

AL 110

Interviewee: Dr. Ronnie Zoe Hawkins

Interviewer: Clarence Walter Thomas

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T: This is Clarence Walter Thomas for the University of Florida Oral History Program. Today is Sunday, April 2, 1989, and I will be interviewing Dr. Ronnie Zoe Hawkins, [a medical doctor who is also] a doctoral student at the University of Florida, Department of Philosophy, specializing in environmental ethics. Dr. Hawkins is also an environmental activist. Dr. Hawkins was born in California but was reared in St. Petersburg, Florida. She now resides in Alachua County. The interview is being conducted at the philosophy department's conference room located in Dauer Hall on the campus of the University of Florida. Ronnie, I would like to begin by having you tell us what you think the important issues or the important components are of growth vs. no-growth.

H: I think the concept of growth, first of all, is something people need to think a lot more about than they have up to this point. It gets thrown around as a slogan. "Oh, we want growth. How can you possibly be against growth?" But you have to look at the word growth and ask what is it that is growing.

I remember being at a conference about this a couple of years ago, and they started off by posing the question, "What is growth?" The first answer they got from the audience was, "It is getting larger. Something is getting bigger." But when you apply growth to Alachua County or the state of Florida, the state of Florida obviously is not getting bigger. We have a finite land area, so we are not getting bigger. Alachua County is not getting bigger. There are different types of growth. If you are talking about population growth, you are talking about a higher density of human beings per unit area of land.

It seems to me that it is very important for us to try to separate out the two concepts of population growth and economic growth, but very few people – and very few politicians – seem to want to do that. I think it is very important that we do. I do not feel like I can speak as an expert about how to do that, but I think we have certainly gotten to the point in the county, in the state, and globally where we are going to have to recognize the fact that increased human population growth per se is not going to be a good thing. How that separates out from improving the standards of living for individual human beings is something I am interested in. I want to look into that further, but I have to begin looking into it by realizing that these are things that need to be teased apart and separated.

T: What is your stand on the growth vs. no-growth issue?

H: As far as locally, statewide, and globally, my personal stand is that it is time to

turn around most of the trends we see. Personally, I would like to see fewer people in my immediate environment. I would like to see fewer people globally. I am not talking about some sort of extermination, but I am talking about over the long haul. We have to realize that it is important for things to level off and reach some sort of sustainable balance. In the long run, it might be better if the population were smaller than it is. That is something that could be attained over a number of generations, and I think it is important that at least a few people have the guts to say that might be a reasonable goal.

T: In terms of economic growth, what would your stand be?

H: Economic growth. I do not even like these terms because they seem so vague. I am all for improving the standard of living for everybody. In the ideal sense, I would like to see people in Third World countries having a very good standard of living and a high level of education. All these things are very important. People who are living in this country, in this state, and in this county ought to be considered part of the democratic process that is going on and ought to be living well, however you want to define that. But if you are talking about numbers of people and about those people dividing up some sort of economic pie of goods or whatever it is that fulfills their needs, the more people you have to divide things up among, the less individuals are going to have, in most cases. Maybe that is not true with something like education or higher values, but it is certainly true of material things. It is certainly true of land. I think as we get farther from our biological base and we get into these abstract concepts that we get when we talk about economics, we tend to forget that there are certain limitations. I think it is very important that we realize there are certain limitations.

Take full employment, for instance. If we want to talk about getting full employment, it seems important that we know how many people we want to employ. If that number is always increasing, it seems very difficult to deal with that. There is just this concept of finiteness that I think is very important. The way people tend to want to stand on this growth/no-growth issue right now, it sounds like there are people for unimpeded growth, and then there are people who say they want some kind of managed growth, but they still want growth; they still want increase.

Well, I personally do not. If we are talking about an increase in numbers of individuals, I do not see that that is a beneficial thing at all right now, certainly not to the things I care about. Like I said, the concept of quality of life has a lot of components to it, of which material goods is just one component.

T: I know that you have both global concerns as well as local concerns; that is something that you mentioned in our pre-interview. Would you please reflect on your global concerns in terms of your stand on growth vs. no-growth, and then

follow that with local concerns?

H: Globally, I have brought in this graph--it is obviously rounded off a little bit--of the human species over time. Going back to A.D. 1, the population is considerably less than 1 billion worldwide, and it increased very slowly over the next number of centuries. Here at A.D. 1,500, it is still considerably less than 1 billion. Right around where we get into the 1700s and the 1800s, it is starting to turn upward, and then it just started shooting up in this last century. This is a typical J curve. This is a curve that you get when you are talking about exponential growth.

It is really strange that most people do not have a good handle on exponential growth. It is the kind of situation you get where you have doubling. If you take a course in microbiology, you deal with a monoculture, a single bacterial species on a petri plate. There is a certain lag time while this population slowly increases, but you have organisms that are doubling at a certain rate. At the very end, they are still doubling, but you build up a large base in terms of numbers of these monocellular organisms. Suddenly, in just one doubling, you have a huge number. If you look at a bacterial population growth curve in a closed, finite system, like a petri dish, it shoots up, and then it starts shooting down.

Now, the human species is smarter than bacteria growing in a petri plate, and I think that we can come to terms with this. We can realize that it is not in our best interest – it is not in the best interest of the ecosystem – for us to have this kind of growth. A lot of people are realizing that. What seems strange to me is that people here in this country at this time in history tend not to want to deal with it and face it. I feel like we have a big responsibility to start dealing with that. Twenty or fifty years ago, people were more interested in talking about it than they are now. We had the [President Ronald] Reagan era when [the thinking was] "Oh, we are going to have a good time. We are not going to think about the serious problems we face." Meanwhile, those problems are growing and growing and growing. So I think it is very frustrating.

T: Why do you think people were more apt to talk about it before? Are you talking about the 1970s?

H: I guess so. It seems like in the 1960s and 1970s people were talking about these things, but I don't know why. One of the factors is there were a few writers who made certain kinds of dire predictions that did not come true. That led other people to say, "Well, you predicted these massive famines, and they didn't happen." Those things didn't happen, and maybe it was unwise to have made such specific predictions. But we still have a situation where we have a finite system – the planet – and we have this species that is growing at an exponential rate. Sooner or later, in one way or another, it is going to outrun its biological

base, and the sooner we start to deal with that in some serious way the better off we are all going to be.

T: Are you concerned about the exponential growth because as the species begins to grow there is poorer quality of life for all, or because after it reaches a peak it begins to drop drastically, as you said, as with bacteria?

H: Well, all of those things, and more. I think at some point you are going to get poor quality of life for all. One thing that is happening now, unfortunately, is there is a great polarization. There are the haves and the have-nots in terms of countries and in terms of human population groups and things like that.

In one of the readings in the economics class that I am taking right now, there is an offhand statement made about the world's continued human population growth: it may present some problems for feeding all these people, but we think we can overcome those problems. This provides a wonderful marketing opportunity for us. You can have all these Third World people, and we can sell them lots of things, while we in the developed world will make lots of money in that process.

I find that appalling! Never mind the human suffering that may result from having all those people. Never mind the nonhuman suffering and the nonhuman extinction that is going to result. This is a wonderful thing for the capitalist system in the short run. In the long run, even the people who are padded by more money and a developed society are going to feel the effects. I think that is happening here in Florida. I think Florida is going to be one of the places where we in the developed world are really going to come to terms with what growth, as far as human population growth, really is going to mean for individual people.

T: Ronnie, how did you become interested in environmental issues?

H: Well, in a way, I have to say that it is kind of a life-long interest. It is funny in that, as I was growing up, I was responding to lots of things that were going on [without being aware of what they were]. I grew up in Pinellas County down around St. Pete. in the 1950s, and there were lots of rapid changes going on, things that are in some ways just getting underway up here in Alachua County. I had a very negative emotional response to that kind of thing going on. I would come home from school, and all the beautiful oaks that I used to climb in were suddenly lying down on the ground. I did not really understand why that was happening, but it was pretty awful to see it going on.

When we first moved to that land – we came in when I was three; I was born in California – it was a beautiful upland. There was a horse pasture all around the place where my parent's home was built, and as the development came in, the

trees came down, houses went up, a perfect green lawn went in, and a few little palm trees were put in. And some people, probably from the North, would move into the house and stand outside for hours watering the grass, spraying for chinch bugs, and things like that. Sidewalks went in and asphalt went in, and the native species, the animals that I knew and played with when I was a kid, like the gopher tortoise, were being wiped out.

I knew it was going on, but I did not really deal with it cognitively the way I do now. For one thing, I was a kid, but for another thing, it seemed, as I remember it, that no one talked very much about those things. This was just sort of accepted as inevitable – this is the way human society progresses, and nothing can be done.

I think that is all in question now. I think that certainly the people here in Alachua County who came from places like Pinellas County or Dade County – people who have seen this before – are going to make a stand here, or they are going to do something, at least. They are going to talk about the process. They are going to question the need for it, and I think things are going to change. It may be slow change. It may not be the kind of change that I would like to see. Not only is this "growth" not inevitable, but what is inevitable is that sooner or later this kind of change, this kind of destruction of the biological system, is going to have to come to an end. That is something we can feel pretty sure about. The question is when and how.

I guess I really became an environmental activist in the late 1970s or early 1980s. It was kind of sudden for me, and I guess that is part of the reason why I am as outspoken as I am now. I grew up on one level aware of these things going on but not really confronting it intellectually. I was very involved in school; I was very involved in certain activities in the early 1970s that took most of my time. So when some of the things that were going on started coming out in the news, I did not have much time to pay attention to it. For instance, I got my undergraduate degree in zoology. One of the things that I considered was graduate work in zoology in a tropical rain forest. I knew that the life, the number of species, was so rich down there, and I just thought it would be fascinating to do work down there. I did not know in 1970, when I got my bachelor's degree, that the tropical rain forests on the planet were being destroyed at an incredible rate. I did not know that. My professors did not tell me about that. It was not in the media the way it is now. I ended up going to medical school, and I was very involved [in that] for a number of years. I was sheltered from the changes.

Then in the late 1970s I started surfacing from all that and seeing what was really happening. I was hearing things like we may lose a million species by the year 2000. I remember that dire prediction. That is one that is going to be hard to

refute, I think, but it really snapped me to attention. My reaction was what in the hell are we doing to the planet? What kind of leaders do we have who will allow this massive destruction to go on? How can we possibly not realize that we are undercutting the biological base that we depend on for our lives, to say nothing of the creatures we are driving into extinction?

Right now, I am in a philosophy program, and one of the major issues that I hope to address in my dissertation will be the ethics of driving species into extinction, which I am surprised to find out is difficult to address on the basis of what has gone before in ethics. For one thing, we have never faced this situation before. We did not have to come to terms with the fact that our species is actively driving hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of other species into extinction. In past generations, philosophers did not have to deal with that as a problem. It was already starting to occur, but it certainly was not occurring on this kind of scale.

At any rate, I suddenly started finding out these things in the late 1970s. On the global scale, it was the tropical rain forest, where the majority of the Earth's plant and animal species – the biological diversity, the richness of life--is concentrated.

Also, at the local level right at the same period of time, I remember reading an article in the *Gainesville Sun* about the creation of the Gopher Tortoise Council, [an organization formed in part to save the gopher tortoise from extinction]. I thought in my lifetime here is a species, the gopher tortoise, that is going down the tubes. When I was a kid they were all around, and I had to remember that when I left St. Petersburg there were not so many around anymore. When I was growing up, there was a little tiny hatchling that built its burrow in our yard and lived there for years as I was growing up. I think it was still there [when I left for college], and it was still pretty small. These tortoises grow very slowly, and they can live [for a very long time]. They are sort of like humans in their time scale. They need to be maybe fifteen years old before they can reproduce, and they can live to be sixty, seventy, or eighty years old, maybe more. [They reproduce so slowly that if the few that get to be adults are killed, the population is in trouble.] There was this one growing up as I grew up, and I loved having this animal out in my yard. I would feed it hibiscus flowers and things like that, and he would come out of his little burrow and eat them. Of course, it is not there now. That also has been eliminated. The whole tortoise population in that area of Pinellas County is probably gone. There is a very busy street now just a block away from where we used to live. That used to be a little path. [There is no more wildlife there.]

At any rate, when I read that the Gopher Tortoise Council was being formed because interested people – lay people, biologists, and professionals – were coming together to deal with what was happening to this one species, that really hit me somehow. It got me involved at the local level. You see, the gopher tortoise is a creature of the uplands, the nice, dry, sandy habitats where builders

like to build. Now, we've come a long way in getting good protection for our wetlands, but it is going to be hard to get upland protection. I think we really need to get upland protection [for all the upland species, including the gopher tortoise].

T: So these things prompted you to become an environmental activist. What types of things were you able to do as an environmental activist? Did you band together in different organizations? What types of things can you do to try to stop the different habitats from being encroached upon?

H: In light of the recent county commission election, for instance, it leads one to question whether you are doing any good at all. I think we are, but it is a very difficult process in some ways. Personally, when I started getting active, it was really a revelation for me. I had always been very quiet and shy and unwilling to speak out about things. When I went through school, I would do anything to get out of giving a report in front of the class or anything like that. But suddenly the things I really cared about were very clearly being threatened, and I was amazed at myself to find that I could get up and speak in front of the county commission or I could get up and speak at a meeting of the [Florida] Game and Freshwater Fish Commission or at a number of different places. I was not thinking about myself anymore; I was thinking about these creatures and the land and the issues. Somebody has to say these things; somebody has to do it. It may be an unpopular position, but damn it, somebody has to do it.

There was a period of time when I went to meetings of some very middle-of-the-road environmental groups, like Florida Defenders of the Environment. I went thinking that these people must really be doing this job, and they must be confronting these issues. I heard these very anthropocentric discussions about recreation or getting along with the developers or something like that, and I would get very frustrated. Sometimes at the end I would get up and tell them the way I felt about it, that essentially, at least in some instances, they were really selling out, and what I thought should be the principles that they should hold. And everybody would get mad at me, and I would probably just leave. Later, though, I would hear from some of the people. They told me that after I left they got down [to business] and discussed some of those points that I had brought up, and maybe that did some good.

So for a long time I have seen my role as having fun bringing up issues that people are skirting and avoiding, like the population issue. The population issue is certainly an unpopular issue among good liberals, for instance, and I think that is very intriguing. I am getting more and more interested in it, and it may play a big role in my dissertation just because anything that is kind of a taboo issue is intriguing to me. I want to talk about it. I want to get to the roots of it.

T: So you feel that you must be outspoken because you are involved in an unpopular issue that people otherwise would not discuss?

H: Well, I think that is certainly true when you are dealing with issues of the status of nonhuman creatures, for instance, which is another component that some people would say is separate from environmental concerns. I have been involved in the so-called animal rights movement. In medical school, I was involved in experiments on nonhuman primates, so I feel like I have seen that from the inside. There are a lot of ethical problems with experimentation on nonhuman animals, and I think that a lot of people realize that now. Back in the early 1970s when I was involved in it, you really could not talk about it. A few people who cared about things like that could talk among themselves, but it was a very difficult thing to bring up. Now, at least there has been discussion about it, and I think overall it has certainly been very positive, although I think there is a long way we need to go.

I also need to say that my personal orientation is to put more of my energy into dealing with species that are really being driven off the edge. I am glad there are other people who are dealing with things like cruelty to domestic animals and things like that. But some of those creatures are too populous--our companion animals, for instance. Then there is the livestock industry. That is of interest to me, [too, but my primary focus is on wild species that are threatened with extinction, because when they are gone, that's really the end of it].

I guess probably the major revolution in my thinking, which was latent even when I was a kid because I always cared about other species, is anthropocentrism, which is a word that means human centeredness. Everything revolves around what is going to benefit the human being, and you don't really care very much about everything else. The more I think about it, that is really the keystone to the change in thinking that I think is important, even for the welfare of the human being. We have to begin to see beyond our own species, think ecologically, see the whole planet, and see the whole ecological community out there in each part of the planet. We have to see things in that way, even if we only care about our own survival. If we don't, we aren't going to put things together in the right way.

T: Ronnie, let's talk about Alachua County – past, present, and future. What are your concerns? What issues have arisen about the environment?

H: Well, I have been in association with Alachua County on and off just about all my life. My dad was up here and got his master's degree when I was a little kid. I was living in St. Pete., but I would come up and visit him. Then when I was about ten, I guess, my mom was up here fulfilling her continuing education for teachers. Then I went to medical school here back in the early 1970s. Most recently I have been here going on ten years now, so I have seen a lot of

changes.

Again, I have to say that [my reactions to] most of the changes I saw when I was younger were at a less conscious level, although I certainly had an emotional response to them. There is a lot more pavement here now and a lot less wildland than there was.

In the last few years, I have become more and more aware of the environmental destruction that was going on. There are certain business establishments and certain apartment complexes that I watched being built in certain places that I had to drive by every day on my way to work. I saw them scrape the land clear, and then I watched the buildings go up. There is a particular apartment complex down on Archer Road now. They built this wonderful thing, but now they are having trouble renting it. I have this sort of disgust with regard to things like that.

Then right across the street I watched an "eating-and-drinking establishment" go in. They scraped the land clear there and put up this stupid little box. They are still not incorporating architectural ideas of solar heating and cooling and all those things. No, they put up a little box. I remember one day they put up some kind of massive air conditioning system on it, and you could see that from the road. Then the next day they put this little wall around it so you couldn't see it. I remember deciding I would never go in there. Sure, I do patronize some places around here, even though I wish they were not here, but some of them I just decided I am not even going to go in there once. I have never gone in there once. I have never gone in the Oaks Mall addition [Oaks Mall Plaza] yet, either, although I was not that personally involved in the issue over the oak trees there. We can talk about that later, maybe. I do not particularly like to go to the Oaks Mall, but occasionally I do.

- T: Go ahead and tell us about the oak trees that had to be cut down. What is your opinion?
- H: Well, we may get back to this later if we talk about Earth First! Some of the major people involved with Earth First! here felt that that issue was very trivial compared to the larger land-use issues that are going on in the state of Florida. When you are trying to save a major piece of wildlife habitat, you can't get too excited about a few oak trees that are surrounded by concrete, anyway. I basically have to agree with that. But, on the other hand, these may be the only oak trees that a lot of people are going to see, because most of the lives of many people really involve going from a home in the suburbs to the mall and back. If those people care enough about those trees to stand out in front of them with some signs, I think that is a really positive thing. That shows that even people whose lives are really embedded in this whole lifestyle are starting to think a little

bit. I think it was good that there was a controversy there. Even though the wheels of "progress" are still grinding, I think maybe they are grinding a tiny bit slower.

T: What other issues in terms of the environment have come up during the time that you have lived in Alachua County in which you have been concerned?

H: Over the last eight to ten years, I could not count the number of times I have gone to meetings and hearings at the city commission or the county commission, for instance, on the conservation element of the land-use plan. I was a member of the Hazardous Material Committee for the city of Gainesville for a while. In some ways, that was a little peripheral to my main interest, which is in wildlife and natural ecosystems. But all of those things are important concerns. They take a lot of time. A lot of things are very immediate. It is kind of like just damage control that's going on. Drive down Archer Road, and suddenly there is this bright orange sign on this wooded lot: Notice of Land Use Change. You call and find out that somebody wants to rezone and start developing the area or put a business there.

Right now, I live close to the intersection of Archer and Parker roads. A local politician, who I guess should remain nameless, had tried for several years to get about twenty acres rezoned. The owner apparently has had opportunity to sell it, but I guess he could not get the kind of price that he wanted. He has tried to get the thing rezoned, but [what he wants] does not fit in at all [with the surrounding land use]. It is really residential around there, and there are a couple of businesses that are kind of run out of the home. Then there is a minimart that was put there against the wishes of a lot of the people who live there. When they finally put it in, they put it in in the kind of way that says that we are not really changing the zoning, but we are just putting it there ["by special exception"]. They made a little exception [to the land-use plan] to be able to do that with these convenience stores, anyway. So now, of course, he points to the store there and says, "Since you have that, now you should zone this so that I can have my business."

The latest thing is, since they would not rezone for him, now he wants to get an amendment to the comprehensive plan. I think he is asking for a rural cluster there, which would eventually be some sort of activity center that would compete with the businessmen in Archer, which they are not going to like, but basically would really change the residential character of the neighborhood there. A lot of people will fight it, but [the pro-"growth" people] wear you down.

Of course, [I am concerned about] not only these things close to home, but I have gone to a lot of meetings because someone called and said, "They want to put some monstrosity on the edge of a lake that is near where I live," or they

want to cut into this natural area, or change that, or put a road through. So you go and talk about your concerns to the commission. It is usually very frustrating, because it is sort of a fight to get one or two commissioners who would listen and care about these things. We still do not have a majority of people [on the commission] who make environmental concerns a priority, so you just watch legislation be passed that you do not like. Occasionally you are able to soften it a little bit. I guess that is sort of the feeling [of frustration]. But you still feel like you have to do it.

I wanted to talk about how the environment is a real personal involvement for me. Every new bulldozer swath that is cut into a natural area really affects me in a personal way. In fact, that is the second category I was going to get to as far as effects of growth. I guess the business community or whoever that speaks with such disdain about the environmentalists may think these people just like to come and frustrate progress. They just like to make trouble. I cannot speak for all the people who speak out for environmental concerns, but for me just driving on Archer Road every day and seeing the bodies of the creatures that have been killed on the road [is evidence that development and maintaining the natural environment are not compatible]. Sometimes I stop and drag them out of the road. I hate to see them sit there and get run over and bloat and everything. I just feel it in a very personal way.

About a year ago I found a Sherman's fox squirrel that was a lactating mother [that had been hit by a vehicle] out on Parker Road. Sherman's fox squirrel is a species that probably ought to be protected much more than it is right now. Biologists feel that it is really in trouble. They are larger squirrels, and they need open land. They need to run from tree to tree across open land. Grey squirrels are doing fine. They do fine in urban habitats, and they are taking over as the tree canopy closes in. Sherman's fox squirrels are losing their habitat, but they are still on the hunting list. I remember stopping the car and looking at this one – it was still warm. It obviously had some babies somewhere in a nest that were probably just going to die. Parker was not a paved road until a few years ago, [but now it has lots of traffic].

I am sure the person [that killed it] did not intentionally hit it. But it just shows the human impact [when they move into an area]. Everywhere you look, there are human impacts, and every time you add one more human, you just magnify those impacts. Right now, for instance, off Williston Road they're cutting into the woods and putting in a lot more apartment buildings that may not fill because we're having problems with a high vacancy rate. Of course, they want to bring more people here so they can fill them up. Well, here are all these woods going down. The first day I drove by there and saw them starting to cut into the woods, there was also a racoon that had just been hit by a car right in the middle of the road. I don't know that that was cause-and-effect, but, obviously, the

habitat is going. Like I said, I personally react to these things. I feel the pain. Sometimes I will be coming by after they have recently cut a swath and are gone for the day, and I may stop and walk around a little bit to see if there is anything that I can rescue. That's how I got involved in tortoise relocations. [That's not the solution to the "growth" problem, but] that is one thing that can be done.

T: Tell us about that relocation that you are working on.

H: The gopher tortoise is a creature that builds a tunnel that may go down twenty or thirty feet in the upland habitats. It is really important for a lot of other species. Over three hundred different organisms – vertebrates, other invertebrates, all kinds of things – will live down in this tunnel. It kind of provides habitat, especially in the really dry sandhill areas. If you lose the tortoises, you are going to lose all these other species. The best known are the gopher frog, the Florida mouse, and the gopher cricket, which all really depend on the burrows. They will be completely gone. Then there are the indigo snake and burrowing owls. Ecologically, the tortoise is really important.

As far as development goes, when an area is bulldozed, I would love to see somebody do a study of all the species that are affected: where they go, what happens to them, how many are killed outright, how many die soon thereafter, how many go somewhere else and have to fight their way in for new territory, and things like that. But it is pretty hard to do that. It is pretty hard to keep track of them, and it is pretty hard to go in and catch them and move them in most cases.

But the tortoises, you know where they are. You see the burrow. You can tell if it is active or not. You can go in and at least trap the tortoise, and you may be able to catch some of the other commensals that live in the burrows with them. In the last few years the [Florida] Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission has started allowing certain individuals in certain cases to relocate tortoise populations. One of the hard things is to find a place to move them to that is not going to be developed later on, someplace where they will be protected. I have been involved in several of those now.

That is another painful thing. The first one I did was this Coventry [subdivision] that Barry Ruttenberg developed off of NW 23rd Boulevard. I did that totally as a volunteer. People get paid fairly well now for them. But I just wanted to make sure that the tortoises were moved. I put in hundreds of hours walking on that land and checking the traps, and it was really painful when they just started to tear the woods down.

T: Are you moving them to other locations in Alachua County or statewide locations?

H: Well, there are regulations about how they can be moved. They can't be moved very far north or south because they think there may be different populations adapted to different climate conditions. Those tortoises were moved out to the Jonesville area, which shortly thereafter made a lot of headlines as a place slated to have some pretty rapid development. But they went to the land of one of the professors at the museum who is in wildlife [and wanted to have his place "restored" with tortoises].

T: What are your thoughts about the future in Alachua County? What needs to be done to protect the environment, to slow down growth?

H: I think the main thing is people's awareness needs to expand, to take in the nonhuman as well as the human, and also to recognize the changes that affect themselves as humans. I will get back to that in just a minute.

Let me tell you one positive thing that is going on that relates to the gopher tortoise. I will probably be involved in a relocation this summer for Bob Rowe, of Haile Plantation. It is intriguing that he sees this as a marketing opportunity, and, for quite some time, I have thought about it that way, too. It is certainly an opportunity that developers can take advantage of. As people become more educated – and I think that is happening, maybe slowly, but it is happening – they are starting to appreciate the native species that we have and the natural communities, and they want to enjoy that, not just this perfect green lawn and little palm trees. Haile Plantation is laid out in a very ecologically sensible manner. They have cluster housing. The houses are close together so that they can leave more open land, and most of the land is [left] in its natural state. They do not have all these great lawns [for people] to spend their time mowing, and some of the people I have talked to who live out there really appreciate that.

But he has a tortoise population that probably should be moved out of the area because a road extension is going to go through there, and we are going to try moving them to another part of Haile Plantation, which is a dry retention basin, and try native landscaping with some plants that the tortoises are used to. They do pretty well there now just with grass, but we could make it even more attractive, both for tortoises and the people. They are really fascinating for people to understand and watch. They are gentle, they are vegetarians, and they can be very compatible with humans, unlike other wildlife species. They are very social. They spend a lot of time interacting. The males will go up to the burrows of the females and bob their heads to entice them to come out. You can watch these things.

It is going to be kind of an experiment, because this retention basin has a number of homes on one side of it, and we are hoping it can be something that

people will prefer to having just a bunch of grass there. It will be something that will be attractive and interesting. Haile Plantation is one of the few places where dogs are supposed to be on a leash. Dogs can kill the tortoises. Kids could and should be educated about not taking them home and putting them in a box. It should be a demonstration of the fact that humans and at least certain native species can live in a kind of harmony and have a positive effect. So I am excited about that. As development goes on, it does not have to be as negative as it usually is. Some developers can set a good example and can even make money off of it. People say they pay a little more to live in a place where there is a lot more nature around them.

T: Ronnie, you just gave me an example of big business or developers working with the environmentalists. Do you have any other examples of their working together, or has it been the case that most big business owners and developers do not work with environmentalists?

H: I think that really depends on the individuals you are talking about. I could not really address that very well right now, other than to say that some are a lot more interested than others. But I personally perceive that this is a growth industry. I think if someone like Bob Rowe – and there are a few others – who has indicated an interest in this kind of thing is recognized for offering that kind of a residential community, and if people indicate that they are interested in living in that kind of a situation, then I think there could easily be a trend toward that. I think that would be positive. I would certainly like to see land not be developed at all, but if it is going to be developed, it certainly could be developed in much more ecologically harmonious ways than it is in many cases now. And I think that once the developers realize that it is in their interest to do that, things will get better.

T: Do you see a new profession coming out of this? For example, now a developer might use a landscape architect to just put the pretty green grass and trees in. Do you see a similar position for an environmentalist who helps you take into consideration the wildlife and the habitat and all of that?

H: Definitely. It is something that I have only started to think about fairly recently, but I think that could also be considered a potential "growth" industry. If we start putting all the components of the ecosystem back together, including the human, and we could have a much richer kind of environment. I am hoping that people will get interested in that.

T: Let us move on to Earth First! Tell us about Earth First! Exactly what is Earth First!, and what is their involvement with growth vs. no-growth?

H: Earth First! is a movement, an organization, and a journal. As an organization, it started somewhere back around 1980, maybe a little before. It was at least

going in 1980 because I subscribed to the journal sometime around then, and I have some of the earliest issues of it. It was put together by some people who had been involved in the mainstream environmental movement and had gotten very frustrated with it. They felt like everything was compromised and everything was giving up this and giving up that. They just wanted to take a stand and say it is time to turn all this around.

Earth First! is more a land-based movement than, say, the animal rights movement. But I consider all of these things compatible. To me, overcoming our anthropocentric bias that always puts the human being before anything else, and within that always puts economics above everything else, is the primary thing. Earth First! is certainly a manifestation of a new viewpoint, as is the animal rights movement "in general." So is the Green Movement, which is probably best known from the Green party in Germany, although Green parties in some fashion are springing up in lots of countries all around the world, including this one. So, to me, all of these things are linked. Some people [in these different movements but who share the non-anthropocentric viewpoint] are arguing among themselves, but I think that is nonproductive.

Earth First! is an organization that started basically out West. If you are asking if it is a journal, a group, or a movement – it is all of those things and more. People can say they were Earth Firsters even though they never go to meetings and never read the journal, but they incorporate this viewpoint in some way. There is a whole gamut there. There are people who write letters and go to meetings and in some ways are very mainstream. They may have responsible positions in the [U.S.] Forest Service (God help them) or some other bureaucracy, and yet at home have this viewpoint. Then there are other people who are out there monkey wrenching, spiking trees, wiping out bulldozers, and things like that. I think it is good that there are all these different kinds of people involved.

I think that is probably what it is going to take to really wake up [the rest of the people]. I am interested in waking up the mainstream and getting them to become aware of what is going on and reorient. Right now, this process of getting that mainstream awake [is taking place]. Sometimes you have to hit it hard. Maybe you have to have some sort of monkey wrenching going on. It is a concern of mine that that kind of monkey wrenching be nonviolent in terms of not endangering human or nonhuman lives. It always strikes me as being very ironic when I see signs going up like "No trespassing. Anybody found walking on this land will be prosecuted," because [what they really mean is] we are getting to destroy it all! Well, that's okay. There is really something wrong in the way everything has been set up, and Earth First! is challenging that set-up on a lot of different levels.

T: You spoke of the Green Movement. Is the Green Movement associated with Greenpeace we have heard about in the news, the organization that has the ships that go to sea to prevent whales from being harpooned?

H: That would be another manifestation of that kind of attitude, overcoming anthropocentrism, thinking in terms of the Earth as a whole. Earth First! has often been compared to Greenpeace, I would say, in terms of direct-action tactics. Earth First is just more land based, and Greenpeace more water based, I guess. At least, that is the way I look at it. But they definitely share that kind of activist orientation.

T: You have interests in growth management. Tell us a little bit about that and how it relates to life here in Florida and Alachua County.

H: Well, in specifics, I am concerned right now about concurrency. I think this is probably going to be the big political issue of the next year or so in Florida politics: the Growth Management Act of 1985 and whether or not it is going to be overturned. There is movement underway from the development community to challenge concurrency, the idea that you cannot develop until the infrastructure is in place for handling that [population] growth. It is really interesting to me. All this time we have been told we need growth, growth, growth. Of course, very little attention has been paid to separating out economic growth and population growth, etc. "It is all growth, and this is all good for us." It is still handed to us in this way.

I have here a final report of the state Comprehensive Plan Committee to the state of Florida that was done in 1987: "Keys to Florida's Future: Winning in a Competitive World." It is like we are competing against all these other places for "growth." It's funny, because what we have been told, and what we are still being told, is that we will all benefit in some way because more growth – specifically, more people – means more prosperity for us all somehow. We want to "increase the tax base" by bringing in all these new people. However, now we are being told, and politicians are admitting, that growth does not pay for itself, and we who are already living here in the state of Florida, who are its present taxpayers, are going to have to pay more in taxes to provide the services and infrastructure for all these new people.

Maybe somebody in economics could explain to me in some way that I could understand better than I do now how these two positions can exist side by side. If on one hand they are going to tell me we want more people to come down here because it is good to increase the tax base, and that is going to make us all more prosperous, why is it that growth does not pay for itself? Somehow we are going to have to pay a lot of money to provide for these people. I can understand intuitively why we would have to pay to provide for these people.

Yes, of course. You have a lot more people, and they are going to need a lot of things.

What I am very unclear about, and very skeptical about, is how these additional people are going to benefit [you and] me. Now, I can see how they are going to benefit a developer, a real estate salesman, or maybe somebody who owns a retail business and wants to sell things to more people. But I do not understand how it is going to benefit me. As a student, it is certainly not going to benefit me.

When I was working for the University, I was not clear how it was benefitting me. If I were out there working as a salesperson in a large retail business, for instance, would that benefit me? Well, maybe I would get a raise, but then I would probably have a lot more people to wait on during the day. It is unclear.

If I were unemployed or underemployed, would this benefit me? Well, maybe if somebody came in and opened a store I could get a job, and if I did not have a job [before], I would be benefitted when that store came to town. However, if five people move down from Ohio who might have more education than I do or might have some other sort of advantage, they might more likely be hired than I would be. So I think these are very important questions, and I think somebody needs to be asking these questions instead of everybody jumping on the bandwagon and saying we all agree that "growth" is good.

This is an incredible document in some ways. When you look at this, they make these dramatic assumptions that we all share this dream of "quality economic growth." They throw around these glittering generalities. There was one that was pretty amazing.

T: Does quality economic growth exist? Is that what the question is?

H: Well, [I do not know]. I want to know exactly what it means specifically for me and for other people. I want it to be spelled out, just like some of the specifics that are going to be coming up in the near future. For instance, they are going to talk about a gasoline tax. They want us to pay an additional ten cents or more per gallon to pay for road building and road maintenance. Well, I do not mind paying for road maintenance [for our present population], even though, in the long term, I might say we would probably be better off if the population were smaller than it is today. [But let's say] I will go along with its being what it is today. Now, when it comes to taking money out of my pocket so I can pay to let developers build new roads through land that is presently wild and put new houses on that land, I have to say, "Hey, wait a minute. That is the exact opposite of what I as a person want."

If I care about wildlife – and I would like to talk about this more later on--the last thing that wildlife needs is new roads to break up the blocks of wildland that we

presently have. There are certain larger mammal species – the panther, the black bear – and also intermediate sized mammal species that really need these large blocks of land. And they need interconnected large blocks of land, especially if the largest blocks are already too small for their requirements, which is the case in certain of the larger mammal species. Building new roads is going to directly impact them in a number of ways. Not only do you have the road kill and the direct habitat loss, but the fragmentation itself is genetically bad for the population.

All of those things are major concerns of mine. They are at least somewhere in the concerns of many people who live in the state. If we are taxed to put in new roads, that is going to directly impact these concerns in a negative way. Now, I want to know how I am supposed to balance that. How is it going to benefit me?

Well, it is not going to benefit me if they build a toll road between Jacksonville and Tampa. They are saying that a toll road will pay for itself in tolls. But it will certainly have the same effect as far as damaging the environment. And if we are talking about taking money directly from this tax and building other new roads through unbroken land, who is that going to help? That is going to help the developer, that is going to help the real estate industry, that is going to help certain other people. It is not going to help you and me. If it is, I need to be convinced of that, and I think a lot of other voters, when they start to think about it, are going to need to be convinced of that.

I can see this whole road-building thing, which is one of the main parts of the "concurrency" concept of the Growth Management Act, and its demands that we have infrastructure in place before we bring lots of people and lots of development in as something, I am hoping, that will serve to, as I said before, get the attention of the mainstream, make them start thinking, and make them start asking these questions. Basically, until somebody can explain to me very specifically how I am misperceiving the situation, and I tend to doubt that they can, it seems to me that it is a big scam that developers now want us to dismantle the Growth Management Act so that the taxpayers can pay to put in infrastructure that will benefit only the developers and a few development-related industries. I think that is a scam, and I think that we need to call them on that question.

- T: Earlier you mentioned that larger mammals need larger areas or larger habitats, and not only should they be large but they should be interconnected. Tell us a little bit more about that in terms of the wildlife corridor.
- H: The wildlife corridor concept is something that Dr. Larry Harris, a professor here at the School of Forest Resources and Conservation, has done a lot of work on. Of course, many biologists have to agree that it is the kind of concept that may help – if anything can help – rehabilitate some of the populations of the larger

mammal species that have been seriously depleted in the last few decades. Here in Florida, we have the panther and the black bear that have been especially hard hit. These are creatures that used to have habitat through just about all the state. They have gotten pushed back into the vanishing wildlands as the human population spread out and have gotten to a point where the amount of area that they need to range through is larger than the amount of wildland that is there. Then you start having problems like a large number of black bears getting hit on the road in certain areas because this is an area where they have to migrate through human habitation and human development to get from one part of their original range to another part of it.

The importance of [isolated] pockets of a particular species goes beyond the road kill. You need to have a certain size of a population in order for that population to be genetically viable over time. If you get fewer individuals than whatever that critical number is in some small land area, and they cannot breed with individuals that have become isolated from them, then eventually the inbreeding may just take its toll on the population. So if we want to sustain the populations of some of these species over time, we have to make some sort of provision for that.

This idea of building a toll road through the [Katharine] Ordway Preserve, for instance, just underscores how important it is to agree that we are not going to cut up large remaining blocks of land any further. The remaining blocks of wildland are very precious to the future of the wildlife we have. And we have to agree that, at some point, this has to be protected in perpetuity.

But since these blocks may not be large enough, we are talking about joining them together with some sort of a corridor of wildland that wildlife can travel along unimpeded. Now, one example [of such a corridor] is along the banks of a river. This whole thing about the Suwannee Trails setback, for instance, is another thing that goes directly counter to the idea of linking up and having wildlife corridors. It is ludicrous to think that if you leave 75 feet or 150 feet as a buffer from the edge of the river, and then have all kinds of human activity going on [in there], you are going to get a significant flow of wildlife. Maybe you will; they are desperate. But then you are also going to have this matter of human and wildlife interactions, which can be a problem.

If we leave significant buffers along rivers – and there are other kinds of features that could be used to link things together, as well, even things like power line rights-of-way and railroad rights-of-way – and come up with a system of incentives for landowners, such as if a portion of their land were left wild that could join this area with that area, some sort of tax break, or some other sort of incentive, we could put together a workable system of interconnection so that wildlife would have their own highway system, in a sense.

But that means that where there are intersections with our highway systems, we need to do something there. We have these underpasses going in where they are putting the interstate through over Alligator Alley. We do not really know how well that is going to work. Some of the biologists wanted much larger kinds of underpasses. This was sort of a compromise. We hope this will help. But in lots of other places we need to consider things like that as well.

Even on a smaller scale, [progress can be made]. For instance, right here in Alachua County, I travel certain roads all the time, and I am becoming aware that there are certain places where wildlife crosses roads. For instance, I have seen at least four otters that have been road killed in the stretch along Archer Road from the Fred Bear Drive area down to [just east of] 34th Street. You wonder what an otter is doing crossing that road. What body of water is it going from or going to? Probably there is a whole system in there that they travel through somehow. There is an area of Archer Road just east of I-75 where they just put in this Firestone place where they work on your car. Lots of turtles cross right there. I found a snapping turtle trying to cross the road a few months ago. These are big, mean turtles that are hard to pick up. And just about two or three days ago I found a cooter that was right in the middle of a lane. I was able to stop, run back, pick him up, and take him down to the wetland he was trying to get to. [But most of them do not make it.]

Humans could design the way they live to be compatible with the way other species need to live. We need a lot more research, and we would need to have a commitment to doing it, but we could do it. This corridor concept, I think, is very modest. Some people apparently got upset a year or so ago [over some maps drawn up by] Reed Noss. (He worked with Larry Harris at the wildlife school here and is very active in Earth First! He is now in Oregon.) He had drawn up these maps, and they got printed on the front page of the *Gainesville Sun*, which made some people very upset. "You are going to take all that land, and you are telling us we can't develop it so that wildlife can cross from one place to another."

When you think that at one time, before humans came here, this whole state could have been filled in as places where these larger mammal species could roam. We are not giving them a hell of a lot if we give them that [bit of corridor land], and I really don't think it is too much to ask. They were here first. To me, like I said before, it is even a question of ethics. At some point, we have to say our species will give a little, because it has [already] taken so much, so other species are going to be able to survive, also.

T: Thinking about that concept on a national basis, it seems as though it would be impossible for some states to use a system like that because of the high amount of development in certain states and the number of large cities. Is Florida

unique in still being able to even consider something like this?

H: I don't know. At this point, I would say that probably every state could come up with something on this order that could improve things for wildlife. Now, the city's urban wildlife would be a separate thing, I guess. But most states have cities and then they have open land, and where they have open land, they are going to have some populations of wildlife, although some of them may be severely depleted, and some species will have gone locally extinct.

There are also reintroduction programs being carried out in certain places. Wolves are being reintroduced in certain places, [for instance]. In fact, that has even been discussed by some people for Florida. So I would say that right now it is not too late. I would not want to come up with any area that I would say you can just write that off. Some people might say that you could just write off south Florida, and maybe that is true for some of the very urbanized parts of it, but [that is not true of] the state as a whole. I would say that, if we act now, Florida has a wonderful opportunity to put something like this into place and see how well it works. But lots of other places can do it, too.

T: Ronnie, what type of support does the local government, the Alachua County government, provide to environmental concerns? I know you are active in it and many people involved in environmental groups are active in it, but does it really work unless the government gets behind it?

H: I guess that is probably the major sticking point right now. We need to have our decision makers actually committed to ideas like this, people who really do consider environmental issues as very critical. I think a lot of people that this course is interviewing are involved in that kind of political struggle right now. Even having a few people in political positions is not enough if you cannot, at least some of the time, have the majority agree to go along and consider the environment before certain other concerns.

T: Have you worked with the local government at all in trying to get these concerns expressed?

H: I have been to a lot of meetings, and I have given them my comments on a number of things. Sometimes I have felt like I have been heard, and other times I have felt that what I said was just falling on deaf ears. It is hard to say.

T: Tell me what types of recommendations you gave the local government. Is it necessary for ordinances or plans to be drawn up or just sympathy toward your concerns?

H: No. You definitely need to have plans for implementation. The one that I have

been involved in the most is the conservation element of the land-use plan, which has gone through a number of changes. Right now, I have signed off. I can't do anymore. Going back several years, the county had a good environmental staff. The county Department of Environmental Services had several individuals who were really committed to doing something significant and coming up with the conservation element of the land-use plan. See, all the counties of the state are mandated by law to come up with comprehensive plans, and it has to do with this growth management legislation. So there was a good conservation element. There were things even then that I probably would have liked to have been made stronger. Basically, it took an approach of really trying to protect what we have left and still allow for development. But there were guidelines. I do not have it in front of me, so I cannot be very specific about it.

At any rate, I went to a good number of meetings about this, and a lot of other concerned citizens did, too. There were opportunities to have input in writing or to make comments at the meeting. Then the conservation element sort of vanished from the scene for roughly a year. The meetings stopped occurring, and we stopped being notified about discussions.

Then it reappeared, but it was quite different. Most people said that it had been gutted. The wording had been changed. Things that used to say something "shall" be done were turned into something "should" be done, which, apparently, in a legal sense, really weakens the force that it has. [In effect, the new wording said,] "If the developer wants to do it, he should do it, but if he does not want to, well, that is okay, too." I should have brought that with me. A lot of things that had been in it had been taken out or were modified in some way. In fact, when it first appeared there was language to the effect that conservation activities will have to be compatible with development activities, rather than the reverse.

There was considerable public outcry. For instance, during this time a fellow named [Richard] Tarbox was put in charge to pull in the reigns of the people in environmental services [for Alachua County], as I understand it. He had been a developer, so he was still guided by those sorts of interests. I think that had a lot to do with [the outcry]. Also, the people involved in the [state] Department of Transportation had quite a bit of input into changing the plan. Things like that were going on, kind of behind the scenes. During this period of time when there was no opportunity for public input, these changes were made. It seems from what has been said by certain people who seemed to be in the know that these were the major figures behind it.

At any rate, there was considerable public comment when it did reappear. As a result, some of the language was changed, and they did change it around so that "development" was to be "compatible with the environment" again and things like that. But it seemed that the major weakening was going to stay.

I went to a number of meetings on the new plan, and it seemed very clear that they were not particularly interested in taking public input, certainly not to the point of making major changes to the new plans. So I have not even gone to meetings on that in the last few months. I just got very discouraged. I got very discouraged with the elections. I am also very busy at school.

Sometimes you just have to fall back and regroup and then get involved again at a later date. There will be more hearings on the conservation element, and I am sure there will be many more times that I will have to go and say something at these public meetings. Little by little, as the mainstream starts to wake up to some of these concerns, I think that, in the long haul, some things will improve. The problem is that we can lose so much in the short run by bad decisions that are being made before these changes come into effect. I think there are a lot of developers out there now who know they better grab for everything they can get, because sooner or later we are going to have to deal with the fact that we cannot go on forever like this.

T: Tell me a little bit about your perceptions of the local press. Just as you need the government on your side to get things done, you need the press to get your story across. I would imagine a lot of people are not even familiar with many of these environmental concerns in their day-to-day lives.

H: That is absolutely correct. If the idea is to wake up the mainstream out there, get them to perceive that there are problems, and start them thinking about what the solutions might be, you have to have the media carrying the appropriate messages. And if the media start to serve as a filter so that certain messages do not get through, then getting people to wake up is going to be much more difficult.

I think that is the kind of thing that has started to happen here with the *Gainesville Sun*, and I find that very disturbing. With the new management that has come in, it seems that some of the things that were covered before that time are being covered less well. It is hard to pin that down without actually going back and digging out newspapers out of the stacks and comparing. For instance, meetings on the conservation element sometimes do not have much announcement in the paper, where previously they had. Previously they had been well covered.

I remember several times when I have personally called somebody at the *Sun* to remind them of a meeting in the next day or two on conservation. I would say, "I hope you will have a notice to that effect," or "I hope it will be covered by a reporter." There have been times when I have been told that something like that will not be news. Or, after the fact, they would say they just did not think

that was a very important story, or something like that.

There are other sorts of things that have gone on. Somebody is making the decision what is news and what is not. For several years now there has been a group trying to develop some way of acquiring a green belt around Gainesville. I do not know all the difficulties that lie behind not being able to come up with a good plan for doing this, but, at any rate, time has gone by.

One of the tracts that apparently was on not only the local list but also the state list of areas that really ought to be preserved was called Hickory Sink. It was out between the Haile Plantation area and Parker Road, west of Gainesville. As I understand it, there were maybe 3,000 acres in there that they wanted to preserve--this very pristine, upland, longleaf pine habitat. There is also a cave somewhere on the property that has some rare species of bats in it.

At any rate, the person whom I think newly came to be in control in that property decided to have it logged. Reed Noss and I went out there to see it when someone told us about it. They were taking out the longleaf pine. A lot of people do not realize that probably most of the upland area of the state was in a longleaf pine, turkey oak, fire-adapted community. The remaining longleaf pines that we have around may be the oldest organisms we have here. Some of them might be 300 or 400 years old. If you see a really big one and it is a longleaf, that has probably been here longer than [just] about anything else you would see. So here were these logging trucks, and there would be two or three trucks backed up at the gate coming out with the longleaf pines on them. Reed was very upset about this because he had been involved to some extent in the discussions about getting the green belt. He had taken part in studies that focused on that land and the different species that were on the land.

Anyway, he told the *Sun* about what was going on. This was being logged, and one of the reasons why had to do with the problems of getting it together to acquire the green space. This is the kind of thing that is going to go on with a lot of other areas that we would like to have included in green space. It is not to say that the person who owns it should not be allowed to do anything and not get any compensation for his land, but it behooves us to come up with some way of compensating these people if we do want to protect areas like that that really do deserve protection.

The *Sun* sent a reporter out, and apparently somebody interviewed Reed for over an hour. It sounded like they were going to do a story on it. Time went by. A couple of weeks passed, and nothing came out. Finally, Reed called them and asked where the story was on this. They said, "We decided that that was just a private logging operation, and it really was not newsworthy at all." So Alachua County has lost a significant part of what could have gone to a green belt.

Now, maybe many of the people who would have read that would have said that the land owner had a right to do that, so there is no real problem. It still could have been news, and had it been reported as news, it might have been an incentive for people who were concerned to say, "Let us try to figure out what the problem is with the process of acquiring the green space. Let us try to hurry that up and work something out." But if it is not news at all, then who is going to know? [Only] a few people who live out there and the people who see the logging trucks come out. Meanwhile, all the species living there are wiped out, and that's it.

If you sit on a news story, or if the decision is made that this is news but that is not news, it's kind of scary when you think what kinds of interests enter in. Maybe they always do to some extent, but certainly an effort could be made to balance things like that.

Maybe we can talk now about some of the local election concerns. I mentioned Hickory Sink and the conservation meetings that seem not to be reported on, at least not fully and not to the extent that they had been before the new management came in to take over the *Sun*, because the problem is not just what happened at the election time. I am sure there are a lot of other things that have changed as well that I might not know about that other people might have known about.

Concerning the election, it seemed very apparent to people who had been involved in some way that there were facts about George Dekle that were not being put into print that could have been, and there were things about Jim Notestein that were being magnified. In the months leading up to the election, time after time you would read about how combative he was at a meeting, how argumentative he was, how he stood in the way of business being passed along. I did not attend every meeting, but I was never present at a county commission meeting in which I had any feeling at all that Jim Notestein was being in any way rude or in any way obstructionist. He would ask questions about things. He would try to get points clarified. Of course, he was serving a different master than the people who were putting the developers' interests above other things, so it is certainly true that he would have a different point of view. But I never saw him do anything I thought would merit the kind of bad-mouthing that the *Sun* was giving him during that period of time.

Now, I know there was a meeting where somehow enough commissioners were absent that he and Penny Wheat seemed to have the upper hand, and they passed a number of items [the other commissioners might not have passed]. Perhaps they should not have been so eager to do that while their colleagues were out of town or whatever, but you can sympathize with them, since most of

the time they would sit there and lose vote after vote, three to two. So you can understand why they might have wanted to take advantage of the situation. Be that as it may, it just seemed like a character assassination that was going on. It just seemed uncalled for, and it seemed to have a political purpose. Of course, it did.

It was interesting when Clay Phillips lost. Clay Phillips was obviously somebody who was chosen because he was a Pollyanna type. He was a Democrat and was going to be for controlled growth, but he would not take an antagonistic kind of a stand. So it certainly looked like it was going to be hard for Notestein to beat him. People who were supporting Jim Notestein were really worried about that race, and I am sure the *Sun* was absolutely stunned when Phillips lost. Frankly, I think one of the things that contributed was the fact that there was this big rainstorm on the day of the election, and the people who were going to vote for Notestein were going to go vote, come hell or high water. While Clay Phillips was a nice guy, the thinking may have been yes, I would vote for him if I were going to go, but I don't think I'll go out in the rain. I think it was sort of along those lines.

As soon as it was apparent that it was going to be Notestein vs. Dekle, I realized right from the start that the *Sun* was probably going to endorse Dekle, just because they had been doing this bad-mouthing of Jim Notestein all along. I almost wrote a letter to the editor to say, "It is going to be really interesting when you have to show your true colors and support somebody who clearly has a terrible environmental record. You are going to have to go on record as a paper that at one time liked to be perceived as a pro-environment paper, but you are going to have to support an anti-environment candidate if you are not going to support Jim Notestein." Of course, that is what they did. They really tried a lot of ways of obfuscating that, but that is still what happened.

I personally know about some of it because George Dekle bought my parent's house about a year before the election. Apparently he had wanted to get my parents to move out in about three weeks time or something, which was pretty unreasonable to ask people in their late seventies and early eighties to move entirely out of a house that rapidly. The whole deal, I think, was very questionable, and I am amazed that my parents agreed to do any of it. They had decided to move, and somehow this seemed to be what they were willing to do. But at some point they had to tell Dekle that they could not be out that fast. I was not present at the time, but my understanding was that they invited Dekle and his wife to come over and discuss the matter in their house, the house he was buying. When they told him that they just could not be out that fast and they needed more time, he threw what my parents have described as a temper tantrum. He screamed and yelled and pounded on the table, and they were completely amazed. They did not know that he was such an explosive kind of

person.

When this race turned into a personality contest, with the *Sun* really not talking much at all about Notestein's record but talking about what kind of personality he had, how combative he was, my father and I finally decided that we ought to contribute at least some sort of a picture of what George Dekle was like. So we finally wrote letters about this, which the *Sun* did not print. I do not like ad hominem arguments, but if the *Sun* was going to make it boil down to some sort of a personality contest, which is basically the way they did their endorsement, then these issues really were important issues.

At the time we were writing these letters, we did not know that Dekle's ex-neighbors in Cross Creek were also writing letters about how explosive his temper was and how they had witnessed a number of strange things that he had done. The incident where he was found apparently trespassing and hiding (shall I say it?) with a camera in the women's restroom of the Cross Creek Fish Camp (I have to say I did not witness this myself, but I heard it from a number of people who apparently were on the scene) was kept out of the *Gainesville Sun* as long as possible. I can see why it would be devastating for that to appear in print just before the election. Apparently he was cited for trespassing in relation to that incident. It was public record. However, Sheriff Lou Hendry did not want that to be released, and the *Sun* did not want to discuss it until it appeared in the [Jacksonville Florida] *Times-Union*. What finally appeared in the *Sun* was minimal.

When you put all those things together, it certainly looks like the media was doing everything it could to filter out negative things about one candidate and magnify negative things about the other candidate. I think in a race as close as this one was, the *Sun* certainly had a very large effect.

T: So, Ronnie, it appears that environmentalists might have the perception that the *Sun* is more big business oriented than is concerned with the issues of the environmentalist. Is that the case?

H: I would say, at this point, definitely so. It came to a head with the election, but that was only part, like I said. In fact, I was involved in a couple of protests in front of the *Sun*. The first one was kind of a spontaneous one. I was out with people who were protesting the Hunt Club property, and we were unhappy with the way the *Sun* initially had been covering that issue. They later covered it much better when it came to be a popular issue. At any rate, we were packing up and leaving, and somebody said, "Hey, we are going right by the *Gainesville Sun* on the way home. Why not stop there for a few minutes and show our displeasure at the way they cover a variety of issues?" Well, we did, and it was interesting.

It took them quite a while to get a reporter out there. They finally did, and I watched as she took down what different people said. Different people gave different reasons for being there. Some were specific about the Hunt Club protest. I remember one person specifically said that he did not like the [*Sun's*] "editorial stand." Then I said although I know they have a right to take an editorial stand that may disagree with mine, I was really very concerned about [their] reporting of the news, that it should be accurate and unbiased. What was very interesting was the way they reported that. Obviously, somebody got in there and filtered through what I had observed that reporter write down on her notepad, because what came out was very garbled and very different. That, to me, simply confirmed what I had been saying: there is some sort of filtering process going on.

On the other side of that, there are good things about the *Sun*. It certainly does do a good job on some of the environmental issues that it does decide to pursue, and there are some good people on the staff of the *Sun*. So it is kind of a problematic situation. I am one of a number of people who have come together to support the idea of another newspaper's coming and covering the area. I would like to see that, but I also have to admit it does seem that a community this size may have trouble supporting two major newspapers. If we are stuck with the *Sun*, it would be nice to have the *Sun* be responsive to our concerns and at least give a balanced reporting of the different issues as they come up.

T: In terms of community support for environmental issues, do you find that most of the personnel wanting to come out and be counted comes from the citizenry of Alachua County, or do you find that a great deal of the people coming out are students or graduate students here at the University of Florida, or a combination?

H: I would say more the community at large. I would have to say that my impression of most students is that they are at a distance from the concerns of the community, except for the students who have been here quite a while. I am an older graduate student, and there are a few others who have lived in the community, so we maintain that kind of connection.

One of the problems is the mobility of our society today. You grow up in a place, you go to school in some other place, and you probably get a job in some other place. If you play the academic game, it is pretty well assumed that you are going to have to do that. You get your degree, and then you have to go somewhere else. Then if you want to climb up the ladder, you have to leap all over the country to do that. While that may have some sort of advantage intellectually – I am not convinced that it does – I think you are certainly paying a price in not really understanding the systems of the land that you live on and not really feeling any kind of commitment to it. If you are just going to live in a place

for a few years, [you may think] development will be good because we will get more money when we sell our house and things like that. You may never have a chance to really understand the [environmental] problems that you would get if certain kinds of decisions were made. You aren't committed to the land, you don't care about the land, and you don't understand the land. If people who have that kind of orientation make up the majority of the people in the society, I think you are eventually going to get some problems just on that basis. If the people who are connected to the land want to develop it and make a big profit, then it does not leave very many people who are there to speak out for the natural systems.

T: In closing, I would like you to elaborate on the future. You are active not only in environmental concerns, but you are a student. You study the environment and environmental ethics. Leave us with what we can do in terms of the future. What are your recommendations? What are your opinions, so that perhaps something might be done about the course that you presently see us headed for.

H: I guess I have to start with more theoretical and abstract considerations that on down the line could become a lot more concrete. I guess to me the biggest thing is converting from this growth-oriented approach to everything. Something is always getting bigger and expanding. In a finite system, that cannot go on forever. I see what we need to do is convert from this growth-centered mentality to a sustainability-centered mentality. We have to start asking questions like what kind of community can be sustained on a piece of land over time. If we are really seriously thinking about that, we are going to have to deal with concerns like what is the maximum or the optimum number of humans that ought to be on that piece of land.

What is the optimum number of humans that could have an optimum kind of lifestyle on that land? Included within that, depending on how you would define an optimum lifestyle, would be all the other species. In my opinion of an optimum lifestyle, all the other component species would also need to be represented in some sort of optimum population, certainly a population that could sustain itself over time. There are lots of alternatives to the way we live now that could foster a much richer kind of community that could be self sustaining. That is one thing that I see we need to do.

Coupled with that, of course, is overcoming this extreme anthropocentrism, which puts humans at the center of everything, and the extreme "economicocentrism," I guess [I could call it], which puts abstract dollar amounts at the center of those concerns. I think we have to break out of both of those things.

When you think about what is really essential, what is really basic, the biological systems are the things that are really basic. We are living organisms. We are

ties to this land, into an ecosystem, and we depend on it to sustain our lives. When abstract numbers are dictating our courses of action such that these courses of action undercut our biological base, there is something wrong there. I really have a lot of faith in humans as a species. We are a very adaptable species potentially, if we would just wake up and realize that economics is a game that is our [own] creation. We can change it, and we certainly ought to change it if it is making us make very bad decisions biologically. We can do that.

When I think about the scams that are going around locally and statewide and beyond, it seems like certain things have been set up in this game to benefit certain individuals. Those individuals want all the other humans to go along with them and not think too much about it and not think about changing them in any way. But when we start to realize that we do have the power to make changes, then we can really do quite a bit.

I really do not think the message is one of pessimism. I think the message is to step back and look at the whole picture, and try to ask the most fundamental questions that can be asked. Then you will see that we have a whole wide range of opportunities here. There are lots of things that can be changed, and lots of things can be made a lot better.

In the short run, more specifically, I see kind of a head-to-head combat coming up over issues such as the roads and the D.O.T. Twenty-Year Plan vs. wildlife corridors, for instance. Things like that seem to be two very different divergent paths to two different futures, and people are just now becoming aware that these are choices that we are going to be making in the near future. Are we going to have some kind of growth management, or are we going to just throw out all the regulations and let things go as they please? I don't think we will go that far. I don't think people are even going to try to promote that.

But how much are we going to change this American dream idea of continued growth, of continued business? Sure, we're always going to build new roads. Sure, we're always going to have more concrete and more asphalt. We are reaching a point where we are going to have to realize that that dream needs to be modified. There is a leveling off, and then there is a maintaining. We maintain the roads that we have, but we do not build new roads at all. The people who used to be employed in building new roads are employed in something else, whether in maintaining existing roads, improving those in some way, making them more compatible for wildlife, making them more compatible for other sorts of human purposes, like adding bike lanes. There are lots of things that can be done. But what needs to be done in the future is not the same as what we have been doing up to this point, and I think that is a realization that we have to get to.

Something that I am involved in now that I hope may lead to this is the Green Movement that is forming around the world. There is a group of people in Florida that is putting on the second Florida Green conference at the end of this month, and I am going to be involved in that.

The theme this year is something called Bioregionalism, which is a term that most people in Florida probably have never heard of. It means very much to some people in other parts of the country and other parts of the world. It is a matter of appreciating the land that you live on. It is the opposite of what I was talking about when I was talking about social mobility. It is really understanding that you are part of a system, whether it is the watershed of a certain river or the slope of a certain mountain. Whatever it is, it is what makes that place where you live something unique. The other species that live there contribute to that uniqueness, and [so do] the other human cultures that were there once, such as certain Indians that lived there or ethnic groups that have come in. It involves trying to appreciate those things. That is all a part of a bioregional consciousness that I would like to see develop in Florida.

It may be a little harder in Florida. People in Earth First! in the West look at people in the East and say, "You don't have much going on back East." Well, things are different in the East. There are different problems; we are facing different sorts of pressures. In Florida, those pressures may be more extreme and more diffuse. There are a lot of people coming from somewhere else who do not sense the connection to the land in Florida, and it is becoming very important for us to educate people and foster some kind of appreciation of it.

I was very surprised and pleased to see how many people came out in opposition to this toll road idea. I was driving down the road, and a Cadillac in front of me had a bumper sticker that said "No Toll Road." I don't know why this person is opposed to it, but I am very pleased that this person is. Perhaps that means that maybe we have gone far enough with certain things, and maybe we need to appreciate the land that we live on a little more, and maybe we need to reorient our priorities. I just hope we can see that [happen].

And I hope people can start to see, even on a very microscale, [more community concern for the environment]. For example, there may be a so-called empty lot with a development sign, and there is a gopher tortoise burrow on it. I hope somebody would notice that and carry their thinking a little bit further: if that land is bulldozed and nobody moves that tortoise, there is going to be a slab of concrete laid over that burrow, and that tortoise will probably take six months to starve to death down there. And a lot of other critters down there in the burrow will die with it. We can think about these things, and then we can figure out ways to avoid the things that are going to be bad. That is a microscopic piece of

the whole picture.

What I am hoping for, personally, is that the mainstream, Ms. or Mr. Average out there, will start to make these connections in her or his mind and will start to put it together. I don't think the problem has ever been that people don't care about these things. I think people do care about these things. I think that most people just do not know and have not put the picture together. And there are a few people who realize that it is in their interest that people not put it together, because right now they are benefitting [from the collective ignorance]. Most of those people probably do care on some level. I have been to meetings where we are discussing what ought to happen to a certain piece of land, and the person who wants to develop it will actually admit, "I agree. I would just as soon leave it in this natural state, too. That is probably the best use for it. But economic factors make me have to develop it." If we can just start to realize that if we do not want it developed, and they really do not want it developed as far as the land use goes, maybe we can change the whole system somehow so that bad decisions are not made and bad land-use actions do not occur. We can at some point start working together. That may sound like a lot, but somehow it certainly does not seem impossible.

T: Thank you very much, Ronnie. We really appreciate the time you devoted to this interview.

H: Thank you. I really appreciate being able to do it.

[End of the interview]