

Full transcript of Terry Lavender interview (slightly edited for easier reading).

Speaker 1 -- Terry Lavender

Speaker 2 – Gary Smith, interviewer

Speaker 3 – Nils Cowan, videographer

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

My name is Terry Lavender and I live about three miles downstream. I don't actually live on the Creek, but I'm about 500 feet from it. So what I do on my property drains to the Creek. So I have impact.

Speaker 2 ([00:16](#)):

How and why did you get involved in community efforts to protect and restore the Creek?

Speaker 1 ([00:22](#)):

I guess it probably goes back to me being a child of the Sixties and early Seventies, and we thought we could save the world and that by the time I was in my thirties, that became something way too big to even imagine. So you start looking for something at a scale you can really have an impact on. And the, the Creek near my backyard became a focus, and over the years it, and then other creeks in King County have held my focus for 35 years and it's a way to engage people because it's very local, something they can understand for the most part.

Speaker 2 ([01:07](#)):

Was there a group that you were involved with in the community?

Speaker 1 ([01:10](#)):

There's a group, Water Tenders. I wasn't a founder. There were some really interesting, brilliant women with a lot of vision who did that, but I was a long-time leader and, worker bee in that group. And it has a very positive reputation and I think has had big impact in this community and countywide in changing how we look at creeks and see them and interact with them

Speaker 2 ([01:44](#)):

Among those women was a one of them president at some point.

Speaker 1 ([01:49](#)):

Yes, Shirley here who owns this property and her family has owned it for over a hundred years. She was president of Water Tenders at one point.

Speaker 2 ([01:59](#)):

And what is the importance of this lake and the surrounding area? The open space in the area.

Speaker 1 ([02:06](#)):

Okay. Well, Bear Creek has no mountains, no snow melt. It is unlike many of the systems in King County, it's entirely groundwater dependent. And so these big forested areas and wetlands in the headwaters are critical to the health of the system. And when I was working with the waterway science panel, which was professors from University of Washington and salmon biologists, and what not, and we were

looking at, what do you focus on to save a system? Basically they came to the conclusion you save these headwater wetland and forested areas, or don't bother.

Speaker 2 ([02:49](#)):

Do you see a difference in the efforts needed in this area, in the upper area of Bear Creek, as opposed to down by the Sammamish River?

Speaker 1 ([02:57](#)):

Yes, they're very different. This area was and is in pretty good shape and largely undeveloped still, and a lot of intact forest and wetlands. And so it was very clear that the effort in the upper basin, upper watershed was to be acquisition for preservation to keep what was already working still good and still working. And so that's been the primary focus. There's been some restoration, some replanting, dealing with noxious weeds, that kind of thing. But for the most part, this system was treated differently than the lower system, which was pretty well trashed. And so that focus has been on acquisition, restoration, rehabilitation. The lower part going through Redmond was just basically a channel with a steep gradient and rip-rapped banks. And there's been tremendous effort put into making that part of the system more functional.

Speaker 2 ([04:07](#)):

And that brings in the salmon starting down in that area. Do you see a hope for a sustainable run of salmon up in Bear Creek here?

Speaker 1 ([04:17](#)):

I have hope that we will have a healthy system that can sustain salmon. The variables are, a lot of them, out of our control with climate change, ocean conditions, the (Ballard) Locks, the Sammamish River, the choices we as people make. But I do have hope that we can keep a place that would be healthy for salmon. And I think we kind of need to look at it a little differently, with more scale, more things other than just salmon. So as green infrastructure, this ribbon of trees that are becoming old growth through our community and places where kids can go and explore and discover things and, you know, freshwater, mussels, birds, lots of other things, but, but I do have hope for the fish. I think we can't get stuck in the idea that we're going to take this part of the Creek and we're going to fix it and we're done, and the fish are going to be there then because habitat is, is never static and it's never just a place it's, It's totally dependent on diversity and change and time.

Speaker 1 ([05:40](#)):

So for example, salmon need gravels to spawn in, and those gravels need to keep washing downstream. And that means the stream has to be free enough to move and access gravel from its banks. And so I think we have to look at it differently than we have. It's not a static system at all.

Speaker 2 ([06:00](#)):

Going back to those women and others that started community efforts up here. Do you think that citizens now can sustain the involvement needed to support these efforts?

Speaker 1 ([06:13](#)):

I don't have as good of an answer about people. I think it's always been a small number of people who have put in the effort, held the vision, provided the leadership. And then people seem to be willing to come out to fight something like a development or something they don't want in their neighborhood, or to come out and plant trees or pull weeds for a day and feel good about what they did. But, it's difficult for people to sustain that kind of work over time. And there just aren't that many people who do it. So I think we need to look more at actions and changes in our culture. Like the idea that you wouldn't have a lawn down to the Creek anymore. And you would take pride in your streamside vegetation and the large wood you let fall in. You know, I remember going to a "Meet the Salmon" event and having some guy come up and tell me that a tree fell in his Creek and he left it there, and that was great. So just a change in our culture of how we see these things and live with them.

Speaker 2 ([07:33](#)):

And so taking all that into account, what's your picture Bear Creek's ideal future?

Speaker 1 ([07:41](#)):

Well, as I said before, this ribbon of green infrastructure that goes through our community, some of these forests are going to start approaching old growth. I mean, not in my lifetime, but certainly in my kids and my grandkids time. This'll be an old growth forest and, and it'll be a place for a lot of different critters and a place for salmon if they're still here or a place for them to return to. And I think we all need to start looking at what it takes to have a healthy system and recognize that it's the same stuff that it takes to have a healthy community and healthy people. And so, I have hope and I like the vision.

Speaker 2 ([08:33](#)):

Let me put in one last question and maybe there was, uh, what do you see as the role of government, including county and city for this kind of effort?

Speaker 1 ([08:41](#)):

Government is who I've worked best with. Everybody has their role. And I think government has been, with some nudging initially, but government is now the driver for most of this. And the funds come from our tax supported dollars, and people continue to support that. I mean, if you think about the money that goes into acquisition, that's a funding source that was approved back in the 1970s, under a Republican governor, Dan Evans, with a vision that, that we needed a fund, a way to preserve these beautiful green places. And so, I lost my train of thought,

Speaker 2 ([09:25](#)):

Well apart from Dan Evans, are there other people say one county person that you've worked with, or maybe local?

Speaker 1 ([09:33](#)):

Yes, lots. So I started out, I saw a little notice in the Woodinville Weekly that said there was a Bear Creek basin plan committee being formed. And I applied and Ray Heller, who was the project manager for that selected me to be on that committee. And I learned so much, and that was sort of what leapfrogged me into this role. And Ray and I worked together for a long time. I've worked with other basin stewards, the King County Conservation Futures program, Ingrid Lundin, and all of them. There's been so many community people I've worked with. Shirley here is a good example, and this property, and then Dick

Schaetzel is a good example of a streamside property owner. He's got five acres and he's left most of it natural, and he protects the stream and he gets a little incentive on his taxes for doing so. And he's been out being an advocate for other people doing the same thing. So, sorry, I got distracted by a dragon fly. So yeah, there's been a lot of good people. And government has been an extremely positive partner. City of Redmond has stepped up and done amazing things. I think they own almost the entire stream corridor through the city and are putting significant efforts into restoration and rehabilitation in partnership with King County many times.

Speaker 3 ([11:11](#)):

Do you want to talk at all about the story with which we may introduce this segment just to provide that little kind of, so let's see,

Speaker 2 ([11:22](#)):

I don't know if you want to get into the story where you met this fellow. The fella, the owner of that property?

Speaker 1 ([11:28](#)):

No, I don't want to tell that story

Speaker 3 ([11:31](#)):

Not that story, but . . .

Speaker 1 ([11:33](#)):

Well, okay. So let me try this. In 1991, I was still working on the basin plan process, and I got a notice in my mailbox that a wetland and part of the stream corridor near my house was being auctioned off by the federal government. And so after a lot of exploring and asking questions and engaging a lot of people from state (Department of) Fish and Wildlife,, and Ray Heller and others, we decided to see if we could impact that sale. And there was no concept of public ownership of streams and wetlands at that point. It wasn't a commonly held idea. And for me, the idea that it was already in public ownership and seeing what "reasonable use exemptions" and other things did to pieces of property, it was really important to me to keep it in public ownership. And so we worked and we got the sale stopped and eventually the federal Marshall donated it to King County.

Speaker 1 ([12:37](#)):

It was a piece of property that had been used as a down payment in a drug deal. So it's affectionately known as the "Drug Wetland," and it has been a catalyst. That was 1991 and there were big press conferences, and it was such an unusual thing. And it was a 2.2 acre wetland. And King County has continued to add to it, just added another piece a couple of weeks ago. It's now a 20 acre preserve. And my neighbor who helped with that, Juanita Verschuyl, she actually left her property to King County in her will. And she passed away recently. And that became part of this big, protected wetland area.

Speaker 3 ([13:21](#)):

Nice story. That's beautiful. That'll dovetail wonderfully. Just two things for me. First, when we first asked, where I think Gary asked where you were, your love for natural spaces or something like that. And you said, I think it comes from if we could just start that with, you know, your involvement in,

however you want to say it. We just want those words versus just, just a, yeah. Maybe take that answer again, but just say, you know, my involvement in wetland preservation out here started, just to help me in the edit if we just defined question was how and why did you get involved in community efforts? Yeah. Yeah. Maybe just take another take on that same question.

Speaker 1 ([14:13](#)):

I could answer it differently and see,

Speaker 3 ([14:16](#)):

It was just the way you started. I think it began with, and we don't know what it is cause we won't hear my voice is off my involvement.

Speaker 1 ([14:26](#)):

So you just want me to start with that sentence?

Speaker 3 ([14:29](#)):

Maybe finish the thought, just so we have another option. Okay. Yeah. Okay. And talk to Gary. Hi, you're on your own.

Speaker 1 ([14:40](#)):

I started out, you know, I was a child of the Sixties and Seventies and we were going to save the world. And that's a pretty big thing. So scaling that to my backyard, my interest in wetlands and streams came from thinking about how, what I do on my property has an impact off my property. And I lost it there.

Speaker 3 ([15:05](#)):

The phone came in right after the party. We got what we need to shut this thing down. And then, yeah, my question would be just about, you know, say I'm somebody from a totally different area of the world. You know, maybe I've learned a lot about wetlands. I mean, what can one creek one stream, you know, success story in this place we call home? What, what can that mean for, for others? It can be, you know, the additional benefit beyond, you know, the fish and nature of the story of this place. What can it do to get

Speaker 1 ([15:42](#)):

The fact that we have these headwater wetlands and forested areas impacts the city of Redmond. They don't have to do as much flood control, and you can watch these wetlands fill up when we have big storm events. And only a couple of times in the 44 years I've lived out here is that actually gone over into the city of Redmond. So it's an important sponge, no matter where you are. And, and I lost it.

Speaker 3 ([16:10](#)):

It's perfect. And then my last question is just be, you know, if these efforts can continue and, and multiply and, and hopefully people take on the responsibility more, what, what is the potential for, for this corridor, whether you reference to salmon or not? I mean, however you want to answer it, but if you want salmon in there. . .

Speaker 2 ([16:40](#)):

I'm a salmon guy, but you're the salmon lady. I'm not going to say anything more about that.

Speaker 1 ([16:45](#)):

As far as the future for Bear Creek and this community, I see this as green infrastructure going forward, big trees, big ribbons of green going through our community, hopefully salmon coming up and utilizing the stream. And people loving it, celebrating every fall when the fish come. I grew up as a kid and we went down and played in the neighborhood streams. I want kids going forward to have that same opportunity. And so I don't think of this as an add-on, I think of it as an essential piece, an essential part of our community.

Speaker 3 ([17:44](#)):

No, no, it's great. Yeah. Can come right out at community really well with what John Marchione said too. Yeah. Anything else, Gary? Is there anything else that you wanted to say that you thought about?

Speaker 1 ([17:55](#)):

And didn't go back? No, I don't think so.

Speaker 3 ([17:58](#)):

I think you nailed it. The last thing you want to do is do.