

Tom McClure interviewed Stewart Noland on April 16, 2024, 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 Wild and Scenic Rivers in Arkansas during the last 50 years. I am Tom McClure interviewing Stewart Noland for the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History Project. The interview is being conducted in Fayetteville, Arkansas on April 16th, 2024. All I need you to do now, Stewart, 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.

Stewart Noland: Stewart Noland, and I hereby grant that permission.

TM: Thank you, Stewart. Just a little bit about Stewart, and we would... Stewart is joining us today in person here at the Pryor Center on the Square in Fayetteville, and just a little bit of information about him. He was raised in Fayetteville. He is a retired civil engineer that now lives in Little Rock. Stewart has a bachelor's degree, a bachelor of science in civil engineering degree, and a master's of science in civil engineering degree, also both from the University of Arkansas. Stewart is married to Debbie Ross Noland, has two children, Ross and Claire, and has four

grandchildren. Stewart is a longtime member of The Ozark Society and also of the Arkansas Canoe Club. So, once again, Stewart, thanks for being here and glad to have you as a part of this project and all that you've done to get this project going.

SN: Thank you.

TM: We have some questions for you to consider today, but we also encourage you to include other things that you would like to say beyond the four questions that we're going to present to you. So our first question is, will you please describe your involvement and efforts to protect Wild and Scenic Rivers in Arkansas?

SN: Yes. During the time that the Wild and Scenic Rivers were under consideration, I was the president of The Ozark Society in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. And Paul Means was our conservation chair, and it was The Ozark Society's primary focus for several years to try to gain a Wild and Scenic River designation for several rivers in Arkansas. And when I say primary focus, I mean, we had numerous opportunities to write correspondence, we attended meetings, we interfaced in depth with the Forest Service, the Forest Service supervisor and their field folks, and we interfaced in politicians all leading up to the designation of the rivers as Wild and Scenic Rivers in Arkansas.

TM: Okay. Question number two, will you please describe how you feel personally about protecting Wild and Scenic Rivers in Arkansas and what value you think these rivers have for the people of Arkansas both now and in the future?

SN: Well, I'm a river runner, and so some of this comes pretty easily to me, but I think it's incredibly important that we protect certain rivers. And I think even on a higher level, it helps to define our civilization, our culture, and how we honor and respect our natural resources.

TM: Okay. Question number three, do you have any special stories that you would like to tell about your experiences or the experiences of others regarding efforts to protect Wild and Scenic Rivers here in Arkansas?

SN: I do. There were several things that we did during that time that were interesting. I remember actually Paul and I met with a Weyerhaeuser forester on the Cossatot River in Southwest Arkansas, which later became a Wild and Scenic River, and to discuss their forest management practices. Of course, at that point in time, the clear cutting was very popular, and we actually showed him where the river had flooded and got up into a clear cut. And it was kind of an eye-opener for him, and they had not intended for that to happen, but it did. And it wasn't a finger-pointing thing, but it was an educational

thing for them. And I think it helped him understand what we were trying to do in the protection of these rivers because our understanding at that point in time was, was that the Weyerhaeuser regional foresters were really the ones that made a lot of these decisions with respect to what was going to happen to those rivers, and so we knew it was important to interface with him. Another thing that we did was with Senator Pryor, we took him on a trip, on a float trip on the Big Piney, which, again, was up for inclusion and was included in the National Wild and Scenic River Act for Arkansas. And we had a great time with him that day, and it was a cold march day, but we had a shore lunch that was warm. We made soup and such, and we just had a great time with him. And then perhaps one of the most important stories. In the beginning, the Illinois Bayou was included on our list of rivers that we wanted to be included, and now it was in the Ozarks, and it was included along with North Sylamore Creek, Illinois Bayou, Hurricane Creek, the upper part of the Buffalo River above where the National River is, Richland Creek, the Big Piney, and the Mulberry. And Paul Means made a trip to Washington, and he either came back or called with the information. And we knew this, that the city of Russellville was looking at potentially putting a dam on one of the forks of the Illinois Bayou for public water supply. And so they had contacted their representatives, and congressmen, and such

and said, "We really don't want to have this river included in the bill."

And so the word was, was that we needed to drop that if we wanted the bill to move forward at that time. And there was quite a bit of discussion about that, but we pretty quickly came to the decision to go ahead and take it off of the list and just have the other six included. And then those were included, the ones I mentioned, along with the Little Missouri River and the Cossatot River in the Ouachita National Forest. And then another thing that happened that was so interesting, and I think Paul probably related this in his discussion with you, Tom, was, was that he was in Washington, DC, and he called me. He said, "Hey, this bill is going to pass." And I thought I misunderstood him because we had saved, The Ozark Society had saved... I remember the number. We had saved \$40,000 to help pay for people to attend hearings in Washington, DC. We thought there may be as many as two different hearings that we would have to attend. Again, all of this was remembering what The Ozark Society had done with their Jubilee bus trip to Washington DC to attend meetings in the fall of 1971 concerning the Buffalo National River. And we fully thought we would need to and would need to attend these hearings and testify and such, and we were prepared to do that. And he said, "No. You don't understand. This thing is going to pass, and we're really not going to have to do much, but continue to support it the way we had." So that

was a huge surprise to me, and sure enough, it did. It passed, and we didn't have to do any of those long distance travels. So that was a big surprise.

TM: Well, thank you, Stewart. Question number four is just, would you like to add anything else that you think needs to be emphasized about the history of Wild and Scenic Rivers protection in Arkansas that you think the public should know or consider?

SN: Yeah, a couple of things. The Wild and Scenic Rivers provide opportunity for recreation, scenic study, fish and wildlife propagation, and I think that the value of those will only increase over time. And my sincere hope is, is that we don't ever take them for granted, and I think that the wisdom of having protected our Wild and Scenic Rivers will be even more apparent in the future. And certainly, recreational opportunities that have occurred since the passage of the bill helped to indicate that. And the other thing that I would like to recognize is, is the efforts of those who came before us. It's important to know that as early as the time of the Buffalo River, there was a state stream preservation committee and then commission, and none of those things really got off the ground a whole lot. But eventually, with the passage of the Wild and Scenic River bill, a lot of that was able to be

accomplished for those eight rivers. So I think it's something that Arkansas can be proud of, and hopefully, it serves us well over time.

TM: Okay. Thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to mention that I have not asked about?

SN: Well, just a couple of things, Tom.

TM: Uh-huh. Sure.

SN: First of all, I think it's important that we had Wild and Scenic Rivers in both of our national forests. And I think I mentioned that a while ago. There's six in the Ozark and two in the Ouachita, and I think that's real important. They're all a little bit different, and I think they offer different opportunities for recreation and such. And the other thing is, and I think Paul may have mentioned this in his discussion, there was bipartisan support for this, and I think that's always important to mention. I mean, there were people on both sides, both political parties that were supportive of this, and I think that's an important thing to mention.

TM: All right. Thank you. Would you like to add anything else to your earlier comments, or do you have any other things that you'd like to mention?

SN: I will mention one additional thing. I really appreciate this effort to document some of this history because... and I know that it'll be here at the Pryor Center for a long period of time. And my hope is, is that somebody will pick this up several hundred years from now and say, "Hey, it's neat to know how all this happened." And it was important then, and it's important now, and I fully expect these rivers to be cherished as much 500 years from now as they are today.

TM: Well, thank you, Stewart. I think I appreciate your comments on all that, and I'll just ask you at this point if you have anything else you'd like to add, or should we just move on from here?

SN: Nothing else.

TM: Okay. Thank you so much for being here, and I would just like to thank you again on behalf of the Pryor Center and The Ozark Society for being here today and sharing with us your perspective and memories of Wild and Scenic Rivers protection efforts here in Arkansas. Also, want to let you know that the Pryor Center will provide you with a copy of this audio recording at some point in the future. Thank you again, and I'll just say goodbye for now.