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Berkeley, California

Malcolm Sproul

Malcolm Sproul: Twenty-Nine Years of Land Conservation

Save Mount Diablo Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Amanda Tewes
in 2021

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Malcolm Sproul at BioBlitz, 2007. Photo by Scott Hein.

Abstract

Malcolm Sproul is a biologist specializing in natural resources management and environmental planning; and a longtime supporter of Save Mount Diablo (SMD), serving as board president from 1998 to 2012 and 2019 to 2020. Sproul was born in Berkeley, California, in 1951. He earned a BA and MLS in environmental planning from the University of California, Berkeley. Sproul joined the SMD board in 1993 and continues to be an important part of the organization's leadership. In this interview, Sproul discusses growing up in El Cerrito, California, including exploring the local natural environment and visiting the family cabin at Echo Lake; meeting and marrying his wife, Casey Sproul; his family background, including his grandfather, Robert Gordon Sproul, who was President of the University of California system; studying environmental planning at UC Berkeley, including fieldwork on Mount Diablo; his work history, including joining LSA Associates in 1979; the history of California's environmental regulations; his early interactions with SMD; joining SMD, including volunteers like Bob Doyle and Susan Watson, leadership, cofounder Mary Bowerman, longtime staff member Seth Adams, land acquisitions and stewardship, fundraising like the Forever Wild Capital Campaign and Moonlight on the Mountain, education and outreach, events like BioBlitz and Four Day Diablo, relationships with political leaders, and SMD's expanded mission; his personal leadership in SMD, including challenges and achievements; development in the Bay Area; and reflections on his personal contributions to SMD.

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Project History

By the early 1970s, the Bay Area was in the midst of great social and cultural change. With plans for the extension of BART into the East Bay, and suburban sprawl threatening Mount Diablo and other open spaces, Save Mount Diablo (SMD) answered a call to action. SMD was founded by Dr. Mary Bowerman and Arthur Bonwell in 1971. It became a nationally accredited land trust based in the San Francisco Bay Area comprised of biologists, conservationists, hikers, cyclists, equestrians, bird watchers, artists, and people who just loved to look at and enjoy the mountain. SMD has been preserving lands on and around Mount Diablo and educating the public to the mountain's natural values since its founding. However, the organization's focus on educational programs and protecting Mount Diablo's connection to its sustaining Diablo Range has grown substantially over the last few years due in part to new leadership and the growing severity of the climate crisis. As an organization, Save Mount Diablo is both an exceptional example of local land conservation efforts, as well as representative of national and international environmental activism that extends beyond the Bay Area. This oral history project began in 2021 as SMD approached its fiftieth anniversary. Most of the interviews were conducted remotely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Interview 1: July 22, 2021

01-00:00:00
Tewes: This is an interview with Malcolm Sproul for the Save Mount Diablo Oral History Project, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on July 22, 2021 in Moraga, California. So thank you so much for joining me today, Malcolm. I appreciate it.

01-00:00:21
Sproul: I'm happy to be here. Happy to do it!

01-00:00:23
Tewes: Let's start at the very beginning.

01-00:00:23
Sproul: Okay.

01-00:00:25
Tewes: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

01-00:00:26
Sproul: I was born February 2, 1951 at Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley.

01-00:00:35
Tewes: And where did you grow up?

01-00:00:35
Sproul: El Cerrito, [California]. My parents, from the hospital, they took me to El Cerrito, and I lived in El Cerrito until college.

01-00:00:46
Tewes: Can you tell me what it was like growing up in El Cerrito?

01-00:00:48
Sproul: A lot of El Cerrito had already been built up, but where we were, it was an area that had some very large homes built early on, like the twenties and thirties, and then more recent subdivisions right after World War II. So we were in an area that was more recently being developed, so there was still vacant land, still a lot of areas to go explore, but developing.

01-00:01:17
Tewes: And where would you go exploring? What would you do?

01-00:01:19
Sproul: Just down below our house was an area that's now called Hillside Park, that the City purchased. But I suspect it was in private ownership at the time that I was a kid and would go hiking down there. The other easily accessible place was Wildcat Canyon, and we'd go up through what was called—or is called—Camp Herms Boy Scout Camp, or down Rifle Range Rd. into the canyon and frequently go up into Tilden [Regional] Park that way. What's now Wildcat

Canyon Regional Park was private property at the time, but [has] now [been] purchased by the [East Bay Regional] Park District. And then we would go through that property and up into Tilden to the nature area.

01-00:02:01
Tewes: And I believe you were in the Boy Scouts?

01-00:02:01
Sproul: I was, yeah.

01-00:02:03
Tewes: And were you accessing these areas through that?

01-00:02:07
Sproul: No, it was just—you know, when we were kids, you went out the door and nobody watched you and you got to go. And so frequently it was just we were on our own, could take off. We also, as Boy Scouts, did things at Camp Herm, but that was part of the organized Boy Scout effort.

01-00:02:30
Tewes: Was there anyone in your life who modeled this love of nature and wildlife?

01-00:02:38
Sproul: A guy named Woodrow W. Middlekauff. Well actually, and my grandfather. We'll touch on him. Woody Middlekauff was a professor of entomology at Cal and was a family friend, and stayed in a cabin two cabins from ours at Echo Lake. It was owned by a guy named Stanley Freeborn, Freeborn Hall, so there's a lot of connections here. [laughs] Stanley Freeborn was a naval officer, and he—well, I'll take that back. His son's a naval officer. Stanley Freeborn was a professor of entomology at [UC] Davis, and he knew Woody and had him stay at his cabin during the summer when he couldn't use it, so he had somebody there. I grew up seeing Woody virtually every summer, and he loved to fish, he loved to—he was just very patient with a kid like me who was interested in the natural world. He also had friends come up, like [A.] Starker Leopold, son of Aldo Leopold, a professor of wildlife at Cal; Ward [C.] Russell, who was I think the curator of mammalogy in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. And so he had all these friends that would come up, and they would do things. Ward Russell was a collector, and so he's out shooting and trapping. I mean, for a little kid, it was fascinating, who was interested in these things.

01-00:04:08
Tewes: Well, I think that's a good transition, thinking about the cabin at Echo Lake. Can you tell me about that spot and what it meant to your family?

01-00:04:16
Sproul: My grandparents built a cabin at Echo Lake in about [1927]. I think that was the first year that they actually started building, and they knew a guy named Frank Kleeberger. And probably before your time, Amanda, there was Kleeberger Field [at the University of California, Berkeley], and it's now

Maxwell Field, the one right down below Bowles Hall. And it was called Kleeberger, named after Frank Kleeberger, and he [was] a professor at that time of what was called recreation—would now be physical education. He had a camp at Echo Lake that he started in the early twenties, and it was called—there was Talking Mountain for boys and Laughing Water for girls. Anyway, he ran it in the summer, and he heard that the [United States] Forest Service was going to be letting leases for cabin sites, because they were trying to encourage people to use the national forest. And he told all his friends, my grandfather being one of them, and said, "You've got to come up here and look at this!" And he did, and they took a lease out and built a cabin, and so that's how we got started there.

01-00:05:21

I have been going to the cabin every year, every summer since I was a kid—I mean, literally six months old. And when I was young, we'd spend a month there. When I got older in high school and things and worked, I couldn't spend as much time. Now, we still use the cabin, but there's a lot of family members competing for it, but I'll try to use it two or three weeks a summer.

01-00:05:46
Tewes: I love that continuity.

01-00:05:48
Sproul: Yeah—

01-00:05:50
Tewes: Well, tell me a little bit—oh, go ahead.

01-00:05:51
Sproul: My grandchildren are up there right now.

01-00:05:54
Tewes: You've traded off this week.

01-00:05:55
Sproul: Yeah.

01-00:05:57
Tewes: Tell me a little bit more about your family.

01-00:06:00
Sproul: Married my wife, Casey [Sproul]—we've known each other forever, since first grade, both grew up in El Cerrito. We've been married for, what, forty-seven years now. Three sons—they've all grown up here. First we lived in Berkeley, and then we moved here when we outgrew our house. And now we have eight grandchildren: six boys and two girls. [Another girl is on the way.]

01-00:06:30
Tewes: Quite a large—

01-00:06:33
Sproul: So it's a family, yeah. [laughs]

01-00:06:37
Tewes: And can you tell me a little bit more about your parents and grandparents?

01-00:06:41
Sproul: Well, do you want all my grandparents or the University grandparents?

01-00:06:48
Tewes: Go ahead and tell—let's give everybody an equal chance.

01-00:06:48
Sproul: Okay, everybody a chance. So I'll start with my mom. My mom's parents, Joseph and Leila [Ogilvie] Hauck. Grandpa Hauck grew up in New York and moved to California—no, he went to the University of Nevada for college, and that's where he met my grandmother, who grew up in Nevada, Elko, Nevada. [The Ogilvies] were members of a Scottish family that had come to Utah as Mormon converts and became very dissatisfied/disaffected—whatever the right word is—with what was going on in the Mormon Church, things like the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and thought that they weren't being true to what the real mission was. They were, in a sense, forced out of Utah and settled in Elko, Nevada. So they went from Scotland to Utah, and then down to Elko, Nevada. So that was my Grandmother Hauck, and so that's—my grandfather met her at the University of Nevada, and then they moved to San Francisco, and very early on bought a house out in the Sea Cliff Neighborhood of San Francisco and lived there right up until they died—literally. They bought the house, I hesitate to say, but late teens, early twenties, so it was a long time ago. So we saw all of our grandparents frequently. In fact, my Grandpa Hauck would come over every Saturday when we were kids to our house, so we got to see him every Saturday.

01-00:08:26
Grandma [Ida Amelia Wittschen Sproul] and Grandpa [Robert Gordon] Sproul—Grandpa was born in San Francisco, Scottish immigrant parents. When he was very young, his mother took him back to Scotland—felt something was wrong here in San Francisco. And then things didn't work out in Scotland, so they came back to San Francisco several years later. My grandmother was born in New York, German immigrant parents, and settled in Oakland. And so a signal event in their lives was the great earthquake [of 1906], where my grandfather and his brother were out delivering newspapers that morning, and my grandmother lived down about Fifth St. in Oakland and watched San Francisco burn—literally. You can't imagine what it would have been like then to see San Francisco burn from across the Bay. But my grandfather went to Cal [University of California, Berkeley]; My grandmother never graduated from college. He met her in the City of Oakland's—damn, I should—I could pull out her [oral] history and give you more facts. But she was working in the cashier's office at the City of Oakland, and he had been hired right out of Cal to be a civil engineer in their Public Works Department,

and he met her there. Didn't like that [job], found he didn't like it, got offered a job at Cal. Two years later, went to work for the University and worked his way up to the position of President [of the University of California system].

01-00:10:02
Tewes: Yeah, quite a story. And we should say that the Oral History Center has several oral histories about those sets of grandparents.

01-00:10:10
Sproul: Yes.

01-00:10:13
Tewes: Well, this is certainly a big name to grow up with in the Bay Area, but I'm wondering what you learned from your family in terms of public service.

01-00:10:26
Sproul: Particularly on the Sproul side—my mom's parents weren't really public-service oriented. But being at Cal, being in his position, my grandfather—it was just, I don't know if it was expected, but certainly something he did a great deal of. And he was involved in things like the establishment of the East Bay Regional Park District. He was one of the primary—probably one of the most visible proponents, because of his position. He was a member of the Save the Redwoods League Board of Directors. I don't know if he was an actual director of the Sierra Club, but I know he's an honorary vice president, so he did things with the Sierra Club, and he always had an interest in conservation, natural lands. He was involved with that, and then just—you'd have to go read his oral history. You'll see all of the public service things that he did. So that was my grandfather. And my parents picked it up, particularly my dad. He served on a state constitution revision committee, he was on the Hastings Law School Board of Directors, he worked with the City of El Cerrito when they rewrote their by-laws or whatever you want to call what the city is governed by. I saw that, also, my dad participating in that.

01-00:12:02
Tewes: Was that an inspiration for you at that point?

01-00:12:05
Sproul: I don't know about an inspiration. I'm not sure that's the right word. But is it something that you see that people you know and think highly of do, and it's something that is beneficial? Then yeah, it became something that—not expected, but something that you were aware of. And when an opportunity came, you gave it serious thought. I mean, a lot of people just don't do any public service. So we'll stop the camera right here. [telephone rings]

01-00:12:35
Tewes: Sure, let's pause. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break. We just spoke about this tradition of public service in your own family, and I'd like to transition us into thinking about your education. You yourself went to Berkeley.

01-00:12:51
Sproul: Yeah.

01-00:12:52
Tewes: Can you tell me about that decision?

01-00:12:53
Sproul: Well, it was the only place I wanted to go. I applied to one school, and that was Cal. And so it wasn't like I was looking around to go somewhere. I was going to go to Cal; that was the deal. I mean, I knew the University, the people that—many people I knew and admired, whether it was Woody Middlekauff or his friends, or my grandfather and things that we knew from him, it just seemed like it was a really good place to go. My dad went there; my aunt went there; my mom went there; my uncle went there, my aunt's husband. So all these people I knew went to Cal, and it seemed—and everybody liked it, so it seemed like the right thing to do.

01-00:13:44
Tewes: Did you know what you wanted to study at that point?

01-00:13:45
Sproul: Not when I was a freshman. Freshman year was tough. You know, you come out of high school and you get grades, and it's easy and you don't have to—well, I shouldn't say you don't have to work hard, but it was nothing like freshman year at Cal. And that was a real eye-opener of how hard you had to work to learn to think differently, I think. A lot of it in high school is memorization. [In college there's] a lot more critical thinking, a lot more intensity in terms of how much time you have to put in, how you take notes—even just how you take notes, to learn how to do that so you get something out of it. You know, I remember one of the first courses I took, I didn't take notes; I just never did that. So what a shock to find that they're necessary! So freshman year was tough.

01-00:14:39
When I was a sophomore, I decided that what I was interested in doing was working in a field that was associated with wildlife and land use. I didn't want to be a straight wildlife biologist. My passion is wildlife and the natural world in general, but I was seeing a lot of changes in the Bay Area, a lot of development, a lot of things being lost. And if you are just a wildlife biologist, you have essentially no role in those decisions and what happens. But if you get involved in land-use planning, you do have the opportunity to affect the types of uses in places and try to protect resources. So if you have some background in the resources and can combine that with the planning, you can be that much more effective.

01-00:15:36
Tewes: I'm really curious about environmental planning in the late sixties, early seventies. What was the state of the field at that time?

01-00:15:42

Sproul: Well, it was brand new practically. I applied to the Landscape Architecture Department, because they were advertising this as being a new area of study. So it wasn't established. They were hiring faculty, guys like Joe [R.] McBride and [Robert H.] "Bob" Twiss. I could bring out the landscape architecture seventy-five-year history and give you more information on that. [Tewes laughs] But they were hiring younger faculty who were interested in the subject. Oh, and Luna [Bergere] Leopold even, Starker Leopold's brother, another son of Aldo Leopold, who was a hydrologist. So they were branching out to other departments: forestry, geography. I don't know where Luna would have been, probably in geology or geography. But [they were] branching out and bringing in other faculty members to develop this Environmental Planning Program, and it seemed great.

01-00:16:42

It was at a time [at the University] when, after the early sixties, when you had the opportunity to tailor your major. It wasn't as structured as it had been before, where you *had* to take certain courses, a large number of certain courses. The Department, and I think all departments, did have requirements, but they had loosened them up and allowed much greater freedom. So for my work, which, both in undergraduate, which was at that point—as an undergraduate they didn't have a defined environmental planning emphasis; at the graduate level they did—you had the opportunity to go out and take courses in all these other departments, whether it was geography; geology, soils; wildlife biology and management, forestry. So what I did is sought them out and built my background that way.

01-00:17:37

Tewes: I'm particularly curious about an architectural studio course you took on Contra Costa County and how that connects with Mount Diablo.

01-00:17:46

Sproul: It was a landscape architecture studio, and the idea was to look at a region from a regional perspective and see if we could look at it, and how it was developing, and are there different ways of doing it? It was central Contra Costa County primarily, included Mount Diablo, Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill, Concord, Clayton, Danville, Alamo, and those areas. In fact, San Ramon—I think probably all the way down to the county line. And the idea was to develop this base of information about the resources and land uses there. And you had people who were interested in recreation, people who were interested in the development pattern, people who were interested in the planted/the developed ornamental landscape. I just jumped on the wildlife and vegetation section and grabbed it, and spent some time on Mount Diablo then, and got the opportunity to go out and look at places now that, frankly, there's just thousands and thousands of homes on. So [I got to] see what they looked like prior to the big development rush down the San Ramon Valley out to the east and the Dougherty Valley and some parts of Concord and Walnut Creek.

01-00:19:17
Tewes: What were you seeing at that time, in terms of suburban development in the East Bay?

01-00:19:22
Sproul: It was exploding. This was a period of very rapid residential development, freeways being built, things that just—today, so that's what's here. Well no, they weren't there back—I mean, I remember as a kid going out to Walnut Creek, and a two-lane road to go out through Lafayette and Orinda, for example. So very big changes, and this was—the sixties and the seventies, in particular, saw a tremendous amount of this growth. Just conversions of thousands and thousands of acres of land.

01-00:20:02
Tewes: I'm curious, as a student of environmental planning at that time, what your take was on, I suppose, the future of the land out here.

01-00:20:11
Sproul: I think the take was I could understand the hayfields and pear orchards and flatter land, where once was a railroad line, and then it becomes a road, then becomes a freeway—that that was going to go. But the take was we've got to protect some of it. We've got to find a way to not develop everything, not go the way of Los Angeles, grading tops of hillsides off and filling valleys and just putting housing everywhere. There had to be a better way, and can you define communities by geographic landforms, which Mount Diablo, obviously, is the prominent one in Contra Costa County.

01-00:20:57
Tewes: That's a great point. I want to transition into thinking about how you applied this learning about this new field into a career, and what you did after you graduated Berkeley.

01-00:21:13
Sproul: Okay. When I was in school, in graduate school, there was, in particular, one woman who had come back, an older woman who had come back to school and wanted to get involved in the Environmental Planning Program, but was already working. She was in a small office, and they were preparing the first kinds of environmental impact reports, and they needed somebody that could write vegetation and wildlife sections for them. She knew of my interest from school and said, "You know, we'll pay you a little money, and could you go out and do this?" And I, for $50, I'd go out and spend a couple of days walking properties. [laughs] A tremendous deal, when you think back on it—I didn't know what the market was—and would write up sections or reports about vegetation and wildlife resources on properties that were proposed for development. So that was my first introduction, and did that through graduate school.

01-00:22:13

Then, coming out of graduate school, I got a call from somebody who was in school at the time and knew—a small office in Sausalito said they're looking for somebody. So I went and interviewed and got the job. It was a good job, doing much the same thing that I was already doing in graduate school for this other firm. A peculiar place to work, because the guy who was the owner of the firm and his other prominent employee were having an affair, so it was an awkward place to be. [laughs] And very soon after that, not even a year, I got a call from another person who I knew from school and [he] said, "Look, I'm leaving Marin County. Would you like to interview for my job?" And I went and interviewed for that job and was given it, and stayed in Marin County for about four years. And that was in the very—what was called their Environmental Services Section in the Planning Department.

01-00:23:21

This was pretty close after what was called the *Friends of Mammoth* decision *[Friends of Mammoth v. Board of Supervisors of Mono County]*. I don't know if you're familiar with that. That's a State Supreme Court decision that took the California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA], that at the time people thought it only applied to public projects. The State Supreme Court said no—and this had to do with Mammoth Lakes and a project down there. Friends of Mammoth sued the project, and the Court said, "No, all projects where a public agency has an action to take, not just the project proponent, but has a role in its approval." In particular, that's where the planning field came from, the environmental planning field came from, in particular, in California.

01-00:24:15

Tewes: I wonder if you could speak a little bit more about that, because all of that's happening within the context of the federal laws in the environmental decade.

01-00:24:23

Sproul: Exactly.

01-00:24:24

Tewes: And where did California fit within these policies at the time?

01-00:24:29

Sproul: I'm not going to be able to give you a good answer, unfortunately.

01-00:24:33

Tewes: Okay.

01-00:24:34

Sproul: Because the feds—I mean, we had the Clean Water Act, that was in the sixties; the Endangered Species Act, which is enacted in the sixties. Those are the two big ones that I can think of, and there are undoubtedly others, but they affected California in the sense that, for example, California enacted their own—well, NEPA too, excuse me. I should not forget the National Environmental Policy Act. So California enacted parallel laws, CEQA being the California Environmental Quality Act. We have a California Endangered

Species Act [CESA]. We have the Porter-Cologne Water Quality [Control] Act in California. So we have parallel types of legislation requiring the same sorts of things, and in some cases now they've merged in who administers them. For example, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the State Water [Resources] Control Board [handles] the federal water quality aspects. The Corps of Engineers [handles] permitting of fill in jurisdictional waters, but from a water quality standpoint, you have the [California] State Water [Resources Control Board] doing that. The federal Endangered Species Act and what they've listed—the states and the feds are pretty close—not 100 percent, but pretty close in terms of the species that they're concerned about.

01-00:26:02
Tewes: And how did all of these new regulations and policies impact the work that you were doing in this burgeoning field?

01-00:26:08
Sproul: Well, it created the field. They literally created the field, particularly NEPA and CEQA, because these documents were necessary, whether it was an environmental impact statement or the related documents that come with NEPA or with CEQA—environmental impact reports or things that are called initial studies/mitigated negative declarations. It created this need for information the decisionmakers needed and had to go through in order then to take up a project, so it literally created the field.

01-00:26:51
Tewes: And I believe in 1979 you transitioned to a new office?

01-00:26:55
Sproul: I went to work for LSA Associates, which at the time was Larry Seeman Associates, now LSA Associates, and have been there ever since.

01-00:27:07
Tewes: And what kind of specialties, I would ask, have you picked up in your years with LSA?

01-00:27:12
Sproul: I started because I'd been writing environmental documents, and that's what they were looking for, somebody that could manage the preparation of environmental documents. Writing environmental documents, frankly, is not the world's most interesting work. There's not a lot of creativity, and it's a lot of just regurgitating things over and over and over again. And so a group of us who were natural resource people, we didn't—we got tired of it, and we started thinking, Well, what can we do different? We started looking around, and we started finding opportunities that—the sorts of things that we do today that are related to listed species, areas that would be called jurisdictional wetlands or waters of the United States. The permits, if you were going to impact something, you needed a permit. Like if you were going to fill a jurisdictional feature, you need permits to do that under both federal and state laws. You have to comply with the state endangered species and federal

Endangered Species Act[s], and there's documents that need to be prepared in order to show [how] projects do that. And then there's some other just research that needs to be done that other—like particularly public agencies have to have in order to comply with the laws. Do we have the species? What do we need to do if we do? And so we started looking for this kind of work, and it was a field that was growing at the time, and we were able to be successful. And that's what I do today.

01-00:29:00

Tewes: In thinking about this broader theme we've been plucking out about a tradition of service, I know you had been involved in several other conservation groups around the Bay Area, including Save the Bay for a while. And I'm curious just as a larger thought, how you and Casey even talk about decisions about which organizations or causes to support.

01-00:29:27

Sproul: Oh, my poor wife doesn't have much choice. [laughs] I hate to say that, but she doesn't say, "This is what you should do." She tells me what I need to do about the kids and the grandchildren and things like that that are very important. But if I come and say, "Hey, Carolee Kerr [Gage's] mother, [Catherine "Kay" Kerr], asked me to be on the Save the Bay board," she's not going to say no. She was used to me going to meetings. That was the other thing about writing environmental documents. I went to so many evening meetings, planning commissions, city council, board of supervisors. I would be out two or three nights a week at public hearings, and it just—you know, great for our business, great way to rack up the hours, but, boy, it takes a lot of time. So she was used to me going to meetings, and her bigger concern was, "Is this going to mean you're going to a lot more meetings?"

01-00:30:25

Tewes: [laughs] And did it?

01-00:30:26

Sproul: Not really. No, because these boards meet once a month or once every other month—particularly Save the Bay at that time. Save Mount Diablo became more intensive in terms of the meetings, but I had already transitioned out of environmental document preparation, so I wasn't going to the same number of evening meetings.

01-00:30:50

Tewes: All right. Well, then I suppose I should rephrase my question and ask what *you* find personally compelling in organizations that you're going to attach yourself to.

01-00:30:59

Sproul: I am looking for things that are interested in protecting the natural resources of the Bay Area. We lived in Berkeley at the time when I joined the Save the Bay board, and that was strictly because Kay Kerr knew me. Kay was one of the founders, and I knew her daughter. Casey and I are friends of hers, and she

knew of my interest, and so she thought I would be somebody that would be a person that they could use on the board. It was a larger board, had some real heavyweights on it. I mean, big time environmental people involved in the environmental movement at that time. And then we moved out here, and it became more difficult to go to things in Berkeley, farther away, and so that transition to Save Mount Diablo happened.

01-00:31:59

Tewes: Well, let's talk about that. How did you first hear about Save Mount Diablo?

01-00:32:02

Sproul: You know, it's hard to say when I first heard about it, but on my bulletin board in El Cerrito—so this goes back to high school—I have a bumper sticker that says "Save Mount Diablo" that I mounted on the bulletin board. So how I got that, I have no idea anymore, but it is probably one of the original bumper stickers. But it's still there. My mom still lives in the house. So that was some sort of connection. [laughs]

01-00:32:34

But the real connection came when I attended a hearing that the [California] State Parks put on in 1988, that they were interested in expanding [to] the southeast of the park, in an area called Riggs Canyon and in Curry Canyon. And I was on their mailing list, and I think I was on their mailing list from the work at Cal—that I got the notice, and it had a map. And it showed where they wanted—they were giving priority to different parcels, which ones they wanted to get first, which ones later. And so I go to the meeting, and it was a public hearing in Walnut Creek, and there were a number of landowners that didn't like the idea at all. They didn't think the park should be expanding out where they owned.

01-00:33:21

Bob Doyle, who at the time was working for the East Bay Regional Park District, but not in any of the capacities that—when he became assistant general manager and general manager, but he was working for the Park District, and I think he was working for a guy named Hulet Hornbeck in their land acquisition branch—he came out and spoke in favor of the proposal. They were buying some land for Morgan Territory Regional Preserve. And so I got up, just as an innocent, not understanding what I was doing in terms of how people would take it, spoke in favor of the proposal. Because I knew the area from having gone to Mount Diablo with the Boy Scouts and hiking around in some of those areas, and I thought this was a great idea to expand the park and spoke. Doyle came up and asked me, Why was I there? And I told him and he understood, because Bob and I knew each other prior [to that] from the kinds of work that I was doing.

01-00:34:23

That was the first connection to Save Mount Diablo, because Bob, at that time, was on the board of directors. I don't know if he was president at the

time, but he was on the board of directors. It was a couple years later that I got a call from him saying, "Hey, would you talk to Susie Watson? Are you interested in joining our board?" I had done some work for the Park District—in fact, that may have been the original connection with Bob—so that's probably the first real tangible contact.

01-00:35:00
Tewes: And what was it about the organization that you decided that that was going to be one to connect with?

01-00:35:07
Sproul: I can't say I knew a lot about the organization. I met with Bob and Susie Watson at her house in Orinda, and I didn't know any of the other board members—not one. I wasn't receiving their newsletter, but I knew what they were doing, which was working to protect land on the mountain, and that was the reason why. So I can't say, oh, I thought they had a great operation, or I knew the people and I was really impressed by them. I mean, I knew Bob. I met Susie for the first time at her house—although it's very possible I met Susie through my mother at some point, because she lived in Orinda, and my parents had a lot of contacts in Orinda, but that I don't remember.

01-00:35:51
Tewes: So my research makes me think that—I think you joined the board around 1993. Does that sound right?

01-00:35:57
Sproul: Correct.

01-00:35:58
Tewes: Okay. Before we get there, I want to talk more about what the organization was like when you joined, and who was involved, and what the operation was that you could observe.

01-00:36:12
Sproul: It was a transition time when I joined the board. Susie Watson was president. Bob was still on the board, but becoming a higher up in the East Bay Regional Park District hierarchy in terms of management and responsibility. You may not know Bob—I don't know if you've ever met him or not. Bob, like some of us, we're very forceful in what we do and could get upset with things. Bob and Susie were butting heads a little bit, and a number of board members had left in that period that—in fact, the year I joined, six new board members joined the board. That, I don't believe, has ever happened since I've been on the board. So this was a big transition time, whether it was older board members who just were [ready] to move off or not, I don't know. And there were a few in the first couple years that I'm not sure why they were on the board, because they weren't really contributing. They would come and sit there, and that would be about it, and so they left. So we had a real transition. Susie left as president I think the second or third year when I was on the board, so we saw this transition was taking place. We had hired a staff member, had one

volunteer secretary. And quite frankly, the staff member was the one who was really starting to drive the organization, and that was Seth Adams.

01-00:37:48

Tewes: Can you tell me about what you observed about the work Seth was doing at that time?

01-00:37:53

Sproul: You know, what he was doing is, for Save Mount Diablo, is very much what I was doing in my work. He's very good at land use, understanding land use. He comes from the same kind of background, as a kid who liked to go out in the hills and find things and hike around. He has that natural resource environmental ethic that—and Doyle, by the way, has that, as well, the same thing that I share with them. And so he had this understanding of, you know, we need to protect these things. He did it from a more political standpoint, because that was—Save Mount Diablo needed to be involved with public decision makers and state legislators, [so] that he was working more on that than anything else.

01-00:38:45

It was somewhat of a change, because it's easy to have people think they don't—well, let me rephrase that. We can strike all of this from the record at some point and get it phrased properly. Conservation organizations frequently don't like to be confrontational—not all of them. I mean, the Sierra Club and others, very confrontational; National Audubon [Society] is now; the local Audubon Society chapter here, no, not at all; and other local organizations now, much more so than they used to be. But Seth, from day one, understood that we were going to be advocates for things when he was hired. Before, what we were doing was trying to encourage the [California] State Legislature to put money up to buy property, to identify bond money to buy property. We weren't buying it, although we bought some, but not much.

01-00:39:49

And so the early Save Mount Diablo efforts were they wanted to see the [Mount Diablo State] Park expand. And Mary Bowerman and Art Bonwell were big, big proponents of that, and I think probably the two most influential founders, although Seth would know better than I, and Bob, in particular, would know better than I. I mean, the Sattlers, [Gen and Bill Sattler], were very important. And I don't know all of the others, because I joined the board after that transition period. It wasn't get out there and go to a public hearing and speak against something, or to call somebody up and say, "Hey, this is a really bad deal. We don't think this is good. We're going to fight it." So it was to try to identify money to support the State in acquiring land for the Park and East Bay Regional Park District, so that was what we had been doing.

01-00:40:43

Seth brought this land-use perspective to the organization, which today I think is the most important thing we do. We have proposed or protected more land

through our advocacy work than anything else. It's hands down much greater, and that's [where] we've had probably our biggest influence. There's no other organization in Contra Costa County that's as influential as we are, and I say that with a lot of pride, because we have built that. Other organizations, their staff comes and goes, they disappear, they don't follow through. We have stayed to it and been very focused on making sure that our voice is heard, and now people understand that we carry some weight in doing that and being able to influence things.

01-00:41:50
Tewes: You just mentioned Mary Bowerman, and I know that you worked with her in some capacity in those early years.

01-00:41:58
Sproul: Mary was on the board still. Mary was a botanist, went to Cal—there's always these great Cal connections. I would drive her to board meetings, and what we called our—I can't even remember if it was called the Land Committee then, but what we call the Land Committee today. I would drive her to board meetings and to the Land Committee, and so I got a chance to know her. I got a chance to talk with her. Mary was a very private person, very quiet, but she always would throw things out so you knew what she felt was important. And that was influential to me, because I respected her greatly and thought, Well, if it's important to Mary, there's a reason for it. Mary had done her PhD dissertation on the mountain, wrote a book called *The [Flowering Plants and Ferns] of Mount Diablo*, and she had spent a lot of time alone as a young woman hiking around the mountain doing the field research back in the thirties. You know, this was a really different time. So obviously, she had some fortitude and she had things to say, but she didn't say them often.

01-00:43:14
Tewes: What did you personally learn from working with Mary in this capacity?

01-00:43:19
Sproul: I think it's focus. Mary had properties she knew to be important. She had a picture, a big picture. There's a quote, in fact, that we use about wanting to see all of the mountain and its foothills protected; that is her quote. She had the vision of wanting to see it protected. She wasn't a big political advocacy person, but she was big on wanting other people to buy the property. And if we could, if we had the money, to also protect property. So she was very, very much focused on people like the State acquiring land, on getting bonds passed [so] the money could be used for acquisition. Yeah, she wasn't as involved in the land-use aspects, that wasn't her specialty or interest. But boy, she knew the land and she knew the things she felt needed to be protected.

01-00:44:25
Tewes: Are there other folks you were working with at this point, either on the board—you mentioned Seth, the only staff at that time—or anyone else you'd like to think about in those early years?

01-00:44:40
Sproul: In the early years. It was, like I say, it was a real time of transition. Susie Watson was, I think, a good president. Susie Watson had the—I'm going to have to phrase this in a way that doesn't sound like I'm elitist. Susie had a very gracious manner, and she could speak to other people in a way that didn't offend them but was effective. And she got engaged in land-use issues from being in Orinda, and [a] freeway expansion that was going to come from the Wilder exit, run through Moraga, and then go up over Las Trampas and down into San Ramon. She was involved in fighting that, so she got involved in land-use issues that way, and so she knew her way around, and she knew a lot of people. She was in circles where there were influential people, and so she could be very effective, because of the people she knew. She had the way of not getting people antagonized, and could present and try to convince them of what we wanted to see happen. I thought Susie was a good president because of that.

01-00:46:12
Tewes: And you mentioned you joined the board at this moment of transition, and I'm curious what your goals were in joining the organization, and what you wanted to see happen with your involvement.

01-00:46:22
Sproul: I wanted to see as much land protected as possible. Very simple. I mean, it's very straightforward. There's nothing personal in it, quite frankly. I mean, I love that we protected a lot of land, and I get to hike on it and go around. But I also love that if I never touch it, there's all these things out there that are going to be able to be there—the wildlife, the plants, you name it—whether it's creeks and streams, they're going to be there, because we did the work to protect it, and to me, that's very satisfying.

01-00:46:59
Tewes: I think that's a great way to think about that. So as we mentioned, you joined the board in 1993. And throughout your many years with Save Mount Diablo, you've seen three directors. I'm just curious what you've come to appreciate in a director for the organization.

01-00:47:19
Sproul: Well, okay, I'll start with our first director, [Gerry Keenan]. She didn't work out, and I don't think she was—she just really wasn't suited to be the executive director of what we did, by temperament, in understanding the big picture. She had one thing she did do, which was [get] Seth—Seth is a big picture person—she got him to focus on, "When you talk about corridors and connections, *show* me what you're saying. Put it on a piece of paper, not just say it." And so that was something that was useful to the organization. But ultimately, how she did things didn't work well, and so we let her—we basically, it was at an executive committee meeting. She said something, and we said, "Gerry, we know that's not true." And she said something back, and [I] said, "Gerry, I think this isn't going to work." Yeah, and that was the end of

her tenure. It was an uncomfortable moment, but not—it had to be done, frankly, it just had to be done. It was creating a lot of tension with the staff at that time, which wasn't very big. And so we hired Ron Brown.

01-00:48:47

Ron, from an organizational standpoint, really helped the organization [with] things that we just didn't do well, because we were new and we didn't have experience with it, and he did. He came from being an executive director with another organization—I can't remember if it was the Jewish Community something, [Contra Costa Jewish Community Center], some related name that I'd have to go back in the records to find out. Anyway, he had experience being an executive director. He knew about running an organization; he knew about finances; he knew about organizing these things, and so he brought that to the organization. He also was very much involved in community outreach in a group in particular called the Contra Costa Forum. It's a group of business leaders in Contra Costa County, and he joined that organization and developed contacts with them and was able to present us to them—and not always they liked us, but he developed those kinds of relationships, so that was important. But Ron had his rough spots and caused a lot of tension with staff over time, a lot of turnover. And ultimately, it just made sense—he decided that—it was his decision at this point—that he would leave the organization.

01-00:50:15

And that takes us to Ted Clement, who is our current executive director. Ted had been an executive director of a land trust in Hawaii, and I think also back east. Prepping for this, I read some of the material we had when we interviewed him, and it's very interesting to see that what he wanted to do then is what he has pushed consistently ever since. His ideas about the strategic plan, about the educational preserve, those are things that he was talking about the day we interviewed him. But what he has done—and I credit him for this—is he has come to understand our land-use advocacy and our greater community involvement that he didn't have. He was very focused on land trusts and conservation easements, and we are doing advocacy. We're pushing public agencies to protect land, and that wasn't his background. But he recognizes the importance, hasn't gotten in the way, and in fact, supports it. So it has worked out very well, and he worked much better with our staff. We don't have—the trying to force staff to do, be a certain way. He understands that you have different personalities and different people, and you need to have a way of working with different folks to get something to move forward. So he's working out well.

01-00:51:54

Tewes: It sounds like you were involved in the hiring process.

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Sproul: Actually, all three of them.

01-00:51:59
Tewes: Oh really? Okay!

01-00:51:59
Sproul: Less so with Ted. I wasn't on the original search committee with Ted, but with Gerry and Ron, yes. And then, with Ted, I was involved in the interview panel in reviewing his quals and making recommendations.

01-00:52:16
Tewes: And at that point, in 2015, what was it you were thinking the organization needed to move forward?

01-00:52:24
Sproul: [laughs] We needed a replacement! Not going to joke at all. It wasn't like we're looking for somebody to change the direction of the organization. We needed another executive director. Ron Brown was leaving and, by God, we needed to have somebody. We were looking for somebody that had the kinds of background in land-use conservation, basically land preservation, that we were most interested in. We were hoping to get advocacy at the same time, but the broader picture of protecting land was somebody that we wanted. Ron didn't have that. Ron came from a completely different field; Gerry came from a completely different field; Ted had that kind of background—a little different than us, but he had, at least, background in it.

01-00:53:23
Tewes: I'm going to back up for a moment and think about your first term as board president, which was a long one, [laughs] from 1998 to 2012. And I know that spans quite some time, but I'm curious if you could walk us through some highlights of that time, the challenges or successes that you could point to?

01-00:53:44
Sproul: It's a funny thing, because I stumbled into the position that—you don't run for something like that—at least I [didn't]. And Susie had stepped down; and Linda Mehlman, a woman who lived in Walnut Creek, and her husband, Steve [Mehlman], were both on the board. She took the position when Susie retired, but they had small children and a fulltime job, and so it was hard for her to devote the time, and I think at most she was president for two years. And so when she said, "Look, I can't keep being president," they started looking around, and I guess I didn't put my head down fast enough. It was more by default than anything else, but I also had a lot of experience from my work of running meetings, managing people, and so it wasn't like I didn't have any background in it, particularly being the person who was responsible for making certain decisions, of making sure meetings are run effectively, and we're doing the things that we say we would do. From that kind of an executive standpoint, [I] had that background. And there's undoubtedly a bunch of ego in it, Yeah, I can do this really well sort of a thing.

01-00:55:11
Tewes: What do you think your professional background brought to how you ran the board?

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Sproul: It goes back to being able to work with people, is what it comes down to, and that's what I learned from being the manager of our office [at LSA Associates]. We had an office of over forty people, for example, at one time. The recession and the Great Recession and current things have changed, but we had a lot of people, and so I had to deal with a lot of different problems and ways to approach things, and could bring that to the organization. And then the professional things that I do. I have technical skills that really nobody else on the board has, and that is this background in land-use planning and in natural resource management. It's this combination of those two things that we do. That's what we do in large part. So yeah, we have fundraising, and I know that's really important; it's not my strength. But the basic underpinnings of our organization, of what we're trying to accomplish, is protect land and its resources. And by doing that, you have to be involved in land use, you have to be involved with working with decision makers. If you buy land or have it, it's something you have to manage, understanding how to manage those things. There's really nobody else on the board that has that kind of a background.

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The hardest thing for me, frankly, in running things, was to get people to say something. It's always surprising to me how they will come to a meeting, people will come to a meeting and just sit there. So I always wonder about a lot of folks—I know some of them—why they're there. But there's a lot of them that I can't understand why they're there, because they don't participate and they don't offer their views and they don't bring anything to the table in terms of discussion. And some of them were there for the—basically to let it be known that they were there. And then there were others that were there, that we had them on our board, because we felt their name would help us—and there's a lot of that in boards of directors, helping—maybe it'd be somebody that can raise funds or knows the right people. In fact, many of them don't have the kind of background in the nitty-gritty of what the organization does.

01-00:58:01
Tewes: So how would you encourage folks to participate?

01-00:58:04
Sproul: You call on them. You literally put them on the spot in a meeting. You also wanted them involved. And we are what we call a working board. If you're on the board, it's not to have your name as a mark. There's organizations that do that. They want to have certain names on their board to show how prestigious and prominent, and this and that. Well, that's not our board. But for the most part, we're looking for working board members, people that will participate, whether it's in our land use—the Land Committee or our Development

Committee. We have an Audit Committee; we have a Stewardship Committee now; we have an Education Committee. That people will get involved and bring their expertise to them, and so that's—you know, if they don't participate in the board meetings, they have to participate in those things. It's much better now than it used to be. Before, because we didn't have as much—we weren't as active as we are today, there were a lot of people that were there just to come to a board meeting and then go home, which is—I guess that's okay, but it always puzzled me as to why. I think they were interested in seeing what we were doing.

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Tewes: Which has its benefits, I'm sure. So I think in this first time around, those fourteen years—

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Sproul: I think it was fifteen, actually.

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Tewes: Is it really? Oh my gosh!

01-00:59:33
Sproul: Yeah. When you go from the first year to the last year, it works out to be fifteen. [laughs] But—

01-00:59:40
Tewes: Overachieving. And during that first course, a lot was accomplished in the organization. I think you added a few conservation projects, including 2,000 acres on and around Mount Diablo, and transitioning the repurposing of Concord Naval Weapons Station, amongst many things.

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Sproul: That actually—yeah, that was later on. That wasn't early on. That was later.

01-01:00:04
Tewes: Right, exactly.

01-01:00:04
Sproul: But they're examples of the things we've done, whether it's Roddy Ranch, the property we bought; the Bertagnolli Property we now call Curry Canyon Ranch; Concord Naval Weapons Station; Blackhawk. I wasn't involved in the Blackhawk wars, but that was a big deal early on for the organization, so you're talking about the big things that resulted in protection of land in one way or another. And then there's the State bond campaigns. We knew that if we showed up, we would get something back. And we, in fact, would give decent amounts of money for a small organization—like in the thousands and thousands of dollars—for the campaign, because we—if it passed, we would then get a ten-fold return on what we invested in terms of money that was available to do things. So we understood that. And there were a number of bond campaigns, both at the State level and the East Bay Regional Park

District, that we were strong supporters of, and ultimately ended up providing funds to buy a lot of property that we were interested in.

01-01:01:16

Then, the East Contra Costa Habitat Conservancy is a more recent one that—Seth was on a steering committee for it, for example. I actually worked on a technical advisory committee, early on, for them. We got involved with that, because we knew if that happened—you look at other HCPs, habitat conservation plans, what would happen is there would be a lot of money available for the things that we're interested in, which is acquiring property. We don't have to acquire it. As long as it gets protected, we're happy. So it could be in the State Park; it could be a unit of the East Bay Regional Park District; it could be a local government buying land. So the HCP, when it was enacted, resulted in a whole lot of funds becoming available in areas of East [Contra Costa] County that are now being protected, and we worked actively to see that happen, so those kinds of things.

01-01:02:24

And then, we've have some of our projects that—things that we're trying to see accomplished. The one that I like to bring up is the Marsh Creek Corridor. Marsh Creek is the largest creek in East Contra Costa County—probably the largest one in the County, thinking about it. It's in the HCP as being an important area, and there were some little pieces of it protected. But we developed the idea that we want to protect as much of that corridor as possible, and we have now purchased a lot of properties along the creek—maybe roughly half of the creek length in the area we're interested is now protected. And again, we don't have to buy it all, but we want to see it protected, and we're—as pieces come up, we're going to do more. So that's a real tangible result of something that Seth and I, in particular, talked about very early on and have pushed forward and are now seeing it becoming a reality.

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Tewes: Wow, that long, huh?

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Sproul: Yeah, it's a long time, because the business we're in is long term. Properties don't—you can't just go out and condemn them. It doesn't happen. I mean, there may be some piece that a flood control district or somebody has condemned and bought. But in large part, the properties we're talking about are purchased, and they have to be purchased from a willing seller, so that doesn't happen all that often. And so what you're doing is identifying what you—what we think is important, and then monitoring those. When we see one become available, then we want to try to buy it. Or if it's something we think the Park District should buy, we're pushing their staff, saying, "Hey, this is coming up. You guys need to start talking to these folks." Again, we are a partner in this. We are not the major, the primary player, although we are a big

influencer of these other organizations, you know, particularly public agencies.

01-01:04:47

Tewes: Thank you, that is a great way of describing that for me. But in thinking back to this first term of your presidency, I'm curious what you're most proud of, over those fifteen years that you served.

01-01:05:02

Sproul: Well, most proud—first, there's the Marsh Creek Corridor project, just from a personal level, because I think that one is one that was like an idea that if I wasn't the one who thought of it first, certainly took it on very early.

01-01:05:20

Another project we did that doesn't get the kind of play that peregrine falcons get—everybody loves peregrine falcons; it's a sexy, dynamic bird—but prairie falcons. Prairie falcons, a related falcon, and they nest on the mountain, but are disappearing. In part, they're disappearing because peregrines are displacing them, which is not a good—they both nest in cavities in cliffs. Peregrines are much more sort of plastic, and they can nest on the Campanile [at UC Berkeley], they can nest on big buildings, they can nest on bridges as well as potholes in cliffs. Prairie falcons only nest in potholes in cliffs. Every so often they'll find a raven's nest on a transmission line tower and they'll nest in it, but pretty much cliff nesters.

01-01:06:13

We sponsored a project, put a decent amount of money into it, that Doug Bell from East Bay Regional Park District was the lead on, that put transmitters on nesting prairie falcons to see what they're doing. And we found that they were going a *long* way to find food. They would go out to the Brentwood area, for example, from the mountain. Peregrines much more—they eat birds. They would hunt primarily very close to the areas that their nests were in. Where prairies were going *way* out there, twenty miles away to do their foraging and bring it back to the nest. So that was some very interesting information that nobody else had at the time. We were the primary sponsor of the research, and that was very satisfying, to get involved with a research project that told us something about not only what's on the mountain, but its relationship to the other lands that we're interested in. And that's where the East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservancy comes in. They're out there protecting now a lot of those lands where the prairie falcons forage, so there's a relationship there between research we have, applying it then to identifying lands that were important for protection.

01-01:07:41

Tewes: That's interesting. When did you decide, as an organization, to become involved with those kinds of reentry—

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Sproul: The peregrine reintroduction project was before my time.

01-01:07:56
Tewes: Okay.

01-01:07:55
Sproul: So I couldn't give you much background on that. But the prairie project was clearly, in fact, something I brought to the board, because I knew Doug, and Doug and I had—I had done a project, a volunteer project called the *Breeding Bird Atlas [of Contra Costa County]*, and the atlas divided Contra Costa County up into these five—what were they, five, oh God, kilometer blocks. They were five-kilometer blocks, and people took a block or more, and you went out and tried to document what bird species bred in the block. I picked one on the mountain, of course, and I picked the south side of the mountain, upper portions of Blackhawk in the Black Hills and Curry Canyon and into what's called the Knobcone Point area, which is where the prairies nest, in Jackass Canyon. So I knew about them. I knew Doug. I would report my results to him, as well as the people doing the atlas, and so that's how I got to know him, heard about what he wanted to do, and brought it to Save Mount Diablo. And so that's the kind of scientific research that, if we can, we'd like to promote, which is where the Mary Bowerman Committee comes in. We don't have the kind of money we put into these—a couple projects, but we're trying to encourage other scientific research that may lend itself to the broader mission of the organization.

01-01:09:30
Tewes: When did that Bowerman Science and Research Committee come about?

01-01:09:35
Sproul: You're going to have a blank for that.

01-01:09:35
Tewes: [laughs] Okay.

01-01:09:36
Sproul: Let's just say the year was [2014] and we'll get you the year for that. [year verified]

01-01:09:40
Tewes: We'll figure it out, okay. But that began during your time?

01-01:09:45
Sproul: [Actually no, Scott had become President.]

01-01:09:49
Tewes: Let's speak a little bit more about the Land Committee, and that's something you've been involved with almost from the start, I believe. Can you tell me about the goals of that particular committee, and what you feel you've brought to it.

01-01:10:06

Sproul: The Land Committee, in large part, would—probably better to say the Land-Use Committee, because it primarily dealt with land-use activities and would—we weren't out saying—"Well, this is the property to buy," or, "This is the one to protect." We weren't doing much of that. Staff did that, and then would bring it to the board. We were really more involved with what was being proposed on the land and monitoring it, sometimes opposing, sometimes trying to work with people. And that goes back to Bob and Mary and, God, who else was—the first meetings I went to, Bob—[telephone rings] uh-oh.

01-01:10:50

Tewes: Oh, let's pause. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break, and we were discussing the Land Committee and its origins, I believe.

01-01:10:58

Sproul: And so when I joined it, Mary and Bob were the real drivers, and they had the knowledge. Because it was my interest, that's why I wanted to join the Committee. I'm not sure they felt they needed another committee member at the time, because they'd been operating themselves before without a whole lot of people. [laughs] So I listened a lot at that point, just listened to what they wanted to be involved with or what they felt the organization, I should say, [should] be involved with. And Bob was very much on the land-use side of things, on what was taking place in land-use activities in different cities and the County, and the kinds of things we needed to do. Mary was on the side of, Well, here's the land we want to protect. That was her interest. She didn't have the same kind of background in land-use work.

01-01:11:54

And then, that grew, that just—I stayed on the Land Committee. We grew the Committee, trying to get other members. And a lot of non-board members, by the way, who had [the] kinds of skills that we were looking for, who had knowledge of different areas of the County, in particular, could comment on them, could say, "You know, this is taking place out here. This is what I think you need to be thinking about in Concord or Brentwood—" or whatever it may be. And so we had a lot of non-board members, and still do. So they aren't all board members, but hopefully they bring skills that are useful—attorneys, for example. We wanted to make sure we had at least one or two attorneys on the Committee, because there's a lot of legal issues that come up on land use. And the Committee evolved that way. And it's very similar now, and I'd say in the last ten, fifteen, twenty years in operating in that way.

01-01:12:59

The one thing that's probably newer is what people call stewardship, that I would call just resource management, that we do a little bit of that at the Land Committee, but we have a separate Stewardship Committee.

01-01:13:15
Tewes: Well, you mentioned that everyone on that committee, in particular, has a certain skillset. Can you give me an example of where your particular skills have come in handy?

01-01:13:27
Sproul: Well, I think we've talked about it. What I do professionally is very much what Save Mount Diablo does as a nonprofit, in getting involved in land use. I'm not an advocate professionally for things, and I can't be—and I can be with Save Mount Diablo. But the same kinds of knowledge of land-use regulation, of environmental law, of recognizing resources and what's important and what's not, they're very, very similar. I literally can take the things that I do for work, and with the exception of I can't be an advocate at work. I have to present things from a factual standpoint, and I can't say, "No, this is terrible. I don't like it." I just have to say, "Here's what you have; here are the laws you have to work with; here's what you're going to need to do." But those skills are exactly what happens with our land-use activities, and there you get to be an advocate.

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From a personal side, there's people, clients, that won't use me at all, because they think I'm biased for Save Mount Diablo. And then there's ones who think that because of my association with Save Mount Diablo, I could be beneficial to them. It cuts both ways, and it's not true either way. I have to walk a very fine rope, middle ground at work; where at Save Mount Diablo I can say, "Hey, we need to do this. We need to get on this job. We need to fight this one." Or, "Here's what we need to see accomplished here," where I don't do that at work.

01-01:15:32
Tewes: As I mentioned, you were president a second time. [laughs] This time from around 2019 to 2020. Can you tell me about that tenure?

01-01:15:42
Sproul: I was a caretaker. When I left my first term as president, Scott Hein became president, and Scott served two three-year terms, and he said, "I'm done. I think we need to have somebody else take it on." And this was sort of like it was when I first became president. Nobody volunteered themselves—literally—on the board. And so I told Ted that if nobody will take it on, I will take it on for a short period of time, and we need to cultivate somebody else, we need do grow them, who will then become president, which is what happened. And so it wasn't like I said, "Boy, got to be president again!" It was, "Let's make sure the organization continues to move, and do the things that we do with somebody that understands the process and the people, and how the organization works, and let's get the next person lined up and in a position that they feel comfortable taking on the presidency." So I did that

01-01:16:54
Tewes: What would you say were the major differences between that first term and second term?

01-01:17:01
Sproul: Well, the first term, obviously, was a very long period of time, and it was a period when the organization grew tremendously. So organizationally, there were real changes during that period of fifteen years. Staff grew, our capacity grew, the number of events we did grew—everything grew. We had more people. The focus that was there when I first started changed. It didn't go away, what was there, but it then changed and grew. I saw that change, and obviously was a part of it. The second time around was just, Let's stay the course. It wasn't to do anything new. It wasn't like Scott wasn't doing something and we really needed to change it, no. Scott did a good job. It was, We need to stay the course and get somebody ready.

01-01:18:07
Tewes: But as your tenure ended in 2020, I presume that overlapped a bit with COVID-19?

01-01:18:16
Sproul: No, it literally ended the month that the restrictions went into place. Poor Jim Felton took on the position the month the restrictions became effective, yeah. I mean, COVID was out there, and we all knew it and we talked about it, what it could mean to us, particularly at the Executive Committee. Were there going to be financial implications to our ability to raise funds, and what would we do if we couldn't? And what was our capacity, if that was the case? But it hadn't happened yet. And then that March, because our fiscal year and [President's] term start April 1, that March everything started changing. So Jim's first year as president has been a[s] a Zoom president. [laughs] And so I'm sure that's very different.

01-01:19:18
Tewes: So true, so true. Well, as long as we're on that topic, what were the conversations that the Executive Committee, in particular, was having about what this would mean for Save Mount Diablo?

01-01:19:32
Sproul: We were worried, I think, in particular that our fundraising would go in the tank. That people were going to be laid off, they were going to be—they wouldn't be working, there wouldn't be—the level of donations that we were receiving prior to—and we live on donations. I mean, that's—we're a nonprofit. We aren't government funded or anything like that. We are a nonprofit, and we have to go out and raise money. So there was a real concern that we—our fundraising would decline, and because of that we would have to make changes in staffing and program as a result, to cut back to reflect that. It didn't come to pass. Fortunately, our donors have been very, very good to us, so we never had to look at staff cuts, we never had to look at cutting certain programs. We were able to get one of those loans, a federal loan, and that

helped, obviously. And it becomes not a loan, but it's forgiven—it's a loan, but it's forgiven if you show you used it for the purpose that it was given, and I believe we're going to be able to do that. So that was very helpful, as well.

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Tewes: That's excellent.

01-01:20:59
Sproul: And that's the sort of thing where a guy like Ted Clement, who went out and got it, did the research and got the staff to pull together the information that qualified us for it, and that's the importance of having staff on top of things.

01-01:21:15
Tewes: Yeah, I was going to ask to what you attribute the success in the last year.

01-01:21:21
Sproul: I think people give to an organization like Save Mount Diablo, because, in the sense, it's they love nature. They love plants, they love animals. They're hikers. Maybe they're equestrians or mountain bikers. But they like open land, they love protecting things. You see the letters that come in about, "Oh, I see the mountain every morning when I get up," or something. This is important to people, and so we are doing something that's why they support us, and I think that didn't go away during COVID. If anything, it got more important, because so many people being home, confined to home, wanted to get out. And I'm sure you've read about just the explosion of people in public open spaces and the level of use has gone up tremendously as a result of COVID.

01-01:22:22
Tewes: Certainly, certainly. I want to start thinking about significant events and programs within the organization's history, and we spoke about some, including the falcon programs and research there.

01-01:22:41
Sproul: Yeah, make sure you—it notes that it's not only peregrine, but prairie [falcons]. The unfortunate part is the prairies are disappearing, because, in part, because of peregrines; in part, because of human activity. They are not tolerant as much as peregrines are of human activity, although you can spook peregrines out of a nest site. When I was doing the *Breeding Bird Atlas*, we had four pairs of prairies nesting in Knobcone Point and Jackass Canyon. Now, this past year, we were down to one, and they're gone, in part, because of peregrines; but also, in part, because of people. We lost a nest site, because mountain bikers illegally built a trail right underneath one of the nest sites, and they won't come back. So you see these kinds of effects of human activity.

01-01:23:37
Tewes: Wow.

01-01:23:41
Sproul: So you were asking about significant events.

01-01:23:42
Tewes: I am not sure which direction I want to go. Let's talk about BioBlitz.

01-01:23:49
Sproul: Okay.

01-01:23:51
Tewes: I believe the organization has been doing that since 2007?

01-01:23:55
Sproul: Yeah. We'd have to check the date, but it's been a while now.

01-01:23:58
Tewes: Well, for some time. Can you tell me what your personal role is [in] this?

01-01:24:01
Sproul: I'm a participant, a very willing participant. You go out to an identified area, and you're trying to document as many species as you possibly can in a twenty-four-hour period. And my expertise is birds and mammals, a little bit of plants. And I can, if I see something interesting, I can record it and tell people. But primarily, I'm out there because of wildlife, and it's just fun to get out in the field. I don't get to go out in the field much. I'm stuck in the office most of the time, so to have the opportunity to go in the field is a lot of fun, and it's a chance to get together with other people with similar backgrounds and interests, and share that.

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And then, the organization loves to use it as a way to say how valuable properties are. There's a little bit of hyperbole in what we say. You talk about thousands of species or 700 species were identified. And you know, most of them are—you could go anywhere and get several hundred plant species around here, so it's not a surprise, but it sounds good. And people react and support that, and you do find things out that are unusual, and you do find things that you don't expect. To me, that's the real value of it, of finding things not that you knew that are there, because I could go out and take you to a piece on the mountain and tell you practically 99 percent of the birds you're going to see, for example, or the mammals. But it's when you find something that you didn't know was there, and you can find maybe why it's there, that that's a little piece of information that we didn't have before. So it's fun to do, and so for me that, to me, that's the primary interest in it.

01-01:25:58
Tewes: And similarly, I should say, you also take a role in Four Days Diablo. What is your position on that?

01-01:26:08
Sproul: Let me just say something about Four Days first.

01-01:26:10
Tewes: Sure.

01-01:26:10

Sproul: I think it is the heart and soul of our activities. It gets to why we exist and why we do what we do. We take people out for four days. They get spoiled—I mean, they have to hike. It's hot sun and things like that, and you get blisters, and some people can't make it. It's some work, but it's taking people out into the areas that have been protected, and showing them what they have helped protect, and what a place this is, that they may never have known about if they just drove the roads around the mountain, for example. So and it gets people who truly are committed to our mission. These are not the people that show up to Moonlight on the Mountain. We'll get to Moonlight in a minute. But these are people that are interested in the natural world, understand that they're going to be hiking and sleeping on the ground in a tent. They're going to get really good dinners and breakfasts, but that's a plus and a perk. But they're going to be out in the woods for four days, and so it's taking them out into the things that they have helped to protect, and I think it's helped really bring some very good volunteers and donors to the organization, people that have become long-term volunteers and donors. You know, you have to have it in a small group. You can't have big groups, or else it's not going to be effective. But with the twenty to twenty-four people or whatever our max is, it works very well.

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So my role is to be a technical expert, is to explain and point things out to people on the second day of the hike, which, to me, goes through the most biologically diverse areas that they see. The other days, they're in a lot of grassland, a lot of oak grassland/woodland. But the second day they go from mixed foothill pine, oak woodland, down into chaparral, into a riparian area, back up into more chaparral, up into the cliffs of Knobcone Point, over into Jackass Canyon, which has just some—is the wildest place on the mountain, quite honestly. It's the hardest place to get into. It doesn't have a trail, except up on the side of one of the ridges that form the canyon, and it is literally the wildest place on the mountain. So I've always told Seth that if condors are going to show up in Mount Diablo, that's where they're going to go first. It's got these great cliffs, and so that's why I really like that day. And it was in the area that I did for the *Breeding Bird Atlas*, so I know it pretty well.

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Tewes: And about how long have you been participating in that?

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Sproul: I think since day one. There is another research subject. [Tewes laughs] I can't tell you when it started, but it's been a number of years.

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And then you get to Moonlight, which is a different event. Moonlight is our major fundraiser, and so it has a different emphasis. What do we advertise dress as: mountain elegant or something like that? Some of the eyewash and hyperbole is a little over [the top] for me, but I'm a little more down in the

dirt. [laughs] But anyway, it's a very successful event. It has just a tremendous location, and if you—we should probably have you come out this year if we do it on the ground, for doing this. It's in a place called the China Wall. It's a plateau with a geologic formation that looks like the Great Wall of China. And we get 400 [or] 500 people out there, and we serve them dinner, and there's music and an auction—silent auction, live auction.

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I think a lot of the people that buy tables—organizations—this is more a publicity exercise, which probably sounds bad, but it's a way of saying, "Hey, we're doing something for the environment." East Bay Regional Park District gets a couple tables, for example, but so do the Plumbers & Steamfitters, and then there's other companies that will get a table. So you get a real variety of people, but they aren't the people, in large part, that do Four Day Diablo. They're dressing up and a lot of them are comped. They work for a company that's bought a table that said, "Hey, anybody interested in doing this?" So it's a little different group, in terms of the attendance. Boy, it's been successful. A guy named Bob Marx on our board came up with the idea. He owns a horse ranch right on the other side of the hill, and so he said, "Hey, this would be a neat place to do something." And boy, was he right.

01-01:31:34

Tewes: I'm curious, given that this is going to be the twentieth anniversary of Moonlight, how you've seen that even change over the years.

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Sproul: [It was] much smaller. The location has not changed, the basic approach has not changed. In other words, that we have the same auction ideas—wrong word—the same silent and live auction. We serve the meal; we have the music. Before, it was like thirteen tables, just a little cluster. And now, it's a sea of tables! I couldn't even tell you how many. But we're going from maybe 100-plus people to 500 people, so it's grown tremendously, and I think it's a little more—I don't want to use the word sophisticated, but it's better organized. And so now we have drink stations, and you can get beer or wine, soft drinks. We may not have had those the first time around. The amenities have improved. We've found that it can be very cold up there when the fog comes in, and so now there's a blanket for everybody, for example. If that fog comes in, they're going to at least keep them somewhat warm. So we've learned from it, from what works well and what doesn't. We take them up there. We drive them up in these little coaches, I guess you'd call them, so nobody has to walk in. It's all very [much] done for the comfort of the guests. The biggest difference is the purpose hasn't changed, but the number of people certainly has. And we've learned as we've gone [along], as to how we do it.

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Tewes: Another big endeavor that Save Mount Diablo has taken on over the years is the Forever Wild Capital Campaign.

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Sproul: Yes, and we finished it! We're done!

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Tewes: Congratulations! [laughs] Well, I understand that's been a while in the making.

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Sproul: Well, [it's been] a long time in the making, yes.

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Tewes: Can you tell me a little bit about the origins of that, and the journey to get there?

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Sproul: Well you know, it goes back before the current executive director. This goes back to Ron Brown's time and it goes back to the Great Recession in 2008. We started the campaign, and then that hit—and it *did* hit us. That recession did hit us. And also then was a lot of staff turnover, and so continuity was lost. And it's not like $15 million is a huge number, because there's other organizations that do a lot more, but it's a big number.

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And we're [located in] a geographically centralized area, in terms of who we appeal to. We're not like somebody that is all of the San Francisco Bay Area, in terms of having a donor base. Our donor base is pretty much Contra Costa County, bleeding down into [the] Dublin/Pleasanton area, Livermore. Then you get outliers. But it's primarily Contra Costa County, and primarily Central Contra Costa County. We have tried to grow in East County, and we're doing better now, but that's been a long time coming. And we didn't do much down south of San Ramon until Dublin started to grow like crazy, and people started opening their eyes. But it's been Danville, Alamo, Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill area, Clayton, that's been the heart of our donors. And then out here in Lamorinda [Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda], too. There's a fair number here in Lamorinda, so, that's what we have to draw on.

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So getting $15 million, it takes some work, and we just, we have clawed at it is, I think, the best way to look at it. And now we've done it! So—

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Tewes: Well, can you tell me a little bit more about why this particular campaign was important for the organization?

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Sproul: Well, we need to have money available if we are going to go after a property, in particular. This isn't for operations, in large part. This is to have pots of money that, if there's a big piece of property or even a small piece that we're interested in, we have the money on hand that we can go get that. We don't have to try to fundraise right there. We can make decisions. Do we have the

money? What are we going to do? How quickly can we move on this? It also has put together a pot of money for a reserve for land management—stewardship, the term. But really, that's land management. So we have money that will fund our management activities and can generate income, and we don't have to go into the corpus of it, but we'll take the revenue that it generates to use to pay for these things. We've put money aside for legal purposes that we haven't had before, and so we don't have to worry about that or go to somebody and say, "Hey, we've got this big thing coming up. We're going to need legal help here, and we don't have any money to pay for it." We now have those resources, and we have the resources to protect the land that we do own from some kind of legal action—or an easement, for that matter, you know, whether we own it or an easement.

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Tewes: A very important part of planning.

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Sproul: Yes, it is. It helps us in the long term, is what it does. It makes us more stable.

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Tewes: That's an excellent way of thinking about it. I'm also curious about the new expanded focus on education. You mentioned that was one of Ted's—

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Sproul: That has been a Ted interest from day one, yes.

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Tewes: [laughs] I'm curious how that connects to the work that you've done over the years and what your interests are with Save Mount Diablo.

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Sproul: Huh, where does it connect? That's an interesting question, because, well, from an educational standpoint, I haven't done anything with kids, if that's what you term education. But, for example, I donate every year a birding hike that is an auction item, and that's educational, quite frankly. This is, hey, we do it on Save Mount Diablo property. Yes, people are learning about what's there, but they're also learning about Save Mount Diablo and getting an introduction to the organization. But it's not the kinds of, Okay, let's bring schoolkids out and work with them, and teach them about the trees or whatever it may be. So I haven't had that kind of contact. That's not what I have done for the organization, most interestingly, because they've never asked, which I think is—somebody could open their eyes and do. Because I used to do stuff with the Boy Scouts and the Cub Scouts out here when our kids were young and led trips for Audubon for years. So that's something that they perhaps could take advantage of, but they get other people to do it, too, so that's good. You know, that's a good thing. I don't have to do it all. It's good to have other people do things.

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Tewes: That is an important thing to understand: you're doing a lot already. [laughs] Are there other significant events in the organization's history you'd like to cover?

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Sproul: Significant events? Well, I think we've talked about before, I think *the* most significant event in what we have done was when we hired Seth. Seth has been, since before my time—he was on staff before I joined the board. Seth has a vision. Seth has big picture ideas, and he's pushed the organization on those. There isn't anybody else like that, other—there's board members who have worked with him on things like that, but Seth has, I think, the best big picture. So that was a critical—we are so lucky that we—that happened. If we didn't get somebody that was committed and had that vision, God knows where we'd be, what we'd be doing. It could be like one of these little land trusts. All they do is get easements, and they only get them after somebody has made decisions about what's going to take place, and it's the end of the line. No, we're out front and we are pushing people, we are pushing ideas. And that, in large part, comes from Seth. So I can't say enough about that, and how important it is. So that, in terms of a significant event, is probably, to me, is the most important one.

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Then you get to just all kinds of things that have happened that—we've talked about a lot of them here. Whether it's the kinds of events that we sponsor, whether it's Four Day Diablo or Moonlight, those are very important to the organization. We used to lead tons of hikes back when I joined the board. We had one guy who organized all the hikes, and when he left the board, the hike program sort of slowed down a great deal—not sort of, it *did* slow down a great deal. Now we've ramped it up again, so that the hike program we have now has a different name, but it's basically the same idea and the same emphasis that we had twenty-five years ago. Getting people out is so important. It's not just a single event, but it's the notion of how important it is to get people out to see what we're doing, to build that support. We're an advocacy organization, so we need that support.

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I'm trying to think, other real significant events in the organization. At that point, it's—I'd have to think more about that, and I think I said that to you before. There's things that happened that stand out in my mind that are significant in a way, but there's others that are just as significant that—when Roddy Ranch was protected. What happened out in the hallways, the corridors at the Board of Supervisors, and 1,000 acres got protected in a conversation. You know, that's a pretty interesting event. Or purchasing Curry Canyon Ranch, the Bertagnolli Property, was a very significant event for us, the biggest piece we've ever purchased.

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But there's others, like when we purchased a property, the Silva [Ranch] Property, which is on this figure, [holds up a map] one of the properties on [the 1988 state parks acquisition study], that brought together a number of partners in its acquisition, including fine money from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. A developer, Shapell Industries—they're a home builder—put money into it. And of course, our own emphasis. That there was a property that—and I bring it up, because it's one that I worked one, and I've worked for—Shapell is a client of mine—that I could bring them to the table, and so I knew about—and the fine money from Fish and Wildlife. I worked with the fish and game warden, so those were pieces of the puzzle that I was personally involved with. You know, that's an illustration of the kinds of—of an event that happened in our history, in how we acquired a property. But there's plenty of other examples, too, so those are just ones that I know a little bit more about.

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Tewes: Well yeah, can you give me a little bit more about the Silva Property and what challenges there were in acquiring that?

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Sproul: Property becomes available—and [a] person at the East Bay Regional Park District is the person who told me this—because of the four Ds, and of course I've forgotten one of the Ds. There's death, there's divorce, and there's debt and there's one other D that I don't recall. But properties become available because of those kinds of events in the life of an owner, and that's what happened at Silva. It was a piece of property that the owners needed to get rid of. It was completely undeveloped. It was pure cattle ranch land, grazing land, and we learned that it was becoming available, so the challenge there was to get the money to make it happen. We'd known about it, I mean, here it's one of the properties on this map. [shows the 1988 state parks map] In fact, what is it, it's a priority—it is Silva, number two, it's a two priority, so a high priority out of four. We knew about it for a long, long time.

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And at that point, when it became available, how could we get the money to do it? Because back in those days, we didn't have the kinds of financial resources that we have today, so we had to find a way to get the money. And that was a challenge for a lot of things early on. We bought a lot of properties on option, for example, where we would pay $25,000 to get the first option, and then we'd pay $50,000 six months down the road, then we'd pay another $100,000 in another six months, and we sort of did a time—over time bought a property, because we didn't have that much money up front to do it. We are better now, in terms of how we can buy property.

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But again, as I've said, the big properties all get protected by advocacy, the biggest ones. Most people don't realize that. I have friends who tell me, "Well,

I support Save Mount Diablo, because you guys don't take land from people, you buy it." Well, they haven't looked at our advocacy work very closely, because we affect the number of units and where things are developed strongly on properties like that. Or Concord Naval Weapons Station, where we are able to work with the East Bay Regional Park District—again, they're a primary partner there; we are a supporter of them—but to push for how much land would get protected and not be used for housing or commercial development that you'd see if we weren't there, because there *would* have been a lot more development in that case. And again, we can't take all the credit. You've got to realize, we are a part of a much bigger group of organizations/partners to see things like this happen, but from the private side, we're probably the biggest.

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Tewes: Right. Well, while we're on the topic, I'd be interested to hear more about how Save Mount Diablo has employed easements.

01-01:47:52

Sproul: It's funny, when you talk about easements, I put a little hierarchy down here.

01-01:47:58

Tewes: Oh sure.

01-01:48:00

Sproul: When you're protecting land, where do things fit? The most important, as I've said, is our land-use activities, our advocacy. Then, number two has been working with the East Bay Regional Park District, other local agencies, and the habitat conservation [plan] HCP, to have them purchase land—not us, but us saying these are important. Here are the things that you need to be thinking about. They don't need us to tell them about all of them, but we are helping with that. So that's number two. Then, our number three most effective method has been purchase, outright purchase by us, and then we try to turn the land around and sell it to either the State Parks or East Bay Parks, and that's number three. The fourth and least important [to date] is easements, and that's because easements, number one, we're fairly new to it. But easements also work [best] in a region where there aren't other pressures for development, other things that could happen, where the land values are lower. Or there's the political will to just prevent development.

01-01:49:17

Marin County and MALT, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, a perfect example. The political will in Marin County is to protect what's called the inland rural corridor and coastal zone agricultural lands. I mean, that is built right into the County plan. The zoning protects them, the general plan protects them, and so the ranchers out there, in large part, they don't have—there's not a development potential. So for them to try to get some money, at this point, they can sell easements and give up their development rights, and MALT purchases those. The [ranchers] get money; they can plow it right back into

their operation, and it helps to maintain the agricultural community. The whole—it's not just the ranch, but it's all the support services that go with that, that you have to have enough ranches in order to make that work. You don't want to have to go out to the Central Valley to get everything, so—or it's forest land up in Sonoma County or Napa County, some place like that. Well, what's going to happen there? Maybe one home on a hundred acres, something? And so people sell easements on their property. They maintain ownership; they continue to use it for certain purposes, which the easement allows.

01-01:50:37

And so it's a market that is different than here in Contra Costa County, where the development potential is so high and the value of the land is so high, there aren't a lot of people that are interested in selling an easement to somebody like us. The Trail Riders [Concord Mt. Diablo Trail Ride Association], fortunately—and you've probably heard a little bit about them—the Trail Riders is a perfect example of where we *can* take an easement, because they want to keep their operation. They want to be able to ride their horses and they want to have a place to stable them. They don't want the area around them to be developed, which is what happens with all these other stables down, lower down and closer to development. They go away. So they want to maintain what they do, what they like to do, and so selling an easement of their undeveloped property to us is beneficial to both of us. It protects their use, and we protect the land.

01-01:51:34

The other place where easements can be—we can use them effectively, is on pieces that if we buy a property, say, a twenty-acre property that has a house on it, but we don't want to see all of it developed in the future. If we can buy that property, turn it around, place an easement over fifteen acres and say, "Okay, you get five acres," and then we can sell that property to a buyer, "Here's what you get to use, but the rest of it stays undeveloped." And that's actually very attractive to some people, because they know then what's around them is going to—[it's] why they're buying the property in many cases. So there's another use of an easement that can work out.

01-01:52:20

Tewes: And yes, thank you for explaining more about the association with the [Concord Mt. Diablo] Trail Ride Association.

01-01:52:30

Sproul: Yeah, you can't underestimate how land values and the pressures for development affect a lot of these things, which is why advocacy—if you can get the decision makers to say, "No, you're not going to develop there. No. You're going to have to leave that alone, put it in open space," we can make a real, real effect on a project, and we've done that over and over again. And then, political decisions about the urban limit line, for example. What the urban limit line does and how that protects land—at least in the short term. So

those are the kinds of things we're—literally thousands of acres can get protected through our activities. We obviously don't do the vote. We can't vote it, but we can influence and hopefully get the vote to go the way we want to see it.

01-01:53:25
Tewes: What kind of response has Save Mount Diablo had with local political leaders?

01-01:53:31
Sproul: It all depends on the agency and the jurisdiction. We have had very good relationships with many, many state legislators, in fact, where you wouldn't—[telephone rings]

01-01:53:44
Tewes: Let's pause.

01-01:53:44
Sproul: Excuse me.

01-01:53:45
Tewes: [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break, Malcolm, and you were just talking about urban limit lines and also the relationship that Save Mount Diablo has with local political groups.

01-01:53:57
Sproul: Yeah, not so much political groups, but politicians, and you throw in state legislators into that. We have been very fortunate to have state legislators that would work with us from day one, in fact. In fact, that was the primary thing the board did, was working with the state legislators to get money for projects. And that has continued. We've had very good relationships, in most cases—there's been a few, but in most cases they've worked with us, they've tried to promote our projects. Because helping protect land is a real nice thing that a politician can say they did.

01-01:54:36
And then you get to the Board of Supervisors. Contra Costa was a very development-oriented county for a long, long time. Big, big projects, and that's the growth in Central County that we've seen, and now has spilled over into East County. Our relationship there was different. We had some supervisors who would support us, but—[telephone rings] why don't we just let that ring?

01-01:55:07
Tewes: Let's—okay.

01-01:55:09
Sproul: Let's just let that ring. It's probably that same one that called—if they leave a message, then you know it's somebody you know.

01-01:55:18
Tewes: [laughs] A real person.

01-01:55:19
Sproul: Yeah. That'll send them into the message.

01-01:55:23
Tewes: Okay.

01-01:55:24
Sproul: Anyway, at the county level [someone speaks on the answering machine]—

01-01:55:38
Tewes: I'm going to pause. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break. We were just talking about—

01-01:55:42
Sproul: Yeah, so we're back at the County, Contra Costa. At the Board of Supervisors, we generally have not had a favorable board. But we have been effective in working with staff at the County level, and so it's not just the politicians, but it's staff. We have had two people, in particular, that we've been able to work with. In fact, I shouldn't even say two; much more than two. I'm thinking of easily three at the moment. So that we have had good relations with staff and been able to affect projects that way, so it's not just when it gets to the vote, but what gets *brought* to the vote that's important.

01-01:56:25
And then you take the different cities around here, and a lot of them are very development oriented, and so you have the politicians, the councilmembers that are of that orientation. Frequently, the local residents are dead set against something, so you have some of their own people, their constituents, who are going to be opposed, and so they're more willing to modify or make changes to projects that we wanted to see. Sometimes you get a good council or a board and, boy, everything goes smoothly. That's less frequent. But that's the kind of—but we have those relationships. I think the more important point is we have those relationships. We have councilmembers we can talk to. They know about our influence, I think, is the way to put it. And they know that they've got to take what we say seriously, and so we have been effective because of that.

01-01:57:36
Tewes: Well, you were just speaking about the local government that really supports development, and I'm curious about the changes in development you've seen since you moved to this area thirty-five years ago.

01-01:57:51
Sproul: Well, the big projects—here in Moraga, Moraga looks very much like it did in 1986. There have been a few projects, but there have not been big projects. I think Sanders Ranch went in—it's way out at the end of town and nobody sees it. Literally it's out the end of a road and nobody sees it. You have to drive out

there to see it. For the most part, there haven't been that many certainly big projects. Small things, but very, very few since we moved here. And this was a brand-new home in 1986, so Moraga hasn't changed much. And Orinda hasn't changed much and, frankly, Lafayette hasn't changed much. Although Lafayette's getting more higher-density development in what I'll call the Mount Diablo Corridor, the road—Mt. Diablo Rd. Corridor, which is along—between Hwy. 24 and then what would be called the commercial district of Lafayette. But even that, it's still very similar.

01-01:58:50

But the big projects have taken place in—Walnut Creek even was pretty much built out by the seventies. But boy, San Ramon, Pittsburg, Brentwood, all those East County—and San Ramon—a lot of Danville was already built—have seen huge developments. The Dougherty Valley, 11,000 units on 10,000 acres, but half of that had to be open space. And that is, in part, the kinds of things we worked on. But still, huge developments, big, big developments in the East County, and those things—there aren't many big projects out there like that anymore. And Dublin, we've been active in what's happened in Dublin recently, where people got tired of seeing everything just getting plowed over. They were very development oriented in Dublin, and [that is] no longer the case. San Ramon was much more development oriented—no longer, not so much the case now. But the big projects are pretty much done.

01-01:59:55

There's probably something out in the East County that's big that could happen. I mean, we're fighting a couple Seeno projects right now. But there aren't many big ones anymore. There was one on the local ballot out in Antioch, and that got shut down by the voters with a lot of our help, a lot of organizing, a lot of getting [it] to the point where people were aware of it and what was proposed. But that's going to be the end of it, with what the County is—the HCP is purchasing, East Bay Parks, the line is being drawn even there. Here, when you go Danville, Alamo, Walnut Creek around to Clayton, the line is pretty much there of what's going to separate open space from development. I mean, there's other small pieces, but not big things.

01-02:00:56

Tewes: I suppose related to that entire conversation is the expansion to include the Diablo Range in Save Mount Diablo's mission here, I think around 2018. Can you tell me what that has meant for the organization?

01-02:01:17

Sproul: Well, what does it mean to the organization? At the moment, it's—the biggest meaning to the organization is that there's a little bit more staff time that we're devoting to it, from a purely pragmatic standpoint. We're not purchasing land down there. We're helping people, so it's expanding our area of influence, but it's a whole different land-use arena. Even in Eastern Alameda County, they had something called Measure D, where lands were rezoned to hundred-acre minimums, instead of Contra Costa's ag zoning is five-acre minimums. So

that's a real difference in density that's possible. On a hundred acres, you're talking one home on—you may not even notice it's out there. But if you've got a hundred acres, and you've got twenty homes, that's a whole different thing, so the zoning and the land use are different.

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The activities down in the Diablo Range are going to be different. They're going to be big public infrastructure, like a dam, an off-channel dam, like is proposed in Del Puerto Canyon. It's going to be major solar projects or wind farms. You're not going to see the kinds of residential commercial development that you see here in Contra Costa County. So it's a different arena. We don't have the political connections down there—not even close to it—but what we're trying to do is publicize it and make people aware of it.

01-02:03:03

From my standpoint, the most important thing is the connection to maintain a physical connection south of 580 to the open space lands on Mount Diablo and its foothills north of 580. That's, to me, the critical thing, that there can be that exchange, genetic exchange, back and forth, particularly of wildlife. That if you did some things that would change that, that all of a sudden there was development or the vegetation patterns would change, then you could lose that. And that, I think, would be a problem. That's one of the [reasons] why we're in this. We want to maintain those corridors, those connections. Once you get past 580, it really—it just kind of goes like that, and it really opens up. And all of a sudden, there's all this wild land and it's remote. I'm sure you've flown to LA and looked down when you come in up the coast or down, you just look out and there's all this open land down there. Well, that's the Diablo Range. And so the issues are different. And it's Seth's baby, so he's really—this is his push.

01-02:04:29

Tewes: An important direction, as you look to the future here, certainly.

01-02:04:32

Sproul: I think it is. You know, there was one question like: what is your view for the future? And if you said in ten years, what's my vision for us? It's going to be very similar to what we're doing now, probably twenty years from now. We'll get more properties, we'll fill in the pieces of the puzzle, but a lot of the battles will be done: the political battles, the urban limit lines, the definition between open space and developed land. And so what's going to happen in fifty years? What are we going to be doing? My own view is we could morph into something very different than we are today, focusing on the Diablo Range, with a secondary organization managing the easements that we've acquired over the years, and still have permanent conservation easements on them. But it's a whole different emphasis at that point, and who knows? I'm not going to be here to see it, so—

01-02:05:40
Tewes: Well, as we're wrapping up our thoughts here, I'd be curious overall if you could think about what some of the most significant challenges and achievements Save Mount Diablo has encountered over the years.

01-02:05:57
Sproul: I'm going to drop the challenges part, because I think we've talked about enough of them that we know what the challenges are. We know that there's a very—the land values in Contra Costa County are such that it's—there's a lot why people want to develop here. The developers aren't stupid. There's a lot of money to be made, and we are—and that drives up the price of land, and that's the challenge, whether it's a challenge for the Park District, the East Bay Parks or the State Parks or us, whoever. The challenges are it's not cheap to do business. It's a lot less than down in Santa Barbara or Newport Beach. There, that's a whole order of magnitude different. [laughs] But it's different than remote rural lands that we don't deal in. So that's the challenge, I think.

01-02:06:53
A challenge for us—and now I'm going to dwell on challenges—is how we can replace staff, in particular Seth, at some point in the future, that has that same drive and vision. How are we going to accomplish that as an organization? We haven't even talked about that, but it's going to happen someday. I'll tell you, he's as bullish today as he was when I first met him. I went out in the field with him this morning, and he was Seth. Seth was Seth, and so he's not slowing down, but it's going to happen. And so how we can, in our staff—not in an executive director, who—I look at executive directors as baseball managers. You know, they come, they've got certain skills, they have things they want to do, and then they move on. Where Seth has been with us for a long, long time. He's committed to what the organization does, just sort of at a gut level. So how are we going to replace that, and with the same knowledge and vision that he has of the land? So that's a challenge for us.

01-02:08:09
But what we've accomplished—when you look at the map, and I'll go back to this map—and I can take a map of all around Mount Diablo and show you—and we talk about it in our literature, about 6,000 acres were protected in 1970 or something—we can probably verify a date, but—nothing. Now, we're looking at over 100,000 acres. What an accomplishment. Being able to piece these pictures together and literally create a protected landscape. Taking a natural landscape, but making it protected, and it will be retained as a protected landscape rather than chopped up with one piece that's protected and then another one's developed. No, but a big piece of protected land, and I think that's really significant, and that's what's so satisfying about doing this. We are really contributing and making progress at it.

01-02:09:18
Tewes: Certainly tangible results that we're seeing. Shifting just a little bit, I do want to acknowledge that recently you picked up a few awards for all of the work

you've done over the years, one of which was *Diablo Magazine*'s Threads of Hope Award in 2020, and also in 2020 the Mountain Saver Award from Save Mount Diablo. Now, I'm just thinking overall, what does it mean to you to have such recognition of all that you have contributed?

01-02:09:50
Sproul: You know, it's funny, I've never been in this for recognition. When I was president, I never wrote a column that had my picture on it. I didn't care—I don't care. I'm not looking for that recognition. So the recognition comes when you see what we've accomplished. That, to me, is just to be able to say, "Wow, there's a lot of places we've been able to do something," is very satisfying.

01-02:10:20
So you take the Threads of Hope Award. It's a recognition of the amount of time I've put in, but I think more importantly, it's a recognition of the accomplishments of Save Mount Diablo and what we have been able to do for the Contra Costa County community. I think that's really what it is. So it's nice, but I'm going to take that little trophy and [place] it in the Save Mount Diablo office, because I think it's really more a reflection of what we do as an organization than what I do as an individual. The Mountain Saver Award, on the other hand, I really am pleased by that, because it's saying—it's a thank you for the time that I've been able to put in. You don't look for it, but it's nice to have people say thank you, and that's what I see the Mountain Saver Award as, and that one's going to go right up here [on our living room fireplace mantle].

01-02:11:16
Tewes: I love it.

01-02:11:17
Sproul: Yeah.

01-02:11:21
Tewes: What do you hope you've contributed to Save Mount Diablo these many years?

01-02:11:26
Sproul: What I hope is I've contributed to the success of the organization. And to me, the success of the organization is not how much money we've raised—although how important that is, people will tell you that all the time. But it's these tangible, how important—what I've contributed is an understanding of the land, an understanding of the processes that we deal in, the political and land use, and being able to then see how much land we've protected. That I can see what I know, as an individual, helped that to occur, and so that's where I've been able to contribute, I think, most. I ran meetings for fifteen years, and I think there's a certain—you know, that helps, that's a good thing, that contributes. But it's the ability to have the knowledge of certain things

that could help us accomplish our goals, if that sounds like it makes sense to you.

01-02:12:33
Tewes: It does, it does. We've already spoken about your hopes for the future of the organization, but I'm just curious what the organization and the land you're helping to protect means to you personally.

01-02:12:49
Sproul: Well, I love—I mean, what I do is I look—I mean, I have binoculars at practically every desk in this house. I love wildlife, I love natural lands. I've grown up with that. And I think I've had that interest from day one. I don't think it was something somebody directed me in. I mean, it's something I've had just from day one. I didn't need anybody to point me in that direction, it's always been there. So that's why I do it, because those are things that are obviously important to me. And now, with the education that I have, knowing how important it is to maintain those resources, not just from a recreational, oh, Malcolm wants to go out and hike on a piece of property, but knowing that those resources, which we are so fortunate to have, we are so lucky to then know that they will be here. And there are so many pressures on what's taking place from climate change—and who knows what the world's going to look like down the road. But we're trying to maintain things that have been here literally for millions and millions of years, and hopefully that can be continued. And by protecting big blocks of land, that helps to do that. So we'll keep our fingers crossed.

01-02:14:25
Tewes: Indeed. But you're well on the way, well on the way. Well, Malcolm, that's all I have for questions, but is there anything you'd like to add that we have not yet discussed?

01-02:14:36
Sproul: Well, I'm about worn out now! [laughs] So—

01-02:14:38
Tewes: So, it's perfect then. Okay

01-02:14:41
Sproul: If I think of something, I'll let you know.

01-02:14:42
Tewes: Perfect.

01-02:14:43
Sproul: And I can go back over my notes and see if there's anything that I think was critical that we may have overlooked. If I got back to you on that, but—

01-02:14:51
Tewes: Okay. That sounds like a good place for us to end then. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it.

01-02:14:56
Sproul: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]