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Interviewee: John Parsons (JP)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

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TM: Today is Thursday, January 24th, 2019. This is part four of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with John Parsons. This interview is conducted at John's home here in Rimrock, Arizona. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning, John. How are you?

JP: Thank you so much for being here, Tom. We really appreciate it.

TM: Thank you for having me. In the first three interviews, we set the stage for a boy from Indiana, comes to Arizona, ends up in the Grand Canyon, and now is going to do a lot of work on the Verde River. Can you kind of set that stage for how it was that you ended up focusing down on the Verde?

JP: Well, thanks Tom. I have a personal belief that the existence of the Grand Canyon has shaped human demographics in the Northern Arizona area for far longer than Anglos have lived in their stick houses in the area, that it also shaped the prehistoric natives that lived in this area and how they interacted with their landscape. But that trend continues in the demographics of Northern Arizona and Flagstaff in particular. I was drawn to Flagstaff specifically because of the Grand Canyon, as I believe that many untold thousands of other people have been over the decades and continue to be today and will be in the future. And so, my point is that if I would have never been attracted to that area because of the Grand Canyon, I would have never become involved with the Verde River. And so there's a very clear, at least in my mind, connection between the two. And that's why I like to say that Grand Canyon helped save the Verde River. My efforts on behalf of the Verde River have been widely claimed and accredited as saving the Verde River and locally all known as Mr. Verde River. And the town of Camp Verde has named a park for me. So I can make a legitimate case that I have played an important role in the integrity and the future survival of the Verde River. I'm very proud of that. But the idea that the Grand Canyon is somehow involved in the Verde initially on the surface is a rather specious kind of claim. And so how can that be? The key fundamental is that I as well as so many others have been drawn to Flagstaff because of the Grand Canyon. It's the closest best place to live if you love the Grand Canyon, like so many people do.

As soon as I arrived in Flagstaff, I was immediately interested in being part of the river running community. But because of the clique of Grand Canyon boatmen, I was completely shut out. In hindsight, I can understand that. And to a degree, I can even respect and appreciate it. At the time I didn't understand it, but I'm sure that the people that were part of that clique had hundreds of individuals who had a very small exposure to the Grand Canyon, decided to change their life, and

suddenly want to be a boatmen. Well, [laughs] okay, I see that now, but I didn't see that then. So, I was undaunted and decided within less than six months of living in Flagstaff to start a river runners club for people like me who could never be part of the clique of Grand Canyon boaters. It's just simply not possible. They had a world unto their own, and it was a closed society. It was more than a clique. I mean, you had to have experiences that only boatmen know to be part of that clique. Well, okay. What if you're interested in rivers and you don't have any way to share your love of rivers with other people?

So, in the first week of March of 1981 I started the Northern Arizona Paddlers Club, it was in that building at Thorpe Park was our first meeting there in Flagstaff. And it was really well attended. I think there was over 25-30 people that came and they were all so excited to be with likeminded people. The chattering and the excitement and so on that was going on was really remarkable. The club received an immediate enthusiastic reception from the rest of the river runners and became a mainstay in the Flagstaff outdoor culture for many years. I think it held its momentum for probably at least 10 to 12 years before club leadership, such as it might be, just kind of dissipated and the club fell by the wayside. But during the 1980s, which was very formative years for resource conservation throughout Northern Arizona in many different categories, the club was a real mainstay out there. So that helped influence everything that I did as a resident of Flagstaff and Northern Arizona and eventually led to bringing untold numbers of new people to experience the Verde because prior to my showing up in Northern Arizona, the Verde had zero friends and nobody knew a thing about it.

After NAZPAC was formed and after I traveled the Verde on my first trip, I just naturally began to promote that river and tried to bring the people that I knew in the club to the Verde River because it was our home river. It was a river that you didn't need a permit, and you didn't have to deal with the Park Service, and there were no equipment or skill requirements, and there wasn't a waiting list. If you woke up one day and there was water and you decided to paddle, you could just go do it. That was a really welcome and refreshing, wonderful development for so many people. It took a long time for the mainstream Grand Canyon river runners to stop looking down their nose at the Verde. But in the meantime, the rest of us were having a ball down there. It was our playground and we loved it as most river runners in Flagstaff still do when there's water, because as you know we've been in a 20 year drought. In any event, I went on from just bringing people to the river to realizing that the river had a serious issue of lack of friends and also a serious issue of sand and gravel mining in the mainstream of the Verde River. Most rivers, after snow melt season, they clear up. The Verde never cleared up. It just ran turbid the whole time. So I went upriver and wondered why that was happening. The sand and gravel was operating right in the middle of the river. I mean, the drag lines and the track hoes and everything right in the middle of the river. [laughs]

TM: John, isn't there a federal regulation about disturbing water quality or was this before those regulation were...?

JP: There's clearly a federal law called the Clean Water Act. [laughs] Obviously it was in pretty clear violation of that. So I started off on a crusade long ago. And Susun enlisted my help for her situation because she was living on the river at the time and they were mining the river right behind her house.

TM: Can you describe for me when you first went up there... Tell me a little bit more about what you saw. What was happening, the draglines, that whole deal. How was it that the river had become a gravel pit?

JP: Well, as you well know from your extensive and esteemed historical investigations, certain human practices become entrenched behaviors and their realities are more or less accepted by the people that have been doing a particular behavior for so long that there's really no questioning of the why of it or the how of it, it's just the way it is. Sand and gravel mining had been existing in the

Verde River for longer than I'm really aware of. For a really long time. Probably since mechanized equipment was developed shortly after World War I. It was the accepted way to extract sand and gravel for use in the construction industry. And in fact, in the seven years of my crusade to get them out of the river, the human cry of the operators and their supporters was that if sand and gravel mining ended in the Verde River, it would shut down development in Verde Valley and Northern Arizona. [laughs] Well that sure would have been fun if it would have been the truth. [laughs]

One of the things that I did in the midst of that process was to go over to Albuquerque and try and get an idea of how sand and gravel supported the Albuquerque metropolitan area and what they were doing over there cause I knew they weren't mining in the Rio Grande. That's where I learned that the alluvial terraces that had existed for forever was just this goldmine in sand and gravel. Well, if you look at the Verde fault zone and the Verde Rim to the west of the river, thousands or millions of years of erosion have brought down and created these just fabulously rich alluvial terraces here as well. So that gave me reason to believe that I wasn't going to shut down extraction of sand and gravel and that they would just simply move to richer and better grounds once they were forced out of the river, which they did and development has flourished ever since. There's never been any thought of it being shut down by lack of materials. But it was a very contentious battle that went on for years. I don't know quite how you want me to describe it.

TM: It sounds like you went to paddle the Verde. You saw a lot of turbidity in the water and you headed upstream and you found a drag line there in the river. Then what happened?

JP: Well, you know, it's really hard to describe in the detailed context of this interview how I transitioned from just a recreationist into a political activist and someone who had a passion to pursue a goal for many, many years. It was not a sudden overnight transition. It was a transition that just grew into becoming part of my life and a life focus. That's one thing that people do in their life. They don't wake up one day and say, I'm going to be a doctor. They have to go to medical school, and be an intern and everything else. It takes years to transition from their first idea of what they want to be into becoming that. The same process happened with me. So it's just...it was a love of the river and it was the base of support from the Northern Arizona Paddlers Club and from local paddlers here in the Verde Valley community and just personal gnarliness on my own side that made me take on that issue and not let go of it for years.

TM: So what happened in the first couple years? You clearly saw, hey, this stuff is happening here in this river that shouldn't be going on. How did you pull together allies? How did you figure out how to approach it?

JP: This is something that the Grand Canyon doesn't have a problem with. [laughs] Probably hasn't had for something on the order of about 50, 60, 70 years. The only way that you can build a constituency for a natural resource is to take people out and expose them to that natural resource. There's some sort of a bond that takes place between any given natural resource, whether it's a wilderness area, a river, a park, whatever, even a grove of trees that speaks directly to the human soul and spirit. People develop an affinity and a stakeholder ownership into that resource as a result of their exposure to it. My first order of business was simply people, numbers, and people who would care and know and understand the beauty of the river. So, as opposed to trying to take people up and say, "Isn't this horrible here? Isn't this a travesty? Isn't this an egregious violation of federal law?" No, that's not the plan. The plan is to get more people onto the Wild and Scenic section of the Verde River and Verde Falls, and all the rapids, and the hot springs down at the end of the run, and the yahoo thrills of the big whitewater, the technical thrills of the low water, whatever the case may be. The more people that you could get on that river, the more people who would love that river. Once they love that river, then they would begin to care about threats to that river. So it's a horse-cart thing. You have to put some momentum in front of that cart before it's going to go anywhere. You can't take them back to the spilled apples in the back of the cart and say, "Oh, look at

this. We've got to do something about this." People don't relate to things that way. They relate to things when they have that built in stakeholder ownership and that built in care for that resource. Then they care. Then they want to do something. Well, that's how that worked for me.

It was so bad in the mid-80s that the sand and gravel interests were just so upset with "environmentalists" that they got the legislature to begin to work a law that would take away our rights to paddle across private property on the surface of the water. They were going to outlaw that even in waters of the United States. Let's say there was 1000 CFS in the Verde and you happen to be on the surface of that water here in the floor of the valley that's a checkerboard of private property, that you could get arrested for trespassing on private property even though you'd be on the surface of the water. That's where it really kind of shifted gears in my perspective.

TM: Now, there's a Supreme Court decision that had addressed this issue and had said that the public has the right to float the water surface regardless of who owns the bed. Did that come to your help at all, or did you...

JP: Only to a small degree. But you have to realize the Arizona legislature has never really paid much attention to the United States Supreme Court, and still doesn't. When they get of a mind to they think that they have the right to do whatever they want. So they're just going to go ahead and forge ahead and create a new law and to heck with the rest of that stuff. So that's when I ran in my first election in 1986 because it had reached a boiling point. The sand and gravel industry was behind it because that was going to keep people from finding out what they were doing and that was going to remove that entire element of opposition to what they were doing.

TM: You mentioned 1986 you ran for office. What did you run for?

JP: I ran as an Independent for Arizona state legislature in our legislative district in Flagstaff there. I think it's LD-2. I'm not sure. Time has a way of helping me forget minor details. [TM laughs] This was shortly after a political activist had joined our club from back east. He sort of goaded me into doing this and helped me understand that it was really the only viable way that there was ever going to be any knowledge or public attention to what the legislature was trying to do. As chance would have it, I had served six months on a grand jury in Phoenix earlier in '86. It was a week a month for six months and between presentations by the attorney general's office, there were hours of dead time. I had nothing to do and the only thing in the jury room was the Arizona revised statutes so I just basically read laws for hours [laughs] at a time. That's how I learned the process of becoming an independent candidate and all the steps that you would have to go through in order to legally get on a ballot and be a viable candidate. I had no knowledge of those things. So the fluke of being on that grand jury supplied that and some other things that became very beneficial.

So I collected the requisite signatures. All my paddling buddies NAZPAC went door to door with the petitions and got enough signatures to get me on cause it was an issue we all believed in. It was a commonality among us that no, we don't want to get politically active but we have to because if we don't you can just kiss it all goodbye. Really. I had an old Dodge crew cab Forest Service truck and I put a red canoe upside down on top of it and took duct tape that said 'Vote for Parsons' on the side. I drove all around the district, which stretched from Kingman to Winslow and from Hopi to pretty much... I don't think Prescott was in the district. No, Prescott wasn't in the district. But it was from Jerome to Hopi and from Kingman to Winslow. I told people that I knew I couldn't win as an Independent and that was not why I was running. I was running because of one issue and one issue only and if you voted for me, you were voting because you cared for that issue. You realize that I wasn't gonna win but the votes that I would receive, I could go down to Phoenix and register as a lobbyist and I could tell people, this many people care about this issue. And I would have a built in support base, if you want to call it that.

I think I received 1,915 votes, which was a lot. People were very surprised that a goofball with a canoe could get 1,915 votes. It proved that there were... And just in one district in Arizona. This wasn't statewide. This was just one district. This was people that lived in places where there's no flowing water. There's no flowing water in Kingman, you know. There's no, well, once in a while there's flowing water in Winslow, but whatever. But people all throughout the district cared about this. You could look at the precincts all around the district and see the votes from each of those precincts. It wasn't just Flagstaff. It wasn't just the funhogs in Flagstaff voting for me, it was people throughout the whole area and the Verde Valley and up in Jerome and you name it. So that made a huge impression on the political establishment.

So I did go to Phoenix and I did register as a lobbyist, and I did become involved in the whole process and was very instrumental. No one can take any individual credit for any law that ever becomes law. But some people have more of an influence than others and I had a very great influence on getting a law created that preserved our rights to travel the surface of the water here in the state of Arizona. It was a bipartisan effort in both the House and the Senate. I made a lot of friends down there. I established a good reputation. I went to governor Mecham's office to witness the signing of the bill and conned him out of the pen that he signed it with. [laughs] It was a lot of fun. Then that's where I asked him to appoint me to the Outdoor Recreation Coordinating Commission. He was an LDS Pontiac dealer at the time so his whole administration of his top people were his LDS brothers and whatnot. I had a beard, you know, and I just didn't really fit into the LDS profile, but he said, "Well, you'll have to see my chief of staff Sam Udall." You remember long ago on South San Francisco there was a Goodwill store down there by Macy's? I was a frequent visitor to that and I had found a first edition copy of the Udall family history from eastern Arizona signed by the patriarch of the family himself. An autographed first edition hardback. Things weren't going well in my interview with Mecham's chief of staff. He said, "You'll have to see my chief of staff, Sam Udall." He didn't think I had any reason to be on that recreation commission and it was about time for him to just usher me out of the office.

I'm so glad to get to tell this story on tape. It's the first time and I hope that everyone enjoys it as much as I do. So I said, "Well, Sam, you wouldn't happen to have a first edition copy of your family history signed by your family patriarch would ya?" Well, he leaned across that desk and his eyes got really wide and he said, "No, I don't but I sure want one." I said, "Well, if you appoint me to that commission, I'll give you one." [laughs] So we had to make this weird deal to meet in a parking lot and me pass it to him in a classic brown paper bag. I mean, this is Arizona, you know, and things like this happened here on a fairly routine basis. Sure enough, they appointed me to the commission. That really shifted the balance of what I was able to do with the Verde River. That made all the difference right there.

TM: Was the formation of the commission an outcoming of the legislation or was that commission already in place?

JP: Oh, it was already in place. I had studied it extensively in my grand jury time that six months. I knew all about it. That's why I knew to ask to be on that commission cause I knew what it did. Back in those days it was called the Arizona Outdoor Recreation Coordinating Commission. The acronym is AORCC, A-O-R-C-C. It had three primary legal responsibilities. Back in those days, all boats in Arizona were required to be registered, even kayaks and canoes. This was before inflatables, but anything that floated was supposed to be registered. So a 16 foot canoe paid the same registration fee as a 16 foot power ski boat. There was no distinction between the boats. The money from the registration went into a fund called State Lake Improvement Fund, S-L-I-F. Then the big powerful interest at Wahweap and over on the Colorado River, they were given grants to build boat docks and all this other sweet stuff at the expensive of people like us who paid into that fund never got a thing. So once I got established on that commission, I brought that up and I said, "Look, there's never been a

dime out of that fund for any river in this state where people paddle.” I was successful in getting a million dollars out of the fund for the Verde River. That built all of our access points that are now used today and taken for granted by the boating community, but there was a time when none of them existed in the 80s. It was just really ridiculously outlandish thinking to think that we might somehow get the money to build first-class river access points, which we did. The credibility that I got from being on that commission, appointed in April of '87, was the key to get real people on the Verde River to look at the sand and gravel issue. Legislators, agency administrators, Senator DeConcini, EPA officials, Corps of Engineers officials, you name it. I mean, as opposed to just getting yahoos from Flagstaff to get to love the Verde River, I finally had enough credibility to begin to take people on canoe trips right through the sand and gravel operations while they were actively operating, okay. That's where the pedal hits the metal. And this one company, Valley Concrete... Was it Valley Concrete honey? Yeah.

At that time you had to make a low water crossing to get to Dead Horse State Park, they've since built a bridge. Their gravel operation was just upriver from that low water crossing and they had one of those old school dredge lines with the big boom, you know, and they swing the bucket out. The little grapevine in the Verde Valley would know when I was going to bring a trip there and they'd fire up that drag line. As we'd be driving across that low water crossing, that guy would just...our cars would be like about here and he'd drop that bucket right in that pool of dredge water right there, and slosh the water all over us. [laughs] Of course it had the opposite effect intended. Instead of intimidating people, it really brought home what was happening there. Good things eventually happened there. But back then it was a pretty new nefarious situation. Susun and several of our friends, we just basically devoted all of our free time to getting people on the river to show them what was the situation. Eventually that carried the day and the EPA issued a cease and desist order that was effective on September 30th of 1989. That was the last day for them and now they're just a distant memory. I would venture to say, very few people in the Verde Valley or the state of Arizona are aware that that type of thing ever took place. It's just, you know, 30 years ago.

TM: But its anniversary is coming up. September when?

JP: 30th. Right. One of the interesting things that happened... I was doing absolutely everything possible to get people organized and together to reach critical mass to get 'em out of the river. I got the EPA people down there in early '80, or I think it was...had to be early '89. But their big thing was... I had several different groups of EPA people and the very first group says, “This is good, but how do we know that this just isn't you? How do we know that people here care about the river? If there's nobody except a handful of people that cares about this river, probably not a whole lot we're going to be able to do. Show us that people care.” So quite a long story that's too long for this tape. I thought a lot about that and I thought well you got to do something to show that people care. So I went to the Chamber of Commerce and the newspaper in Cottonwood and told them the situation. I said, “Why don't we organize an event that will get hundreds of people to turn out, show they care about the Verde River.” So the Chamber and the newspaper took the lead and they also still claim credit for the idea, but it wasn't their idea. We created on the last Saturday of September of 1989, Verde River Days and it was at Dead Horse State Park. It has continued continuously on the last Saturday in September since then.

This year will be the 30th year since it was there. Well, much to our surprise on the last Saturday in September, hundreds and [laughs] hundreds of people turned out to the event. We were just all totally blown away. We didn't know what to expect. I mean, here it could have been 50 people or even less, but no, it was just packed with people. It was a huge day. It was a giant turning point in realization that there were people that cared about the Verde. Rank and file people that weren't boaters. They're families; they're business people; they're old people; newcomers. There were people from all walks of life and they were there because they loved the river and cared about it.

That was their main feedback to all of us, "Thank you so much for putting this together so we can learn more about this river." I had a hunch that there were people like that, but we didn't have any way to know. The EPA had gotten wind that we were organizing this event and they assumed it was going to work much more than we did. So the cease and desist order came out in the federal register I believe it was only...well from the last Saturday to September 30th of '89, you can look it up on a calendar...it was only a few days. But it was just a giant, giant turning point in the history of the Verde River.

Back when I first started trying to get people interested in the river, it didn't have any friends at all. There were no organizations that looked at it. It was sort of an afterthought of the Phoenix area Sierra Club. It was just there, you know, and there weren't any real studies going on. The only study that I was ever able to quote was the one that Steve Carothers did called Breeding Birds of the Verde Valley. I can't remember who his collaborator was. But there hadn't been... There was no bibliography of studies. Now, it'd be pages and pages and pages of different studies that have gone on. And there's all kinds of groups of people that love the Verde and routinely show their support. There's a huge active body of friends. And of course, that's the next phase of what we did with the Verde. But it worked, you know, it worked.

TM: So the cease and desist order came in and that shut down the sand and gravel people. Did the river then get any restoration after that?

JP: No. Restoration is not a word that was in the common vocabulary in [laughs] those days. I'm not sure too many people knew even what that meant, unless they were working on restoring an old car. So they would know what that meant if it was a car. [laughs] Yeah, I'm restoring my Model A. [TM laughs] But that's where the next phase came in. I had discovered a group in the process of this whole sand and gravel thing that due to my familiarization with Arizona state laws, I studied their enabling legislation and realized that they had huge power that they didn't even know they had. So I got involved in the Verde Natural Resource Conservation District, which acronym is Verde NRC.

TM: Run that past me again. The Verde Natural...

JP: Resource Conservation District.

TM: And when was that set up?

JP: That's a long story. Here's the short version. It was part of Roosevelt's New Deal. When Roosevelt was trying to mitigate the impacts of the drought stricken dust bowl of the Midwest, he realized that there wasn't any legal way to spend federal money on private property. So there had to be some kind of a mechanism to legally facilitate that. That's when his brain trust created the generic framework for... Well, first they created the Soil Conservation Service, which has morphed into the United States Natural Resource Conservation District in Gore's reinvention of government days. They created the Natural Resource Conservation District laws and they shipped them off to all 48 state legislatures and said if you adopt whatever version of this you want and pass it into law, that would enable local agricultural interests to create a district, draw it out on a map, collect signatures, and petition the state to recognize a conservation district. Once the conservation district was recognized and became part of state government, then federal money could come to private property owners in the district. So our district was a laggard. It was formed the week before Pearl Harbor in December of 1941.

TM: Let's go back for a minute, because I'm also thinking about the Taylor Grazing Act. This was all an outcome out of the dust bowl period where our top soil was blowing away and we were overgrazing the public domain like mad. Is this part of that?

JP: Well, it's part of the galaxy of those concerns.

TM: Okay, thank you.

JP: Cause, you know, lots of things had to be done and thank goodness in those days there were forward thinking people who understood the big picture and could do something about it. Oh, I forgot to mention I ran for US Congress in 1988 and that was another big help to that sand and gravel effort and also to just the Verde in general. That was a lot of fun.

TM: And again, with a canoe on the truck that said 'Vote for...'?

JP: No, I was a little more organized then. [both laugh] That was back in the days when people were civil to each other and running for office was really fun and people complimented one another and said fine things about each other. There was no acrimony and no 'you lousy SOB'.

TM: I'm trying to put this in perspective because didn't governor Mecham get impeached?

JP: Yeah, he did indeed and Rose Mofford then became governor after Ev left.

TM: What year was that?

JP: Oh, I think it was in '88, early '88.

TM: Did you get involved in that?

JP: No, that whole thing was pretty toxic. You didn't want to be anywhere close to that one.

TM: Okay. So tell me about this 1988 run for Congress. How did that work out? What district were you looking for?

JP: It worked great. It was a huge district. It went from...

TM: This is congressional district one. This is Arizona, like...

JP: Right. It went from the Utah line to...

TM: Kingman to Prescott. Picks up...

JP: Everywhere.

TM: ...Casa Grande now and goes...

JP: Well, now, thank goodness it didn't go to Casa Grande back then. It was mostly the northwest corner of the state. It was a lot of fun. When you're running as an Independent you know that you're not gonna win. Anybody thinks they're going to win as an Independent is clinically deluded. But you run as an Independent to call attention to whatever it is that your issues are. People that run as independents can have any number of issues. Some totally off the wall and some fairly mainstream. You just never know. Look over there on that wall, that was my campaign poster back then. You see a sketch of the Grand Canyon rim in that. I actually formed my own party [laughs] and that's the name of it there 'Land, Water and Legacy'. What I was trying to communicate to people was that the legacy of the state of Arizona is about land and water. The reason that we're here is a very convoluted combination of land and water. Land, it's plentiful. Water, very scarce. And that without the water, we can't be part of this land that we love and that the legacy that you hope that you have someday is all based on these two fundamental resources and that they need to be managed with respect and a conservative attitude for a sustainable future. That's the mainstream message now but in 1988 it was not. [laughs]

TM: How many votes did you get? [laughs]

JP: I can't remember. We can look it up online. It's in the Secretary of State's office. Several thousand votes, but I can't remember the total. It was enough to increase my credibility with the people that I was trying to influence on behalf of the Verde River. It also helped establish me with a lot of county and municipal elected and staff resources on a first name basis so that I wasn't a stranger to them. They knew me. We'd just enjoy each other's company and then get around to talking about things that mattered in terms of resource conservation. So that was a lot of fun. In any event, after getting involved with the Verde NRC, we were able to get a big federal grant in part due to connections that I'd made to establish a riparian restoration nursery at Dead Horse Ranch State Park. That was one of our main gigs, was to grow cottonwoods and willows to try to restore the Verde River and other degraded stream courses in the state of Arizona. We also sold the trees. We didn't give them away. The income from the sales of the cuttings helped pay for the operation of the nursery and provided a pretty nice cash kitty to do stuff with the NRC. It was all totally illegal according to state law. The biggest aspect of the NRC that we utilized was that we could form partnerships with any state or federal agency according to whatever parameters that we decided between us and it would be legal. That's why we were able to get a big chunk of land on Dead Horse Ranch State Park with massive amounts of irrigation water for the nursery. We just made an agreement and they said, "Okay, you go use that 40 acres and here's how the ditch works and you're on your own." [laughs] Pretty cool.

We formed partnerships with pretty much all the galaxy of players in river conservation, the Bureau of Rec and, oh man, I can't even remember them all. Water here on the Verde is a big deal, always has been. The big bugaboo is Prescott, Prescott Valley, Chino Valley, the tri-cities over there on the other side of the mountain. They want our water here, and they couldn't care less if they dried up the Verde. That's just a given. They want to pump the headwaters. They want to do whatever they can. There was an awareness that began in 1990, when I ran in my third election, that unless we did something that the Verde River would die, go dry and become just another one of the victims of rapacious overuse of natural resources in the state of Arizona. You've heard the thing, many a time, that 90% of our riparian at one time was dead because of just total over-withdrawal, destruction of groundwater resources, whatever you want to call it. Whatever that percentage is is probably never going to be precisely quantified. But let's just say that 90% is pretty dang close. In any event, just go down and look at any stretch of the Gila and you can see it. [laughs] What Gila?

Water's been something ever since the Anglos showed up here that they just figured they could use at will and not care about conserving it or preserving it or giving a thought as to the legacy of our land and water. That's the whole thing, still is. It may not be getting as much attention right now because of other stuff in the political galaxy, but that issue's just never going away. It's still there and it's one of the most fundamental issues of our human existence in the state of Arizona.

TM: So it sounds like in the first 10 years of your work on the Verde, you were able to stop the dredging of the river and start raising awareness that the water in the river was going to stop just simply due to runaway growth in Arizona.

JP: Sure. So anyway, luckily we had a county supervisor back then who's long dead that even though he was a very conservative Republican, he understood this. He had been the county extension agent here for his career. His name is Carlton Camp. Carl was kind of a classic curmudgeon sort of a guy, but he had a soft spot in his heart for the Verde River contrary to many of his peers. He knew that collaboration was the best antidote to conflict. He was a catalyst to form a group called the Verde Watershed Association, VWA. Of course, the Verde NRC jumped into that collaboration with both feet and all the other state and federal players that were involved in those issues jumped in. So it was a big, well attended group. I mean, sometimes our meetings would have a hundred people or whatever. It was pretty impressive. And so, you know, I'm in that mix with the NRC and Salt River Project and who knows who else.

I was always promoting this idea here...is that you have to have a constituency. You have to have people that think they know the river so that they'll care about the river. I kept on topic with that point just relentlessly. Well, believe it or not, this was back shortly after Clinton was elected when the Bureau of Reclamation tried to reinvent itself. I know that's an oxymoron, but they did to their credit and they bought into this. They pretty much approached us at the NRCD and said, "What can we do to help?" [laughs] Can you imagine that? So anyway, we were right there for it. At that time I'd been hired as the director of the Verde NRCD so I was actually getting paid to manage the organization and direct it in ways that I thought would be productive. I said, "All right, here's what you can do. You just give us a big pile of money and we're going to go into the river business and we're gonna buy rafts and boats and we're going to hire people and we're gonna run the equivalent of a commercial outfitting business, and you're going to pay for us to give away river trips for free." They just bought right into it. [laughs] So they'd shower us with money each year in the fiscal cycle.

We had an agreement with the Forest Service to have our office on their land over in Camp Verde. We had tons of space and storage and everything like that so we just basically went into the outfitting business. We set up a way to take people down the river when there was water. And luckily there was water during that time period. So that was our deal. We just wanted them to know why the Verde River was a topic, why it was worth saving, why it mattered to them, why it mattered to the Verde Valley, why it mattered to the state of Arizona, why it mattered to the whole concept of natural resource conservation. And that we were all in this together. Our mantra now and always has been, is that if you take people out on the river, and you've seen this yourself a thousand times, the river speaks to them in its own unique way in ways that you will never find words to express. The river does it by magic, and you don't know when it's going to do it, but you know that it will do it. So that's what we relied on.

We didn't get real heavy handed with our political messages when we took these people down the river, but we tried to present the parameters of the situations that faced the river. We tried not to make political grand standing statements or to be accusatory or defamatory or in any way objectionable in how we made the connection cause we were confident that the river would speak to them in its own way. And it did, you know, I mean, it always does. [laughs] They'd come off that river so fired up for the Verde and we'd just go, "See it works." [laughs] It was really something. I don't know how many hundreds of people we took down the river but it was a ridiculous amount. Overall it was about a thousand people I think we rounded it off to.

Eventually the drought came and this is where the story gets incredibly fun. There's no water to float a raft. Because of the fact that we were taking ordinary John Q. Public down there, we couldn't expect them to paddle, you know? We had to put them in a boat and get them safely eight miles down the river to the takeout. Well, there was no water. Meanwhile we had a ton of Bureau money. So I called up our contacts down there. This is when they had a lavish headquarters right after the conclusion of the Central Arizona Project. They had big bureaucracy. I says, "Hey, I'd like to have a meeting with all the overhead." They said, "Oh, okay. What's it about?" I said, "Well, you know, we're entering a drought and we have to have adaptive management." They went, "Oh, adaptive management. Okay, come on down." [laughs] I mean, you've probably seen more pictures of Bureau of Reclamation employees than any other human being I know. Back in those days in the 40s and 50s there wasn't a whole lot of structural change in their appearance through the 60s and 70s. Maybe the flattops in the 60s got a little more crisp. I'm not sure. But you know, the ties were always pretty narrow and everything was pretty straight-laced.

TM: Did you still have your beard?

JP: Oh heck yeah. [TM laughs] There were no beards in the Bureau. Anyway, you can imagine... I think it was '96 when this happened. The old school guys in the Bureau, some of them had been there 30 years, you know, so they started in the gogo days of the 60s and they went through the

dam building days of the 70s and stuff. And they were still wearing the same shirts they probably wore 30 years before that with their same little pocket protector. [laughs] So I get in this windowless room down there and you know how body language is when a group of males are not looking forward to whatever it is that you're going to say. They're just all sort of giving me this blank stare like, oh god, what are you going to say? So I go and launch into the drought and not enough water and, "Well, I think it's time that we used your funding allocation to charter the train and run river trips on the train." [laughs] Oh, if I could just have a picture of their faces at that moment, it would be one of my prized possessions. They just couldn't believe that I had the audacity to ask them to charter a fricking train to run river trips. But there was a train up north of Clarkdale that runs right beside the river. So I painstakingly made this case that if we rented a flatcar and a coach car, that we could put GIS maps all around the outside of the railing of the flatcar, and we could put a podium in the middle with a sound system, and we could have a series of speakers, and we could have people in the car talking to the seated passengers. Then we could explain the entire dynamics of the Verde River just as well from the train as we could from a raft and it would be right there for them to see in the climate controlled comfort of the train car. Well, it was all of a sudden like this thunderclap hitting these guys in this room. This one old alpha male he says, "You know, that's one of the best ideas I think I've ever heard." [both laugh]

So we made a deal that day that the Bureau would have one representative on each trip as a speaker, that was part of the bargain. They delegated one of the new guys, his name was Will Doyle, to be the speaker. Subtext was they wanted to make sure I wasn't doing something weird, you know, by having their guy there. But old Will, he turned out to be the star of the show. So anyway, we rewrote our agreements so that we could... It costs thousands of dollars to charter train cars. This is not cheap.

TM: But I would think that the Clarkdale-Perkinsville railroad people would've just loved you.

JP: Yeah, they did. Yeah, I mean, considering that we spent [laughs] bazillions of dollars. Put the federal Bureau of Reclamation money directly into their pocket. [laughs] Oh, one of the best bureaucratic coups I ever had in my life. I honestly don't think at this point in my life, there's no way I can top that one. That's out of reach. We pulled it off and it was really effective. Will, every trip he'd bring back these glowing reviews to the people in Phoenix. It was really productive and it was just as efficient as putting them in a raft.

TM: So the idea here is to educate people about the resource, get them to buy into its protection and care. However, meanwhile you're going to deal with Prescott that is wanting to put in this big pump field in the Big Chino and just pump the water out, which would impact then all the springs that feed the Verde and dry it up.

JP: At least in this case, not necessarily in our current national political climate, but in those days 20 some years ago, the size, activity and perception of a group of stakeholders in any particular side of any issue was a major part of people's ways of thinking about it. So if those people over in Prescott perceived that there was nobody over here on this side of the mountain that cared, well they could do whatever they wanted to do. But when you realize you're not just dealing with one sign carrying radical about your issue, you're dealing with hundreds if not thousands of people on the other side of the mountain that really care, changes the entire dynamic. You can't just get away with stuff. It becomes a much more convoluted process. It becomes much easier for people to sue people to prevent things knowing that there's people that back them up on that issue and stuff like that. Becomes easier for Salt River Project to make threats against the tri-cities about drying up the Verde because Salt River Project owns the rights. It becomes easier for people here in the Verde to adopt a former enemy, aka SRP, as an ally knowing that SRP has more money than we do to sue them over the drying up of the Verde. It just changes everything when you have people, when you have a mass of people that are obvious that they care.

TM: So a couple of things I was thinking about. One is for just the people who read this transcript and listen to this interview in the future to understand that SRP stands for the Salt River Project, which is the water organization that delivers water to the huge state capital called Phoenix and all its surrounding suburb cities. So if there's a fight over water here, Prescott and its three satellite cities are looking at the Verde watershed to get water, but so is this giant downstream user called Salt River Project. So the concept here, if I then can pull this back together, is to get all the players to the table and that will keep one player or a small subset of players from pulling the blanket to themselves.

JP: Right, you nailed it. That's exactly the way it worked. What that did was it changed the balance of power, it changed the dynamics of how the major players played with each other. That was a real key step in everything. Well, getting back to Will Doyle, he was a young man, very well spoken and a very good stage presence when he stood up to make a speech. He had this stock speech that he gave every trip. You've heard the reference to William Jennings Bryan's classic old speech where a eloquent speaker can stand up and just get you so fired up you can hardly stand it. Well, Will's deal, you're not going to believe this, incredible, was the beaver. Will could stand up on that podium and he could start off talking about the beaver and how the mountain man and the trappers and the ranchers and farmers that exterminated the beavers from the western watersheds and just destroyed the hydrology of the western United States. [laughs]

TM: Paid by the Bureau of Reclamation. [laughs]

JP: [laughs] I mean, you'd see these people just about ready to rise up out of their seats with Will telling them about how the humble beaver had provided water resources all across the west and now it was gone. Not only was the beaver turned to top hats for rich Englishman, but the water resources were destroyed. [laughs] We couldn't even... First time we heard that speech, the rest of us are back there just going, wow. [both laugh] And every time Will would show up, we'd all crowd around him and go, "Go Will, we love your beaver speech." He pumped up and he's walk around ready to go. He'd stand up there and just let it rip. It was one of my greatest memories of all time, was Will's beaver speech.

TM: So he would try to get public buy in to save the beaver by keeping water in the creek.

JP: Well, his point was that it was a direct action of man that had destroyed so much of the water resources. When he brought it back around, it's going to be a direction action of man that's going to conserve those water resources. He used the beaver as a foil. It helped them grasp a difficult concept by embodying a rodent to bring that home to them. That it was just one beaver at a time, but it was a collective amount of beavers that did these things. And it's the same with us humans. Even though we're one human, if we're a collective who cares about these water resources, we could make a difference. It was a perfect way to describe it. It was better than anything that we'd ever thought of. We just figured that we'd describe the river and tell people what its resources were and what was at stake in losing it and things like that. But we didn't have a way to make an emotional connection like Will did with his beaver evangelism. It was really something to see. And he was a Bureau of Reclamation employee.

TM: And so this was 1991, '92?

JP: No, this started in '97. I met with the Bureau in '96 to pitch the idea. Might have been '98, I can't remember, but it was late 90s call it. Anyway, as a result of that all sorts of organizations began to form to care about the river. NAU took a huge role in commissioning studies. The newly formed Water Protection Fund began to fund projects here in the Verde. We went from 1981 when there were no friends of the Verde to 2001 when there was more organizations and friends than you could count practically, and that remains the case today. The river is exceptionally well supported. The

efforts that had been brought to bear on its behalf by the various groups that care about the Verde River and its watershed are really exemplary. The Walmart Foundation has poured millions of dollars into various river efforts. The list just goes on and on and on. But the Verde River is safe today and saved, you might say, because of that collective action over a 20 year time period.

TM: Well actually, now it looks like it's almost a 40 year time period cause we're going to go from 1980 to 2020. Today, as the population of Arizona since 1980, I want to say, has doubled.

JP: More so.

TM: More so. What are the future threats to the Verde?

JP: They're the same as they've always been. Pumping the headwaters and overuse of the surface water.

TM: The reason I'm asking this is I just read in the paper, as Lake Mead reaches historic lows and the reservoir that feeds it, Lake Powell behind Glen Canyon dam, is in the same dilemma, Central Arizona Project and Arizona are looking at legislation that will allow deep well pumping into the aquifers to augment the lack of Colorado River water. How do you think that's going to impact the Verde?

JP: Minimal. That's a intergalactic metropolitan issue down south in the Valley and whatnot more so than it relates to up here. Prescott has undergone leadership changes over the years. They have become much more aware of the true cause of concern about destroying the river. There are many more environmentally conscious voters over there than there were as a result of its expansion. There was always going to be threats to any water resource in the state of Arizona. I don't care if it's a spring that has an outflow of a milliliter an hour. Somebody's going to go after it. That's just the way it is here. But because of the vigilance and the established credibility of the groups that care about the watershed and the river, the threats are of a lesser magnitude than they ever were before. That doesn't mean they have been eliminated. That means that they are in a category that we would call somewhat manageable and lesser in magnitude.

Salt River Project, for example, has become very supportive of so many different things up here. And people have become extraordinarily creative in thinking of ways to help the river. The Nature Conservancy in particular, has done so many good things for the Verde River I can't even count them. Just in their innovative ways of managing water that comes out of the irrigation diversions; in helping people understand that meters are not an attack on your personal water rights or your personal privacy, they're trying to preserve the water that's important for you and your land and make better use of it. Well as the good old boys and sons of the pioneers passed on, the newer younger people understand this way of thinking and they buy into it. Here in just the last three years, I believe, it's a real short time period, one of the river's greatest benefactors of all time, he decided to use his own money to build a large scale industrial barley malting plant. He convinced the major agricultural producer in the lower Verde Valley to grow barley instead of water intensive summer crop because barley is a spring crop and it uses geometrically lesser irrigation water than the summer crops. Then Chip, the guy that built the malting plant, went and got all these partners from the metropolitan breweries down in Phoenix to use his malted barley. Then they sell it to their customers as a way to keep water in the Verde River. The motto is 'drink beer, conserve water'. [laughs] It's getting huge publicity. It's written up in many different venues and media reports. It really is working and you can really document that it really does keep water in the river channel. It just has huge support. Salt River Project loves it. Anything that gets them more water down there is like, you know, they're all for it. As more and more breweries... In fact, he's got so much demand for barley right now he doesn't have enough barley, so they're trying to expand [TM laughs] the barley production in the Verde Valley. It's hilarious. Who would've thought of that one?

TM: They could go up to the Big Chino and they could grow barley up there instead of building houses.

JP: Yes. Anyway, it's a process. We stayed with it for 20 years and then we retired in early 2001 and became Forest Service volunteers for seven years and just went off and had our own little good time. We've let other people carry the baton and they've been doing a really great job. We were really gratified that the town of Camp Verde named a park for us. I thought you had to be dead to have something named for you, but they did it while I was still alive and that's a real compliment. It's been a good time, but it's all the Grand Canyon's fault and it's all those cliquey river runners fault. You know, if I'd have gotten pals in that clique and everything, just party with your pals, I'd have never gone off done all this other stuff. [laughs] No, NAZPAC would've never happened. No, none of those elections would have ever happened.

I ran in four elections total. I got to tell you about the last one. The third one was for state rep as a Democrat. And I'd had enough of elections. It was 1992 and at the time there was a guy alive who, for the purposes of this interview I'm not gonna mention his name, but he was not a big fan of the Verde River. He ran against Carlton Camp in the Republican primary for county supervisor and he lost. Then he decided to resign as a Republican and become an Independent and run against Carlton as an Independent in the 1992 election. Well, I didn't want him to win because he didn't like the river. So I ran as a Democrat to siphon votes away from him and I was successful at preventing him from beating Carlton. That was an interesting experience. Well I can't go into too much detail cause I'd have to use his name and I don't want to do that in this interview. But, in any event, at this point in my life the elections are a distant memory. I call it a past life. [laughs] We're no longer involved in politics and never will be again. But we had a good run at it when we did.

TM: I've got some questions to ask you about these political days from the 1980s. There was I believe a bill, but I'm not sure, passed through the Arizona state legislature to protect the Grand Canyon River concessionaires. Were you aware of that?

JP: Oh, vaguely. But by that time I was so focused on the Verde that I didn't get too involved in that.

TM: Okay.

JP: I did not get involved in that.

TM: And then there was a gentleman in Flagstaff named Byron Hayes. You familiar with Byron?

JP: I knew Byron, yeah. As a matter of fact he was a member of NAZPAC for a while.

TM: Okay. That's what I was wondering because he fragmented kind of out of that and went after Mecham and was part of the impeach governor Mecham campaign. And then the whole concept of navigability or the concept of if there's water on it, you can boat it. That's still ongoing. Didn't that start something where the entire state was looked at for its navigability potential?

JP: Yeah, the whole streambed issue is still out there. That issue's probably gonna to be either a front burner, back burner, side burner, or some kind of burner long after we're gone. It's just something that people love to chew on. But you know, they basically left us alone as paddlers. So that doesn't seem to be any part of the mix. That was our ox and as long as our ox wasn't being gored, we just kind of forgot about it.

TM: One last question I'd like to ask you, is about who gets to go. Once we have a river as a resource that we want to protect, then people want to come and either they'll go commercially or they'll ride the train [laughs] or they'll paddle their own watercraft. But we can't love the place to death. I

mean, you can't...you can overrun a river and the Arkansas might be a good example of that, where there's 300- to 400,000 people a year on that river on big business years.

JP: We don't have to worry about that here.

TM: Okay. But where that is a worry, have you ever given any thought to that on how that issue could be sorted out of who gets to go?

JP: Well, no I haven't because it would never conceivably be an issue here. It's just water. The Verde is almost, except for a few springs that give it that baseflow there, it can almost be considered a ephemeral river. The part of the watershed that produces the runoff is very small. The Verde River watershed is 6,600 square miles total, but probably only about 10% to 15% maybe of that watershed produces the bulk of the spring runoff. The watershed technically goes up past Seligman way the heck up there. It's huge. Well, the bulk of the boatable flows that would cause people to love it to death come from a very small area south of Williams where Whitehorse Lake is, over toward Baker Butte which is north of Payson. So if you look at the Mogollon Rim... [drawing] This is kind of the watershed and this is the rim side, Flag's over here and Williams over there. The rim in the watershed context, sits right here and kind of goes from Sycamore Canyon down toward Payson/Kohl's ranch and stuff like that. Well, there's a hinge line right there that's the dividing line between the Verde and the LCR and it's called the Arizona divide. There's actually a sign on the interstate for when you cross it out there by A1 Mountain. Between that watershed divide and the cliff face right here, there's sort of a imaginary little ridgeline, it's really faint. I call it the hinge line. So when the storms come in, either from the northwest or if we get lucky with an atmospheric river from the southwest, the orographic of that topography, this is where they put the snow right here, and then a lesser amount on the backside of that little hinge right there. This accounts for at least 60% to 75% of the total snow runoff that comes from the Arizona divide down in here, and this one to a lesser degree. This area here, for example, would be up by Kachina Village.

The dividing line is the airport exit. That's the watershed dividing on JW Powell Boulevard. It has to be an exceptional year for enough snow to be up there in Kachina to go down and wind up in Pumphouse and augment Oak Creek. The bulk of it is right there. Well, even in good years it doesn't get that much snowpack. Plus it comes off at really weird times and you never know when it's going to come up. We just had our one-weekend season here just last weekend. Well, it's gone. [laughs]

TM: Kind of hard to figure your business on that.

JP: You can't very well come and love it to death. [laughs] It's not a dam regulated river like a lot of these ones that are loved to death or it doesn't have this enormous Rocky Mountain watershed where water comes off for months. It doesn't have that. And you can't ever predict when it's going to run in monsoons. I mean, making predictions about the Verde is kind of like going to Las Vegas and walking up to the craps table and saying, "Yeah, I'm going to win this one." [both laugh] On those exceptional years, for example, when there's predictable water and people can make plans, which hasn't happened in a long time, you will get a pretty fair amount of crowding on the Wild and Scenic stretch down there. But it's only maybe for one or two weekends a season and then the water disappears. That's the built in self-regulatory mechanism on not loving it to death, the hydrology of the watershed. And the tributaries are too small for normal people normal to run without getting in trouble. They're fun to run if you know and love dodging rocks, but most people don't. They wrap on the first rock they see and their trips over. [laughs]

TM: It does seem there's an ever-growing group of people that have that first step figured out. They may have wrapped their boat, but they got encouraged to try again. [laughs] They work through the strainers and the brush that sweeps the river and can separate the person from their boat and they

keep going. And they go on the low flows. They go on these types of runoffs that we have in the middle of winter. So those people are out there and like you say there's no permit. They just go.

JP: Yeah. And they won't ever love it to death because there's not that many of them. They're a specialized breed of river runner. Lots of people get in trouble on that river because they think it's a tame a little river. The keyword being 'little'. The threats are the same, they're just of a different scale. If anything, they're bigger threats on the Verde because of its narrowness and shallowness whereas in the Grand Canyon, you're looking at so much water in many cases, with a few notable exceptions, it would be difficult to hit a rock in a rapid like Sockdolager or Grapevine or any... Who knows how deep the dang river is, but you're a long distance away from rocks on the bottom of the river.

TM: The two rivers really cannot compare just for that reason. But the Verde as a wonderful Arizona resource to boat, as you say, there is no permit system, is a draw a year round for recreation. It's pretty neat.

JP: And the river access points that we put together helped a lot in spreading that use out. The town of Clarkdale has a mayor up there who is... His name is Doug Von Guasig. He loves the Verde River more than any elected official ever has. Well, I don't know, Diane Jones, former mayor of Cottonwood would be tied with Doug. But Doug's one of the biggest fans of the river. He's conned the town of Clarkdale into developing river access and improving the ability for people to boat a very small stretch of the spring-fed Verde before any of it gets diverted for irrigation. It's a fabulous program. He got the town to figure a legal way to create a mechanism for outfitters to operate on that stretch of river and allocate user days. He actually runs an outfit called the Verde River Institute and he personally takes and guides people down the river himself to continue the tradition of familiarization with the river. When I say Doug conned the town of Clarkdale into that, I don't mean it in a derogatory way. It was very sweet persuasion that Doug worked in a very kind way to get that to happen.

TM: But it sounds like they did recognize that river use needed to be allocated. That you couldn't just, hey, we have a two week or a month long window of good water, we're just gonna jam people on with inner tubes and all kinds of other things.

JP: Yeah, it's working out well up in Clarkdale and it's well supported. But you get down in that other stretch of river between Dead Horse and Camp Verde and you can get pretty seriously injured down in there if you're not paying attention. You can get pinned by a strainer, wrap on a rock, or get stranded. They have a fair amount of rescues down in there of people that are going unprepared. You see a lot of baby boomers show up with boats on the tops of their truck, you know, "Oh, water." [laughs] The next thing you know they're a rescue event. It happens. It's just the way it is. One of my favorite rescue stories from the 80s, it probably would have been '91. The Beasley Flats access point had just been finished so word got out about that down in the valley. A church youth group decided they were going to bring the youth up and run that day stretch of the river from the Highway 260 bridge down to the Beasley Flats river access point. The leader of the youth group brought the group up here and he asked people—this was before there was any maps or anything—he says, "How will I know when I get to Beasley Flats?" Somebody goes, "Just look for the ramada." So anyway, time passed and they weren't there at Beasley. It got dark and they called the sheriff and they deployed the search and rescue. They found this youth group with the light off the helicopter several miles downstream and in a state of disarray and wreckage, luckily no injuries. They couldn't rescue them that night, but they had got them all out the next morning. The youth group leader was livid. He said, "I was so deceived!" They said, "Well, what were you deceived about?" He says, "They told me to look for the ramada and I didn't see any Ramada Inn." [laughs] He sailed right past Beasley Flats takeout and got into some serious trouble and luckily nobody got hurt. They lost equipment and money and stuff, but they didn't lose any people. [laughs] Stories like that get around and the river

has a mixed reputation in some quarters because it can cause trouble. There's probably at least as many incidents per capita here on this river as there is on Grand Canyon or any other rivers. It's just humans have a proclivity to get in trouble if you let them.

TM: And oftentimes those are actually great learning experiences. So while the director won't be back, some of those kids figured it out and said, "Oh, next time, now I know I'm going to do X, Y, Z," and they're down there paddling today.

JP: Yeah. [laughs]

TM: So it's funny that way.

JP: Yeah. So that's how it all happened. We did get commissioned as volunteers to paddle the river in '07 to do a small guide for the State Parks up there at the state park. And then in 2010, we did another long stretch of the river for a different group of people to create a guide for that thing. So that was fun.

TM: Are those still in print?

JP: Yes. They're online too. When we were volunteers for State Parks doing that guide, we also founded the Friends of the Verde River Greenway. Then that morphed into just Friends of the Verde and they have become the conduit for all that Walmart money. So that's kind of gratifying. That's about it really. There's not much else. But I really am grateful for the opportunity to make the connection between the Grand Canyon and the Verde River so that you can legitimately say how the Grand Canyon saved the Verde River and you can make a credible case that that's a valid and reasonable statement. I appreciate the opportunity to do that today, Tom.

TM: Well, John, thank you very much for this series of four interviews. Today is Thursday, January 24th, 2019 and this will conclude part four of a really wonderful series of four interviews. John, thank you so very much.

JP: Thank you so very much.