not, or if that was a popular idea or not.

CM: I think, basically, the people who went to condemnation procedures in the court system received more money than the ones that did just sell their land outright. There's no question about it.

WS: Did that become kind of common knowledge, do you think?

CM: Well; you take an old boy, his farm sold for \$30,000 here, and his neighbor who went to condemnation procedure and he got \$100,000 -- it didn't take them long to realize that that's the route they should go. They were awarded. Of course, they had to pay a lawyer to do it. And the government had their lawyers. But they did receive more money by going that route.

WS: Well, I imagine in any situation like this -- and this wouldn't make the Riverways unusual -- but I've also heard stories how some of these lawyers were ambulance-chasing types, where they just kind of got on the bandwagon. I don't know if that was a popular

(laughing) conception or not.

CM: (laughs) I don't care to comment on that.

[Tape meter, 200]

I know that we had a couple of appraisers -- one of them, locally, was Noel Burrows; "Nellie" Burrows, they called him. Every appraisal he turned in, I'd say without exception, the people received that amount of money. Because he made it a reality of what they should get. And the people were satisfied with it. He served on a lot of appraisals up and down this river. The reason I know it, they tried most of these cases in federal court at Cape Girardeau. In fact, *all* of them were tried there in that eastern district of Missouri. And this judge would just accept his [Burrows'] recommendation without fanfare.

WS: Just out of respect Mr. Burrows' professional opinion, I guess.

CM: Well, he knew him. He knew him, and he knew his ability to judge people and the value of the land.

WS: Would that have been Federal Judge Meredith?

CM: James Meredith, yes. I knew him fairly well. [W. J.] "Dub" Crutcher was another appraiser. Dub, and I, and Jim Meredith, and another fellow duck hunted together, some. We tried to set him [Meredith] up in a picture one time. You could only kill two ducks. So we killed six ducks. That was two a piece. And we were going to take a picture of James Meredith with these six ducks in his hands. And about the time we got ready to take the picture, why, he dropped the ducks and told us what we could (laughing) do with

it.

But he was a man who represented the people. No question about it. Jim Meredith was a great judge and judge of character. He really was.

WS: I wonder why some of those government appraisals were so much lower than what the federal courts finally gave to the landowners?

CM: I think some of the land officers took the attitude that this land is poor, this land is not unique in the way of this river flowing in front of it. They did not take into reasoning about their appraisals the aesthetic value of the river, located next to this farm. There's nothing like it. And that was never [considered], that *I* ever heard of. In some of their filings, that this land is not worth any more on the river than it is back here five miles on a ridge top. Well, it is, and always has been. In fact, the only farms that you might say we ever had in this county was along this riverbed; the river valley. And some of them were pretty good, little, old farms. But they're all gone now.

[Tape meter, 250]

I don't know of any that are left, that are productive, with families on them and making a living out of them. Not in this county.

WS: Back when you all were testifying in Congress and all, what was it that made you want to support the Park Service but not the Forest Service?

CM: We never did think the Forest Service was in the business of entertainment. The Park Service entertains people all the time, in their park system, all over the United States. I don't know of a place where the Forest Service actively goes about their pursuit of having

people in to their area. Now they do have some public campgrounds along highways out west and places like that. But the Park Service is different from the Forest Service. It always has been. Compare Yellowstone to our Mark Twain National Forest here. Well, sure, it's a big forest. It's got a few campgrounds in it, but *very few*. So there it is. In my opinion, I always said, "The Park Service is the best agency to do this and to develop it."

I don't think that the Park Service has developed this system as it should have been through the years. Sometimes they've run out of money to do this. Now, they did spend a lot of money acquiring the land. But as far as upgrading, they wasted money on some \$50,000 restrooms that flood every year. They shouldn't do that. Common sense will tell you that if you put \$50,000 worth of structure in a floodplain, something's going to happen to it. And you can drive to all of them, and they've closed a lot of them down.

WS: When you look back, as far as your involvement with all of this goes, is there anything you would do differently if you could?

CM: I probably would have subdued my position on some of it, maybe, in the earlier times of it; through my friendship with some of the local people. But, my dad always told me, "If you're going to be for something, be for it. Don't be just half for it." So we participated.

[Tape meter, 300]

Let's put it this way. Dick Ichord had one of the largest Congressional areas in the state of Missouri; the Eighth Congressional District. This little old town of Van Buren contributed to his campaign, per capita-wise, more money than he did get from any other areas. We supported him in what he did. Several of the businessmen contributed. And

some of them were Republicans. But they felt like, “If we get this park, it might help us economically.” Now, basically, that was where some of them came in: the economics of it. The smallest and the poorest county in the state of Missouri.

The state of Missouri couldn’t develop the Big Spring Park, or Alley Springs, or Round Springs. They didn’t have the money to do it. We felt like the federal government was the agency to do it, through the National Park Service. I still say today that if we get the right direction with the National Park Service, that we can do that. Our county is in the top ten counties -- right now, today -- of growth, in the state of Missouri. Carter County, believe it or not, is growing. We feel like there are people coming into this county and community that are retiring here, and they’re spending money here.

I’ll give you an example. Watercress Camping Area over here is administered by the Forest Service. My son was mayor here. It’s been a coordinated affair with the Forest Service and the city of Van Buren. But right across the river, there was a 120-acre farm over there, and there’s been some \$250,000 homes built there. I asked the man the other day. I just wanted to know for my own [information]. I said, “George (Burrows), what did you give Gus Frazier and Cellie Frazier for that farm over there?” 120 acres. He said, “I gave them \$4,000.”

[Tape meter, 350]

I just recently had a nephew buy two lots over there for \$55,000. A hundred feet by two hundred feet.

So that’s helping our economy in Carter County. And, people moving in here.

You had no idea how they find the place; you wonder sometimes how they find it.

WS: Well, Mr. McSpadden, I believe that's all my questions for you. I don't want to leave anything out, if you'd like to make some closing remarks.

CM: I have none, other than I hope that you're very successful.

[Tape meter, 365-370, Incidental conversation omitted. End side two, tape one of one. End of interview.]