

MICHAEL HOUCK

TAPE 3, Side 1

February 9, 1996

M.O'R.: This is a continuation of the interview with Mike Houck on February 9th, 1996.

M.H.: And while we developed a certain rapport over that year-plus period among folks on the committee, and I think there was a lot of give and take, I still think we've got miles to go in terms of educating the farm community about the dynamics of a river system and what their impacts are on that system.

M.O'R.: What kinds of practices are you talking about when you say that they need to be aware of how their operations affect things?

M.H.: Well, one of my biggest concerns goes back to the riparian zone. There was a lot of resistance to keeping cattle out of the riparian zone, to designating an area along tributary streams and the river itself, the main stem, to reduce grazing impacts and removal of trees, such as you described earlier, and protection of that zone.

The flow of pollutants off of farm fields is a significant problem, but my concerns - and that's actually one of the things that troubles me a little bit about the Clean Water Act itself and how it's implemented in that it doesn't focus on the system, it focuses on constituents that get into the water, whether it be phosphates or whatever other pollutants you're concerned about. And that does not address the importance of adjacent wetlands and riparian habitat. So I'm coming at it from a habitat perspective.

There are other folks who come at it from a chemistry - chemical constituent perspective. And those had to be brought together. And so most of my comments during that process related to the physical nature of tributary streams and the river. And there is general resistance to recognizing the importance of riparian habitat and wetlands to that system.

And that's been, actually, a frustration I've had with Unified Sewerage Agency and the water quality agencies, too, because there's a tendency for them to say, "No, no, no. Mr. Houck, my job is to make sure that X amount of phosphate doesn't get into the river, not to provide wildlife habitat and open space."

And then my response back is, "Well, then you need to broaden your mission." Which we've been working on. City of Portland, Bureau of Environmental Services actually rewrote its mission, and I believe takes more responsibility for managing the system than just simply worrying about water quality issues.

M.O'R.: Now, the USA, of course, is an organization that's involved very much in the whole water quality picture vis-a-vis the Tualatin, just by virtue of their operation - maybe both negative and positive impacts. There are claims that the water that they put in during the summertime in particular actually cleans the Tualatin up because it's actually higher quality.

M.H.: And they've got a lot of great programs, too, educational programs - especially in the urban area, which is where they serve, probably, so -.

M.O'R.: Obviously there has been an evolution of awareness and attitude on everybody's part, but especially on USA's part, in part because they were, you know, brought to it by these lawsuits,

and also by the requirements earlier that the State put upon them. So what's your sense of their operation now in terms of just - you know, to some extent where they're at now has been historically determined. For instance, these large sewage plants which some people say wouldn't be the way to go if you had today's knowledge back when you built those plants. I think that Jack Smith makes that argument, that he thinks smaller plants, more smaller plants would have been a better option.

M.H.: Oh, really? Because -?

M.O'R.: He thinks - well, in fact he even makes the argument that in some places septic systems would be better, just because - I've forgotten exactly the nature of it. I think he believes it would have less impact overall than these large sort of industrial kind of plants that dump, you know, so much effluent into the river just at one place.

M.H.: Wow. Well, I'd have to say that I wouldn't want septic fields all over the region, so I'm not ...

M.O'R.: Well, I'm not sure he would suggest septic fields in the densely-populated parts of Washington County. I think when he made that remark he was talking about a more rural situation down by the coast. But I think he does feel that maybe USA - actually, maybe it was more of an economic issue than a water quality, the more I think about it, but he thought that - you know, that we wouldn't have spent as much money maybe on developing that system out there.

M.H.: Well, I would agree with Jack in the sense that there is a tendency for bureaucracies like the Bureau of Environmental Services and USA and others to want to build big things, big,

engineered things, pipes and so forth. And it's a constant battle to try to get them to think about using natural processes more, when it's appropriate. I can't imagine that we don't need sewage treatment plants; we obviously do, but there are other ways to deal with some of the surface water management that can utilize natural systems and protect them through time so that you get flood reduction and you get water quality benefits from intact riparian zones and wetlands and so forth.

And I think that Unified Sewerage Agency has come a long ways in the last ten years, five to ten years, in its outlook, just as the Bureau of Environmental Services has. My earlier comment about concerns I've had about their narrow focus relates more to the ongoing debate about the so-called buffer zones along streams, and their position has been, "Well, we can't justify a buffer zone larger than X number of feet, because that our research tells us that we cannot substantiate scientifically that you need a wider riparian zone for your water quality benefits."

And my argument is, well, if you're looking at the whole system, you also need to take into consideration fish and wildlife habitat needs. And their position, of course, is: Well, we are mandated only to deal with water quality. And so any additional riparian zone you're going to get is going to have to come through some other process.

My argument is the processes need to be integrated so you're talking about managing the system. You shouldn't have to go to USA for this piece of the system and to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife or Washington County Planning for this piece of the system and then somewhere else for another piece. And we still have a

ways to go institutionally to create that integration, which is why I'm spending all my time on regional planning now, because I'm hopeful that maybe that's the mechanism to bring that all together. But I wasn't being overly critical of USA. I think they have expended huge amounts of time, energy and money on educating citizens and working with citizen groups on the watersheds like Fanno Creek and Cedar Mill Creek and so forth. And that would have never occurred 10 years ago. None of that would have been going - none of that was going on 10 years ago.

M.O'R.: Now, you know some of the people involved in USA just as a result of coming in contact with them?

M.H.: Mm-hmm.

M.O'R.: You mentioned Bill Gaffey earlier, also Gary Kraemer.

M.H.: Mark Jockers, Linda Kelly, Laurie Fayha.

M.O'R.: Probably Rob Howard as well?

M.H.: Yeah. Bob Barra. He's the one who took me up to the headwaters.

M.O'R.: And that trip was recently, you said?

M.H.: Well, within the last three years.

M.O'R.: As long as we're on that subject, just a brief question about that. You went up into the coast range to the water plant there?

M.H.: Yeah. Right.

M.O'R.: What did you see there?

M.H.: Well, a totally different river: cascading, high gradient, whitewater. Clackamas, Sandy River style river up in the headwaters, totally different in nature than the more meandering low-gradient river that flows through the farmland.

M.O'R.: Of course, part of the water that's coming down even up there isn't as a result of natural ...

M.H.: It comes from the Trask.

M.O'R.: Yes. It's been diverted from the Trask?

M.H.: Right.

M.O'R.: Which again is people interfering with nature.

M.H.: I'm not a big fan of inter-basin transfers like that, personally. But it exists.

M.O'R.: I imagine that that would - it doesn't seem to be, but I would have imagined that that would be - would have been a bit of a contested issue that, you know, Washington County and the Tualatin Valley wanted to take water ...

M.H.: I don't recall any discussions ...

M.O'R.: Yeah, I don't either.

M.H.: ... about that. I'm sure there were some folks who probably raised some eyebrows, but I don't remember hearing about it.

M.O'R.: Yeah, I certainly don't, either.

M.H.: Well, if you think about it, there's a huge inter-basin transfer from the Sandy to the Tualatin. I mean, Portland's water supply is piped out into Washington County. That's Bull Run water; it winds up in the Tualatin River, eventually.

M.O'R.: Well, that's true. Actually, that's just another little side issue, but with respect to Portland's water planning vis-a-vis the Bull Run and the increasing demand on the water supply, do you have any thoughts about that?

M.H.: Well, yeah. We've - in fact, we've developed some pretty specific recommendations to the water - regional water supply plan.

This is my own personal feeling; it's not an official Audubon position per se, or Coalition for Liveable Future, but I really think that we should look seriously at the Willamette as a future drinking water supply. I feel that very strongly, because I think if the region really looked at the Willamette as its future for supplying the region's drinking water, I think there would be a lot more sensitivity to what we're putting into the Willamette River. And I'm actually very serious about that.

The regional water supply plan errs in a few ways, the most significant one probably being 100 percent reliable provision of water in the future. I would question whether it makes economic or ecological sense to plan on providing water to everybody who wants it for every purpose they may want to put that water to in the driest, hottest year on record; that we probably should plan for shortages. We should plan to provide water virtually all the time, but understanding there may be a few days where you cannot go out and water your lawn and wash your car. You just can't do that. We cannot spend the amount of money that's necessary to provide absolute 100 percent certainty you will always have water, any day of the year you want it.

My feeling is that there is a huge amount more that can be gained through conservation and that conservation should be considered a source of water, and that we need to enact more policies regarding the use of native vegetation, reduction of lawns, reduction of the uses for that potable water for non-potable

purposes such as irrigation and so forth, for lawns and landscaping and that sort of thing.

We think that there's a huge amount of conservation that could be had in Washington County - well, throughout the region, and that if we did a better job at conserving water, we would not have to tap additional sources. I am adamantly opposed to building a third reservoir in Bull Run. That's - to me, that's equivalent to building the west side bypass; it's another big engineering project trying to build ourselves out of a situation, and creating another reservoir up there is not the appropriate response in my opinion, and I don't think the - at this point, I don't think the preferred alternative is the third reservoir.

So conservation, conservation, conservation will mean we don't need to worry about - oh, and the other thought: Even if the Willamette weren't used for drinking water, which I think we should seriously have it on the table for discussion, and in fact some providers are already planning to take water out of the Willamette, some of the smaller providers themselves.

M.O'R.: One thing I wondered about was whether the City of Portland Water Bureau should take responsibility for all these outlying communities.

M.H.: Well, you get a lot of resistance from them, of course.

M.O'R.: Right.

M.H.: I think there should be regional water quality authority, region-wide, consolidated. I think it's absurd to have 26 providers out there, or however many there are. But they're very turf-conscious, and they're going to maintain their integrity.



The notion of using the Willamette or other sources, assuming you know what the down side is, because obviously you don't want to take water out of an already low-flow situation, especially during the summer months, out of a stream or a river if it's going to negatively impact that system, but use of the Willamette for non-potable purposes, and reuse of effluent and gray water for golf courses, for you know, whatever irrigation purposes you can put that to is something we need to be looking at, and the potential - although the economics of this may not work out, dual systems, so that you've got this water for watering your lawn or washing your car or whatever, and this water for drinking.

So all of those need to be included in a comprehensive regional plan.

M.O'R.: Yeah, that latter idea makes sense to me, too. Seems like we use a lot of pure Bull Run water to wash cars and ...

M.H.: Yeah. It's absurd.

M.O'R.: You mentioned Senate Bill 1010, and that was something else I wanted to talk to you about, at least briefly. You say you participated on a committee to help draft the legislation, was that it?

M.H.: No, no. This is the result of the legislation. It mandated a committee be set up to study the problem and come up with recommendations on ag impacts, agricultural impacts on the Tualatin.

M.O'R.: I see.

M.H.: And so that committee we just sat down and said, "Well, what can we do? What do you recommend?" Education, education,

education. Voluntary compliance. We're not going to provide any money to implement it.

M.O'R.: Well, what I was going to ask you about there, because I thought maybe you had spent some time down in Salem or something, but just where you think the various - you know, how effective you think the various levels of government are in addressing water issues and also habitat issues. I'm thinking in terms of the fact that, you know, a lawsuit had to be brought against the EPA in the mid 80's to enforce the Clean Water Act. So we have that situation where the EPA, you know, wasn't even enforcing its own federal law, and then we have - you know, obviously in any government situation you've got the give and take between all the various interests that impinge on the process. I'm just wondering, you know, from your own experience working on these issues which levels of government seem to be the most effective in addressing this problem?

M.H.: Well, I'm personally disappointed at the enforcement and implementation and creation of more appropriate policies at every level, from local all the way up to the feds. The fact that if you look around the region at what's going on with the landscape, it ultimately translates to water quality, in my opinion. We are not doing a very good job of stewarding the landscape, and therefore, by extension, water quality in our streams. Streams are being culverted, paved over, stripped of riparian vegetation. Wetlands are being filled. Upland forests are being converted to impervious surface. All of those things are having a negative impact on water quality throughout the region.

We're beginning to take some tentative steps - well, at the local level some tentative steps have already been taken. The City of Portland has a pretty good environmental zoning process, but still I don't think is seriously managing watersheds and ecosystems in the manner that this region needs to if we're going to maintain the quality of life, which translates to air quality and water quality, too.

We have the ability, through the regional planning process, to try to knit together a more comprehensive land management, water quality management program in the region. Metro has recommended at this point, for example, taking flood plains and stream corridors and wetlands and steep slopes out of the buildable lands inventory, so that you would not use those acreages to calculate how much housing you need, how much acreage you need to satisfy your housing needs and so forth. That has not been done to this point.

Unfortunately, all of those lands have been zoned for various uses, whether it be housing or industrial or whatever. Well, of course once a private property owner has his land or her land zoned for industrial uses, by god, you know, that's the highest and best use for that land. That's how it's going to be used. And that zoning process has created a lot of tension between private property interests and those who would like to see the landscape receive some more consideration and protection.

So we've got, in my opinion, you know, sort of stop-gap, half-baked, half-implemented policies all the way from the state up to the federal level, and we need to do a lot better job, not only in terms of designing policies, but as you pointed out, one of the biggest problems is implementing and then enforcing. You can have

all the great laws you want on the books, but the reality is that they're not enforced, and they're not doing the job.

M.O'R.: I've taken off on the tack of asking you a little bit about the people out at USA, but I sort of dropped that, so let's return to that for just a second. Can you give me - you said that you'd known Bill Gaffey, for instance, prior to his coming to USA.

M.H.: Right.

M.O'R.: What was his history before the USA?

M.H.: Well, I remember him through the Bureau of Environmental Services, City of Portland. And then he was a consultant for a brief period of time before he went to USA, as I recall.

M.O'R.: And so what kind of work was he doing for the City of Portland, then?

M.H.: Similar work. I mean, they have similar missions. He was an upper manager, so I met him by virtue of serving on committees in the City of Portland, advisory committees. That's where I primarily remember Bill from.

M.O'R.: And Gary, you mentioned that you've had a little interaction with Gary Krahmer, who's somebody who grew up on a farm out there between Hillsboro and Cornelius and then almost accidentally wound up in the sewage business. What was your sense of him during the time that he was at the head of USA?

M.H.: Well, he seemed like an extremely conscientious fellow, although I had the feeling that Gary, much like a lot of the other folks in the Bureau of Environmental Services and USA, having had - I don't know what his background training was, whether he was an engineer by training or not, but I think there was kind of the "If we build it, it will solve the problem" sort of school. And I

think that still holds sway in a lot of organizations like USA. I think that Gaffey, or I'm hopeful that Gaffey has more of a - I guess more of an integrated approach and a willingness to look at natural systems and how the natural systems contribute to solving the problems. So I think that may have represented a shift; I don't know. That's my interpretation. But I think - my impression was I never got the sense that Gary Krahmer was not being straight with me personally, and concerned about solving the problems. So I think he was a dedicated Director of USA.

M.O'R.: In fact, he didn't really have too much formal training.

M.H.: That's what you meant by accident.

M.O'R.: Yeah, I think he did wind up taking some courses once he was already in the business, some college-level programs, but he didn't start off with that in mind.

M.H.: Well, he seemed like a nice guy who, if not being overwhelmed certainly was pressed to deal with the problems that he had to deal with, which I think was probably true for the Agency.

Obviously it's not an easy task to be told to clean up the Tualatin, so I think everybody was challenged.

M.O'R.: Right. And to be slapped with a million dollar settlement, or whatever it was, on the lawsuit, too ...

M.H.: Right.

M.O'R.: ... although I guess that settlement was constructed in part to have USA fund things that it probably would have funded anyway.

M.H.: Sure. Yeah, I think that endowment fund's great. It's a great way for that money to be used.

M.O'R.: Actually, it's responsible for us sitting here talking today.

M.H.: Oh, good point.

M.O'R.: A little bit of that money is responsible for this. In terms of the specific stresses on the Tualatin, there's lots of different sources. There's the agricultural community, which we've already talked a little bit about.

M.H.: Right.

M.O'R.: Probably the biggest stress, I would guess, would be just the amount of development, the amount of new homes that are going up out in Washington County, and I suppose to some extent that's just an inevitable pressure that we have to deal with. But then there's also the industrial component, all the high-tech industry out there. Do you have any sense as to which of these problems are going to be the most intractable in the future?

M.H.: Well, again, when I think of the Tualatin I don't just think of the main stem. I think the tributaries are obviously very critical to the river's health, too. And I think the most intractable problem personally is going to be impervious surfaces, those hard surfaces that are a result of urban development.

The constituents of the water are of course of great concern, and I don't want to underplay their importance, but I think the sheer volume of water coming off into these urban tributary streams is probably the biggest, most intractable problem we need to deal with. How can we develop the landscape without trashing the streams via increased winter flows and decreased summer flows? I think that's the biggie.

But going back to your question, they're all important. They're all tremendously important: ag, urban, forest. There's - I would not be willing to say this one is more important than another one, because they each have their impacts, whether it be temperature, phosphates, you know, other fertilizers, bacteria, volume, oils, heavy metals, organics, whatever. They're all important.

M.O'R.: Were you aware of this plan at the time - this is also probably ten years ago. I don't have the date real certain in my mind on this one, but the plan to put a landfill up in the headwaters of Dairy Creek?

M.H.: Mm-hmm.

M.O'R.: I guess that was another example of where USA was - there was I guess a wetland there, or nearby at least ...

M.H.: Yeah. You're talking about up in Buxton area?

M.O'R.: I think so. It was ...

M.H.: I actually did get involved in that one. I was monitoring the potential sites. I remember not being very excited about most of them, actually.

M.O'R.: Well, Jack Smith told me that there was an issue where there was going to be some pretty nasty water coming out of that site if they had sited the landfill there because of the ...

M.H.: Well, I don't know of many landfills that don't put out some pretty nasty stuff.

M.O'R.: Yeah. Well, it was a situation, I guess, where the groundwater would percolate through the garbage and come out the other end. And USA was already to leap in and say, "Oh, yeah, we can take that water and we can treat it." And so that was a force,

I guess, that facilitated the possible siting of the landfill in that particular area because they thought, "Well, we can take care of this problem." And this may be another example of what you were talking about earlier about the engineering ...

M.H.: We can engineer our way out of the problem. Right. It's bullshit.

[end of side one]



MICHAEL HOUCK

TAPE 3, Side 2

February 9, 1996

M.O'R.: Well, ultimately, of course, it wasn't sited there. I guess now the garbage is going to Arlington or someplace that was originally going to go there.

M.H.: Right.

M.O'R.: And you say you were involved in it to some extent?

M.H.: Well, I actually got dragged into the Ramsey Lake site. There was a site proposed out in North Portland. I was more actively involved in that than the others. But I did wind up looking at many of the sites.

M.O'R.: And what about the Ramsey Lake site? What was the dynamics of that? Was it a site that really was in the running?

M.H.: Yeah. I think so. That's certainly the impression I had, and the City of Portland put a full-court press on that one and put the kibosh on it, along with the Port, because of course it's very valuable industrial land. So the irony behind that one is that we were actually able to protect some of the wetlands out there from development, too. Because it's pretty bizarre to talk about wanting to protect wetlands and then turn around and fill them.

M.O'R.: And how did you accomplish that?

M.H.: Well, it was just - we put a panel of - I don't remember; I don't think the governor was there, but we got the mayor and parks director and Port of Portland and PGE and all of these forces arrayed against that site. It's not going to be selected. The

local neighborhoods. I mean, it was - I would love to go back, actually. I think there was some video - and resurrect that video, because there I am sitting next to the powers that be, the development interests, all testifying against this site. It was interesting.

M.O'R.: But if the development interests - you say now the wetlands are preserved. Is that preserved for all time, then?

M.H.: Yeah.

M.O'R.: Okay.

M.H.: Well, actually, the Ramsey Lake area is now being used for alternative treatment of storm water, as well. There have been additional wetlands created to run storm water through, pretreatment before it goes into the Columbia Slough.

But other areas in the Ramsey Lake vicinity are being used for industrial development.

M.O'R.: But not in the wetlands per se?

M.H.: Correct. Because they'd already been filled.

M.O'R.: I see. You also mentioned last time - we talked a little bit about the heron rookery down there in that same general vicinity, anyway, and the freeway plan.

M.H.: Marine Drive.

M.O'R.: Oh, okay. It's not the freeway, then. I guess I'm confusing it with the idea that they would put another I-5 bypass through Forest Park and across the river.

M.H.: Oh, no. That's part of the west side bypass scenario and the third bridge.

M.O'R.: Right.

M.H.: Different issue.

M.O'R.: Which also got ...

M.H.: Right. Although there are still advocates on the north side of the Columbia for the third bridge, and there were in Washington County. There's a lot of pressure coming from Washington County for the bypass over Forest Park, Sauvie Park, third bridge. Fortunately, most of them are out of power now.

M.O'R.: I guess you can see from Washington County's point of view that at least for anybody that wanted to go that direction, it would be real handy.

M.H.: Yes. At great cost, economic and environmentally.

M.O'R.: I want to talk to you in some detail about some of the most recent things you've been involved in, such as the 2040 Plan, et cetera, but it might be better for me if we waited and saved that until Tuesday morning.

M.H.: That's fine. Actually, I'm way, way, way behind in my work, so I've got phone calls. Audubon has been shut down for several days.

M.O'R.: How are things up there?

M.H.: Well, Balch Creek looks like the Clackamas River, volume-wise, and it looks like the Amazon, color-wise.

M.O'R.: But no slides or anything?

M.H.: Well, there are slides that have closed Cornell above Audubon, but you can get up to - at least as of yesterday afternoon you could get up to Audubon.

M.O'R.: But the place is closed down, anyway?

M.H.: Yeah. There was no electricity.

M.O'R.: Okay. Well, let's leave it here, then, and I will in the meantime have a chance to look over more closely some of the

materials you gave me on the 2040 Plan, and we'll talk about that Tuesday.

M.H.: Okay.

M.O'R.: Thanks.

[end of tape]