

Full transcript of John Marchione interview (slightly edited for easier reading).

Speaker 1 -- Gary Smith, interviewer

Speaker 2 -- John Marchione

Speaker 3 -- Nils Cowan, videographer

Speaker 1 ([00:01](#)):

For the record, John, please give me your name and your connection to this location, starting with your former position in Redmond and then describing the spot where at right now.

Speaker 2 ([00:10](#)):

My name is John Marchione. I was Redmond's mayor for 12 years from 2008 to 2019. I grew up in Redmond. I've canoed or rafted or whatever form down the Sammamish River a number of times as a kid. In my memory of this particular spot where Bear Creek merges into Sammamish River, Bear Creek was up 10 - 12 feet. And it was kind of like a little waterfall. It was a waterfall into Sammamish River. And then to the east of us was the old Redmond golf course, which paralleled Bear Creek back before it curves north.

Speaker 1 ([00:56](#)):

So those childhood memories, that must give you a personal connection to this spot. Did you actually swim or get in the creek here?

Speaker 2 ([01:05](#)):

No. Well, never Sammamish River. We always floated on it. Bear Creek, I didn't get in at this point; I would get in ankle deep up north by Evans Creek and splash around.

Speaker 1 ([01:19](#)):

When I interviewed you for the oral history project last time, you referred to this lower Bear Creek restoration as an audacious project. Who do you credit with taking that lead on this spot and landing the restoration?

Speaker 2 ([01:33](#)):

Well, anything audacious takes a team. And so Jon Spangler and Roger Dane, Tom Hardy, they're the ones who conceptually came up with this. And then the second part was getting the funding. And pulling 10 - \$12 million out of the state to do this project was even more audacious than the concept itself.

Speaker 1 ([02:00](#)):

So it's been seven years since this lower Bear Creek project was finished. What results can you point to with reference to lower Bear Creek?

Speaker 2 ([02:08](#)):

Oh, well, there is more water storage, and it was designed that way. And so we don't have a lot of urban flooding in Redmond and that storage has helped. But you also see wildlife. You see there are salmon in the creek. I've had actually a handful of people in the last few days tell me about seeing salmon here.

There's a beaver dam to the east of us, which is nature doing its work, the engineers of nature. But I've also seen even more birds -- hawks, eagles flying around.

Speaker 1 ([02:49](#)):

You mentioned Roger Dane who worked on the project. In his interview for this, for this oral history he called the completion of lower Bear Creek rehabilitation and the Keller Farm mitigation the two biggest and highest priority of all city restoration projects. What's your opinion?

Speaker 2 ([03:07](#)):

I agree. I mean, I agree that this is one of the most important restoration projects in terms of river, water, and salmon habitat, whatever. Redmond's original name was Salmonberg, and the story goes that there were so many salmon in Bear Creek you could walk across Bear Creek on top of the salmon. Restoring Bear Creek is just such a key piece and, and this restoration project is so important to bringing back the salmon to the upper Bear Creek. It is more than significant -- I wish I could come up with the word -- stupendously important in achieving that.

Speaker 1 ([03:52](#)):

How about the Keller Farm project?

Speaker 2 ([03:54](#)):

The Keller Farm project again creates a storage of water. And so it allows the salmon to come upstream. It also prevents urban flooding. And the habitat for the salmon to spawn is important. Cause we re-did the bottom of this [creek]. We put in the pebbles and the woody debris and so forth so the salmon have a less stressful trip getting up there. And the wetlands, the Keller farm wetlands is an important piece to keep.

Speaker 1 ([04:31](#)):

Given that, up against the urban development that continues in Redmond, do you think it's really possible to save a salmon bearing creek that flows right through the heart of downtown?

Speaker 2 ([04:41](#)):

I definitely think so. I wouldn't waste their money if I didn't think it was possible. I think besides restoring -- the audaciousness of restoring -- lower Bear Creek, we've worked our way up where we are moving industrial away from the river. We are creating a clean river all the way north, as far as we can. And we're working with King County and others to extend the reach.

Speaker 3 ([05:07](#)):

Can we start just at the beginning of that? I definitely think it's possible. You said, I think it's possible. Just say, I think it's possible to restore salmon to this creek.

Speaker 2 ([05:15](#)):

I think it's possible to restore salmon to this creek. This is a great investment and is turning out to be successful already. And we're going to continue with that by cleaning up spots as we go north along Bear Creek.

Speaker 1 ([05:32](#)):

Beautiful, and then thinking back again, John, to earlier years, when you were a college intern, I think you can name the university. You worked at King County some 35 years ago. What lessons do you learn, did you learn there that might've helped you in your job as mayor?

Speaker 2 ([05:50](#)):

I was in grad school at the University of Washington, getting my master's in public administration. I was doing internship for King County Public Works and I was assigned to surface water management, and one of their divisions was creek and river restoration. And so I learned about the mechanics, if you will, of what that means. I didn't realize how important woody debris was. I didn't understand the meandering. You know, in engineering school, they draw straight lines. Well, in nature, those straight lines are not helpful to the habitat that live here.

Speaker 3 ([06:27](#)):

Very good, John. Can you wrap up on your own?

Speaker 2 ([06:31](#)):

Not that I can think of. If you've got a question, I'll answer it

Speaker 3 ([06:34](#)):

I have a couple. Just, how does it feel to you to, to see this restoration kind of happening, knowing you have this personal connection? Just, what's your feeling when you come here and see that as a beginning?

Speaker 2 ([06:49](#)):

I'm excited to come here, and I try to come down here once or twice a year. This is an evolving, growing project to put something into motion that nature takes over and manages. So seven years might've been the end of the contract, but through the work that nature has done, and we've fixed on the edges -- it just brings life to the city, to the river, to the whole basin. And so it's an ongoing legacy that will keep growing.

Speaker 3 ([07:24](#)):

Yeah. In terms of why are you excited about, about the future here, this spot and sort of what it means for the larger area, the greater watershed.

Speaker 2 ([07:35](#)):

The excitement . . . The beauty of this project is that it contributes to the overall habitat and livability of Redmond and the community. We have to be sustainable in all areas. And if nature is not working with human growth, then we're going to have even bigger conflicts down the line. Restoring this and having our residents understand the connection is a thrilling thing to see. And it's the delight in a child's eyes when they realize what this is. It's just very rewarding to me.