

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Lecture

Date: May 6, 1983

FIU Number: SPC 931

John DeGrove: JD

Marjory Stoneman Douglas: MSD

[17:26 minutes]

MSD: They brought the man and his dogs over here. They chased the panther up a tree and then they shoot him with a, at a distance of twelve feet or so, with a dart. It's an anesthetic. The panther is tranquilized and he falls, lucky for him if, lucky, if he falls into a net and if there's no net or if the net stretches then he crashes to the ground and panthers have been known to break bones in that fall. So, then they put a collar on him that have batteries and beepers and they let the panther go. Then once a week, for a week every month, a helicopter goes up, over the Big Cypress and it's got something that records the beeps, so they can hear the beeps on the panther and they say, 'Oh yes, it's number ten panther down there, behind that clump of trees. That's how they learn about panther. What they learn about panther I can't imagine, beyond where they may be at the moment. This is supposed to be very important, but in the process, they were shooting a panther at twelve feet. Now, when you go and get a hypodermic, from a doctor, he doesn't stand twelve feet off and shoot at you. You know, he very carefully tries to find a vein and put it in and, you know, it has to be done with care, but they just shoot 'em. So a panther, now there's a differing story, and they're either shooting at one panther and hitting another, which I don't think is the best shooting I've ever heard of, at twelve feet, or that panther was struck in an artery not a vein. How, at twelve feet, can you distinguish between a panther's arteries and his veins? I don't know. Also, they say it was an overdose or they say the panther was allergic. Well, whatever it was, the panther died. Now then, I am perfectly certain that two of the panthers have been killed. One, with the collar on it and one disappeared and eventually the beeping stopped and they found the panther, with the collar on it, drowned, Now, I betcha' the collar had something to do with it, but of course, the Fish and Game say, 'Oh, no doesn't have anything to do with us.' The panther had a collar on it! Why it's important to study panther with collars, I cannot understand. What I mean is; if you, a panther with a collar isn't the same thing as a panther without a collar. It is a less wild, natural animal and they have no idea, yet, whether the collar interferes with the breeding relationships. Why not? These are very sensitive animals and certainly all this tramping around, with dogs, and incidentally, in the process of chasing the panther, with a pack of dogs that are silent, they flush bobcats. Now, the bobcat will not tree, the way a panther will. It turns and fights, the poor little thing. It's a smaller animal than the panther, but a more fighting character. It fights and five dogs can kill it immediately. So, for just about every panther they've treed, they've killed at least one bobcat and then the man gives the dead bobcat to the dogs to eat. How do you like that? I don't! Anyway, this is the situation that's been going on and I've been in correspondence with Colonel Brantley of the Fish and Game Commission, of course you know what he thinks of me. I'm one of those horrible old women in tennis shoes, you know, who's supposed to get... who get hysterical about something that's none of my business. This is masculine business, you know. Women can't intrude on this. This is hunting! This is the immemorial privilege of the male, which supplies the female with food, as indeed it did all those centuries. But thank goodness you don't have to depend on your husbands to go out and shoot a deer, to get his dinner, anymore. So, that I am supposed to be a perfectly silly old woman, objecting to this panther thing, but it's been killing off the panthers and I don't like it! So, thank goodness it's been stopped until January and Senator Neil, of

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Bradenton, a very nice man, who seems to see what I'm talking about, about the panther collaring and all, had just offered a bill which passed the senate committee, unanimously, last week and will go before the senate, or has gone already, this week, to set up a committee, really, to study the whole panther situation. And I hope that it will not, in fact, if they put that committee under the Colonel Brantley, of the Fish and Wildlife, I am simply going to explode. And I'm going to go up and shoot 'em, every one of them, because they have no business to do that. We've got to have an objective committee to study the panther. We've got to have people who know panther, not just the Fish and Game thing. I'm really declaring war on the Fish and Game Commission. Holding my breath, 'til we see. I don't know whether the Governor appoints that committee, I think he does, but I've got to find out if it's under control of the Fish and Game Commission, in which case we've got to begin the process all over again and do something different. So we are in the process of doing all these things, now, to correct some of the stupidities that people have done with our native plant and animal population and the water supply. The latest thing in our description of all the horrors that are going on, is that we have this tree, the melaleuca, that I said was coming into the Everglades National Park. It's coming into the Big Cypress like mad. It's the worst of those three trees, because so far, they hardly know anything that can kill it. You can cut it down and it comes up from the roots and the trunk. You can burn it and the seeds are shed around the, beyond the area of the fire so you get a lot more melaleuca coming up. They tell me, now, you can cut the individual trees, I don't know what they're called, poisoned axes or something, (asking someone off camera), you said, what's the name of it? Some kind of a hatchet that will poison them so they won't grow up again, but that means every single tree has to be cut, they're coming in so thickly, that there are forests of melaleuca. If you go from here, well, if we'd been watching today coming up, you watch all the way to Palm Beach from Miami, you see melaleucas coming up, like everything. Now, high water does affect it. So, that in the Everglades, it's not so much a menace, but there's not high water in the Big Cypress and we can't flood it so we've got to find out how else we can get at it or the Big Cypress is going to go. And nothing can live when the tree comes in so thickly. You couldn't get through it. I don't think a panther could get through it. It would be... it's a real problem. Well, anyway, I've told enough bad things to keep you busy for a long time, but be prepared to hear that I'm going to be hanged for shooting all the Fish and Wildlife people, up in Tallahassee, if they don't do right by that panther committee. The point is this, if enough people get aroused, to write to the governor and the cabinet or to their legislatures, we will be able to get action, because there is no strength in the world like the strength of public opinion. That is what we have to get, why we have to, why I have to go around telling people all about this, so that we will have enough informed and powerful public opinion to help us. It is the only safety in the long run. Thank you very much.

JD: Shall we leave it on in case we have any questions? Are you ok?

MSD: Yes, I had a nice lunch.

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JD: That reminds me I should have said that Marjory Stoneman Douglas is the Founder of Friends of the Everglades, the leader of Friends of the Everglades and you should acquaint them with the opportunity of being a member.

MSD: Thank you very much indeed. Yes, I founded this we founded this organization, back when we were doing all this in 69 and 70 Friends of the Everglades, and we are the people particularly fighting all this kind of thing. We work of course closely with the other Audubon Society the Sierra Club, the Sierra Club particularly the greatest possible help. They are just coming along great they are young people with lots of energy. The Isaac Walton League, we work with all of them but we are particularly the ones who are dedicated to the whole Everglades basin. We'd love to have you with us it costs you exactly \$1.00 and if you would care to give me a dollar give somebody else your dollar and fill out some blanks that I have for your name addresses and telephone numbers. See I did think about it. You will get what publications I have time to write you will be informed and we've been getting wonderful publicity in the papers. So you get to know a lot of people and we'd be very happy to have you with us. thank you very much. now you better hook me.

JD: We'll take a few questions if that's ok?

MD: Well start with me.

JD: Well if you have questions and by the way these membership cards will be up here feel free to come take them and fill them out if you feel free but we might not let you out the door.

MSD: OH no you can't do that might have to go home

JD: Okay. How about question I agree I think I've covered pretty well those

MSD: I think I've covered it pretty well.

Member of Audience: I read in the paper, a week or so ago, that the Corps of Engineers now says that they have to have an environmental impact statement before they can change the drainage through into Everglades National Park.

MSD: Well, that may be according to their legal requirements. I don't think it'd be any great problem to get an environmental impact statement, but I hadn't seen that and, of course, what I think is that they're just temporizing and that we may have to get, I think probably the short cut would be to go to Congress, and to their, to that Senate committee on...

JD: Interior (unintelligible).

JD: Yes, and get them to tell us what can be done and can't be done. I see no reason why we shouldn't have an environmental impact statement. We, certainly it's been impacted, you might say.

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JD: Yes.

MSD: Yes.

Second Member of Audience: I'm from Water Management District. That's only on the L-67 Extension that you have to get that. We're competing with work to get a better delivery schedule to the park, and have written to the committee, joining with the park and the Corps

MSD: Awfully sorry. I'm not hearing very well.

Second Audience Member: I'm sorry. Going again. I was just explaining to her, that we have, we are working to get some of that work done at that environmental impact statement, just on one part of it, but I have a question for you. And then, I'm a native of Michigan and I now work for the South Florida Water Management District...

MSD: Yes.

Second Audience Member: ...and do quite extensive speaking for the District, but you were here when the decisions were made, in the forties, to bring in the Corps and do the projects and all. Do you think, at that time, that people realized what harm would come?

MSD: No, I don't, and oh, I didn't realize it either. I am the first, of all offenders, because in that book I wrote, *The Everglades: River of Grass*, at the end of the last chapter, that book was published in '47, the year when the engineers came in and I said myself, 'Now the engineers have come in and the problems of the Everglades will be solved.' Well, I was a cockeyed liar. You know, really, and I've had to rewrite that last statement I assure you. Nobody realized and I suppose you can't blame the Corps of Engineers for not realizing, but I blame them, because it seems to me, if you're going to do an engineering problem, project, you ought to understand the country that it's in. You ought to be able to make, they didn't make very much of a study. I don't think they studied much more than a year.

Second Audience Member: There wasn't the public opinion, as you say, the impetus to do those type of studies and there wasn't the technology available...

MSD: No, quite right.

Second Audience Member: ...and there weren't the scientists...

MSD: Well, there was, there was this study on the ground water of Southeastern Florida, which is an excellent, excellent study, but they didn't pay much attention to it. You know, they're kind of independent customers. They don't, they're not on any State control, at all, and they're a little, I think they're a little arrogant. I've said that to their faces, so I'm not saying it behind their backs, because you know what they've done all over the country with the wild rivers.

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They love to put damns in rivers. They hate a wild river. They just naturally hate it, and they like to canalize things. That's the way they do it and I think we've got to, we've got to stop some of that.

JD: The first comprehensive study, of this area was done in the thirties, by a cooperative group of federal state agencies. It was called, Bulletin 442.

MSD: Oh!

JD: Remember that one?

MSD: 442. Yes.

JD: And it was used to, actually the 1947 project, in spite of its unfortunate name, 'Flood Control', at least abandoned the idea of draining all the Everglades...

MSD: Oh, quite! Oh, quite.

JD: ...and we had the, before that we were going to drain it every damn day. Every inch of it, every yard of it, all of it. And, then we came, in '72, to a new sensitivity and now in 1983, we're gonna come to a new sensitivity...

MSD: Yes, yes, and I'm very glad that...

JD: ...and the hope is that this will be the last, (unintelligible).

MSD: The last sensitivity, (audience laughter). Well, I think so. I've talked to Mr. Malloy and people and they all seem to be so very much more aware than they used to be. Well, you know why. Is because we've all been yelling and screaming. How do you like that!

JD: Justly and rightly and happily so.

MSD: Yes.

JD: Now, maybe we'll take one more question if you have it but I don't think we should overdo our privilege.

MSD: Oh, I can keep on talking, but it's a question of time.

JD: Is there another question? If not, I am going to say again what an honor it's been to have this great lady with us. Delighted and I hope she'll come back many times and I don't think her age should be any inhibitor in that. It reminds me of a gentleman in Haysville, North Carolina, where I have a place. I'm part of the problem in North Carolina, and he went into get his driver's license at the age of a hundred...

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MSD: There!

JD: ...and you can get a driver's license for four years, in North Carolina.

MSD: Oh, really?

JD: And as he walked out the door, he said, Well, I'll see you in four years.

MSD: Well, I'll tell you, I had a lot of ancestors from North Carolina. That's where it comes from.

JD: Oh, good. So you see, that probably accounts for your longevity.

MSD: That's where it comes from. Maybe he was one of mine.

JD: Again, we want to thank you so much for being with us and we hope you'll be back many times.

MSD: Very pleased.