

Tom McClure interviewed Beryl Anthony on May 31, 2023, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Tom McClure: The interview we are conducting today is a part of a joint project between the Pryor Center and the Ozark Society to document some of the history of the protection of wilderness areas in Arkansas during the last 50 years. I am Tom McClure interviewing Congressman Beryl Anthony for the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History project. The interview is being conducted in Fayetteville, Arkansas on May 31st, 2023. Congressman Anthony, all I need you to do now is to state your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Pryor Center permission to make the audio file and related material available to others.

Beryl Anthony: My name is Beryl Anthony, and you have my permission to make this interview available to the public and others.

TM: Well, thank you, Congressman, and welcome. And we are today speaking with Former Congressman Beryl Anthony, and he is joining us by phone from Palm City, Florida. Congressman Anthony graduated from the University of Arkansas with Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees from the university and from the University of Arkansas School of Law. He was a prosecuting attorney for the 13th Judicial District in Arkansas and served as a member of the US House

of Representatives for seven terms. Congressman Anthony played a major role in the negotiations and decision-making that led to the Arkansas Wilderness Act of 1984 and worked with other members of the Arkansas Congressional Delegation to help move the final bill through Congress. Well, once again, welcome, Congressman Anthony, and we have a few questions for you to consider today, but we also want to encourage you to include other things that you would like to say. So, our first question is, will you please describe your involvement in efforts to protect wilderness areas in Arkansas?

BA: Yes, Tom. I've always been interested in the outdoors. I grew up with a father who was a hunter, fisherman, and as a young child took me on many trips. So, I grew up appreciating the outdoors. When I got to Washington, DC and realized that there was an attempt to set aside wilderness areas in Arkansas, most of it contained inside the US Forest Service lands, I was asked to become involved. I didn't serve on a committee of jurisdiction in the Congress, but I tried to lend my support and coordination in trying to move the legislation forward. My good friend from Little Rock, Ed Bethune, introduced the bill in the House of Representatives in 1983. And just as an aside, in case you don't know this, but my oldest daughter married Ed Bethune's son. So, we have a family interest as well as a wilderness interest. I co-sponsored his piece of legislation, and then I had the timber industry

representatives reach out to me and asked me if I could push the legislation forward, because it was creating some difficulties for them in trying to make plans on what lands would be available for their sawmill operations through the Forest Service. So, I studied the proposal and became a co-sponsor with Congressman Bethune. One of the interesting things that I did to try to move the process forward, I organized a hiking trip up into the proposed wilderness areas, and I had many representatives of organizations that were pushing the legislation forward, as well as support from the timber industry who wanted to see it resolved. And after a long, beautiful, hot hike through the mountains, we got to this absolutely spectacular waterfall with a beautiful pool right below it. Without saying what I was going to do, I just plunged into the water. Everybody joined me. We happened to have a photographer there from the statewide paper, the Arkansas Gazette, and they clicked a lot of photographs. They thought so much about it that it made the front page of the paper. What happened as a result of that, Senator Bumpers saw how much publicity it got and saw how much interest there was. He reintroduced or introduced his piece of legislation in the Senate, and as a result of a multitude of hearings, a testimony from various individuals, the legislation passed the House and passed the Senate. And then, this was probably the most interesting part of the legislation, Senator Bumpers represented the

Senate, and me representing the House with our two staff people and huge maps showing the boundaries and descriptions of all of the properties that were being asked to be placed into wilderness, we met in a conference room and basically, the four of us, just with give-and-take, arguing about what was wilderness, what wasn't wilderness, what should be in, what shouldn't be out. We basically drew up a map, agreed upon it, shook hands upon it and — excuse me — and that became what is known as a conference report. But just as an aside, Tom, there was one little piece of history I'd like to put on the record. A very good friend of mine, a classmate of mine at law school, Don Hamilton, he had approached me on several occasions about Flatside, which was the closest piece of property to the large urban area of Little Rock. And I told him when we met with him that it wasn't wilderness, had too many roads, had too many developments in it. And I'll always remember the comment he made to me. He said, "Congressman Anthony," he said, "if you set it aside, someday it will be wilderness." And he said, "It's the closest place for us to take our Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts." So after we had agreed upon the needs and bounds of the wilderness area, I turned to Senator Bumpers and I said, "I have one additional area that doesn't qualify but I'm giving my consent to put it in." And it was Flatside. And I basically did it as a favor to Don Hamilton and all of the hard work that he had put into it

on a personal level. That piece of legislation passed and got signed into law by Ronald Reagan.

TM: Well, thank you, Congressman, for sharing all those insights and stories. The second question that we have is will you please describe how you feel about protecting wilderness areas personally, and also what value you see these areas having for you and for the people of Arkansas, both now and into the future?

BA: Tom, I am a strong, strong supporter. I've set in aside as many eligible pieces of property that can be set aside for wilderness areas, state parks, national parks. In this fast-paced world that we live in, and the children that are being brought up in this fast-paced world with the social media taking them away from the outdoors many, many times, I think it's critical to provide these natural, beautiful, unique areas in Arkansas as well as all through the United States for the future so that these future generations will have a place to go out and really comprehend what nature's about, what the beauty of the outdoors is about. The additional benefits is we get to protect endangered species. There's a unit down in Southeast Arkansas that was set aside years ago called the Felsenthal Wildlife Area, and it's the only place where the red-cockaded woodpecker survives. Then you have endangered plant species, but then you just have absolutely

gorgeous scenery with lakes, waterfalls, sunset, sun rising. So, you have my total commitment. Wilderness areas benefits all people.

TM: Well, thank you. And the next question that we have is, and you have already answered some of this, but you may have other things that happened during this process back in the early '80s, do you have special stories that you would like to tell about your experiences or the experiences of other people regarding efforts to protect wilderness areas here in Arkansas?

BA: Tom, between 1966 and 1970, I was a deputy prosecuting attorney in Union County, Arkansas, before I got elected to be the prosecutor for the 13th Judicial District. During that period of time, there was an attempt by the people in Southeast Arkansas to get lands set aside in the hardwood bottom that eventually became the Felsenthal Wildlife Refuge. There was a kind of a unique twist there before the land could be turned over to the Department of Interior. The county had to purchase the land, clear the title, and be prepared to give a unfettered, clear, peaceable title to the property. Well, that fell upon the county judge. He came to me, because as a deputy prosecutor, I was the legal attorney for the county. So, I developed a system where I went out and negotiated with the landowners to purchase the land. And I had a very close friend, Jodie Mahony, who was a state

representative, he worked out a piece of legislation so that as the county purchased the land, he provided through the state the revenue so that the county could afford it. And then we had Jodie's brother, Mike Mahony, who was practicing the law across the street from my office. He did all the title work. So we did such a good job in Union County that the people in Ashley County ask us if we would do it for them, and we did. And as a result of that preliminary work, in 1975 the US Congress passed the law, setting aside the Felsenthal Wildlife Refuge. So always look back with fond memories when I see it on a map and I see how large it is, and I think, "Well, in some small way, I had an impact in putting that together and having that saved for generations to come for people to enjoy."

TM: Yes. Well, thank you for giving us that perspective as well, and I'm familiar with that area myself and it's a fabulous place.

BA: Just as an aside.

TM: Yes.

BA: My father was on the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and he took it upon himself to talk the commission into buying, I think, 9,000 acres just east of the Felsenthal Wildlife Refuge. And that then became a special management area, and as a tribute to him, they named that

piece of property after him, Beryl Anthony. So if you see on a map, it doesn't reflect my name, it reflects my father's name. So not only do I have a heritage of trying to protect lands for the future, but my father also, so it's a family effort and one that we grew up respecting as youth and carried it on into our adult lives.

TM: Well, that's a good legacy. The next question is just asking you if you have anything else that you would like to add that you think needs to be emphasized to the public about wilderness or just general resource issues, and especially if you have any other stories about the history of wilderness, about your own experiences or anybody else, and what is it that you think that the public should know or consider that maybe they are not aware of as much as you think they should be or you think is important for thinking about as we go forward with protection of wilderness areas in future?

BA: That is a very good question. And from time to time, trying to set lands aside can become a real political issue with certain groups opposing the expansion and inclusion of certain lands. They always have their own reasons for it, but in my case, the beneficial attributes of setting aside as many wilderness acres as you possibly can for the future generations to come, I personally think it's one of the best things that government can do. If we do not set aside these unique

and pristine places, people will find a way to destroy them with overuse and development. So I think it's incumbent upon good governance and good leadership to find and protect these pristine areas where they can generate harmony and beauty and peace for generations to come for people who have the ability to utilize them. So it's an education process, and the best way you can do it is stick with the facts, argue the facts, don't get emotional, and talk about the best and the brightest ideas of why it's a proper concept to set aside certain lands for the public use and have them protected for generations to come. Sometimes it's a slow process, sometimes it's a messy process, but I think it's a process that has to be pursued because the ultimate goal is quite worthy.

TM: Well, thank you for that. Is there anything else that you would like to mention that I have not asked about that you think that you'd like to talk about or is there anything that you'd like to add to any of your earlier comments?

BA: No.

TM: And you can color outside the lines here a little bit if you want to. It doesn't have to be exactly what I asked, but I appreciate you [inaudible].

BA: I'm just thrilled that you reached out and let me have a small part in preserving the history. To me, the unique part about how the wilderness building got to be put in place is that when it finally came down to where the boundary lines were going to be, there were only two people in the room that had the authority to vote for it, and that was Senator Dale Bumpers and Beryl Anthony. That was a pretty powering prospect because in the public opinion, I came from a forestry family, we were known for harvesting trees. Senator Bumpers had already developed a record for being a strong environmentalist. And I think the part that pleased me the most is that I was able to show the public that you can come from a family of foresters and you can make your life off of timber, but you can also have a balanced approach to it and understand the need for setting aside unique critical pieces of property that are considered wilderness. So to me, that was a big joy and something that I thoroughly enjoyed and look back on with a great deal of pride.

TM: Well, thank you for sharing that. And I think there are maybe things that I haven't asked you about that we've got a little bit of time if you would like to say more about your experiences with this legislation on Capitol Hill or your feelings about wilderness in general. You've said some really interesting things that are quite powerful and I appreciate

that, but if you would like to add any more, we can do that or we can stop it here, whatever you want to do.

BA: Tom, if I were still in office, I'd probably talk your ears off, but having been retired many years and enjoying the peace and quiet of retired life, what you've done by this interview has really jogged my memory in terms of things that occurred many years ago. Truthfully, I had to go back and do a little bit of Googling research to see when these bills were actually introduced and when they were passed to make sure that I had my facts straight. I just have this strong memory of how it happened, but the minute details sometimes escape you. But I guess I'll close by just saying, when I look on a map of the state of Arkansas and the many thousands of acres that have been set aside as national forest lands, wilderness lands, we have state parks, we have one of the oldest national parks right there in Hot Springs, Arkansas, which I had the pleasure of representing for the last four years of my term in office, Arkansas is quite fortunate in having the leadership through various organizations and political leaders that were willing to fight the battle over a long period of time to make sure that future generations will always be able to enjoy pristine pieces of property and call them wilderness areas. And I'm just proud to have been a small part of it.

TM: Well, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Pryor Center and the Ozark Society for being here today and telling us what happened decades ago. It's been nearly 40 years now that led to the wilderness areas that we have now here in Arkansas. And I want to also mention that the Pryor Center will provide you with a copy of this audio recording at some point. It may be a few weeks, but they will do that. And thanks again. It was great talking with you and I'll just say goodbye for now.

BA: Tom, thank you very much.

TM: You bet. Thank you.