

*Jack Kaufman discusses growth in the Florida Defenders of the Environment and the Cross Florida Barge Canal*

Interviewer: We were talking about the early days, versus now, and the fact that in the early days, FDE was, well, environmental organizations were very small and this was not a very common way of going about trying to influence government by getting together scientists and presenting expert testimony and public hearings and so on. And so, my question is; 'What was it like, then, your role, you know, and how has that changed, now?'

Jack Kaufman: When we first started out, it was the case of a few small voices crying in the wilderness, trying to get the state government to listen to us and trying to get the federal government to listen to us about the Cross Florida Barge Canal and at that time the state government was entirely in favor of it, in fact everybody, almost, was in favor of the Cross Florida Barge Canal because they'd been told it was a good thing and they believed it and so what we had to do, we were faced with a problem of reversing everybody's perception of this project that had been touted and praised and was so popular, by all levels of government. We had to turn that around 180 degrees and convince them they'd been told, all these years was very good, was in fact very bad. It was extremely difficult, first of all, getting them to listen, to even pay any attention. Literally to listen to what you had to say, much less act on it and I say we were very fortunate at the time when this came up that the ecology movement, gained strength nationwide and there was this nationwide swing toward environmental awareness, which because the public demanded it, then the government began to be responsive. This happened about the same time we got into this battle. It was very fortunate for us. The political climate changed. The candidates that got elected were candidates that were more environmentally aware and environmentally concerned and this happened at the highest levels of the state and federal government. The new administrations that came in, Governor Askew and Governor Graham, very different, difference between night and day, from some of the previous administrations, that had backed the Cross Florida Barge Canal and they knew nothing about it. I assume that Governor Askew's administration probably thought in the beginning this was a good project, too, but they were willing to listen to the facts and to really dig into it and find out what was really going on and the Department of Administration planned a three day workshop on the Cross Florida Barge as a result of our constant criticism of the project and our attempts to get them to see that this was a bad project they held the three day workshop in

Tallahassee to get at the facts. This is the first time the state government had really looked at both sides of the issue and they held the three day workshop with representatives of the Canal Authority and the Corps of Engineers and FDE and other interested people, to find out what were all of the facts about the canal with regard to the environment, the economics, the geology, all parts of it and during this three day workshop, really, the States' position on the canal really turned around 180 degrees, as a result of those three days and instead of being an enthusiastic supporter of the canal, the state government, from then on, became increasingly opposed to the canal resulting, finally, in 1976 in the Governor and Cabinet withdrawing their support of the canal.

Interviewer: Did that also, their changing their opinion about it, did that also change the way FDE was perceived, by government?

Jack: I think very much so. I think that our reputation as an honest straightforward organization was built on that workshop. I think that our presentation, at the workshop, brought the attention of government to FDE and showed the government that FDE was an effective honest organization that they could rely on for honest testimony. And, since then, we have been increasingly called upon, not having to go beat down the doors to talk to them, but we've been invited to testify at legislative hearings and administrative hearing for the Governor and the Cabinet, to testify as experts on these problems. And, we've got to the point, now, where leaders of FDE people like Marjorie and Helen Hood are now very strong politically in the state, are some in environmental matters, have more political clout probably than anybody in the State of Florida. They are not having to beg to be heard, now they are invited to come and testify and to give their opinions and invited to serve on advisory boards and give their counsel to the government.