

Interview with Marjory Stoneman Douglas

Date: June 15, 1983

FIU Number: SPC 950B

Interviewer: I

Marjory Stoneman Douglas: MSD

[26:23]

MSD: Where we were leaving off. Now I've forgotten.

Interviewer: When you were, Marjory, when you were talking before about the pollution that comes from the Kissimmee system and ends up in the drinking water... Please describe how, what is the derivation of that drinking water?

MSD: Yes. Well, you see, the pollution that comes down the canal that was put through the meanders of the Kissimmee River comes chiefly from the dairy farms, the cattle meadows, the filling stations and whatever settlements have been built along that canal. I think the principle pollution seems to be untreated cow manure that the dairy people dump into the canal water, and that water comes rushing down to Lake Okeechobee, so that all that Northern portion of Lake Okeechobee is polluted, so that when you fly over it, you can see the water's brown. And it's polluted with plants, like this dreadful hydrilla, which floats just below the surface, and water hyacinths that, whatever it does to the water, it kills the fish. So that it is not only polluting the water, it is destroying the excellent freshwater fishing that has always existed in Lake Okeechobee. Then on the south, the sugar people irrigate, short irrigation canals. When they plant the sugarcane, they need water, and when the cane is growing, they back pump that water into the lake, well of course then it carries with it the ash of the burning fires and whatever pesticides and all that nutrients and human waste all sorts of things back into Lake Okeechobee, so the southern part of Lake Okeechobee is all polluted also. In fact you could be pretty sure all the water is polluted. That is the water that flows down the canals into the number two and number three conservancy basin, and again flows into our well fields from the other canals. You see, when they make a pond and pour the polluted water in it; it will not clean itself up. We understand, you learn from school, that running water always purifies itself. Well it does if it comes slowly enough and if there are meadows, grasses and plants along the way. But where they put it in standing ponds, the pollution just sticks to the bottom in a kind of nasty ooze, and there it is, and that gets into the other water. So the pond conditions do not clean it up. And what, of course, must be done with all that is very simple: you've got to make the people who cause the pollution stop it. The dairy people should keep that manure and put it into ponds or reservoirs or whatever they call it, and if there's a process by which they can divide or separate it off so they'll get very good fertilizer for their... they can make that, oh dear, what's that stuff? Gas, what is it, methane or something? Out of all that, and they can run, make electricity out of it, and they waste it as part of the stupidity of the whole process. It's just so stupid, as if we haven't grown up enough yet, as if we haven't known enough yet how to run profitable businesses with water taken care of properly. That's the whole problem is that people along the banks and then they want the State of Florida to do the cleaning up. There has been all this talk about making the Rotenburger track and the Holyland into other basins in which the water could be poured and cleaned up, I don't know if they will make additional ones, I'm sure. They want that back pumped from the sugar farms into the basins by the State. Well, the sugar people

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should clean up their own act. So, just like the dairy farmers, it's no sense. Why should the people pollute the water and the State clean it up? There's no sense in it. The whole thing is very silly.

I: Are there sources of pollution...?

MSD: Man-made pollution. Originally there wasn't; it was good, clear water, because, why, there wouldn't be much pollution just birds and animals, and the sewage doesn't amount to anything from that. That would be cleaned up by the natural process of the flowing water. But with man around, egads, we've got every sort of thing. There is something like fifty-three sewerage plants up and down that stretch of canal, many of which don't do a very good job. It's almost untreated sewage that goes into the canal. Well that's silly. The whole thing's ridiculous.

I: And is it possible to do anything at the receiving end of... When we get it here in the city, is there anything that can be done to remove the pollutants?

MSD: Well no, we can't do anything, all we do is put all these chemicals; our water is overloaded with chemicals that can kill us. But you can't, either pollutants should be removed before you put it in the water, because that's where it should be handled. They should never have been allowed to dump untreated stuff into the water. And the funny part about it is that we have laws on the books, both state laws and federal laws, to prevent just that kind of pollution. But we cannot get the laws enforced; you can't tell the state departments to clean up their act, because the people who have all the, well the sugar people and the agriculture people and the cattle people have very strong lobbies, they have some of the strongest lobbies in the State of Florida. And they were forced; they don't want to clean up their act, they want the state to do it. Well, that's the way, the rest of us are stupid for not making them do it. Some years ago, Johnny Jones, who is head of the National Wildlife Federation, and I for the Friends of the Everglades, and, God bless them, the Coral Gables Women's Club, threatened to bring suit against the State of Florida and the federal government for not enforcing their own laws. And we had a big hearing, for a hearing officer; before you threaten to sue the government as a state, you have to give them sixty days in which there is a public hearing with a hearing officer, and they go over the evidence and see whether or not they are justified or not. So we had a hearing in which the wildlife people and ourselves, the Friends of the Everglades and the Women's Club, were represented by two very smart young lawyers. (Phone rings, then interruption) We had two very smart lawyers you see, and the other side, we sued the State of Florida, we sued the Water Management District, we sued the DER, the DNR and everything else we could lay our hands on, but we did not sue the sugar people. They were the ones; it was the government we were suing for not enforcing the laws. Well, the sugar people came in as interveners, and they had six or seven lawyers; you've never seen so many lawyers. Only one of them was very good, really, the rest of them weren't very good, we didn't think. And our two smart boys and our case, and the hearing officer said, "No problem, they've got to clean up their act. You're completely right." So he told the DER to order the sugar people to clean up their act. Well, so then the DER said to the sugar people "you've got to clean up your act, but you can have two-three years to do it in." So there we were, back where we were again. And we didn't sue the federals, because it would have taken a year and a half to get on the agenda, so we gave up on the whole thing. But

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that's the kind of run around we've been getting. The sugar people, of course, are going to have to go, because they are exhausting the soil to such an extent. We will be rid of them, but I don't think we will be rid of them as soon as I would like. There may be fifteen years yet before they go. They ought to go sooner than that, really, if they had any sense, they would. So...

I: Are they primarily a problem because of their practice of back pumping the?

MSD: The problem to us... yes, because of the back pumping. And because they interfere with the sheetflow. We could run canals through the immediate agricultural area, if there were marsh fields and things like that, we could run a mile-long canal and take the water below that and the sheetflow below that. That would be all right. We don't necessarily need to disturb farming that doesn't do us any harm, where they don't back pump. But the minute they get to be a nuisance we'd have to do away with them. So it's not impossible, but the sugar people don't belong in Florida, anyway, they belong down in the West Indies where they get plenty of rain and dry, and where they get much more sugar to the cane than they get up here. They don't, in the West Indies, they can let the cane grow to two to four years, and they get more sugar. Here we have so many fruits around the lake that they're afraid of it, and they harvest eight months to a year and don't get the sugar content. The whole thing is stupid; they lose money all around. Then they expect us to pay more sugar prices to keep, because it costs them so much, and they want us to do all their work for them. Couldn't be stupider.

I: How is it, I understand that they were active in the, some of the earlier drainage efforts.

MSD: Who?

I: The sugar...

MSD: People? Well they put in irrigation canals and back pumps. That's where they were active. But everybody else had all kinds of canals; that's where they were active too. The trouble was, when the engineers came in, we thought they were going to be able to solve the problem, but they didn't pay any attention to the overall picture. And all they did was regulate canals and put in more and put in pumps and dikes and made the thing a lot more complicated, so they didn't do us any good at all. The worst of it was, they ran things from their own point of view, and we couldn't get it through their heads and we worked with the Water Management District to set up to work with the US Corps of Engineers and the whole thing was; we had a very bad time with them. You can't get either of them to understand the nature of the case, but they are beginning to understand it better. But just recently, Everglades National Park and the Water Management District has gotten together with seven points that needed to be done, and the Water Management District agreed with the Everglades National Park. Then when the Corps came in, they agreed to only one of those points, and they don't like any of the others, and they don't conform. I don't know what's going to happen, I'm sure. It is this complete diversity of opinion between them, and really it's not good at all. They're just getting in the way. But because of the federal government, you see, we have great difficulty in controlling them. The control and all that is where the complication comes in.

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Interviewer: Is this a matter, once again, of not enforcing the laws that are on the books, or is this another matter?

MSD: Well, some of them. The pollution is a matter of not enforcing the laws on the books, but the matter of changing or improving the whole system, the laws are not on the books about that. There again, John Jones of the Wildlife Federation and I for the Friends of the Everglades, and Arthur Marshall, who knows more about it than anybody, who's been our great environmental leader, went to the Legislature and got them to put a resolution to Congress for the committee that controls the Corps, to tell the Corps to study the restoration of the Kissimmee River from the canal. And the Congress appropriated \$60,000 for them to do it. Well, they've been studying it ever since. Last Spring, Mrs. Tschinkel, for the Governor, called in the corps said, "Now what, let us have the reports you've been studying?" They didn't have any.

...A plane flies over...

I: We were talking about the Corps and the Water Management District and not understanding the system.

MSD: Yes. But I don't know exactly where I was.

I: You said they seemed to be catching on...

MSD: Oh yes! Oh yes! And I think I said the Water Management District is really doing better because they had cooperated with the Everglades National Park, and both of them together had decided on seven points that needed to be improved in the true Everglades, that is south of Lake Okeechobee. To regulate properly the water going into the Park and the rest of it. Well, the Corps, they had a hearing with the Corps, discussing the seven points, and the Corps said they could only go along with the first point. And Colonel Devereaux said the rest of it he couldn't go along with at all. That's very difficult, because these are things that the Water Management District and the Everglades Park people know, and I don't have that confidence in the Corps as against those two other people. I think they know much more what they're talking about. So the great problem is we had Alice Wainwright with the Audubon Society called a meeting several weeks ago down at Audubon House at which Jean Bellamy, who is on the Water Management District, spoke, and they asked us all to write to the senatorial committee that controlled the Corps. So everybody's been writing letters to that committee saying, "tell the Corps they've got to agree with those other points," but so far, nothing has happened because of it. Maybe they need everybody to write more letters to that Senate committee to get the Corps to do it. You see, the Corps is pretty well run by the War department, or whatever it's called now, the Department of Defense something, and they don't have to listen, and it makes it very difficult indeed. They're outrageous, I think. I've been happy to tell that to their faces several times.

Interviewer: You've mentioned Everglades National Park several times now, lets talk about Everglades National Park and the efforts to establish that Park. You were, you lived in Miami at that time. Can you describe those early efforts? Who was involved?

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MSD: Well, I was... the man who started the whole idea of a National Park was a marvelous man by the name of Ernest F. Coe. Mr. Coe, C-O-E, who gave his life, the end of his life was given over, completely dedicated to making an Everglades National Park at the end of the peninsula. Now Mr. Coe, I couldn't say exactly when we began, but I would imagine was in the '30s. Because it was really twenty years, well that would make it like, like '27; it could have been way in there. It was about twenty years before we got it. Well, Mr. Coe for a while was the only one. He went to my father, who was Judge Stoneman on the *Herald*, editor of the *Herald*. My father agreed with him perfectly, and they organized a committee to help with the establishment of the Everglades National Park. The committee was headed by Dr. David Fairchild, and Mr. Coe was given a little bit of a salary and a little funny office, and he did it by doing nothing but talk about an Everglades National Park. He talked about it so much, to everybody, over and over again, that people really for the Park dreaded to stop to talk to him about it because he'd show them all the letters he'd written and all the letter he'd had and everything he was doing over and over again and that's what it took to get it established. So I was on later, I was on the committee, under David Fairchild, that brought people in from all over the country, not only the National Park people and government people, but private people interested in National Parks and we took them, we took a great, cruising houseboat called the Everglades, and they were on it. Ruth Bryan Owen, who was our representative from Congress, and I were the only two women. We had a marvelous time, of course, because they were some awfully interesting men. Dr. Gilbert Pearson who was then head of the then Federated Audubon Societies, Dr. Gilbert Grosvenor, who was editor and founder of the National Geographic, Horace Albright, who was the head of the National Park system and Arno Cammerer, who was the assistant and later became the head of the National Park system, and all kinds of other people. We took them around in The Everglades in a dirigible and an airplane and they saw the birds, there were marvelous birds in those days. You could look down on flights of birds covering the Everglades, almost. We took them in small boats up to bird rookeries in the moonlight, the sunset and the moonlight with the birds coming over, and we were on the cruising houseboat up around the 10,000 islands and all around the edge to see if they thought the place was fit to be a National Park, and they unanimously decided that it must be a great National Park.

MSD: So that really, from then on, it was a case, then in about '38, I think, when the *Herald* had been sold by Mr. Shutts, my father, to the Knight people, to Jack Knight and the (CUT IN TAPE, JUMPS)

I: ...There's gonna be rain.

MSD: Rain?

I: Um... He probably knows.

MSD: I thought he was saying "Cheers! Cheers! Cheers!"

I: Well, cheers for the rain! (laughs)

MSD: Three cheers for the rain.

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I: Yeah.

MSD: Okay.

I: We have a bird, the kingbird, that we call a rain bird, because when the rain starts then he begins to sing (laughs) Oh yes, should we begin again?

MSD: Oh yes, when the *Herald* was sold to the Knights, Jack Knight told the Managing Editor John Pennecamp, who'd been the editor, who'd been my father's assistant editor, and was the editor after my father died, told Pennecamp to start the State buying of the land. You see, in order to set up a national park, somebody has to buy the land and give it to the federal government. The federal government cannot buy land itself for the park. So, John Pennecamp went to work to get the State of Florida to buy land to give the State, and they did. The federal government then got the area, and it was dedicated in '47. It was not the complete area that Mr. Coe, who knew more about it than anybody, wanted. Mr. Coe wanted it to include the part of the Big Cypress just north of the trail very much more than... I don't know if there is very much more or not, I've forgotten. He wanted the Coral Reef off Key Largo to be included. And the water courses, like Taylor River, that go into the Park from the lower Dade County. Mr. Coe said, and he knew what he was talking about, those things must be included in the Park. But actually, John Pennecamp and Senator Holland, who was a great help in the Senate to acquire the Park, said it couldn't be done. You couldn't buy anymore of that. I think it was political, but since then we've proved that Mr. Coe was right. We had all this trouble with the Big Cypress, we've had all this trouble with... they did own some of the Taylor River and they sold it and I don't know why, like stupidly, because we've had to control that since, and they've made that coral reef that should be included in the park, now that's the Pennecamp Coral Reef Park. So that, Mr. Coe was right. But, at any rate, it was dedicated by Senator Truman in 1947 over there in the town of Everglades, and that's when the Park started. And it has been a very great thing for the environment conservation work in South Florida, because we have this great National Park, which is federal property, and it must be preserved, and it has been beginning, it's been a great help in our efforts to preserve the Everglades and all that, because we've got to get the water into the park as it always used to go. It was before the establishment of the park, that the Tamiami Trail was cut in '28. So even when the Park was started, because of the Tamiami Trail, it didn't have the water that area ordinarily had. We're still having trouble getting adequate water to the park. We need more culverts. We had some culverts now that they have been putting up that would get the water into Big Cypress.