JACK CHURCHILL

TAPE 6, Side 1

March 27, 1996

M.O'R.: This is a continuation of the oral history with Jack Churchill on March 27th.

J.C.: What was Mike's thrust, by the way?

M.O'R.: Well, it was as you described it. I think he was mostly concerned with the wildlife. I did an interview with him on this project just because he was - you know, he's obviously got a high profile.

J.C.: Oh, he's done a lot in the basin. There's no question. And I think all that work that was done up in - I think the whole thing at Hillsboro was really - probably there was another person or two involved, but I think he had a lot of influence in getting that thing going.

M.O'R.: You mean the Jackson Bottom wetlands?

J.C.: Yeah. Didn't he have something to do with that?

M.O'R.: Yeah, he was involved. He was, I think, peripherally involved. It was Jim Harp, a realtor in Hillsboro and ...

J.C.: Right. But he gave a lot of support from Audubon.

M.O'R.: Yeah, that's right.

J.C.: You know, and I think it's very important that - I mean, because that legitimized a lot, you see. So I would say it was very critical and crucial to have that effort going on as a parallel action.

And Mike gets to be very important in an issue, and he tries to carry the weight of all the environmentalists and all the water

quality, and he's compromising out my objectives for his objectives. And that's just a - you know, I don't think that's really being too critical. That's the way it is when you have different water - different policy thrusts.

M.O'R.: Yeah, he's involved now in something called the Coalition for a Liveable Future, too. I don't know if you know much about that, but it brings together a wide variety of persons, more concerned with urban issues, I would say.

J.C.: Well, I think - and I work - I did a seminar in - you know, he put on those things, those meetings, and out of those - you know those conferences he had?

M.O'R.: No, I don't know about this.

J.C.: He put those on, I think - and we did one on urban streams, and my seminar did some papers on those, and so we worked very closely on some of those. And the urban stream thing, I think he did more of a thrust for. You know, I worried a lot about that, the - my entire experience, the urban streams were doomed from the start, from a hydrological standpoint. Once - because you keep destroying the watershed. All the work at Johns Hopkins said there was no urban stream that had any viability, in the whole world.

And so what was done in Oregon - I mean, this is true. Rock Creek Park in Washington D.C., gone as a viable stream. It's just carrying off water because all the upper watershed is gone. I mean, Rock Creek used to be a beautiful flowing stream, and now it's just kind of a gray-mattered sewer.

And I think what Mike has done, really, is preserve probably some stream and water bodies in the metropolitan area - because we've had the park land to do it. Balch Creek or something - Balch

Creek and - well, Tryon Creek I don't think he had too much to do with; you know, in Lake Oswego there, and it's not very healthy, anyhow, because the upper watershed again has been pretty butchered.

But you know, the other - and Johnson Creek, whatever restoration has gone on is headed in the right direction.

So maybe, you know -. So I think that most urban streams that I've seen get into an irreversible rate of degradation, and that's the problem with this guy that wants to just raise the phosphate level. In water quality, what - the only administrative - and this isn't quite consistent with what I was saying before, but I never have been very consistent - is that we should be looking at trends. It's the trend that counts, not the point. And if it's - you know, I mean, okay, if you've got 13,000 violations you've got a trend. That's the important thing.

If there's a downward trend, at some state hydrologically - and it's a downward trend because there's been hydrological disturbances as well as water quality disturbances, probably - you are going to get into an irreversible state at some point in terms of the viability of that stream as it was. It's going to be greatly reduced, and it will probably not be able to recover.

But maybe that's nature, too. You know, nature's a moving thing, too, so maybe a lot of it is going on in nature. But man can help that along.

So the question is - to me always is, can this stream be turned around into an upward trend rather than a downward trend? And this is where I think on the Tualatin is that I think we've seen improvement, rather than continued degradation. So to me it

is an enormous success story being a larger urbanized stream now. No matter what the levels they talk about and all this, we're seeing trends upward rather than trends downward. And although these water quality says, you know, it's 8.5 rather than 7.2, well, you know - okay, if that was a trend, that's good, okay, but the instantaneous measurement, since it's fallacious in the first place, isn't very good.

M.O'R.: Well, another interesting thing, I think, about the success story on the Tualatin, that's definitely ...

J.C.: Oh, yeah. We haven't talked about that. Let's talk about that for a while.

M.O'R.: Well, at this conference that I mentioned that I attended earlier, that was definitely the sort of keynote. People came up and talked again and again about how successful the clean-up effort was on the Tualatin, and USA of course now, despite the history of exactly how they got there, is quite proud of their role.

J.C.: Well, that's all right. Let them take credit.

M.O'R.: And so, you know, it is a success story. What are your thoughts on what should be done with the success story, maybe is the question?

J.C.: Oh, I don't know. It will have its own - you know. The success story, I think, is not in the river. I don't think it's a success story. And I don't think it's in USA. The success story, and if it's a continuing phenomenon of upward trend, and let's say that the measure is an upward trend, as far as the river's concerned, so it's a success story, period. But the thing that got it there, and the thing that will keep it there is that

people rediscovered the river. As the use of the river expands, the water quality trend will keep upward, if the political pressure is there, regardless of what the technical aspects are.

If the people don't use the river, and the public interest is not in it, then I believe that the water quality will again turn downward, regardless of what the technical fixes are. So the more public access you get, the more public use you get, the more public - the better the water quality will be over the longer period. You may run into all sorts of problems along the way.

But look what the - I think maybe the most important thing out of the suit against USA was this billion dollars to start getting people involved in looking at things. And really, I mean, you know, really if - the money that's gotten into the schools and gotten into the communities, has gotten into the families, you know, and all this, is terribly important. That's my view.

M.O'R.: Yeah, in fact ...

J.C.: The fact that there are conferences out there, and we patted ourselves on the back. I mean, I had this little group out there, what, in 19 - you know, just ten years ago, and we were sitting around in a little old sewage treatment hall - you know, maybe 20 of us, trying to figure out where the river was and where it had been and where it was going - I mean, in just a kind of esoteric vacuum. And I had real live people. I mean, most of the people didn't even live in the basin, probably, that I had.

Now, how many people did you have there?

M.O'R.: Oh, it was pretty well ...

J.C.: How many?

M.O'R.: Oh, I'm going to guess - I'm not necessarily terribly good at this - but 100 folks, maybe.

J.C.: All living in the basin?

M.O'R.: Most of them. I don't live in the basin myself.

J.C.: Well, I know. But I mean, isn't that fantastic? And they represent a lot of groups.

M.O'R.: Well, that was the other thing I was going to say, too, is that some of this money of course is going to support groups such as the River Keepers and the Friends of Fanno. I'm just wondering - it almost seems like there's a strategic value in having these citizens' groups out there, too.

J.C.: The citizens' groups?

M.O'R.: Yeah.

J.C.: If it wasn't for the citizens' groups, you wouldn't have Fanno Creek. There's no question about that. And I don't know the exact work of the River Keepers - you know, they kind of picked up where we'd dropped it off, and rediscovered the River Keepers, as we say, but that's fine.

But what they really did was to - didn't that start out organizing those canoe trips and ...

M.O'R.: Yes, it did.

J.C.: Okay. But look what that brought. I mean, that was a fantastic thing. But that did more than all the money that went to all the technical studies that USA did in terms of getting that river cleaned up.

One of those - you know, people going down that river, and that - you know, just the story and so on, but the people started using the river, and my god, I mean, I really believe it.

This happened to Bear Creek. We fooled around technically with Bear Creek for a long time, and then people in Medford and Ashland, they really started to stop and look at the river, and it's beginning to get cleaned up, and the City Council of Ashland's having a hell of a time not making the right decisions. They're a good City Council, but still, until people really started screaming about their creek, it didn't move very much.

So that's why - you know, we built public involvement into the Water Quality Act and so on, but you don't make public involvement through federal legislation. If the values of the urban people get - you know, understand their needs for water and demand the use of their water, you know, they will get it.

You know, and the thing that you have to go back to is that the water belongs to the people of Oregon. It doesn't belong to USA, or any of those people. It's a public good.

[interruption]

M.O'R.: Well, maybe just the last thing to talk about is, you know, the resistance that USA put up to getting on board with this stands in contrast to - relatively speaking, anyway, how little trouble it was for them to actually meet the phosphate standards. I know they had to spend some money, and I know that the cost of sewer hookups is now higher in Washington County than it used to be, but in the beginning I think there was a perception out there that the end of the world had come and that it wasn't possible to make these standards.

J.C.: The question you ask is, since it was so easy to clean up, why did they fight it so hard?

M.O'R.: That's essentially the question, yeah. For one thing I suppose it wasn't totally apparent.

[interruption]

J.C.: Well, I think my answer really is in the fact that USA was not a sewage treatment agency but a public relations agency, and they never seriously looked at management of their plant. In fact, I had thought very seriously of bringing in Japanese witnesses to show how these plants could be operated if we ever went to court, because Bob Burd has visited Japan and told how, you know, the same equipment can be operated at a very good capacity. They had no meters, you know. They never monitored anything - in-plant monitoring, you know, they had no real control, quality control of what they were doing. And they didn't care.

See, the people they hired had no quality objectives. And the manager, Gary, was only interested in getting hookups. So I think there was the threat - our threat was that it would be - and I thought we talked about this a little bit, "You don't want another moratorium."

M.O'R.: Right.

J.C.: So I think it was the threat of a moratorium which is the real measurement of his success, was the thing that got the argument going is they didn't - and so on many things the battle wasn't fought on the real issues. But it was clear when we deposed the plant treatment people, you know, just incredibly stupid, and mismanagement so - Timson has those depositions. I don't know if wading through them is worth your while, but that's my view. And it's kind of - because yeah, I think the level of competence was really low. See, Gary Krahmer never had any - he was just a little

old local boy that made good. He had never had any background in - never had any technical training.

M.O'R.: Not much, actually.

J.C.: No, he's a sewage treatment plant operator, you know, which - I mean, Christ, that's once-a-year training, one week or one day. I mean, he knew nothing. And the people he hired were terrible in terms of their technical competency.

So here you had a Cadillac and they had a - but Bob Burd would probably know more about that. That's a good question for him.

But also I think we attacked - and remember, the County Commission was all development, and they met kind of privately with - you know, it was always kind of a closed meeting when Gary reported to the Commission. And I think it was all just about development. So that's kind of my response. They didn't care whether they could or not, they just didn't understand. So they hired, you know, people to say they couldn't do it.

M.O'R.: Well, of course now the perception is that this was all a good thing to do, because you know, I think they're feeling now that even for the developers it's turned out to be better, probably because of the moratorium threat - and quality of life and all the rest of it.

J.C.: Yeah, and one of the things we want to get into, I think, is John Jackson's role in this and how incompetent he's been in terms of the non-point source issue.

M.O'R.: Okay.

J.C.: Have you interviewed him at all?

M.O'R.: No, I haven't.

J.C.: But I don't know how we can get into that very easily, and I don't know if I have much to say. I don't think - they generally have done a good public relations job, but nothing in the substance.

M.O'R.: Jackson's position was what, again?

J.C.: Well, he's Basin Manager, I guess, for the USA.

M.O'R.: Oh, okay.

J.C.: When I first went to DEQ, he was dumped on me, and he's the most worthless person.

M.O'R.: Okay. Well, why don't we call it a day, and we'll maybe do a follow-up interview - nowhere near this duration, but we'll pick up some points later on.

Okay. Thanks again. It's been really a great interview, I think.

J.C.: I hope it was.

M.O'R.: Very interesting history.

J.C.: Well, whatever.

[end of tape]