

Tom McClure interviewed Keneth L. Smith on May 30, 2023, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Ken Smith: This narration will begin at that point, if I may. I was within the Park Service. That was my first field assignment as a civil engineer trainee, I guess it was called in Mount Rainier National Park. And of course I wanted to see as much of that park as I could in weekends and other times. And at one point there was a young man, college student there at park headquarters who wanted to get out on his days off and learn more about the park. He was from a college student from down in Portland, Oregon area. And Doug Scott was introduced to me at that point. And the first summer I remember we wanted to get out and he was working in a little restaurant or dining area across from park headquarters. This is Mount Rainier National Park, Washington State. So, that's a long way from Arkansas, but the connection would develop. And what happened was that that first summer, for example, I remember we walked up the... Well, he didn't have a car. He was from Portland, Oregon area, no car. I had this Volkswagen bug and we went up the road about 12 miles to a place called Paradise, up a tree line. And I remember we went up that mountain side up a snowfield. And I remember that he and two, three other students, I guess, were... That was their chance to see that area above tree line. And it was forbidden by Mrs. Doloff, the woman who ran the Longmire facility

where he was employed, he was not to go above and not to go out on the snowfield or go above tree line so that we described in talking about going up the hill to this place above tree line. Well, it was Camp Muir, named for John Muir. And Muir had climbed, I guess, all the way up to the mountain one time. Anyhow, it was Camp Muir, but in the discussions, we decided to call it Rium, R-I-U-M, Muir, spelled backwards. Well, we had a successful trip hike up to Mount Rium and it turned out just fine. Later on, they were packing Park Service, I guess, was packing some loaded horses up there. And one of them dropped in through a snow branch and disappeared into a crevasse in the ice. Fortunately, none of the... Our human adventurers suffered that the horse, they sent in a park ranger down there, rappelled on a rope down there to try to rescue the horse. And the horse was already dead in a shower of ice and the ranger had to be pulled out quickly because he was on the way to being frozen. Well, that didn't get back to Mrs. Doloff who ran the inn there where he was employed. The next trip I remember, it took him and a woman employee up to drop off up in the high country and turn them down and they would hike down cross country part of the way and hit a trail back down into the park headquarters and that worked out. And I had given him, and probably in violation of the strict park rules, an old description of a trail route that might be gone cross country down to park headquarters from

where I dropped him and his friend across about tree line up higher. Anyhow, he made it just fine. He'd read the report that had been written in the 1930s analyzing the possibility of a new trail. And when he came out of there, he said there should be no trail there. And so, it was actually, a lot of it was a cross country overlooking national forest land for the south so that he was beginning to get this idea about approach to, I guess, sustaining nature in places like that. He was originally from Oregon. I didn't know much about him. And that second trip is the only other one I recall is being involved or my being involved with him in any way so that Doug Scott disappeared for my life. And then I, after two or three changes of location, there I was enrolled for graduate or study at the University of Michigan and I walked into the dean's office that first day to get some of the, what should I say? In signing in documents and stuff.

Tom McClure: Sure.

KS: And I was there and waiting to see somebody in the dean's office and somebody tapped me on the shoulder, Doug Scott.

TM: Wow.

KS: And he had, I don't know they immediately recall except that he was starting graduate studies at the University of Michigan in the School of

Natural Resources, and there I was. And I was hoping to work on a master's in natural resources administration, which I did finally obtain. He was working, I guess, toward a doctorate and that sort of thing, natural resources. And well, a lot of his thesis was to be about the legislative history, I think, of the Wilderness Act. And so Doug, I left university to finish the course, essentially finished the coursework there for the master's and natural resources and wound up down with the National Park Service in Washington, DC. And it happened that I chose a place to live within walking distance of the US Department of Interior Building right across the Francis Scott Key Bridge over in Washington was my place of employment. Doug Scott needed to get down there and go through the files pertaining to Wilderness negotiations designation. And so, he started, he was there at Ann Arbor, and he was trying Ann Arbor doing his coursework and then he had to get down to Washington and right away he was in there in and out, I guess, on short assignments to find things and find information. He was one bright guy and he was there in the headquarters of the Wilderness Society and these other environmental groups. And so, he, I don't know the whole story. I don't think he ever finished his PhD. He was at about that time, all of those organizations, Alderman, Wilderness Societies, Sierra Club and so on, were becoming alarmed at the thought that there was a lot of designated Wilderness areas, one

sort and another all the way from just proposals all the way to having gone through the legislative mill and everything, but they were not under... They could be subject to whim of people who were employed by these agencies, Forest Service, fishing, wildlife for fishing, wildlife, whatever. And so, there was not enough legal protection for these areas to be invaded practically on whim. There was another big, big question what to do with Alaska because Alaska had practically no Wilderness, debt legislative Wilderness protection. What happened, and I was not, I was over there doing my thing with the Park Service and didn't hear everything except that Doug Scott had a little standing invitation to rent, to stay rent-free, sleeping on a cot in the living room in my little two room apartment was just over in Arlington, Virginia for an active person literally within walking distance of Downtown Washington. Not only the Department of the Interior where I worked, but a little further along the Audubon Society, whoever had an office, downtown office, Downtown Washington or in among the volunteer groups, that was where Doug Scott would be spending time going through files. I was alarmed a little bit at all of the armloads of stuff that he probably ran them broke, just making Xerox copies of things, but they, I think, and I never did talk to him about it, but I think that they were impressed by his intelligence, his energy, and so it developed into a more lasting employment relationship in one way or

another. I found, I have files at home that indicated that he was traveling to places like Chicago, and I don't know where else, just to make contact with these people. And what was developing rapidly was that the Kennedy-Johnson administration was coming to an end a little later on. Who else was it? A Democrat president was involved and that man was supportive. He understood what they were driving at and they actually... Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn up into Northern Alaska for a firsthand look at wilderness, proposed wilderness. I have a little report that I guess originated with Doug. Well, he wrote it, but it was based on, as he says, on what others had learned about the wilderness need, the question about what to do. And he was right in the middle of these fights, and I'm wondering whether you ever saw him. He became as close. Going through the files, I learned that he had been at a meeting in Columbia, Missouri with Midwestern real wilderness people. He would have been coming to Arkansas except that there were bigger fish to fry elsewhere, and at least some of the Arkansas delegation, I think it was just simply persuaded by what Doug Scott had put together and others had agreed to. And so, that Doug finally, at one point he just burned out. He'd been writing reports and analyses and so on. I have some of this in my briefcase here and he at some point, I guess, the wilderness campaign would come to a pause, at least if not to a stop. And he wound up in Washington State running

a little theater arts center back in Western Washington. He was capable of doing that sort of thing, but by that time, several years later, he had two young daughters, married two young daughters, and they left that place on the coast of Western Washington, moved over into inland, I guess. Part of the operating mode for those people who were just up to their ears and concerns related to wilderness was that they didn't have time to talk about anything else. I did when Doug was in Washington, and I was living in Arlington, Virginia, one Saturday, I guess it was, or Sunday, when he could not get Downtown Washington to do anything, we went out as far as Shenandoah National Park and drove hauling, going together in a Volkswagen. All I remember about that trip, and I recalled it later in a letter to him that... well, it was fall and black walnuts were falling under the road, and I am fond of black walnuts. Doug had other things on his mind, so he sat in the car and read a copy of the Washington Post Newspaper. He was getting better routed in the surroundings of local events, national events, so that he was reading that newspaper. And while I was gathering walnuts, I really wasn't thinking about it, but he was 120% involved in what was going on in the country and reading a national newspaper like that helped round out his information and his context.

TM: Sure.

KS: I really wasn't thinking about it. I just wanted, and he was willing to go on a Saturday or Sunday just to go out to Shenandoah National Park and go for a hike and so which we did. Doug Scott, after those years disappeared, he did talk about his family owned a place over on the Oregon Coast, the North Coast there, I guess, a home site or something. And he did spend some time out there and sort of disappeared except that...

Speaker 3: I'm hearing the paper rattling, so I'm going to just put it here.

KS: What am I supposed to do? I've been talking about something else, but it's within this-

S3: We're 20 minutes in and so (unclear)-

KS: ... but isn't this universe?

S3: We're recording.

TM: Okay.

S3: But if you want to go ahead and do, if you've got your preamble that you want to read and then start on your questions, I just wanted to give you an idea of the timeframe because we're hoping to wrap it by 4:00.

TM: Okay.

S3: Because I'll need to leave around then.

TM: Okay.

S3: But I'll just give you a timeframe.

TM: Can I walk over and tell-

S3: Absolutely.

TM: ... to make sure he hears me?

S3: Of course.

TM: Ken, they have some boilerplate stuff that I need to read about dates and I need to ask you to state your name and just say it's okay to use this for public use. And I'll just tell you when that is and you just say your name-

KS: Yeah. I think I've been through that (unclear) together.

TM: Yeah. Yeah, you've done that before.

KS: In fact, I was through it with Doug Scott.

TM: Okay.

KS: He was doing the contacting politicians and people like that, and what happened was that, for example-

TM: Well, I've got to stop you here for just a second because they want me to read this and then I'll let you continue with your Doug Scott story, okay? So, this is... I'll just read it here and you can see it. 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 and I am Tom McClure.

KS: And all the personal information.

TM: Yeah. I am Tom McClure and I am interviewing Ken Smith for the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History Project.

KS: I have no problem with any of this-

TM: Yeah. Okay.

KS: Let's go on.

TM: Okay. That sounds good.

KS: With Doug Scott, it was a question of basically, as it developed a little later, that I was giving him information which would go under my

name, really, or part of our joint effort, then he was doing the whatever else needed to be. I think the best thing is to show this stuff to you.

TM: Okay.

KS: And I guess this will be... Did you ever see this?

TM: No, I don't think so.

KS: That must have come from Doug Scott, or at least he was the person who assembled that. And that is a good background piece on the creation of the Wilderness Act.

TM: The Pew Wilderness Center, yeah.

KS: If you don't have it or haven't seen it, I notice this came out more than 10 years ago, but this stuff that I have is already legally the possession of the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville Library. But if you somewhere back there is... Oh, here, these people were cooperating in producing the information that went into that report. What they're wanting to do was get legislation, the Wilderness Act nationwide, maybe more than one, and you're welcome to... I can't let you have the thing, but if you want to copy-

TM: No, no, no. No, I'll give it back to you. But it's nice to know about it.

KS: How's that?

TM: It's nice to know about it. Yeah.

KS: This here, I don't know, this is 15, 20 years old, but these organizations are still around and you could find the same information. In fact, I can...

TM: Yeah, I can-

KS: Here's Jimmy Carter invited up to North Shortsville. And the only picture I have of Doug Scott after he grew a beard, which was fashionable, was that is Doug. He was right in the middle of the fight in Washington.

TM: Yes, he was.

KS: And looking at clean-shaven, as I knew him earlier, it was not as bushy, but he... Doug Scott was, as he would say, it was not my creation. Let's see. Yeah. As he says, "Here's an American wilderness vision, the vision of a wilderness forever, future, safe from tampering by private or public," supposedly. This is not my phrase. It is Howard Zahniser's. Zahniser, you probably heard of, he died about the time this whole thing began, but he was the brains and the spokesman for years. It is not my vision, but the one that I inherited and you too

have inherited from the wilderness leaders who went before. So, he put it in here and it came to me in the mail, I guess, and I haven't found that he personally sent it, but it reached me.

TM: Sure.

KS: And it will be, all this stuff would be the university library.

TM: Okay.

KS: And so there is essentially what I can tell you. I, of course, when they asked for help writing a letter is in a campaign, I was writing letters, and Doug Scott had a letter that was jointly written by me and by Doug, and with my full endorsement of approval, of course, Doug Scott was one devoted, dedicated, intelligent person. So, that was all I could come here with was that story.

TM: Well, I think that's quite a lot. I appreciate you. I appreciate you giving us that national perspective, and I did meet Doug Scott. In fact, I was at that meeting in Missouri you're talking about in 1981. I was there.

KS: Were you there?

TM: And I heard him speak and that's the only time I've met him, but he was a dynamic speaker.

KS: So, we actually were face to face-

TM: Yes.

KS: ... and met with Doug.

TM: I met with him. Yeah. So, I appreciate what you said and-

KS: How was that?

TM: I appreciate what you said and hearing your story about him, because I know he was a national leader on things that affected wilderness here in Arkansas and Missouri and other places.

KS: I was sort of bouncing around from one assignment to the other with the Park Service and Doug had remarked at some point that they hoped that we could get together, but we never did. But here's an old Ozark Society newsletter out of Missouri, which you may have seen, and Bob Wiley of a Missouri end of the Ozark Society was saying that he heard David Brower, who was quite a spellbinder himself. And he says... Well, he says that in that meeting, David Brower was quite a spellbinder, I guess, like handing down the stone tablets, but the nuts and bolts principally came and he summarized them, they came from Doug Scott. And these are things that I sort of... They came through the mail and got set aside. Then somehow I got that celebration in

Washington. I was not there, but Doug Scott turned out to be one of the two leaders in setting up that meeting too, master of ceremonies or whatever they call him. These are things I'm showing you, but if you want to... I think the only copies I have, I'm going to have to-

TM: Yeah, you keep-

KS: ... turn them to... Well, this is going to go right into the university library, and I think it probably needs to get over there, under their protection.

TM: Yes.

KS: Immediately.

TM: Yeah. They'd seem like worthy documents that somebody will enjoy seeing someday.

KS: How was this?

TM: I think they're interesting documents that deserve to be protected and made available to the public some way. That's a good idea (unclear)-

KS: Well, this was in my wilderness protection file or there was another file folder for Doug Scott because we were in touch for years.

TM: Yes.

KS: And so that is the core at least.

TM: Yeah. Let me ask you a question. These questions that we had here are just very open-ended questions and you can tell stories or you can tell us. But one of the things we're trying to focus on is wilderness protection in Arkansas in the last 50 years. And that includes the Buffalo River wilderness areas, the three areas that are within the Buffalo National River. And I know you were involved to some degree in the planning for the National River. And what can you tell us about those three areas, the Lower Buffalo, the Ponca unit, and the one that's up next to the National Forest?

KS: I think all the basic drawing of boundaries and classifying areas was done by others who jumped into the act right away.

TM: Do you remember-

KS: Certainly the boundaries at the outset were drawn mainly well after a couple of preliminary visits over the two or three years. There was one master plan, as they called it, drawn up, because the Congress needed to know about the boundary, the total acreage, and of course where all the goodies were going to be lodged in this new park so that they could talk about them. And I was on that master plan team, but there was a couple of people who were much more in... I was classified as

an engineer, which mean, "Well, you're an engineer, aren't you? You don't need to know about all this other stuff." Well, the main mover in that plan was a man, John Willis Bright, J.W. Bright. And he was in a unit in the Park Service office in the interior department, but he had already had some knowledge of rivers and the rivers kind of struck his fancy. He and his wife, I guess, kids actually went up into Nebraska on the Niobrara River, I think it was, just to float, get that experience. And down in Arkansas, he became... Volunteered himself, I'm sure, selected himself to be the team captain on the first master plan to study with the Buffalo. And I was kind of bouncing between, on some bounce between one assignment and another. I remember that. I was not even officially a member of the team, but I had been there. I'd gathered information for a book, and by that time, maybe the book was even in print, but I was there with the master plan group, and some of them were Jay Bright, and there was a park ranger guy who was usually with Jay, and they were getting acquainted with that landscape, even renting a couple of horses so they could go down there into the Lower Buffalo Wilderness area and see what that was like. It was partly that he was learning the main components of Buffalo National River, but also sort of whatever struck their fancy. They found, I guess at that time there were topographic maps being just newly published that could show things that had not been visible

before. And they went up a little side canyon there in the Lower Buffalo and actually parked the horses, I guess, and walked up there and scrambled up a hillside because it indicated there was a cave. Well, it was nothing more than a shelter there. And the geologic feature is still there. But later I learned that some local guy had used that hidden spot for making an Ozark product that he could put in a glass container and ship out, take over to Tulsa even, and distribute for a price.

TM: I can imagine.

KS: That sort of thing. I went up there to that thing later on and it was not the kind of major feature that would be visited by the public, should be. They confided on their own, but it was a steep scramble up the hill for that. But Jay Bright and Jim Roush, his ranger assistant, were looking around for things like that. And I was accompanying the other members of that master plan team. One of them in particular was what I would term a park naturalist, and so I were going finding places for him to see, because he was interested in that natural history side of things. And then, well, there were others, but there was always dead wood. In a group that size, they'd hastily pulled them down together. There was one of them who had come down from an office in Philadelphia and several in that newly formed planning unit in

Washington DC. And I don't know how many others, but anyhow, it was a hastily pulled together planning team that made most of the valid decisions, I think, about drawing boundary of that park. Well, I say Jay Bright was very politically oriented. He did not want this group to have overreaching, to just grab everything that might look interesting. The original survey that had been done by some Park Service people out of an office in Philadelphia, I don't recall exact acreage, but it might have totaled about 118,000, 120,000, and I think it was probably a lot of... And they didn't... They were flying blind. They didn't have good maps. The first thing that the Park Service needed was to get decent topographic mapping of the entire area, and so they had requested that, and I think some of these preliminary topographic maps were just quicky copies, but had the boundaries or rather the topography up to date. And so, that was sort of a process of quickly getting more information, pulling it together, and trying to come up with a park that would be accepted by Congress. And so, they shaved some of the fat, I would say, off the original proposal, which was, I don't know, 118,000. It came down to 105,000 or whatever acreage I'm talking about. And so, what happened though was that I wound up transferring from an office out west Denver, Colorado, or wherever I was, into the planning office there in Washington, which was actually physically located across the

river in Virginia. And there was slack time there where I could go through the file of all that earlier work on planning, which had sort of drifted into Washington, I guess, the paperwork, and found that what I was wanting to learn, and what it amounted to was that to a degree the Park Service was flying blind, and that they didn't have complete information, and they probably through... I know the very first proposal for that park was something like, I don't know, 140,000 acres or something like that. It was cut down to say 118,000. And today, looking at it, we had to quickly draw a boundary that would be more realistic and still do the protecting the river. But I look at it now and one of the basic problems in drawing a park in rugged country like that is you wind up following section lines or the very quarter section lines, and we had to do that, where we had a boundary that was sawtooth or zigzag, and it covered the essentials, but today, well, we have people who are trying to straighten that out. I mean, acquire a little bit more land, even with private funds, so that people are not going to build their dream house or cabin in one of those zigzags overlooking the river. That was prime property. But 40 years ago, we weren't thinking that. And Jay Bright, very politically astute, at least, observant, thought that we'd better not ask for too much, we meaning the Park Service.

TM: Right.

KS: But the essentials were incorporated in that park. And even what I learned later on was went back to Jay Bright, and Jay Bright being the team captain, and he... I said there were certain things there. Well, I noticed that the park ranger type who did the boundary, not knowing the specifics about Ponca, had included 40 acres or something like that, that already maybe had a private development or something not crucial to the needs of the Park Service. So, I go back to Jay Bright and say... I went back and I said, "Here, the Park Service doesn't need this, this area." He said, "What you can do, if you want to cut out 40 acres and not essential to the mission of that park, take that same 40 and try to beef up the boundary where most needed somewhere else, and it has to be in the same county, because we've told the county authorities how many acres will be in Newton County, how many in Searcy County, the acreage within the (unclear) cannot be changed." Well, I worked on that for the first summer I was there at the Washington office, and that brought some improvement, but still there was that zigzag boundary that was rather awkward to work with in terms of natural features and things that were not going on straight lines and zigzags. So, I guess even now we're seeing that our friend here his son is involved in trying to rectify some of the shortcomings of that boundary designation that was done, gosh, 40, 45 years ago now.

TM: Yeah. Yeah.

KS: I think we're learning that there are more basic things that are changing in terms of the climate basically, and of the population and that they access a lot of these places that we could just go drive over there and set up a tent camp and within one of those saw tooth areas, today it's not as practical to do.

TM: No, it's not. Well, I wanted to just mention just a little bit about, since this is being recorded, just a little bit about you. So, if you'll give me a couple of minutes here, I just want to mention some of the things that you have done. And here it is on May 30th, 2023. I want you to think about what things may be about the future here in a minute, but today Ken Smith is with us at the Pryor Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Ken has a mechanical engineering degree from the University of Arkansas and a master's degree in natural resources administration from the University of Michigan. Ken worked for 13 years for the National Park Service as a civil engineer and park planner. He has authored several books, including the Buffalo River Country. Ken played major roles in the protection of the Buffalo River, including stopping dams, designating wilderness, and making sure that special places like Lost Valley were included for long-term protection in the Buffalo National River. He is also an expert trail builder and spearheaded the design and building of the Buffalo River Trail. So, Ken, one of the questions here that I have for you, and it's thinking about the future, is what do

you think that these wilderness areas that we have in the Buffalo National River and some in the national forests are, why do you think that they're important to have there, and what do you think they'll mean to people into the future?

KS: I think I'm just simply philosophically in favor of undeveloped lands like that, beginning as a place for escape, for adventure, and that could be especially for the young people coming on all the time who would want to know something about... Well, rugged wilderness, they would probably call it, but the values are many, of course. And if they grow up to become a natural history student or major in any of those natural history places, they need undisturbed areas as a baseline that has essentially been unchanged since the days of the first white settlers or even before. They need to know that. To me, it also is just a lot of it is just flat out beautiful and I respond to that sort of thing and other people do. Not the majority of the citizens of this country perhaps, but enough of them and more of them perhaps as they come to learn about the value of undisturbed nature. Well, they already know I had some adventures in the national parks, of course, myself, Mount Rainier, Yosemite, Sequoia, other places back east, and that all of that is part of our country, part of our heritage, part of our way of life, I guess, so that I certainly had no calm qualms about designated wilderness. I can look at early my life and my fathers particularly, we

always responded to the outdoors and yet in those days before, my father left a story about, well, he and a couple of crazy friends of his went up and just... In those days, they could go and shoot down an animal in the Canada or the West and think nothing of it. That has had to stop. And even when I was a kid, I remember target practice with the 22 was going out there on a ravine up the Whittington Avenue side of Hot Springs, Arkansas, where I was a kid, and just shooting 22 shorts or whatever they were and dropping the holes as they were called on the ground. I got to thinking about that. A lot of our empty cartridges were just for 22 certainly just dropped, and that sort of thing comes back to disturb my thinking.

TM: Sure. Well, we're going to have to wrap up here, but I just wondered in the last minute or two that we have, do you have anything else that you'd like to mention that I haven't asked you or that you thought about related to wilderness or the protection of wild areas?

KS: I have come now to think that wild areas, and a lot of that protection works, is at least on the statute books, the boundaries of the Buffalo National River, and there are people who are concerned about that, and they should be. I hope they continue to be, and yet there is something else. Maybe some people would say, "You (unclear). Environmentalists, you're always wanting more." Yes, there is work to

be done in places, even like the cities. Fayetteville, I have it on my mind that there needs to be at least a better protection of roadsides. It means shelling out mount money, I think, to the other owners to acquire consolidated strips of land (unclear) by the highways. I'm afraid that some people would say, "Well, you're never through asking wanting more." Well, more is what we all call home, our world, and we need to protect, enjoy, learn from more of it, even right around the corner in the first wooded hillside or something like that. It is here. I think a lot of those battles to many of them to protect parks, of course, have essentially been achieved one, I guess you would say, though in reading about the Alaska wilderness, I learned that there was some of the Alaska editors who didn't want all that the conservationists were wanting, so I guess there's still some unfinished work there. Some of these things just have to be dealt with, and it even on the local level, you need to look around and see there are patches and pieces and angled little pieces of woods, for example, in around Fayetteville, or in Hot Springs where I grew up, or anywhere that today I think we are coming to realize that there are limits on the natural world, and some of those we're bumping up against the limits.

TM: Yeah.

KS: And a lot of these things, what we are learning is that a lot of this marginal pieces of land that I'm talking about have their best value is probably just growing green things and absorbing whatever crud is in the atmosphere and going on for there. So, that's what's on my mind right now.

TM: Well, I'm going to have to stop it here, but I just want to thank you on behalf of the Pryor Center and the Ozark Society that are doing this joint project to look at wilderness protection over the last 50 years. And I appreciate you coming in and sharing all your thoughts and stories and thank you again.

KS: Well, thank you for asking me to sound off.

TM: You bet.