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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
EDMUND H. HARVEY
DELAWARE WILDLANDS, INCORPORATED
SEPTEMBER 14, 1976

Transcribed by:
R. Herman
February 13, 1978
Interview with Edmund H. (Ted) Harvey

Centerville, Delaware

September 14, 1976

Interviewer: Rebecca Button

B = Rebecca Button

H = Edmund H. (Ted) Harvey

B: This is an interview with Ted Harvey at his office, Delaware Wildlands, Incorporated in Centerville on September 14, 1976. Mr. Harvey, your reputation as a conservationist in Delaware and your contribution to conservation efforts are well known. Could you describe your earliest kinds of efforts in conservation and your ideas that made Delaware Wildlands happen?

H: Well, sometimes I wonder why I wound up being called a conservationist because like many tags, it covers a wide range of meanings, almost as many meanings as there are people who use the word. And but I think...well, I always liked to fish and I liked hunting but I loved fishing so...and also at a very early age I learned to fly and I'll get back to that in a minute. But anyway, when I was nineteen I went down to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which was a very small town of about five thousand people and I was the fifth licensed guide boat captain in Fort Lauderdale. And then I also guided for turkey and deer out in the glades in the big cypress country. And with...with that exposure, remember the...remembering the fishing and so forth and you see things change and a little more land gobbled up and you wonder ah I guess sort of like...you wonder why the vineyard buys or the vintner buys.
And ahh, that takes a long time and being aware of this question you're asking yourself. But also, a few years in south Florida I went down to the Keys which ahh looking back on were heaven in those days. What is now M , there were seventeen colored people and three white people on the Key and I built ahh the first modern fishing lodge on the Keys ahh back in 1932 when I was twenty one. And the fishing was just unimaginable ahh and ahh then you'd go away for awhile and you'd come back and you'd go fishing and the places you caught fish are dead and this happened in Lauderdale for instance ahh there were three reefs of varying distances off shore and if it was too rough to fish outside, you would go to the first reef and you would catch bottom feeding fish ahh. As the town and the state grew, the pollution problems increased and the first reef died for all intents and purposes and then next the second reef died and then the third reef died and or pretty much so and ahh although you can still...I don't mean to say can't go out there and catch fish but when you compare it and know what caused it is really basically the pressure of people, ahh and not thinking ahead. And then you are away for awhile and you go back and ahh, ahh and slowly these things just sort of gel in your mind and, and you wish something could be done about it ahh your first...I think this is fairly common with all kinds of conservationists no matter whether they tackle and knock themselves out on causes that have no chance at all of ever succeeding. You sort of wish you'd lived in the days before development ahh completely forgetting that if you did, you probably wouldn't be able to survive. So at least with, in my case and some other guys who I like to call responsible
conservationists, they realize that they are living in the tail end of the twentieth century and there are some things that... many things probably which we could do well without if we want to survive as people and certainly many things we could change if we want to keep wildlife populations healthy. Ah, but we can't go tearing off and turn back the clock which I think too many people want to do. Even as much as we'd like to, we ought to realize we can't. But we can try and get a little sense here and a little sense there and we could say well, we got to have industry, we've got to have this. More and more people are coming and there of course is a major problem that faces the world in any field. Ah, say you...you start thinking of a phrase that used to be awfully overworked I thought was "oh, we want to maintain the balance of nature" when the fact is that the balance of nature was upset sometime in the distant past. But I think in all endeavors or all walks of life that... and I don't think this is possible, but if people can think of balance in anything whether it's economics or getting along with your family or with people or in schools or anything at all that man does, he ought to be aware that balance is probably an unobtainable goal. Should be something, that should be taken into serious consideration when anything is... in anything, ah just daily living. You can't laugh all the time. You can't cry all the time. You can't work all the time. You can't sleep all the time. So you...you should be aware that balance is a goal in anything that man does. So, that leads to coming back to Delaware after being away for many years and... and seeing the changes all of which or most of which were inevitable.
Others probably could have been avoided or maybe could have been avoided with some sensible planning, not dreaming. In other words I don't feel that so many of our highways have to be just one strip of commercial stuff with no trees and parking lots which drain off and flood our streams, and so forth. Maybe a little sensible planning could avoid that, but anyway, we're stuck with it and again people, housing, economics don't allow everybody to live in a place surrounded by trees and woods. But some of the little things that pass as developments, I think could be a lot more attractive and... and more pleasant to live in than some of the ones that have been made which people have no choice other than to live in. And I also feel that for people to be aware of balance, as I said earlier, to know that it's a goal even though it may be unobtainable. It's awfully hard to be living two feet away from your neighbor in a yard about four feet wide and think much more except just going to sleep and eating, and it certainly isn't a place where a person's thinking can go into the realm or... or at least where any kind of a philosophy other than just let's get through another day can... can grow. Ah, but say you wan... you... you can you see so much land that you remembered woods or streams which are no longer streams that they're channeled ways to get rid of water. Woods cut down for a factory or development that a little planning there might have located the place somewhere else. Ah, but being away and coming back is when you notice things, and it's sort of dreary to me to be any place in the world now and see the same kind of highways with the... I hate to use Kirkwood Highway but it's been used so much but there's thousands of Kirkwood Highways all over the
world. So you...you get to thinking about these things and the first ideas I had about trying to form an organization to buy lands in Delaware and Maryland as my first...as I got to thinking about this I thought well, hell nobody's too much interested in this stuff, and so you mope around and talked to a few people just casually and I had been a member of the Nature Conservancy for years and I admired their work a lot but there were some things that they were doing which I didn't feel applied to...to the Delmarva Peninsula and would be boring to go into those differences. Also I also felt that an organization in Delmarva should not always buy land, if it were able to raise money, to just hold until a state agency or federal agency or county agency could take it over. I think some areas are better protected in private hands where you don't have as many obligations to all kinds of people. In other words, some natural areas just can't stand the pressure of people and I think they are best managed if possible with private funds. Although I think other areas if the state or the federal government Fish and Wildlife Service for instance, wants these properties for part of their refuge programs or something and they don't have the funds at the time, if an organization is fortunate enough to have the funds, they should buy it and hold it until these people can get the money to buy it back from you. Well anyway, finally several of my friends and I had supper together and the upshot was that let's form this thing, Delaware Wildlands, and we'll help if you'll head it up and that was in '61... that...1961 that we incorporated and I've been head of it ever since and I've got to say that Delaware Wildlands is fortunate because they don't have to pay
as... head of the Delaware Wildlands I don't receive a salary and I do get a little stuffy about that at times especially when rightly some of the directors get mad at me for something and I like to be able to say right, find somebody else and see what you got to pay him. But anyway, it has been highly successful but like...I think most organizations or most movements of these kinds, there has to be a crisis to get them off and in this case it just happened that Shell Oil Company started buying lands down in southeastern New Castle County for a refinery and this triggered a big controversy and a lot of people were in the mood to contribute to...make donations which are tax deductible to organizations like...well, to Delaware Wildlands to start buying strategic places along the coast and our marshes...and our salt marshes and so forth and of course one of the very earliest things that encouraged people to support us was the Old Cypress Swamp in Sussex County that had waters of the Pocomoke River. And I and a few others had remembered that as children when it was really a...a miniature Dismal Swamp and it had been drained by the United States Soil and Conservation people in the state of...their state their corresponding state agency and I don't mind draining just like I'm talking about balancing and you can drain something but you don't have to...if five feet...if five foot ditch would do it, why put in twenty foot deep and so anyway, we started buying lands down there too. We now own better than ten thousand acres of the Old Cypress Swamp which we reforested and hope to get water levels back and of course the...probably the biggest economic value in the future is that preservation or enhancement of the
Old Swamp is... because it is a act for recharge area for the
largest act referred I understand in the lower... for Sussex
County, central Sussex County, on down in Cape Charles of Virginia.
And a little funny thing that tickles me about that is I asked a
geologist, professional geologist, if I could say that this was a
valuable asset, and he told no, I couldn't and I said why not, and he said nothing was valuable until it has been sold. Well, I
don't want to go into the difference of philosophy there, but my
immediate reaction is well, why put anything in a safe deposit
box. But I guess it's interesting that people that look
fairly much alike or the same species think so differently.
And of course I'm sure he thinks I'm just as right... he's just as
right as I think I'm right. But anyway one thing that does
dis... no it doesn't disgust me because it's just normal, I guess,
In any field there are extreme people and I just don't happen
to like extremes of any kind because I think if anybody's
extreme, they can't see anything right. And again I come back
to the thing I'm harping on is balance. You have to have
balance and you have to know what... a little bit what the score is
before you know what balance is, and that can only come from
experience and reading and observing, mostly observing.

B: Who were some of the people who worked with you when you first
organized and how did the acquisitions happen in terms of
their order?

H: Well, the first people who encouraged me tremendously was... were
was ah, ah Nat Edmunds, Mrs. George Edmunds, who died
several years ago and whom I miss tremendously. Ah, and she
suggested that we take a... some of the women garden club ladies
on a tour of the swamp and down by the marshes along the Delaware estuary and this stirred up a lot of enthusiasm with these ladies, most of whom were friends of mine and...and Nat's. And then we had ah...oh, friends that I've been...and cousins and relatives I've been muttering about. my feelings about these things for years. We had dinner I think I mentioned earlier, and when they said well, why don't we go ahead and incorporate if you'll head it up. But the...this garden club tour... really got a lot of people talking and the first piece of land we bought was...well each of us as I recall...there was about let's see...there was at Nat Edmunds, Rod Ward, who just died last week, Bill Potter, his brother-in-law, Charlie Warner who is no longer living at and several others at formed the at... oh, well I'm sorry I can't at...they were all equally important but their names just popped out of my head since I'm talking into this silly machine. But anyway, we did incorporate and we bought our first piece of land adjoining Trist Pond, which is a cypress pond in Sussex County, a beautiful place, and is an example of a kind of natural area that I think is best protected by at remaining a private ownership of an organization such as ours. And at we...I think we each put ah up about two hundred dollars to incorporate and so forth. So anyway, this place, this at small tract I think it was eighty acres was our first purchase, and we borrowed eight thousand dollars from Philadelphia Conservationists which is another conservation, private conservation organization which I have the highest regard and it's president, Austin Jenkins, who has done a tremendous job. Ah, and ah, and we wondered how we were gonna pay that back. Well, then we had our first fund appeal and I was
overwhelmed at the response we got and as soon as that was over, we paid back Philadelphia Conservationists, and we've been doing quite well ever since. Ah, we don't take any public money, which is ah...maybe I'm a little unbalanced myself on this, but I feel the minute...if we did take federal money, we would be turning over our leadership to somebody sitting in Washington which I would abhor. Ah, as I said, people have been most generous in their support but the...as...to the extent that ah now sixteen...going on sixteen years later, we own about oh, nineteen...twenty thousand acres in Delaware and Maryland, mostly in Delaware and roughly broken down, this is about forty five hundred acres of...along the upper end of Delaware Bay...some marshes on the bay itself, about six hundred acres on the western side of Rehobeth Bay and I sometimes think this six hundred acres on the west side of Rehobeth Bay may be the only...I hope not...but may be the only fairly natural area left in...ah that isn't developed either in trailer camps or boating or something. Not I'm against any of these things, it's just that...the balance again. And...it's depressing to me a little bit. I don't want to become political but I saw...see...saw this happen in B County in Florida where Fort Lauderdale...which Fort Lauderdale is the county seat. And until about 19...well actually till about 1946...right after the war...'48, the...the guys, many of whom were friends of mine, were county commissioners...had done an excellent job running the county still...until it started to boom and it just got away from them. And again it's no reflection on the people. But they didn't have the experience to cope with this tremendous influx of people and speculators and
developers. Ah, the percentage of honorable people among them is as high as in any other group I'm sure. But the land was there for the taking and ah the first reaction always when something like this happens is, isn't it great! That's again probably human nature but...

B: Maybe that was the same thing when people were opting for the Shell Refinery and they were not looking at our land area and the fact that we had a refinery. We...and they were trying to be told that the jobs were there when they were not going to be there. Isn't that true?

H: That's true and ah come right back to that... but I see the same thing in Sussex County in Delaware. Ah, there are public hearings on the solution, methods and disposals, and they get very emotional and everything and they wouldn't arise ah...oh...and the Delaware Division of Environmental Control gets all the...the ah.. bears all the wrath of the people when you really can...the blame really, if there is a blame is because the council has approved the land for development so the Division of Environmental Control has to provide some kind of sewage disposal. And the... I'd like to see the emotions and the pressures put where they belong which is on the zoning ah board of town ah....(unclear)

B: Have you tried to, and I'm sure you have, tried to have people in Delaware see the need for the long range and moderation? Have you spoken to many civic groups?

H: Well ah, a few. But ah, the thing is again as I said earlier, people don't...including myself... ah... It's human nature I think not to do much until somebody gives you a kick in the rear end or else you suddenly realize somebody's got...somthing's
happening. And by that time all the rigmarole necessary for it to happen has been done. So you're reacting in...with your emotions rather than with thinking.

B: But don't the people...don't you feel that some of our younger people now in 1976 are having an environmental view that their parents might not have had? The parents who developed this level?

H: Yes, I think so and I...I...I-am... I know so in many of the younger people ah that I know and certainly in...in my own family. Ah, and again I think this is human nature. Emotions are a little too high. When you sit down to argue...say...with the corps of engineers and they ought to stick to their...the only thing that the corps of engineers understands, which is sensible I guess, is to be as cold blooded about these things as they are, and not get up and cry and scream unless you know what you're crying and screaming about.

B: Ah was the Don Quixote kind of building that's carrying the electric lines through our lands, the high metal ah necessary ah invasions?

H: Yeah. I remember ah oh one particular ah instance very well about high line...high power lines and ah we were trying in our innocence to get them to go underground and we were told...and I think with...with accuracy that the insulation needed for going underground had not been developed. But again it's... it's-ah...I'm sure ah the guy first invented the wheel was told it wouldn't work and even in our parents' time...I mean I'm sure they thought people were insane if they thought they'd be flying around the air and the same with automobiles and everything else
that has developed ah... ah the're many peoples... probably a vast majority of people would say it can't be done. But it usually is done. I remember one time regressing a little bit that ah two of my friends both of whom I... well, two of my best friends, one of whom was a former head of a very large company, and... and we were discussing nuclear energy and power plants and... and one of my friends and I were saying ah you know the dangers of... of long range death not... let alone pollution up to two or five thousand, ten thousand years ah should be enough to deter man from going ahead with it. And at first to one of my friends and my horror, this other friend said oh that ah they're gonna... it's gonna come, and we both said you mean you're for it and he said no, I'm not for it. I'm as strongly opposed to it as you all are. But the fact is and I'm afraid he's right, if man knows how to do something he does it.

B: This brings a good question to mind. Ah what is going... what do you foresee, and does Delaware Wildlands have any plans for acquisition where we may have that new threat to the coastal zone from the off shore drilling in the so-called Baltimore Canyon?

H: Well, first let me say that a lot of the things I'm talking about here are not really in Delaware Wildlands' field. Our field is to try and raise money to buy endangered areas or areas... natural areas or... that we think ought to be saved, and we go out and try and raise money to do it. Well, anyway, as I said, I... a lot of the things I've been talking about are really not in Delaware Wildlands' field of... of endeavor. But... and of course, as a tax-exempt non-profit organization, Delaware Wildlands
cannot actively get involved in political issues or lobbying or... unless they're asked to. Ah, but I'm... I'm also on the board of the... board of directors of National Wildlife Federation and a lot of the things I'm talking about are more in an organization like their field than Delaware Wildlands. And I'm also on the board of trustees and endowment trustees of the National Wildlife Federation so again a lot of the things I'm talking about are much broader scope than Delaware Wildlands can become involved in. But you were asking about the... with the exploration for oil off Delaware and Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York, which you know leases have just been let about fifty to seventy miles off shore. And what impact this may have on Delaware or the states involved and our coast in particular. First, there is no assurance that there's oil out there because sufficient exploration has not been done. There's indications that oil might be out there in large quantities but nobody will know until they've sunk a few wells. There may be gas out there too but may not. We don't know. Well, my position is just as Ted... has been... there are some things worth national interest that way which you would like to do or like to see emotionally and maybe selfishly, I don't know, ah. If there's anything I'm not, I'm not pompous, I don't think. At least if I am, I hope some of my friends will shoot me. And I also have much... well, I don't mean to talk about myself but I've been around and... and I learned a long time ago that it doesn't make much difference what color you are or what race you are, what language you speak, basically you all want the same things and you all dislike the same things except for the percentage that...
B: You’re ... you’re talking about elemental things...

H: Elemental things yeah... ah this doesn’t mean I love everybody of every race, creed, color any more than I love everybody that’s my own race, creed and color. But I don’t mean to get off on that subject again. I think balance ought to be thought of once in a while. But anyway, uh if I had said much to the horror some of my emotional fellow conservationists... if that’s the word, uh if there’s oil out there, let’s find out wha... it’s there because it’s much preferable than being blackmailed out of existence.

B: Or... or...

H: Yeah...

B: Ah, the Russian fleet... ah in the strategic area where the tankers go through...

H: Absolutely. So, and I’ve discussed with some political leaders in the state that ah that until we know, our only real protection for heavy on-shore development is the Coastal Zone Act. And we should not do anything, even think about altering the Coastal Zone Act, until we know what the... wha... how much oil’s out there and what’s going to be done with it. A lot of people, you mentioned the Shell ah controversy a little bit ago and I did too I think a lot of people now feel it’s just a... a maybe next week they’ll be bringing oil ashore. Well, this again is the automatic people reaction ah some people think it means the streets are gonna be paved with gold just as they did in the Shell hassle and the people from... the people who were all for Shell ah at that time, who lived in the little town in Smyrna or towns close around, would not bother to go over to... drive over to Delaware City and see that... the result of the Getty refinery coming in didn’t pave the streets
of Delaware City with gold.

B: They took the houses on the river road down in one week's time, many of them fine old houses which can never be replaced.

H: Well, let's see, where were we? Oh, about on-shore development... what's gonna happen to the shore line if oil is... and gas are found out there in really worthwhile commercial quantities? And ah I think there should be sensible planning not hiring some firm from Boston or Los Angeles to come in at some fancy rate, but just some common sense planning and thinking about zoning and what we want and what we don't want. And ah I think any... even if oil is found out there in... ah you know beyond our... beyond wildest expectations or dreams, I think if people will think and try and be aware of balance that we can control the on-shore development. And again ah there's nothing... it would be good for the state probably if it were done right. It doesn't necessarily have to be dirty and it doesn't necessarily have to mean ah an influx of people who might be working on construction and then go... ah and stay and collect unemployment for a year or two as they've done in previous large construction projects. Ah my hope is for national defense that we find oil but my... also my hope is that ah that we will control and enhance to our benefit the on-shore facilities which will be required. I'm not completely optimistic that this can be done, but if people will think about it and plan right without going all over... flying off the handle, it can be done. And I'm thinking which probably a lot of people wouldn't think is a good comparison, one of my good friends who is on the board of trustees of ah endowment trustees of the National Wildlife Refuge is... is Walter M who is president of
the Tabasco pepper people and I'm sure an awful lot of people who... if they haven't been to Avery Island where he lives and where the peppers are grown, I know how beautiful that island is. It's a... it's just a... almost a dream of a... of a tropical paradise.

B: Where is that?

H: It's just off the coast of Louisiana near New Iberia. And anyway, they discovered oil in vast quantities there and if you go and this enhances the wealth of the owners fantastically—but if you were there you would never know that there was an oil well on the place because the family insisted that the wells be covered, landscaped and everything else and all you could hear at the most occasionally on a very dead, calm night is an occasional...

B: Gush?

H: Thump, thump... But I use this as an example, it can be done.

Ah....

B: Does Delaware Wildlands now... coming back to that... your organization again... do you have new plans... do you foresee long range plans in Delaware for your... for your... needs in terms of... I don't mean your needs but the needs that the Wildlands see as important for the future of the state? New acquisitions for example.

H: Yes, I do. Ah... ah you know if you allowed yourself and if you had the funds you could get out of balance on this too. You could have too much open space for normal growth and control growth hopefully. You see what I mean? So there's balance on both sides. I mean... I think I was saying earlier that I know I was saying earlier that some lands of ours ideally should always remain
privately owned to protect their natural values and the I hate this phrase too but a sort of living museums and it's very difficult for a publicly owned property such as that to resist the pressures of people where as if you had too many trails and so forth ah ah you would destroy the very...actively destroy the very things you want to preserve. So, it would no longer be a unique natural area. But in Delaware's Wildlands properties as they are now, there are several properties which we probably wouldn't have bought unless we felt...or that they were being considered by the state as ah ah parks or wildlife areas. Ah and these we would gladly turn over to the state at fair value in order to go on with other acquisitions. And for the next several years anyway we're pretty flat on funds because of the large purchase of the... last March of the six-thousand-acre tract which is the northern end of our ten to eleven thousand acres in Old Swamp...Cypress Swamp. Ah but if we continued growing and when we get that paid off there are other areas which we should acquire or the state should acquire or the federal government should add on to Bombay Hook Refuge or to ah the Bombay Hook Refuge in Sussex County. All in all which I sort of...I think if you really look at it our estuary is pretty well protected when you look at the...where our properties are where the State Fish and Wildlife divisions...properties are and where the federal refuges are, there are not many places that ah ah are open to heavy industrial development with the exception of a few such as the and some areas around perhaps. Ah and this is why I feel as I mentioned earlier and why I think most responsible people will agree
me that if with the pressures perhaps com...if oil is discovered that we really ought to...we would be foolish to let down the board and relax the Coastal Zone Act until we have other protections. Or until we see what's coming. I think the so called anti-industry image which seems to touch such a sensitive nerve in...large companies is mainly...it's just like if you're at your first dance and your first partner told you you had bad breath. I mean it's...it's nobody likes to be said they're not welcome...told they're not welcome. And I think they're overly sensitive to that. I do think we're in pretty good shape now. But again in a hundred years from now if somebody hears these supposed words of wisdom they may not be apropos to the time.

B: But moderation won't have gone out of style probably.

H: It may be pretty well out numbered. I hope not. But I hope you're right that there are signs of moderation. One of the things which I wish they would teach in the schools...well, well don't get me going on schools because I would like to know what they're teaching anyway and I would like to see the teachers get a big raise, but somebody asked well, are you entitled by your teaching ability for this raise? But it's surprising to me how very few people who are concerned about things know the...anything but the vaguest have anything but the vaguest conception of how their own legislature works and how much influence they can have on the legislature without picketing or without screaming...

B: Especially in our state

H: Absolutely. Some people don't even know where our legislature meets and they incline to beg all politicians are beetle or dumb
or stupid. They're not. Most of them, the vast majority of them, are trying to do a very good...good...best job they're capable of doing.

B: And working with all kinds of renumerations.

H: Absolutely. This doesn't mean I give a blanket vote of confidence in every legislator in the country, but a majority of them, just like I'm convinced that the majority of people in the world, are people of good will. But they're...many...many people have too good manners to ever make the headlines and... I think in closing, I'd like to go back to what I think should be everybody of good will's goal, and that is balance, whether it be in balance between development and open space and natural areas or whether it's in politics or religion or practically ever...anything that man gets involved in. He may not be able to obtain balance, but it ought to be a very important part of his thinking. And that unless you can get close to balance, one side or the other is going to be out of balance and all you have to do about...do is think about a bicycle that's out of balance and you're not going to get very far in anything worthwhile unless you can ride a bicycle.