

**RBRL OHD 005-03**

**The Oral History Documentary Series**

**Nancy Smith**

Nancy Smith Interviewed by Sarah Duncan

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DUNCAN: This is Sara Duncan interviewing Nancy Blount Smith for the Sandy Creek Oral History Project and this is July 13, 2005 and we are at the Sandy Creek Visitor Center in Athens, Georgia. Did I pronounce your name right? Blount?

SMITH: It's Blunt actually.

DUNCAN: Blunt, okay excuse me. Blunt.

SMITH: It's all right.

DUNCAN: First of all why don't you tell me a little about yourself?

SMITH: I have a degree in biology from Greensboro College in North Carolina and all my life I have been involved with educating children about the natural environment through the nature center movement, which was created in the mid '60s by a man named John Ripley Forbes who created the Natural Science for Youth Foundation and a nation wide movement of community nature centers began out of his efforts and that foundations efforts. Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens, Georgia was one of those nature centers that were influenced by his philosophy. I grew up in that profession. When I graduated from college I

immediately began as a curator of education with Greensboro Natural Science and Zoo in Greensboro, North Carolina. I and then went to Los Angeles and worked as an Assistant Director for Marine Education at the University of Southern California Sea Grant Program and developed educational materials for the purpose of meshing the idea of Marine science to intercity children in the Los Angeles area in interdisciplinary fashion: through English, through math, through social studies. These curricular materials were based upon oceanographic and marine science principles. They were written out of grant for sea grant and incorporated into Los Angeles unified and Los Angeles County School District there for children who mostly had never seen the ocean until they were in their teens, so it was very effective. Then I came to Athens to direct Sandy Creek Nature Center in 1979.

DUNCAN: So you hadn't entered this area until '79? That was what drew you here?

SMITH: '79, correct.

DUNCAN: I was going to ask you about that, it looked like there was quite a bit of turnover in the nature center management before you came here. What was that like coming into that environment and a new nature center?

SMITH: I was fortunate because I had a supervisor, the director of the Greensboro Center, who was a political genius and he was also willing to share a lot of his personal philosophies on how to effectively manage group dynamics. So, I owe it to him to be able to walk into Athens, Georgia, into the Nature Center that was \$8,000 in the red that owed the school

district, and the city, and the county government's money and had a staff of Ceda workers and no director. Ceda of course is temporary federal funding that was an ineffective program that was cancelled shortly there after. But the Nature Center was drawing upon support from the school district at 50 percent, the city at 25 percent, and the county for 25 percent for its operating expenses. And of course there were two different fiscal years and there was a private nonprofit board of directors calling themselves Northeast Georgia Nature Center Incorporated, a private nonprofit group who had a very different idea --each and every one of them-- on how a nature center needed to be managed and who really didn't know which way to turn. I think they hired me...they interviewed me on the phone in my office in Los Angeles on the basis of something they thought I could mend. That was the way they hired me to come in and I took it as a challenge and came. And I don't think anybody else they had hired as the director had that with the expectation in mind that it was going to be a kind of web of human dynamics that was going to be difficult to smooth out. It was not difficult because all you had you to do was come in and be friendly and understand everyone's point of view. Of course, the fiscal year business was a nightmare, because you constantly had to go here and appeal to the mayor, and here to appeal to the county commissioners, then you had to go here and appeal to the school district, to the superintendent, and then you had to appeal to your own board of directors who had a budget of their own, which was minimal at the time, but it was still a budget. And they still were in control and they could tell me what to do and so could the commission chairman, and so could the mayor, and so could the school superintendent, so it was like having four bosses.

DUNCAN: Did they always want to do the same thing?

SMITH: No, no, not at all. [BOTH laugh]

DUNCAN: I didn't think so.

SMITH: But they were all reasonable people. They all had their hearts in the same place the all the rest of us had our hearts in. We wanted the place to be effectively teaching environmental principles to young people, so we could continue to live on this earth, so we can continue to breathe the air, and drink the water, that's the bottom line. So everyone thought that was a very lofty principle to pursue and it was just a matter of playing mediator I suppose, putting people together. And I had other people on the Nature Center Board who were that ilk suit who liked to put people together toward a common goal. Together a bunch of people captured a dynamic and went forward and it was successful.

DUNCAN: That's great.

SMITH: So, I was just put in a place where I could do that. There were a lot of people who were capable of that, who joined forces and pushed and people who were community leaders who you never really heard from they are behind the scenes and they're connecting that person and this person and never recognized for that. People like May Anne Hodgson, who was at that time was a sustainer on the Junior League. Her husband was in the insurance business and banking business and she was a very influential leader in this community but enjoyed being that way behind the scenes. So, she very quietly put things together so that

they would flow smoothly. It was amazing how people like that worked, there were others of course too. So it was a collective that was able to cement the relationships so that we could go forward and in 1980 a proposal was submitted and it was sold to the board of directors first. It came from the board of directors and it went to the county government and that was not without a great deal of preliminary setup: going to the mayor and talking to him about this idea, where do we need to go, going to the school district, talking to board members, talking to the superintendent, "Where do we need to go with this nature center?", getting everybody's ideas, and getting everybody's input; because if you hadn't done that it would have never happened. Everybody's input went into this, everybody was recognized for it. And the county took the Nature Center, of course we knew they were going to do that before the proposal was ever submitted, but that's how it had to happen. So, it happened that way, it happened beautifully, and the county took the Nature Center and in the mean time they built the Sandy Creek Park. What happened ultimately was I was assigned, of course I was the director of the Nature Center, so the county took me and that ... which was convenient for them because the park had to be opened. The first three phases had already been completed on Sandy Creek Park and there was pressure to open the park and they needed somebody to run it, so I was it.

DUNCAN: And when did you officially start the park do you remember?

SMITH: 19-well it was kind of funny because in 1980 most of that year I was working most of my time in this area and I was still paid by the county, as the ... well the county school district we still got input from them and we had a contract with the school district at that time

for services so the school district knew exactly what it was paying for. So the upshot of the arrangement was I was working at the park alongside George Chandler, he was the builder as the public works department was building using inmate labor to build it. I was working with him as far as recreational activities, and hiring staff, and buying equipment like mowers and things to begin operations. So the two of us worked side by side and I was still paid the Nature Center salary -- you know nothing had changed that way -- and then I became officially part of the county government's budget as far as personnel went and salary in July 1st of 1981. And then in October of that same year the park officially opened to the public.

DUNCAN: You mentioned that the park was built using prison labor. What was that like working with the prison labor and the prisons themselves?

SMITH: Well, George Chandler could talk about that a whole lot better than I can I am sure. George was ultimately responsible for negotiating with the architect and the Soil Conservation Service because it was a 50:50 agreement. George was under an enormous amount of pressure to build the park with virtually no help, and not very much money to build things, and no personnel. He had to use existing personnel to build this park and of course nobody had no experience doing that so the infrastructure was put in with inmate labor with a person who was assigned to George Chandler his name was Fred Smotherman and he took inmate labor and built the infrastructure, i.e. plumbing. And there were problems with that because there wasn't a whole lot of money and there wasn't any expertise except for George, who could lay roads, and who could do that, and supervise the building of the subcontractors. He did that, but as far as using inmate labor and the supervision of

inmate labor there were a number of people put in positions where they didn't have the resources or experience to do what they had to do. Part of the result of that was that ... well for the first year for example the first deep freeze we had all the pipes burst, and we had geysers going up all over the park. So there was a great deal of repair that had to be done for the infrastructure and then there were many modifications operationally that had to be made, which is fine and you expect that, but it was a charge to George Chandler at no extra expense that probably cost him 50 percent more time than he had ever had to devote to anything. He can speak to the details of that I am sure and would probably be delighted to do so. George just let everything roll off, he was amazingly peaceful about the whole thing at least in front of me and it managed to happen.

DUNCAN: What was your involvement in those first few months?

SMITH: Mostly, coming up with a budget for the first year of operations knowing it was going to open to the public whether people liked it, or it was ready or not -- and of course it wasn't -- but we had to open it anyway because there was a lot of pressure from the fishing community to open it up and let people come in with their boats and fish. It had been stocked with ... let me see what did they stock it with? They stocked it with bass, and blue gill, and catfish. And people were just chomping at the bit to come up and fish. So the county of course wants to bend to that pressure to get that monkey off their back so they said okay you will open this park. This park will be dedicated and opened on this day and that's the way it's going to be. So what I had to do is come up with a budget, and had to develop policies for their approval, and I had to develop an operational procedure for their approval,

and a mission, and a goal. And I had to create a whole department that included not just this place, but Sandy Creek Nature Center and the Greenway between them that was already under construction, well, not under construction but it was a concept that of course Charles Agar had come up with a long, long time ago in the late '60's, and had students coming up with master plans for this greenway system. And Walt Cook and Alma Walker who are both on the Nature Center Board were the impetus for the Nature Center becoming involved in the instrumentation of that first leg of the Greenway which ended up being Cook's trail between the park and the Nature Center. And that was already a movement that was not stoppable, though nobody wanted to stop it, everybody wanted it to happen. All those dynamics were involved with the first year's operation and I had to come up with all that and create the department, its policies, its staff, its everything. And I was handed a big wad of keys and said here make it happen, literally.

DUNCAN: And about how much time was that between someone handing you the wad of keys and the parks opening?

SMITH: Well, there was a lot of time in there for knowing it was going to happen that way, maybe two or three months. Anyway it was time enough to find out what I needed to find out to do it. I wasn't proud, I was going to find out from the people who knew, and some of them weren't even from the state of Georgia [DUNCAN laughs]. I had to find out how to do and why to do and I leaned a lot into the national government [who] do that for the National Park Service. Because this is a resource based park and a resource park has principles upon which it must abide in order to be successful and preserve not only public recreation services



that are outdoor related, but to preserve the environment which it is designed to protect. I knew I had to do those things and it was not a difficult thing to do. I had plenty of time to do it initially. Of course there were things you learned how to do along the way but you just have to get enough to get it started, and then you can change as you need to.

DUNCAN: What did this area look like? Maybe you can just describe for me what the park looked like both when you first saw it, and when the park opened in October of '81.

SMITH: It was a well kept secret for the first two phases of development; I didn't know anything about the county government and what they were doing. I really didn't. It was totally unknown to me that this was being built up here.

DUNCAN: Really?

SMITH: Oh no, I didn't know.

DUNCAN: Even when you were working down at the Nature Center and just didn't even ...?

SMITH: They didn't talk about it. They didn't want anybody to know about it because then the pressure comes. At least I suppose, that's my best guess at it. I didn't know what the park looked like before hand. But I could pretty much describe it based on the previous land owner's comments to me and I sought him out because I wanted to know what it looked like

before it was a park. It was a farm. A huge farm owned by a man named McIntyre and his family. There was a swamp where the lake is here now and of course Douglas Sailors gave me a perspective on that too. He was grandfathered in because his farm was right there and part of his land was condemned and taken -- of course everyone was paid -- but during the condemnation process some of their land was taken away for the park and of course the fence went up and all that. Talking to those people gave me a pretty good perspective of what it looked like beforehand and the only difference really was in the fields -- and well there are improvements, but there were lots of fields -- and with course your interspersed little cubbies of trees, your little oasis in the middle of the field edges and more fences and things, probably not much different then it looks today.

DUNCAN: What about when...?

SMITH: Except there was a lot of topsoil that isn't there anymore. [BOTH laugh] We won't get into that. We won't talk about what happened to the topsoil.

DUNCAN: That doesn't sound good whatever it is. What about when the park first opened in '81?

SMITH: When the park first opened there was a dedication of course and during the dedication the lake was named for Cecil W. Chapman and the park was officially named Sandy Creek Park and there was festivity, and cheese, and punch, and all that stuff, and the mumpy-mumpy politicians came out in their three piece suit to sit and roast in the sun. And

the first two phases of development had been completed at that point in time. The Federal Government Soil Conservation Service which is now the Natural Resources Conservation Service, same outfit different name, and probably a different emphasis too. This was site ten the third and last in a series of ten planned dams. And the third and the last was designed for recreational purposes as well as flood control irrigation and all that and all that was explained during the dedication. And the federal governments role in that and financially and otherwise and all the facts and history of it came out at that pointing time. And there was an Upper Oconee Watershed Association ... I am getting the name wrong ... Little Sandy Creek Watershed Association. And that group was instrumental -- it was a volunteer group -- in convincing the county and pushing the paperwork through the Nixon administration and all that to get the grant going, to get it finalized. Cecil Chapman of course was the District Conservationist here in Athens, and because of him it happened. He pushed that through personally and he and Jim Holland worked together to get it done. And their persistence is the reason that happened: Holland, Chapman and the Little Sandy Creek Watershed Association.

DUNCAN: What do you remember about Cecil Chapman?

SMITH: He was a jocular fellow. He was wonderful. He was gruff and sweet. He was almost all those things you wouldn't want to see in your grandfather by the time I met him. I adored him. I thought he was wonderful, but he was very, very gruff, but at the same time he was a cream puff. [BOTH laugh] It was just great. I was able to convince him that he needed to join the board of the Nature Center, which he did and came face to face with his

archenemy whose name ...well, whose name would make his ears turn red, just thinking about her. They got along after it was over with. One of the board members down at the Nature Center, Alma Walker -- who was literally the person responsible for the Nature Center being there -- she was the one who took those professors by the scruff of the neck and dragged them into saving the swamp. And SCS wanted to channalize Sandy Creek at the time you see. They wanted to straighten it up.

DUNCAN: That's right, that's right.

SMITH: And Alma went ballistic and got all these other people: Walt Cook, Don Scott, all of these University professors together, and Eugene Odum whose textbook trains every environmentalist in the world, and he was right here in Athens. And these people got together under her fist, literally. She said you will not allow them to do this and they didn't. They pressured Chapman to such an extent that he stopped it from happening and then that property down there got purchased from a bunch of land owners in the area who jumped on the wagon: The Farmer family, Robert is a cousin in that family and they owned a lot of land down there and -- who was the other -- Freeman, oh there were several. Homer Fleming was one who they donated the land and some of it was purchased with the grant. I don't know exactly how much I can't pull off the top of my head.

DUNCAN: That was the land for the Nature Center?

SMITH: The land for the Nature Center, yeah but it was all affecting that you see, because the SCS had plans for all that drainage area and the Nature Center was right in the middle of it. It was the reason, the thing everyone pointed their fingers to and said we've got to save this habitat. And then you pull out the endangered species lists at the time, you pull in the fact that the Louisiana Water Thrush nests down there, that there is a fern that doesn't grow anywhere else in the state of Georgia except right down there, the Marginal Wood Fern.

[That] was used to convince the federal government not to channelize Sandy Creek because it would be destroying the habitat. Even though mankind's quest for development and his rabid timbering of the state destroyed all and put the silt in the areas to start with -- that started the swamp areas -- even so, that ended up being a good thing for certain species. There was the argument and the SCS of course caved into that and created a spillway here on this dam. The design of this dam on this lake and the design of the spillway is unique in all the world. There is not another dam or spillway constructed like this one is and that is because of Alma Walker that it was designed and constructed the way it is, because she just would not let go.

DUNCAN: Interesting. And when you say the spillway is that the part...?

SMITH: [SMITH laughs] We called it affectionately ... we never said so in public really but we always called it ... then when Alma died -- she died of Lou Gehrig disease -- from then on we affectionately called that spillway the Alma Walker Memorial Spillway. Because she in fact was the impetus behind the redesign of it so the creek wouldn't have to be channelized

to promote the flow of the water through there. So their standard dam design was not applicable in this case they had to modify it.

DUNCAN: Okay that is interesting and that is all that while it was the Soil Conservation Service that was doing all the work and then they jumped on board with the park. Now how did that happen?

SMITH: Jumped on what?

DUNCAN: When they got involved in the actual creation of the park. I guess what I am trying to get at is...

SMITH: It was all part of the same grant application I think from SCS because the watershed area -- this was site ten of course -- the watershed area went way up there. Way into Jackson County and up the river, and it included ten sites and this was to be the last one in a watershed management area. They were going to build ten dams. This happened in the early '70s. I think the first application was sent to the federal government for this whole process for agriculture-to promote agriculture, irrigation, and flood control those were the three things. The fourth which was site ten was recreation. So there were four reasons why SCS wanted to do this: flood control and management, to promote agriculture, and to allow for effective irrigation with agriculture products and live stock and then recreation.

DUNCAN: I had heard that a little differently so I am glad you mentioned it.

SMITH: Basically, that was the grant application. It was submitted and accepted in phased development over period of years starting with the building of the dam which commenced in 1968, somewhere in that neighborhood. The federal government paid one hundred percent the cost of the building of the dam which was an impressive figure at the time which was \$3,000,000.

DUNCAN: That sounds right; I know I have seen that.

SMITH: It was somewhere in that neighborhood \$3,000,000. 'Course it got held up in the Nixon administration, but in the meantime you see all these people and organizations who were determined it was going to happen anyway even though there was a political delay at the federal level. The White House was holding up all these things, but then of course it got relieved -- maybe Watergate saved the park, I don't know [BOTH laugh] -- but anyway it recommenced. But in the meantime it gave the impetus. It gave a lot of people time to say, "Yes we're gonna have this." So the pressure was on and of course the project began. There's two others above this one so there are three out of the original planned ten. There is one up here up on -- oh my gosh -- Sea Graves Mill, there is one up there. There is one above that and I have no idea where that is and then this one.

DUNCAN: Okay. And this one you said was the last one?

SMITH: This was the last of the three incorporating the fourth principle recreation, public recreation in addition to the other three. 'Course the swamp was destroyed right in the middle of it, but there weren't a lot federal regulations that the federal government had to comply with at the time, but there was an archeological study done and it was determined there was a Cherokee or Creek village where the current camping area is now. We are still finding pots over there. You can go over there any day of the week and find pottery shards and arrowheads. As they were excavating the trail that goes up the other side of the lake there were just arrowheads galore unearthed, beautiful things – yeah quartz and flint.

DUNCAN: Do you know how old, I mean you said it was Cherokee or Creek?

SMITH: No, no I don't.

DUNCAN: Don't worry about it [DUNCAN laughs].

SMITH: The University did the study and I never did see the study actually.

DUNCAN: That is interesting. I never heard about that. How was the land acquired? You said some of it was condemned.

SMITH: Some of it was condemned. That is a horrible word, but it is an official word that is used. Most of the condemnation was by mutual consent and the land owners were paid fair market value or more of their properties. Most everybody was in favor of it. There were a



few that balked but you're gonna have that. But mostly there were benefits for the land owners that they could see. I do not know from a personal perspective about the specifics of that procedure but I know it took five years and it went from 1968 to 1972 or 1973. '73 I think the last parcel was brought in to the fold. I don't know when the actual construction on the roads and buildings ... I don't know when that started.

DUNCAN: It looks like 1977 or 1978.

SMITH: Yes, probably so. That sounds about right. Phase one and two were already complete when I saw the park and phase three was in the process of being done. I can't even remember exactly what they were, but all the infrastructure was in place except the water lines to the buildings and that was subsequently built in other phases, but the roads were in place, the parking lot was in place.

DUNCAN: Was the swim beach already...?

SMITH: No the swim beach was phase five I think. It came along in '80 -- somewhere in the early to mid '80s when it was constructed. I wasn't involved in any of the planning or design of any of the phases except for six and seven. I had some influence over six and influence over seven. This visitor center was phase six. The barbeque was phase six. They didn't have a staff before that. There is nothing in the design. They just wander around you know we just shove them all in the gate house I guess. The continuity of phases 1-3 I just wasn't familiar with, George can fill you in on that.

DUNCAN: How big of staff did you have when you opened?

SMITH: Three. This is a six hundred and thirty four acre park, right?

DUNCAN: Right.

SMITH: Two hundred and sixty of it is lake. Its brand new there's a Department Director who also has to take care of the Nature Center, and deal with the Greenway business, writing grants and that sort of thing. There was a gatekeeper, who once you established operating hours, which was every day of the week seven to ten, except for Wednesday. Wednesday was the only day we were closed and that person maintained the gate for forty hours a week. Then someone else had to fill in -- which was usually me -- to do gatehouse work. And then there was one full time maintenance person who was brought on board, but not until after, way after. I mowed grass for a year on a tractor. I learned how to operate a tractor and I mowed grass. Then there was a recreational assistant that was hired and he mowed grass. There were no programs because everybody was maintaining the grounds and dealing with the problems of a new park.

DUNCAN: What kind of maintenance was there besides mowing grass?

SMITH: Other than mowing grass there was cleaning out all the restrooms and all the buildings, and the floors, maintaining all these buildings, vacuuming all the carpets, washing

the windows, doing everything that you have to do, emptying trash three and four times a day in six or seven areas. In one weekend we would completely fill a dumpster when we first opened, so all of us had to do all of the work. And there were four of us and one of us was stuck in that in building right there and the other three of us had to run the park.

DUNCAN: Was there any other work done in the more natural areas plantings, or any kind of ...?

SMITH: Not for awhile. No, see the park was still under construction so that the refurbishing of the landscape and the building of the turf on hard pan was one of our first priorities, but see we had no topsoil to grow any grass in so that was a constant struggle to get something growing out there.

DUNCAN: What did happen to the topsoil?

SMITH: Do I have to talk about that?

DUNCAN: Well, you've gotten me really curious now.

SMITH: I don't know personally, it happened before I got here, but it was one of my first questions that I had to deal with -- trying to grow something on this. It was just a hard pan; you could have made pottery out of it. It was horrible. I said what happened to this area was a farm. There are two feet of topsoil down here on the other side. What happened to the

topsoil? Well, the story that I heard -- and I don't know this from personal experience you understand -- but what I have heard was that it was bulldozed up and some of it was used to build the dam and some of it was taken to the landfill, but it was not put back on top for the purpose of growing grass on here. It was used for other purposes.

DUNCAN: I would imagine that that would make it kinda difficult to make this into a sort of a resource area.

SMITH: The design itself, this area that we had the most area with the area that was excavated in leveled off into a ball field. With backstops and fences and everything, so they designed this whole area so the first thing you see when you enter this natural resource park is the ball field complex. So that was a design problem that was inconsistent with standards all over the country or all over the world, shall I say, for resources. It bastardized the concept of a resource park. And the top soil was scraped off so badly because it had to be leveled with the proper drainage for a ball field. You can't have puddles on the ball field. Anyway that happen but it just made everything difficult because there wasn't anything to grow anything in.

DUNCAN: I can imagine [DUNCAN laughs].

SMITH: So we poured thousands of dollars a year on fertilizer on this place, I mean just wasted all kinds of money to try to get grass growing in soil that is not suitable to grow anything.

DUNCAN: What finally happened? I mean there seems to be grass now.

SMITH: Well, you keep trying and you build up a level of topsoil every year and you get a quarter of inch here even if it is your dead grass seed from the season before, you have something down there upon something can grow. It just takes time.

DUNCAN: So over time it did ...

SMITH: So over time it developed its own layer of topsoil, but it was a struggle when we first started and we had to experiment with different types of grasses and Bermudas that will tolerate that kind of ... the type of grass that grows in concrete. That was what we had to put out.

DUNCAN: Crab grass.

SMITH: George wisely over seeded with a number of things the government used to stabilize soils when they went through and taught farmers to irrigate so their top soils don't wash away and that was the mixture that they used. It was a pasture mix so we had to develop a pasture mix first that included *Cirvisa lespardisa* obviously you don't have that on a ball field either so that created another problem for a ball field but it had to stabilize the soil fairly quickly.

DUNCAN: I see.

SMITH: So at least some things grew in there even if it only made it conducive for weeds to grow in there. And we had to deal with that for about five or six years before we could get a good stand of Fescue going, Bermuda Fescue combination. But anyway those ball fields were designed there so that the Saturday and Sunday picnic groups, family reunions, that sort of thing can enjoy a good pick up game of softball except there was one that was little league regulation size that was snuck in there, but anyway that is what happened.

DUNCAN: It seems like there is a lot of push pull between the recreation folks and the resource folks. Maybe you can kind of describe who is on what side and what that was like dealing with trying to make everyone happy or at least everyone relax?

SMITH: Well, the only thing that anyone can do who is a professional in that area, in any area, is to understand the difference. Understand that the natural resource parks are natural resource parks. Homestead built Central Park in New York -- that's a resource park -- it is designed to serve the purpose that is different from your average athletic complex. One is for one purpose and the other is for another purpose. One tends to be natural resource related and dependant and the other is not. You are not dependant upon a natural resource environment to play basketball, or tennis, or baseball, or football. You are dependent on the natural resource if you go hiking, nobody hikes up an interstate highway because it is not pleasant, nobody wants to go hiking in a stadium because it is not what they want to do, it is not what they are there for. They are there to enjoy the natural resources their there

sometimes for a quiet, peaceful connection with the environment -- a spiritual connection -- and that cannot be achieved in the accompaniment with a little league ball game with all the noise, and the loud speakers, and the lights. You can't achieve that in that kind experience in that kind of environment. When you start compromising environments that are designed to support activities that include hiking and camping and fishing and boating and picnicking and you combine those with loud recreational activities with lots of man made contraptions that go along with it, it detracts from the natural resource experience. The problem there is that everybody likes the peace and quiet and environment of a resource park everybody seems to be drawn to that, including those who like to play ball, they want their complexes to be built in that type of environment. So that they can enjoy that scenery, that setting and still play ball and that is perfectly natural and normal, but it does become a problem when you compromise a natural resource based area with loud and unusual activities because it limits those who are drawn to that area for reasons besides to play ball. It was difficult to get that concept across and it is still probably still difficult to get that point across in Athens, GA because Athens, GA is a sport related town and if you try to separate any area from that you become an anti-sportsperson instantly. Instantly you become anti-sports and you dance through the tulips and you tree hug and you don't appreciate anything else. So you become an antagonist because in Athens, GA sports is everything to some people. And that is fine except that there are other things to do for people who don't want to do that all the time. There are people who enjoy peace and quiet. They need a place to go where they can enjoy peace in quiet in this very, very noisy world we live in and I've fought to keep this place that way and it was a constant struggle because everybody loved it. Everybody thought it was beautiful and everybody wanted to do their own thing in this place whether it was compatible

or not. So that is pretty much the principle of resource parks is that the activities in a resource park which are recreational in nature depend entirely and completely upon the natural environment to achieve the objectives of the experience. And that is the bottom line and that is recognized world-wide.

DUNCAN: How is it originally decided -- was it originally decided -- to make this a resource park opposed to a recreational park?

SMITH: National principles for many, many reasons which you can talk for hours about so I won't get into which I have already got into.

DUNCAN: Oh, uh-oh. Okay.

SMITH: There are principles in design of community parks that include a certain percentage of the communities area, based on its population density, that gave a percentage generally of how much area needs to be set aside for the purpose of establishing and maintaining resource parks that are designed to allow people access for people to enjoy the natural environments yet protect the integrity of the environment at the same time and the resources for that community: the water resources, the soil resources, the air quality and it is determined by people who know what is needed. They know that trees produce oxygen for people to breathe in a community that's well planned, that is just one example. We are dependant upon the natural environment for our very existence and there are wise people in this world who know that, and establish standards for design and communities. Now communities can either



accept these standards or they can say, “We don’t want that kind of quality because we would rather make a lot of money. We’d rather have builders build and build and build, and cut down all the trees, and pollute the rivers, and not establish barriers for protection of our environment, so that we can foul it if we want to and we can make lots and lots of money.” And we can do that yeah, certainly we can do that. And to an extent the master plan for leisure services that was developed for this county corrupts those standards by reducing the area that is standardized by this community, reducing that by one half. And they will say differently about the southeastern complex down there is a sports with hiking trails associated with it. It is not a resource park. The resource park that was put in there by the design firm that designed the master plan that the county operates on for recreation or leisure services includes half the space for resource parks that principles and standards allow or recommend. One half. So Athens, Georgia has compromised itself as far as its natural resources are concerned in the public sector by one half because there is no resource park for the south end as planned the size of this one here. So, that was a political decision and Athens has sold out in that way.

DUNCAN: This park itself always meant to be a resource park and has sort of ...?

SMITH: I don’t know what the governments plans are for this park now, I know that the staff resources for this park and the operating resources of this park are about one half of what they were fifteen years ago. So that gives me an idea about how much they care about resource related recreation activities and where their emphasis is and where it isn’t. Athens is into, as far as I can tell, and as far as I can see in support for these types of places is into

money, is into a few people making a lot of money so that is what you see here. You can see it in the deterioration of the place.

DUNCAN: When you talk about resources, part of that seems to be recreation hiking within the resources, I am wondering if any of that was also was protecting any specific wildlife in the area or providing a habitat. Was that something that when this park opened was originally a goal?

SMITH: Yes. The county supported it 100 percent. It is a wildlife sanctuary. The county designated it a sanctuary under the auspices of the nature board but it is part of this complex Sandy Creek Park Nature center and Cook's Trail in between its all in a wildlife resource protection area. It's a sanctuary.

DUNCAN: And has it been successful as a sanctuary?

SMITH: Any areas regulations, policies under the public sectors graces are as effective in their missions as law enforcement is effective in that public jurisdiction. Where you have laws you have to have enforcement of those laws or you can throw those laws out the window because they don't exist without a companying enforcement. This area of recreation has very little in statutory enforcement of their policies and regulations. That has not always been the case, but it is now. So if somebody wanted to, for example, enter this park at night and hunt with a light they can do so and get away with it. If they wanted to camp here

overnight illegally they could get away with it because there are not any enforcement resources.

DUNCAN: Has that always been true?

SMITH: No.

DUNCAN: When was sort of the height of that not being true?

SMITH: Clarke County had a mounted police program through the sheriff's office a park police program. It was very effective.

DUNCAN: In the '80s?

SMITH: Yes, late '80s early '90s. Till 1991 I think. Yeah that is all I am going to say about that.

DUNCAN: Okay. I guess the other sort of thing I was getting at when I asked if it was successful is have you seen a lot of different kinds of species here? Biologically is it a good habitat? Is it not just an area where things are going to be hunted but an area where your creatures seem to like it I guess is a simple way of putting it?

SMITH: Life operates in cycles. All life operates in cycles: cycles of enzymes, cycles of hormones, cycles of life, cycles of dependency. All biological cycles where you allow those cycles to go unimpeded then you have success of a species. Greenways for examples are critical area for the migration for gene pools in natural environments for animals, insect even, for all forms of life. Without a flexible gene pool in a species the species will not survive, and that's the simple black and white of that issue. Where you allow the movement of species then that species will genetically survive, unless there are other factors of course that interfere with that. But that is fundamental to the success of species, is their ability to move freely within the environment.

DUNCAN: So would you say that the Greenway, I guess, is the key?

SMITH: The Greenway allows that movement from one habitat to another. So that the species don't get encapsulated and inbreed and then genetically fail. And you can see that in human populations too that are isolated it is a known thing.

DUNCAN: Oh yeah.

SMITH: So the Greenways are critical areas for the survival of a species. And they also act as filters, and sponges, and cleansing agents for what man produces to foul up the environment. Nature can correct just about everything we can come up, provided she has the resources to do it. We allow that movement in the environment to take care of itself, it will take care of itself. Again you isolate it and you don't give it enough room it won't do it.

DUNCAN: Do you think that here with this park, and I suppose with the Greenway and the Nature Center, that is happening? Or is it too early to say?

SMITH: To whatever extent it can happen, however there have been no attempts made on behalf of the government to study changes in environmental the area. Not that I know of. Now there may have been attempts by the staff to convince the government this needs to take place that the environment needs to be studied for deleterious effects or good effects. Whatever changes take place need to be monitored for you to know what's happening. Otherwise you turn your back on it and nobody is ever going to know. As far as I have heard -- of course I have not asked -- it may be taking place and it may not. The only time that we were able to do anything about that or to ... I don't know you put out fires when areas are used heavily. One of the things in a man made lake is all these things that happened as a result of the development of an ecosystem. When an ecosystem is not fully developed you have algae blooms, and fish kills, things like that, and people go "ah", and you constantly have to do stuff about it. You are constantly having to put out this fire, and put out that fire, and put out sterile grass carp launched into there to take care of this mill foil problem, to take care of this other problem that you have because people use this area. And you don't want all the fish to die because you invested this amount. See you are having to constantly manipulate this brand new environment so that it can be compatible to itself and the public that is using it. So as far as maturity of the area goes, I would expect it to mature. The lake turns over twice a year. It's doing its thing. It looks kind of limonitic now, but it still needs to be monitored. I don't think it is.

DUNCAN: Did you find yourself using your biology degree quite a bit?

SMITH: Considerably yes. We had a fish kill, course I am not an ichthyologist, but I knew that we had to contact one to [unintelligible] to know what the problem is so we could get the right start.

DUNCAN: That's a good start.

SMITH: We knew the fish had a fungus and it was in their gills and it was killing them, making them come up to the surface. Well, what it is the algae bloom. It is a new lake. The e-coli levels from upstream are encouraging this bloom that is killing the fish, and there you go, and it will take care of itself thank you very much. In the meantime you have this cleanup problem because people don't come to a lake that smells like dead fish. So you have to do those sorts of things. Probably it would have been better had we left it but you can't do that because you have a public you have to serve and you have to make them comfortable to whatever extent you can. You can't have a hornets nest poised over the door to a restroom, you have to do something about that. There is a compromise in any public area that is partially developed that you have to maintain and it is a very difficult thing to maintain because you're compromising both. You are compromising human civilization and you are compromising the environment. But there are certain things that you must do in order to encourage people to enjoy their experience. If you have wooden picnic tables you have to spray them down or they are going to sit there and they are going to develop chiggers, so that

when people sit down on the picnic table and they get up and the next morning they come out with thirty-five chigger bites on their fanny's, well they are not going to come to your park and picnic under those circumstances. So you have to use pesticides and you have to take measures to bring the two environments together to an extent as well as you can within a reasonable limitations, so that is what you do. And you spend all your life doing that. And you don't have time or monetary resources to conduct studies on the effects of the environment because you are too busy attracting people to your park. And you have to attract people to your park because what governments like to hear are statistics. And if you want more money you have to show statistically that you deserve it. That this park deserves more input and more support because the public obviously wants to use it. So there you go you're off on this statistic chasing track.

DUNCAN: Speaking of statistics, what sort of users were originally sort of envisioned for the park? Who was expected to use the park?

SMITH: Well, fisherman definitely. The federal government envisioned resource recreation functions. They envisioned boating, and fishing, and picnicking, and general enjoyment, hiking trails, they paid for those things. Camping, there is a family camping area up there that was part of the original plan. I guess it was phase four or five I think. Phase seven included the R.V. camp ground that was SPLOST's request and it was for some reason rejected as part of the SPLOST plan, because it made money for the park system. That is another thing the government has to understand, that in order for park systems to justify themselves nation wide they have to earn their keep. And they earn their keep through

reasonable users fees. And that is the principle of if you use it, you pay for it. So that people who don't use it don't have to pay for it, duh. But I don't know why governments don't get into that principle. There is a lot that I don't understand about politicians and politics that just don't make any sense as far as government services go. But the fact is it was needed, it was wanted, it was requested by people who have R.V.'s by the club that is Athens. There was a Sam's Club guy that walked in here he was a Sam's Club guy wanting R.V.'s. Let's have an R.V. park and it will bring all the money it takes to probably operate the whole park.

DUNCAN: And you said that plans were...

SMITH: They said no we can't play that on SPLOST's' project, it makes money. It belongs in the private sector.

DUNCAN: You mentioned that plans are actually designed or plans were actually created for that R.V. Park and there was an investment made into it.

SMITH: \$100,000 was invested in complete working drawings for a recreational vehicles ground here. That the SPLOST committee threw out.

DUNCAN: Was that the official word, was that it made money?

SMITH: That's what I heard; of course no one would say it directly and least of all to tell me. I got it from an inside source.



DUNCAN: Was there some sort of concern with the government competing with private interest's maybe?

SMITH: It's possible that there was pressure from the private sector to do that, of course it never happened. Show me a recreational vehicle campground in Athens, Georgia today. There is none. So the private sector has its own agenda and it is not necessarily what the private sector wants to tell the government. But somebody, some investor is going to make money every time, maybe. But they want that option to be opened to them and the public be damned, and the government listens to them.

DUNCAN: What about demographically, what kind of users were expected?

SMITH: I don't think there were any expectations that were made as far as audience went. The first year it vastly exceeded the federal government's expectations, vastly in its first year of operation. Got a lot of press the first year and that helped an awful lot, the local newspaper was behind it 100 percent. They thought it was wonderful and there wasn't enough they could do to expose this park to the public. Every week there was something big in the paper about Sandy Creek Park. The newspaper was very supportive, but it takes time for people to ... there is so much going on in Athens, Athens is a very busy place. I mean it is a very diverse area. There are people of all kinds of backgrounds and interests and it is just a very dynamic community. It's like no other really. And you hear that from architects and engineering firms that come in from out of state and they are constantly saying this area is

like a bee hive. It's like going in every direction it wants and that is wonderful it is great place to live that way. But it is difficult to get peoples attention in a community like this, because there is so much business, and so much diversity, and things for people to do, and of course the University helps that happen a lot. Athens is a very busy place, if you are bored in Athens it is your own fault. It is just very, very hard to get peoples attention about what's available in Athens. It takes years for something to get established as somewhere to go and do and some place to do something because of that. So we tried and tried and tried, the attendance was good, but everyone who came would say I didn't even know this place was out here. We finally got a highway sign and that helped but it was years before we got that. It was a long time before the transportation department recognized the need for directional signage to the park. "If we put a sign of the park we are going to have to put up a sign for everything." That was the response I got for a request to put up signage for the park. Several years later after the park opened, we finally did get some signage, and that helped because people would pull off the road and say, "What is this?" and that was our biggest exposure. Those highway signs on 441 north, it was as simple as that. People are busy around here.

DUNCAN: How did you advertise before that?

SMITH: Newspapers primarily, we had flyers, we had a mailing list of course we had an annual permit program that we could write off on the back to encourage people to ... it's ownership of the park. So the annual permit was the first year kind of thing. And word kind of spread from that. We had a core group of several hundred people who had family passes, annual permits. We would send flyers to all them. We kept a mailing list of that and we

would send flyers out to all them and we tried to do workshops with a limited staff to attract people to the park, and a family orientation kind of thing. And then the beach came along and the beach attracted an awful lot of people. Water just attracts people from everywhere.

DUNCAN: Was that a different audience?

SMITH: No, not really, not at first, it is now. I don't ... no it wasn't at first. 'Cause we had so many groups come out here, and then we had businesses have their employee picnics out here, and so you had a wide variety of people come in. A lot of it was business, family reunions, sororities, fraternities, just a lot of different kind of folks. The county used it a lot. The government used it a great deal, meetings.

DUNCAN: Okay, okay. They knew it was there.

SMITH: They would have a department party and come out here and rent a picnic shelter and have their Christmas party, and their birthday parties for whoever, retirement parties and things like that. But the beach drew in an awful lot of people and brought a lot of people into the park that wasn't there before. It is a snowballing effect the more people you have the more word spreads and every year the attendance increased by volumes by 15, by 20 percent per year. And then we had a pow-wow that brought in eight thousand people from all over the southeastern United States -- which helped -- and then that went on for a weekend. Then we did it again the next year and it brought in -- despite the rain -- it brought in thousands and thousands of people again, and that increased our exposure.

DUNCAN: And about when was that?

SMITH: And then there was the Boy Scout jamboree, the Southeastern jamboree. Kids came from all over the Southeast U.S. for that.

DUNCAN: About when was that?

SMITH: Oh gosh, I can't even remember when the first jamboree was.

DUNCAN: Just vaguely.

SMITH: '80s, all this happened in the '80s, mid point '80s.

DUNCAN: Okay.

SMITH: First couple of years was tough because we didn't have the staff or the where with all financially to do much of anything. In fact the first pow-wow was co-sponsored by the state. So...

DUNCAN: So did the state contribute staff to that or...?

SMITH: Yes, pretty much. Of course we knew enough about it to do it the second year and the county did it ... well Coca-Cola co-sponsored it the second year.

DUNCAN: Oh, okay. How was it decided -- you mentioned the permit -- how was it decided to charge fees?

SMITH: I looked at what fees were being charged in similar institutions, it was easy.

DUNCAN: What would be a similar institution? Like what would you consider ...?

SMITH: State parks: Stone Mountain Park, Tobashawkey State Park. Parks with a similar audience with a similar structure, I just looked at those and got on the phone. What are you charging them and what are you charging for? What are people willing to pay? What services do you provide for that fee? A lot of them ... we didn't start off with a boat ramp fee. We put that in later on, but most parks at the time did charge a boat ramp fee to launch a boat because a lake, and a boat ramp, and a pier, and all that stuff are expensive to maintain. Everybody wants something for nothing so it is a hard sell for the fishermen. Fishermen they are a very vocal audience and they didn't want to pay it but eventually they did, they had to. As governments change the fishing fees and the boat ramp fees unless you have a large government body over the jurisdiction. It's a very hard sell because you have the good old boyism comes in where "Can't we do away with this? You can't just do that to us. We don't want to have to pay, this is [unintelligible], your position in the commission [unintelligible], you have considerable power to keep us from having to pay this." And that type of thing

goes on a lot and I think it went on a good year but that goes on everywhere. That is just one of those audiences that has a lot of power: hunters and fishermen have a lot of power. I don't know how it is anymore but it used to be that Ducks Unlimited would stand behind the hunters and they were a powerful organization. They were very powerful in North Carolina too. I think less powerful here than in North Carolina, but anyway.

DUNCAN: Why don't we take a little break because I am tired?

SMITH: I am tired too.

DUNCAN: One thing I am kind of wondering about it seems like this is almost- I don't know if it is a unique situation, but a rare situation where you had the county government and the federal government working together. What was that like working with two governments?

SMITH: It was great.

DUNCAN: Really? [BOTH laugh]

SMITH: I enjoyed it. It's not unusual by the way. And a number of grants are awarded to a lot of different communities by the federal Soil Conservation Services, not just the state of Georgia. Athens was lucky because there was federal area that ... the office, the regional office, was in Athens, Georgia for the Soil Conservation Services. So you had the head conservationist right here in Athens for the whole service you know.

DUNCAN: And this is the state conservationist or the ...?

SMITH: No, this is federal.

DUNCAN: Oh okay.

SMITH: This is the United States.

DUNCAN: Oh I see.

SMITH: Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Services and the conservationist was right here in Athens.

DUNCAN: And who was that?

SMITH: Cecil Chapman.

DUNCAN: Oh that was Cecil Chapman?

SMITH: Yes.

DUNCAN: Oh okay I see, I see.

*Richard B. Powell*  
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SMITH: But it was wonderful working with the federal government engineers because they had so much knowledge of what they were doing and they never let go of the principles upon which they were designing and engineering. The principles came first and then everything else followed along in accordance with the principles, so it was great to work with them because they understood that they abided by that and they objected to a lot of things that some of people wanted in this park. They were pretty insistent upon selecting an architectural engineering firm for the master plan for this project, for the design of this park and the working drawings, somebody who understood the design of resource parks. Now they were going to pay 50 percent of the design services and the county was going to pay 50 percent of the design services. What happened was that the architect who was here and in cahoots with the commissioners bid on this project, and his bid price was less than 50 percent of the total project estimate cost. And he put in that bid in order to be awarded the work and the county gave the contract to that architect with the Soil Conservation Services loud objections. The county did it anyway and financed 100 percent of the design services, controlled the design services, and saved money doing it by selecting this guy. The politics of that I don't know, but the park had design flaws in it that the Soil Conservation Service understood. They went ahead and continued their agreement with Clarke County, but Clarke County made a serious mistake starting off that way because there was such an impetus for the park to be built. The Soil Conservation Service continued their relationship with the county but it was not an all together pleasant relationship in some regards. I did not know ... the first two phases I had no involvement at all. They had pretty much ironed out their differences by the time I came along so I don't know how rough that may have been. I



understood it was pretty rough and there was very little agreement on anything. The county started off on the wrong foot with the feds on that, and the design was compromised because of it. The University of Georgia School of Forest Resource and the University of Georgia school of Environmental Design brought their classes out here constantly to show them how not to design a resource park. Here's how you don't do it and here are all the reasons why. I was constantly asked to talk to these groups of kids who were learning about these things about the problems that we had in this park.

DUNCAN: What were some of those?

SMITH: Well, you have a compromised design because you got your primary emphasis when you first drive into this park you see athletics, that's one. The design of the community building was amazing. It was a wind tunnel at the time it was a \$110,000 to build. There is a stone fireplace in that building, second to none. It is incredible. And the first thing they did when they put the roof on the thing, the roof shifted 16 feet or something like that. It was ridiculous and they had to tear it down and start over again. Even as they built it it's a wind tunnel. The wind comes in off the lake and comes around and blows all the coals off the fireplace and up against the wooden walls on the opposite side. You can't use the fireplace in that building. It was never designed to be enclosed if you wanted to enclose it. You can't enclose the thing; it was not designed to be flexible that way. So there it is it is a huge \$110,000...these are the chief engineer words, "It is an architect monument to himself." Indeed it was ... it's quite an obelisk with complete wood supports around it, and a couple of restrooms. And it is about a hundred yard walk uphill from the beach area to the restrooms.

It's a very difficult march up the woods to the restrooms from the beach. Course they have taken care of that problem now, but for years it was a huge problem.

DUNCAN: You mentioned though the embers from the fire being blown into the wooden wall and made me want to ask have you ever had any fires here?

SMITH: No actually, we were lucky that way through a lot of droughts. There was one fire that occurred out here and we called the fire department. By the time the fire department had come out, here the mounted patrol man, and the maintenance officer, and Rick Kelly had put it out with their bare hands. [BOTH laugh] They ran out their on their little ATV's and on horseback and put that fire out bare handed and it was an area about the size of this room.

DUNCAN: So what ten feet by ten feet something like that?

SMITH: It was probably like 25-30 I think, something. But anyway they put it out with their bare hands.

DUNCAN: You're right I may have underestimated it.

SMITH: They were all burned.

DUNCAN: I bet.

SMITH: But they got a heroes welcome when...

DUNCAN: Yeah it is a good thing to have people like that on your staff, [DUNCAN laughs] especially with a staff of three.

SMITH: It was an extraordinary leap of loyalty to the park for them to do that. They did it instinctively. It was dry, it was windy, and there was an inmate labor crew up there working in the woods and were smoking and just [SMITH makes flicking noise with mouth] flicking their cigarette buds into the woods. That's what started it.

DUNCAN: So where was it?

SMITH: It was on the other side of the lake right above the camping area by the trails, yeah above the camping area. They were building trails up there and had an inmate crew up there in the woods cutting trees down, but anyhow. Ooh, thunder.

DUNCAN: Interesting. Speaking of the other side of the lake, it looked to me, from some maps and stuff, like some land was purchased over on that side. Is that right?

SMITH: Yes. We purchased the Cook Estate which was a house and farmland -- beautiful piece of property -- and it butted right up to the park. And there was a little pond in there, a little freshwater pond, and a spring, and really nice custom built house back in the woods, and it was vacant. The Cooks had owned it. Mrs. Cook had become too elderly to keep up the

house, so she moved and the county bought that farm. The reason they bought it was to build a resident summer camp for kids where they would learn all about parks, and have fun learning to horseback ride, and learn about police work, and all the staff would participate in it. The mounted police had a particular interest in it, they were really looking forward to it, and it never happened.

DUNCAN: Does the park still own the land?

SMITH: Park still owns it and they're not doing anything with it. We had a staff member living in the house. We had a maintenance fellow, single young man. He lived there and we had an arrangement [unintelligible] an inter-departmental thing, but we let him live there free and he didn't have to pay us anything and he would take care of the place. The roof needed replacing; he was responsible for doing it. He kept the grounds up and kept up the house. A house not lived in deteriorates very quickly and that's what's happening now, its going to Hell because nobody is taking care of it. There is not a maintenance staff right now assigned to the park. They come in from different areas and they clean up the park but they don't know anything about it or have any appreciation for it except that the guys who are actually doing it used to have a history with this park, and used to work here full time, least there's not that problem. Anyway that never happened, that camp never happened, because the budget was, well it was all thrown out because we consolidated the governments and then that was the end of that. That was the end of money coming into parks at that point of time. [It] might have been a real good thing for other things but not for parks.

DUNCAN: That was actually the next thing I was going to ask you about. What that merger was like, you did mention that there was a day camp that came out of that?

SMITH: That came out of the crisis when the city was still the city and the county was still the county. That was developed during that time and was in place when unification took place. But that was one of the good things that came out of that argument that was all about unifying the governments. It was a political argument, and a good thing came out of it.

DUNCAN: And that was the day camp which now has turned out to be very good.

SMITH: The day camp, yes that was the primary glowing example, there were a lot of good things that came out of it, but that was one of them. When the unification occurred the departments were split one there were two departments again, one was the Arts and Environmental Education and the other was Recreation. There were two departments created out of that unity. Almost immediately the county administrator decided it was time to hire a firm to do a master plan, because he was determined himself to pinfold all of it under one department. And a lot of politicians were ... basically what it did was do what a lot of jurisdictions are doing. And I use the terms jurisdictions in order to come up with justification for separating resource parks and recreation parks, the active passive thing again. Which they used in the master plan time and time again: active recreation and passive recreation. Ooh the ignorance was just rampant in that process. The ignorance that came out of that master plan was enormous. Anyway the master plan was developed and of course the committee that selected the architectural engineering firm and even some of the committee

members even said out loud, “I am not going to decide on any of these architectural engineering firms if they don’t agree up front that they are going to combine these two departments as part of the plan. And we need to decide that now and then select based upon their willingness to do that.” Well that was turned down but still that attitude was there. The committee were carefully selected from people who believed that they needed to be merged into one big department that it would be more effective that way.

DUNCAN: And why was there so much support for...?

SMITH: And of course it happened that way. There was much ado with the Board of Directors down here because the resource parks were just left out in the cold, left out in the cold. Land, raw land is something that you use; it is something that you do develop, you do something with it. You don’t just leave it there, you don’t just not build something out of it its there for a purpose. And the purpose is to be cut down and something built on it so that people can do something that was the attitude. It is probably time for me not to talk about that subject because I am very adamant about it, and it did not turn out the way I thought professionally it should have. And of course the presumption there is that the resource recreation would get dumped on and as it turned out it has been. Because the park right now is in the same financial picture as it was in 1981, which clearly shows the communities deflection of its resources into something else.

DUNCAN: I suppose at the height of the staff and the money that was being put into this park and everything, what was so successful? Why was it at that time it was working so well or so much better?

SMITH: At the time? What time?

DUNCAN: In I suppose the late '80s when there was a mounted police force, there was five staff members is that right?

SMITH: There was a government in place that supported it that understood the need and the desire that there were people who were sympathetic to it.

DUNCAN: Why were they sympathetic to it? Did it take some effort on the part of the people here on you?

SMITH: I can't begin to touch why, what goes on in peoples heads and why some people understand and appreciate some things and don't others, I am not going to touch that. We had a government in place at the time that was supportive of the fact -- it is not a notion, it's not a theory it is a fact -- that people flood into natural resources areas all over the country to the point where National Parks and State Parks are so impacted that they have to control the audience. Because there are so many of them flooding to these areas to do the things that this park intended to do for its own community, on a state and federal level, that they are destroying the areas. Their really severely dilatorily affecting the resources so they are

having to put controls on how many people can use these areas at any given time. In the middle of the winter National Parks are crowded. There are traffic jams in the middle of January in these resource parks, not to mention the balmy times of the year. There are people in control who understand that, and there are people in control who don't understand that. The majority of commissioners in place at the time understood that people want and need this type of park. And the big issue with people nation wide, if you do any kind of research, is security matters. If people feel safe, they will go to these places, and they will picnic, and they will come, and they will enjoy the outdoors. If they don't feel safe in them they will not come. Period. Security it is a big issue so we had a patrol service ... people came ... if you don't have that, a certain element of people come who don't necessarily have your best interest in mind, and it may be the same numbers of people, or close to it. But it is a different sort of person that comes to a park that doesn't have security in it. Secure resource parks are more successful and better supported and better kept.

DUNCAN: Do you remember when it was exactly the mounted patrol was here? I can look it up if you don't if you can't remember off the top of your head.

SMITH: I can't give you dates.

DUNCAN: Okay.

SMITH: But it was a long time. It was until '91 and it was-well, I can look it up it is in here.



DUNCAN: We'll look that up afterwards, so you don't have to go flipping through all that.

SMITH: I can give you copies of that type of information that you can attach to this interview.

DUNCAN: When you said it is a different kind of people that are coming to a park that is not secure ...?

SMITH: Well, that may a different type of person, but a person who might take advantage of a situation. Like locks on a building are to keep well intended people out, they don't keep criminals out, but well intended people can do things they wouldn't do if there was a presence of enforcement in the park, whether it is staff member or whether it is a police officer. National parks know this, they have National Parks Rangers. Those rangers are law enforcement officers. They are primarily public relations, but if they have to enforce they can do it and they are there. They are a constant presence. And the federal government knows this is the way a successful park operates. That parks like that can constitute a clear and present danger to the public if they are not enforced, if there is not a law enforcement there. And it doesn't have to be in your face, but just a presence that is there that we mean business here and when we have regulations we mean it. Douse your campfire; if you don't douse your campfire we are going to give you a ticket. I mean that is the way it is, be responsible and we are going to see to it that you are responsible. If you are not, we are going to do something about it otherwise you are very welcome to be here. You know, we will help you anyway we can and the thing with the mounted police was that it was a public

relations tool that was second to none, people would come to the parks just to see that. To pet the horses and it also gives the police a good image so it helped the Sheriff's office immensely and then later the county police. Anyway, it was a good thing and it kept people safer because some people will come out here and swim across the lake just see if they can do it. Well the park has been lucky. For the last 10 years the park has been lucky and there are staff members here who may be 17 years old being paid eight dollars an hour to run a concession service and when they see someone in trouble they run over there and they help them out and they keep them from drowning, so the parks been lucky. They are not lifeguards, they are not trained lifeguards, they are just there and they see a problem and they prevent something from happening, but that is not always going to be the case, so. Law enforcement did prevent things from happening, they prevented fist fights on the beach, they prevented people from taking off all their clothes, they prevented people from getting drunk, and being unruly, and using loud and obscene language so that mothers with small children would decided they wouldn't bring them out here because they didn't want them exposed to that kind of lude and obscene behavior. With a law enforcement presence that sort of thing just doesn't happen, and if it does it is quickly dispatched and people can go on enjoying themselves. You don't have that out here now. Fortunately, you have a staff that is willing to dive in and mitigate, even though they are not trained in that area. And the government is liable for them if something happens when they intercede. It is a lawsuit waiting to happen and a simple ... you can rock along for eight or ten years and think nothing is wrong out there, everything is fine. Look no we had all these drownings when all this law enforcement was in place A equals B. One year it is going to happen again and it is going to cost them millions [SMITH snaps fingers] just like that. Now that is a prediction that is based on past

experience from elsewhere from other folks who over the years have learned. And maybe it won't and God help us I hope it doesn't. If it does [unintelligible], we'll just do away with the park. No, what we can do is put houses on the lakeside over here and add a lot of tax base, instead of having all these problems with this park and that happens sometimes too.

DUNCAN: At sort of the height of the staff in here, how many staff did you have and what did they do?

SMITH: It was always a recreation programmer, someone with a recreation degree who organized events and workshops and educational programs. There was a maintenance superintendent and three to four maintenance assistants. In a park that draws 15,000-25,000 people a year and takes in a couple hundred thousand a year you have trash cans at least three days out of the week that need to be emptied four times a day. So the correct proportion of staff to maintain this park needs to be maintained, is four to five that work this park alone -- no where else -- 24 hours a day seven days a week. Because you have overnight services here too and you have holidays that you are open and no body else is. Government tends to think too -- it was a constant problem with this thing -- it's the staffing of this place these are the days we operate, your office operates from 8 to 5 five days a week. This place doesn't stop folks, even when people aren't here one day a week, that doesn't mean the staff isn't here having to mow grass, and maintain, and clean up, and paint, and repair roofs, and do all that stuff. The barbeque building by itself takes half a day for two people to clean up. Once a group is finished with it they totally trash this place, and they have to be cleaned up. The decks have to be hosed down, the picnic tables have to be disinfected, and you have to get all

the wasp nests down, and you have to empty the trash, and you have to clean out the pits and the grills, and there are constant problems with the water lines, and you have to inspect the whole park because litigation really leans into injuries at parks. So you have inspections and you have to inspect every piece of equipment every single week and it takes one staff person all day to do that once a week. 60 percent of the total recreation budget in a park like this is maintenance as a rule of thumb. If it is not 60 percent you are not doing it right. 60 percent of the total budget and that is everything that is staff that is supplies, materials, equipment. It is a huge expense, and I don't think that is ever been the case here not in awhile anyways. Maintenance is not something that is recognized as important as much as new stuff, new stuff, brand new not continued, brand new. And it is the car salesman principle, its sell the bright, flashy car and then don't have a good service department for it. It is the same principle. I don't know what it is, but Lee Iacocca knew better. [DUNCAN laughs] If you can't maintain something then make it self destruct in three to five years. There is a good compromise. Lee Iacocca knew people. He knew you had to have the flash and glitter of a brand new thing, but he also knew that you needed to maintain it to make people happy. So he designed it to self destruct in five years so you don't have to maintain it.

DUNCAN: Yes.

SMITH: Everybody is happy. [SMITH laughs] I don't know. But it is a problem here.

With the SPLOST project you submitted a budget with SPLOST the first SPLOST went in and there were recreation things in it. There were parks needs that went in with SPLOST that picnic shelter over there is a SPLOST project.

DUNCAN: Okay.

SMITH: So there were-the expansion of the Nature Center was a SPLOST project. And the ENSAT buildings was a SPLOST thing.

DUNCAN: ENSAT buildings?

SMITH: So you come in with a budget, very carefully recognized from past experience and deeds based upon your audience and your growing percentages per year -- which you carefully calculate and articulate -- to have no one read. Your budget for maintaining these new places per annum that you want the people to know before they vote on this that it is going to cost them \$180,000 a year to keep these new buildings going after they are built. You put this in your report, and you submit it, and you articulate it to the manager, and that is as far as it gets. From there it goes up to a published document that is available for the public that has no mention whatsoever of maintenance cost for anything. Why, because they want people to vote this stuff in. They don't want people to know how much it is going to cost after they build them because if they know that then they are going to vote no, because people are a stupid and b ignorant of anything that goes on or needed. So you have to shove these things down people's throat but don't tell them anything about what it is going to cost once they vote it in.

DUNCAN: Yeah.

SMITH: So you build them right and they are here. What happens to your budget when these two new big places are in place, what happens to your budget the first year they are available to the public? What happens? Guess. What happens to your budget?

DUNCAN: It disappears.

SMITH: Your budget is reduced.

DUNCAN: Yes, Yes.

SMITH: With two new facilities you have less money to maintain them with and that has been the history of parks in Athens-Clarke County. Every year there is more stuff and less money to maintain it with. Now what is going to happen to that I wonder? It doesn't take an Albert Einstein to figure where they're headed. And if there is a plan to do away with them than this would fit right in that plan wouldn't it. The gradual reduction and deterioration to the point where it would become so expensive to bring it up to standard that the logical and most inexpensive to deal with it is to do away with it. So that could be, maybe what is going down or it or it could be a simple negligence.

DUNCAN: Yes, what did you find yourself up against? Maybe you can describe some specific incident that sticks in your mind while you were director.

SMITH: Incident?

DUNCAN: As far as budget --what you have been talking about now --where did you find yourself up against and...?

SMITH: Well, the most glaring incident was the SPLOST. That is the most glaring example.

DUNCAN: Are you talking about the R.V. campground or just in general?

SMITH: Well, that was part of, but that was all together. I use the example of ENSAT and the picnic shelter because they were both projects that came in, in the same year at the same time and there was no compensation for maintaining or even using this.

DUNCAN: Okay. I see.

SMITH: There was no additional funding presented in the annual budgets for the effective maintenance and upkeep of those structures, much less staffing for them. Oh forget that [BOTH laugh], but that was then of what everybody is up against. I was up against it and whoever is in charge now is up against it. It is typical throughout the United States. The important things are for people to get fed and get sheltered. Feeding and sheltering people and making money those are the three really important things. When you are faced with increased expenses, inflationary expenses, which you are going to experience increased costs

for things, government's experiences this to. The government does a good job protecting itself internally against those things that affect the most important issues for people. What hurts in those bad times, is the esoteric elements of public service: the arts and resource recreation. Those esoteric elements go in governments that are hard pressed to deal with other issues: infrastructure, public transportation, highways, public safety, all those issues come first to government. They don't see a holistic balance. They can't because [they] got too much pressure and they don't have the time or the wherewithal to be able to deal with it in a holistic manner to the point where they can get reelected by trying to justify it. They may believe it personally and some of them have the courage to fight for it. And those are the ones who don't get reelected. They serve their one term, make their impact, and then they go, and that is the history of that. People stay misinformed because they didn't really want to know. They just want things handed to them, but you aren't going to take away somebody's fire protection, and you darn sure aren't not going to take away their police protection, so what goes? So it is not a matter of evil people in charge it is a matter of ... well, I've never been there, don't think I want to be there. I mean people who go into office - - in this community particularly -- have an enormous amount of courage because they are battered from all sides 24 hours a day. So I don't mean to criticize people in charge, it is just that I feel the dynamics of the situation ... it's sad really. So what you emphasize to -- because you understand something about that -- is you create every opportunity for people to participate and help what they believe in. So that you create a volunteer program in all aspects of your operation, and you emphasis that. And when you can prove and when your volunteers can prove in front of the politicians that volunteers have put in 350 hours of volunteer service to this department in this fiscal year proves that people want this service.



So you use that to justify increased operating expenses, and I did. The nature center had one of the finest volunteer programs anywhere that I have ever seen. And there were good, talented people running it. And the county said good job we are going to give you a volunteer coordinator for your department. And they did, bam, in place it was. The volunteer services doubled.

DUNCAN: That is interesting.

SMITH: They were broadened into the park, they were broadened into other areas, some of them went into the city to get some more work started for their programs. But the volunteer program proved without a shadow of a doubt to the politicians and the community that people want this. They need it, they want it, and they will exercise ... and they will devote hours and hours of support to it and here is the proof. And then they go okay and then they give you what you need. Now I don't know what is happening in this new government. I know that the leadership in natural resources is very sensitive to volunteer service because he grew up under it he's very good at it. But I don't know that they are paying any attention to it now; I don't know. Of course, now is not important. They used to; they used to pay attention to it.

DUNCAN: When you talked about specific people in government having the courage to go out and do something, who here really did that for this park?

SMITH: People in office?

DUNCAN: Yes.

SMITH: Who had the courage to push it publicly?

DUNCAN: Yes.

SMITH: Jim Holland. Jule John.

DUNCAN: Who is that?

SMITH: She was commissioner for years, County Commissioner.

DUNCAN: Okay.

SMITH: The mayor for the City of Athens, Lauren Cole. I hate to start naming names because a lot of them did come around. And a lot of them were in place doing things very quietly before I even came around, so I don't know. Now Hugh Logan's involvement, Jim Delapers involvement -- I don't know -- I wasn't involved in that point in time. Hugh Logan's at the time was a state representative and evidently contributed significantly to it.

DUNCAN: Who did you really work with in the government -- or in elected government -- I guess?

SMITH: Who did I work with? As far as politicians or as far as the system itself was concerned?

DUNCAN: Well, how about both. First politicians, then...

SMITH: The structure in the county was that requests came through ... there was no County administrator, but there was a county clerk and requests came through him. But there was also a great deal of individual involvement with the commissioners themselves. If the department so wanted it ... of course I was there I was like a puppy, just [imitates panting] panting after them all the time because they let me.

DUNCAN: Yes.

SMITH: I took advantage of that. I don't know if that is the best way of doing things of course, but it worked. So there was a great deal with personal involvement with the commission chairman, and other commissioners individually, and there was communication through the county clerk's office and all the requests formerly came through there. And then work through various departments, personnel, whatever department you had to work with. George Chandler and I worked side by side in budget preparation. We had to be. George thought that way, but I did I panted after George, "Let's get together. What are you going to do so I know what I have to do?" kind of thing.

DUNCAN: That was with the construction?

SMITH: Yes. George was wonderful. George just made it all worth while. I learned so much from him. He was so easy going and I was so type A that he probably settled me down and gave me an education in how to deal with the county. And the advice that he gave me was good advice, so we had a good relationship.

DUNCAN: What was that advice?

SMITH: There were lots of pieces. Little things here and there that you need to do to get this is X, and here is how you need to go about it with this person, and here is how you go about it with this one kind of thing. And he wasn't the only one who gave me those pieces. It was fascinating to me and I just loved that environment. I knew it wasn't probably the best way for a government to run at the time, but I had department heads go to each commissioner individually. But it was great for me and I liked it a lot. And then there were department meetings and everybody communicated that way. It somehow all fell into place. Then working with SCS that was pretty much how I operated. I leaned on the commission chairman a great deal because he let me. This was his baby; he was responsible for it being here. This was his baby so he did it. He made it happen.

DUNCAN: And that was Jim Holland?

SMITH: Jim Holland, yes. He was the principle antagonist about the unification process so he made considerable enemies in this community who saw to it that he got taken down politically. But anybody who makes a deep impression or does anything worth while does generally get canned one way or another, or tar and feathered. But that is how it was, and that is how it worked, and it worked well. Then the county ultimately -- I guess it was '80, gosh I can't remember, '82, '83 -- hired Roger Alderman who was the first county administrator. And we have an annex courthouse because of him. He was a troubleshooting kind of manager. He would go from place to place and he was trained to be a trouble shooter -- which I didn't know -- he explained it to me. He would go from place to place and he would stir up a hornets nest in some place and get big things done and then he would go someplace else. That's how some of these guys are trained to operate; to go from place to place, shake things up, get good positive planning in place, major infrastructure taken care of, getting an organizational structure going with the government, ruffle everybody's feathers up, make everybody mad, and then [claps] go somewhere else and get them going. And that's the go in and get it done management principle. Everybody hates you and then you leave and start all over again someplace else but, somehow that's a planning principle in training for managers in the public sector.

DUNCAN: Interesting.

SMITH: It's a whole section in public management that you can emphasize, a specialty.

DUNCAN: Where did you go to?

SMITH: And I think it is my belief that Al Crisp is one of those, but he never talked about it openly, but I think he was that kind of manager too. He came in, he went the city of Athens, he went from city of Athens to the county, and then he went from here to Gainesville. He stayed there, shook everybody up. Gainesville is beautiful now. Gainesville is beautiful. Downtown Gainesville is like never before. He walks into a place it blooms and then he leaves and goes someplace else. Then he went from Gainesville to Jackson County and then, I don't know where he is now, but he has left Jackson County. But Jackson County now has drainage, they have a public works department that has principles, they have a planning office. They have all these things that they didn't have before. But anyway that is the type of manager Roger Alderman was, and that was in the early '80s. So they really came about in the early '80s and became a professional government. They hired Culpepper, John Culpepper, who turned their financial situation into a dream. They had a complete reorganization of structure, and off they went they were recognized nationally. So it became the way to go about business to go through the county administrator. It was much easier to do business that way. It was far less strenuous much more professional and much better way to communicate.

DUNCAN: Yes and when you say professional that is opposed to the old boy network?

SMITH: It was a growing government. It had come out of the dark ages from farmers with overalls came to board meetings in their overalls, and hawked into their bandanas while they were doing county business, and made decisions on the spot in public meetings to a

government that was entirely and completely professional. And they did this in a period of ten years. It is a magnificent transformation. I was lucky enough to be right in the middle of it. It was grand. I loved it. It was quite an experience. And it taught how people can grow, and evolve, and change. How flexible people who are true leaders can be open minded and change for the good, and Jim Holland was such a man. But anyway it was good times, it was transitional times and I was good to be a part of that -- frustrating in some regards -- but it was a good thing to be a part of. It was a time of growth, it was a time of professionalism and I enjoyed it very much. It was the kind of job to have and a kind of situation to be in, where you didn't care how much money you made. 'Course I was probably a complete fool, but. It didn't matter. My compensation was the reward of the job. And I was very fortunate to have a job like that that I could love that much. Everybody in the government seemed to enjoy that too. They loved their work.

DUNCAN: What were those rewards of the job?

SMITH: Growth, and sensible growth, support for the principles. When a political body sits before a professional under their employ, who has attempted to do their job professionally ... in other words, you do all the research, you plan, you look at other places and you decide based on public demand. You do your homework before you walk in and ask for \$50,000 for something. You do your research. And when you go before this public body with your request for that much additional money -- or \$150,000 or \$200,000 or \$300,000 whatever it is -- and they sit there and they ask you, they grill you, with questions that you must answer professionally and you must support your answers with fact, with data and you give them

this... it gives you an opportunity to prove the need. So that you know by answering them that they understand that you have done your homework, that they understand the principles upon what you are building your case, not just that they are just supporting you. They are supporting the principles that are coming out of your mouth because they care enough to ask you, "Who says you are going to make \$200,000 a year off of this?" Well sir ... and you give them the history of who you met with, and where you went, and looked at this budget, and looked at that budget, and looked and this service, and that service, and this population, and this amount of space devoted to this, and how much money they take in per annum based upon their demands. And they listen to this and they make their decisions. They either say yes or no. In my case they never said no. And you can't -- well maybe you can -- imagine the enormous professional satisfaction it gives you, to know that their listening to you as a professional. They are testing you to make sure you are a professional. So that when you walk out of the room you know that they know that you are a professional, and that you have done your homework, and they have said yes because of that. And you go out feeling a mile high for what you do, and that is the way they work. The government now -- the government after 1991 -- one of the biggest complaints the first five years was that the public, the commissioners, the politicians, had an open public disdain for department heads. And you would go to a public meeting and you would listen to these commissioners browbeat department heads in public meetings until you would just want to throw up. They did not listen to their professional staff about any matter. It was horrible and everybody talked about it. The government hated the department heads and the department heads hated the government, so things kind of went on hold for awhile. I mean things went on and they would rock along. What happens in a situation like that is you would get this mediocrity that



emerges that is disgusting, this enough to get by crap. But they would call in experts to discuss whether to do this or that or whether to adopt this ordinance or that ordinance. They would spend days and weeks with these experts talking about what they needed to do and then they would completely ignore them in their final decision. Because they had already made up their minds what they were going to do before they even called the experts in. They did this time and time again: adopting ordinances for the new government. And of course everything that was useful or un-useful in the old county government was completely trashed and ruined and some things were changed just for the sake of change. So it was a bad situation for about five or six years, and I resigned as a result of it. That wasn't why I came to work. I didn't come to sit and not make waves and collect my paycheck and go home.

DUNCAN: And that was in 1996 when you resigned?

SMITH: Yes, I had had quite enough of it at that point.

DUNCAN: What size staff did you have at that point?

SMITH: Well, the department included all the arts and facilities too. I don't know 30 something, 30 something I would say and of course that went up to 50 something in the spring and summer season with temporaries. But yeah, it was a pretty fair sized department: Arts and Environmental Education.

DUNCAN: Okay. At that time there was Arts and Environmental Education and then there is Recreation is separate, is that still...?

SMITH: Then the arts they came forth with that in political support of merging the two departments came when the arts people came forth and put pressure on the commissioner and said, "Well, if you are going to have a separate department for recreation, then we want our own department too. There should be three departments not one there should be three. There should be an Arts Department, an Environmental Department and a Recreational Department." Well, that is completely unreasonable in most people's minds and they went, "Wait a minute. Let's get a master plan and merge all these departments. Let's hire an architect to do our bidding for us. And that is what they did and behold the Department of Leisure Services.

DUNCAN: So that is how the department developed?

SMITH: That is how it is now, there is one department called Leisure services. They called it Leisure Services because they didn't want anybody to think Recreation, or environmental education, or art. They wanted all of it to be leisure services. Things that we do in our spare time. [DUNCAN laughs]

DUNCAN: Was that...?

SMITH: Things that we do when we are not having to do anything important [DUNCAN laughs].

DUNCAN: That's right.

SMITH: Things that we do on vacation. Leisure Services. Anyway, I turned in my resignation.

DUNCAN: Did it become the Department of Leisure Services before you resigned?

SMITH: It did. No, after.

DUNCAN: After.

SMITH: Yes, shortly after. When I resigned they merged them. The day I resigned the departments were merged.

DUNCAN: Really?

SMITH: I was the only female department head in the government and [unintelligible] that wasn't elected. There was a couple of elected department heads, but I was the only non-elected department head in the government.

DUNCAN: Why do you think that was?

SMITH: Well, I have my own theories that I will keep to myself. It was very difficult. The only thing I can tell you to get a perspective on where I am coming from is to talk to other women who are department heads and governments and talk to them about sexual discrimination. Then you could talk to them about that for hours and hours, but I am not going to talk to you about it on tape.

DUNCAN: That is fine. [DUNCAN laughs] We don't have to go there.

SMITH: I will tell you when I resigned there were a lot of women leaders in this community that were very angry with me for not fighting, so I will leave it at that. But that was the issue -- that was the central issue -- is why the Department of Arts and Environmental Education was created was because there was a female department head that they had to contend with.

DUNCAN: So it seems to me that how much you say that over time it went from an ideal situation, about the best situation that I have heard of in a local government to...?

SMITH: Well, I don't know if I would put that word on it but...

DUNCAN: Okay, but a very good situation.

SMITH: It was ideal for me but I was crises orientated [BOTH laugh]. It was challenging to me, it was mentally and professionally challenging and I thrived on it. [BOTH laugh]. And there were set backs yes, I would never say ideal, no, it was ideal for me personally, but ideal conditions for the system no. But [it was] steadily improving and steadily and un-dauntingly improving for the people who lived here. It was a good thing overall which isn't to say it wasn't frustrating.

DUNCAN: I am sure. It seems that it went from that to a really not as good of a situation to put it lightly. What was the turning point in that?

SMITH: In?

DUNCAN: From the good to the bad and the county government.

SMITH: I couldn't off the top of my head pin point a turning point. I don't think it was anything specific that was that pivotal. Not anything, no I don't know, it was transition. There was major transition in government and that affected a lot of things, some good, some bad. I did not enjoy working in a jurisdiction where I was expected to not grow. I was expected to go along with everything that the government wanted, just to be nice and quiet, and stay out of the newspaper, and don't get private nonprofit groups all stirred up, keep the monkey off our backs, collect your paycheck, go dance in your tulips, and leave us alone. I didn't enjoy working for that. It wasn't my cup of tea to collect a paycheck for doing

nothing. So I didn't, couldn't. Went into business for myself. Felt like I could challenge myself.

DUNCAN: And that is when you opened your nursery right across the road?

SMITH: Yes. I think that if I had resigned in 1981, they would have created the Department of Leisure services in 1991.

DUNCAN: Really?

SMITH: Immediately upon the transition of governments they would have merged the departments instantly, but I held out and they didn't wanna ... I don't know. There is a dynamic issue. But it was a good thing to be a part of. It was a good learning experience for me and for the rest of the staff and entirely frustrating experience. And that was a part of my decision too, was that the staff was exhausted with this whole fall apart, start over again business, when all they were trying to do was their job. They got jerked into this because I didn't leave anybody out of anything. I gave them my perspective on everything. The county administrator hated me. I would see something wrong principally and I would go immediately to a nonprofit board and I would spell it out for them. And then they would start arguing and going to the commissioners and the county administrator would [confront me]. I was not one to think that I worked for the government. I worked for the people of Athens and I was constantly compromised in that because I would lean on professional nonprofit organizations with things that I knew were wrong. Like if I knew it was wrong for

something to happen I would go and I would tell people who supported the principles upon which the whole system was based, and I would tell them this is wrong, and if it was a political situation they would jump on the politicians saying you have been compromised. The department had to and you ... there was a compromise and it was the county administrator who ... well I won't get into that. Some things got changed at this level before they even got to the commissioners they would be changed. So there was no communication between the departments and the commissioners. It was all changed at the administrative level and then presented to the commissioners with no explanation. And therein lay the problem for the parks because here you have an administration who didn't believe in parks, unless they were sports complexes or golf courses, because that was recreation. That was all there was to it and woods were for cutting down and building things on and that was the administration of the new government. So if you tried to get from here to here with something you had this cutting you off in the middle, so you had no way to get to it. How you got to them with the truth was you went to the nonprofits who didn't have to deal with these middle man and they would go directly here with your problem and I nearly got fired for that.

DUNCAN: Really?

SMITH: They had commissioners attending my nonprofit meetings just to see what was going on. I had commissioners assigned to go to meetings where I was going to speak because they knew I was going to bring something up. And I would do it anyway because it was the truth, and I didn't have any reason to hide the truth. If they wanted to fire me that

was fine too, but they weren't going to do that because I was [unintelligible] and that is the truth. And everybody recognized that as an opportunity to get the truth to the commissioner because they knew that I didn't care whether I was being compromised or not. So they went directly to the commissioner and protected me to bargain for being their agent for delivering the truth. That got to be a real headache. It didn't engender me to the commission, I mean it did to some, but not the majority.

DUNCAN: I imagine not.

SMITH: You win two or three but you don't the whole group. Not doing that not doing it that way. It was underhanded and I will agree but I didn't care, I wanted the truth getting where it needed to go. I didn't apologize for that and I don't to this day. It got to be a real problem because the man I had to answer to, we didn't see eye to eye on anything. I just thought well -- he left before I did -- but I had had enough and I was exhausted and I had had enough and I left right after he did.

DUNCAN: When you talk about the nonprofits you went to what nonprofit organizations were they?

SMITH: Specifically the Nature Center Board when it came to [unintelligible]. There was the Lyndon House too. They were expanding and had a project going and they wanted to do things their way, the Morton Theater Board too. And all those boards had to be taught how to communicate with the government because they didn't like me standing in the way. I



mean I was giving order they communicate through you, but they didn't listen to that. They didn't like me because I was trying to tell them that they couldn't talk to their commissioner, well, screw you little girl, we will talk to whoever we want to, so I didn't get off on the right foot with those groups.

DUNCAN: After you did resign you ended up starting up a native plant nursery. Who were your clients for that -- I am just kind of interested -- who in that area...?

SMITH: The Athens-Clarke County government was my primary.

DUNCAN: Really? So you essentially became a contractor with Athens?

SMITH: Well, there were nurseries I sold to too, and I sold to area retail nurseries, and I sold to organizations. There are hundreds of my plants planted on the Greenway. Which is why I spent time with Athens-Clarke County, because they needed native landscape materials for the Greenway which was good, and the new nature center building, so that was fine, that worked out well. I did a lot of business out of state and out of county. Other than Athens-Clarke County, most of my business is out of county so in surrounding counties, and wildlife federation, and nurseries, and individuals sometimes. It was good, it was brutal. I thought I worked hard for the government, I had no idea what work was until I started my own business.

DUNCAN: Physical labor?

SMITH: Physical and time consuming. It was seven days a week, 14-15 hours a day and it was open 10 years in operation and in the 10 biggest drought years the southeast has ever seen, so it was perfectly planned with the drought.

DUNCAN: You just got lucky.

SMITH: Which we had a good well but it was constant, three and four times a day watering everything. And if you do it right you do it all by hand. My brother and I were in business together and that was a big mistake. Why did I talk about that?

DUNCAN: I was just asking about that in general, wondering what you did. The whatever...

SMITH: I don't think the Russell Research Center needs to know about my burden.

DUNCAN: They probably don't but it just flushes the character out of it I suppose, if someone is curious to know. Do you come back to visit the park?

SMITH: Not very often. I do more now than I used to.

DUNCAN: You have more time now, I guess.

SMITH: I was always trained -- and I guess it is natural for me -- that once you have left a place you are gone. Go something else, I don't look back much. I married an Athens man which is the only reason I am even here. He is an Athens boy, born and raised and I didn't go anywhere after I left, otherwise I would have had I not been married to him, but living someplace other than here wasn't an option. Otherwise, I would have pursued my career elsewhere, I would have moved on, but I didn't go back, never did, I wasn't one to do that. This process is a little uncomfortable to me, because two years ago, three years, four I would not have been able to do it because it has taken some time for me to get around some of the things that really hurt and were disappointments to me and watching this park go down hill and living right next to it is painful. So I don't come up here too much. It's a matter of attitude, it's a matter of when you are finished with someplace you somewhere else and start over, which I couldn't do, but would have. I hope things change for the better, with a better balanced government to meet all of peoples needs equally well without compromising anything. I'm willing to pay higher taxes to do that. That was another reason I could always speak out because I was a tax payer here too. And that was supposed to give you some credence. I hope it changes. It is my understanding that it takes twenty years, quarter of a century for a change that significant in an organizational structure of government to become completely effective. It takes that long for the change to settle down for some level of comfort for the community and that is the way it has happened for place who have done this: Columbus-Muscogee, and several other governments that unified and they had a lot of trouble in the transition and that is understandable so perhaps with time things will get a little bit better balanced. I think there are some commissioners now who are realizing the importance of open space, and they are fighting for it. They don't let anybody forget about it

and I think they have an enormous amount of courage. They are not into politics because of their ego or because they want to make money off of it, they are in it because of what they believe and it is really encouraging to see that kind of public official and stand up for principles. [Thunder]

DUNCAN: Ooh. That adds some emphasis on it doesn't it?

SMITH: I didn't mean it. [BOTH laugh] There are a couple that are really outspoken for the environment and that is good that is a real good thing, but of course we are way behind other places but we are still making progress. They have a whole party in Tasmania, I mean a political party. [Thunder] Jesus.

DUNCAN: Goodness.

SMITH: I hate being in buildings like this during storms like this because you are on a slab and right out in the open.

DUNCAN: Yes, I know what you mean. We are about done; did you have anything to add?

SMITH: No, I guess my last statement summed it up, that maybe we are heading in the right direction. Maybe we will get balanced and put enough support into all the things people need, not just a few. The trouble with the environment is that once you have screwed it up it is gone and it takes a century for it to turn around again, but if you have buildings there it

isn't going to turn around and come back. It is gone forever, and the species that live there are gone forever. There is another link in the chain that we depend on to hold us up, so it is time and the government, I think, will look at these things – already is--because they are making buffer ordinances, they are protecting the river corridors now -- not without the public pressure to do so -- but they are protecting the river against development and that is a good start in the right direction. Because we have leaders who aren't afraid to stand up and take the lead on that issue and maybe it will get even better and that is it, that's ...

DUNCAN: Well, thank you very much that has been really good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



## Biographical Information

RBRL OHD 005-03

Nancy Blount Smith

### Occupation:

Curator of Education with Greensboro Natural Science and Zoo in Greensboro, North Carolina

Assistant Director for Marine Education at the University of Southern California Sea Grant Program

Director Sandy Creek Nature Center in 1979-1996

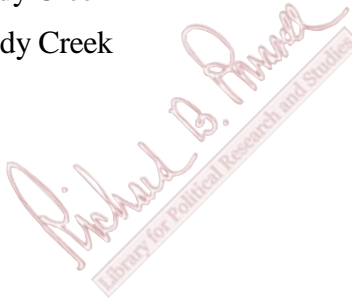


## Subject Analysis

RBRL OHD 005-03

Nancy Blount Smith

- Education
- How Nancy Smith got the job at Sandy Creek Park
- Management of Sandy Creek Park before and after Nancy Smith came on as director
- Resource based parks versus recreational parks
- Construction and development at Sandy Creek
- Budget
- Land purchases and donations
- The spillway at Sandy Creek
- Maintenance of Sandy Creek
- The Greenway
- SPLOST
- Advertising
- Users and audience
- Fees
- Unification of Athens-Clarke County
- Design of Sandy Creek
- Staff
- Unification of the Departments of Arts and Environmental Education with Recreation into Leisure Services
- Security and the mounted police patrol
- Smith's resignation
- Smith's life after Sandy Creek Park



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