

NORMAN DAVIS

Interview 282a

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ABSTRACT:

In this interview Jonathan Gerland speaks with former Temple Inland hardwood forester Norman Davis about his experiences with the company in the 1990's. They discuss the condition of the hardwood bottomlands, the process of cutting these bottomlands, and the philosophy for managing hardwood bottomlands in East Texas. Mr. Davis talks about the hardwood management plan, the attitudes of company officials towards hardwood cutting (particularly Arthur Temple, Jr. and Jack Sweeny), the company's foray into Eucalyptus farming in Mexico, and beaver trapping. They discuss Boggy Slough, in particular.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Yes, I'm with Norman Davis. Today is February 24, 2017 and Mr. Davis was telling me about his experiences of being a hardwood forester here at the time for Temple Inland. So, Mr. Davis, just tell me about being the lone hardwood guy in the midst and the sea of all these pine foresters.

Norman Davis (hereafter ND): Well you were just prior to me saying that, you were talking about just the company stance on their hardwood bottoms. They owned them here, they didn't own them there. They had hardwood sawmills early in the twentieth century and there was factual data of them cutting hardwoods. And I guess that is when I was saying, what my charge was, I was responsible for logging, for management, excuse me, management of those hardwood bottomlands in each district of the company. And ultimately I got to hire a couple of more people and we were always marveling and we could tell the companies that made up the Temple Inland that was there in the 1990's. It was probably six different companies going all the way back to Southwest Settlement & Development and then coming forward to what was the Owens-Illinois, and I mean you could tell when you were on a tract and you didn't have to...you could tell who the previous owner was by what had been done to the hardwood bottoms.

JG: Hmm!

ND: Those owners would just, I mean the first thing they would do is clear-cut the hardwood bottoms and plant pine as far up to the edge of the creek as they could. Some of them, you know, for the Temple's, from when we could tell in the 90's, you just couldn't see any cutting. You just couldn't have told, you saw no ancient stumps, anything like that, and on some of the former ownerships you could tell that they had just let whatever area tie mills were in business at the time – they just had cart blanche. They could come through, and I'm talking about probably the '60's, they could come through and cut whatever they want. It was a price per ton regardless of the quality or anything like that. So, we could tell from our experience of looking at the woods and how they had

been handled in the past, we could just about tell you who the owner was without looking at deeds.

JG: Was that, you think they were cutting at the others anyways because of pulpwood? You said that it was just priced per ton and didn't matter about the quality was that...?

ND: And I'm back in the '60's now.

JG: Okay.

ND: I just think, you know, the hardwood bottoms for some of these companies, they were such a small percentage of their timber base that it just hardly got to the left side of the decimal point for them and they just said, "well let's get some revenue from them." But they would just let these tie mills cut what they needed. They would turn in their scales each week and it would, obviously when you are left to your own devices you're only going to cut the best timber. So, a lot of junky timber was left in some of those bottoms.

JG: Okay, okay. Talk about the so called hardwood, I don't know if it was just hardwoods in general or hardwood bottoms, the so called moratorium. I've seen and heard a lot about it but...and by seen, I mean I read about it more from a public relations stand-point, but I haven't seen any definite time period on when it was implemented or any details about it. What do you know about the so called moratorium?

ND: Well, what I was told... I was first contacted by Paul Hugon in probably 1989, about the prospect of coming down and interviewing for a brand new position. And what I remember Paul telling me about it, is Mr. Temple personally did not want any harvesting in the hardwood bottoms on Temple property until there was a management plan.

JG: Okay.

ND: A management plan that was written by real hardwood foresters and something that he wanted to look these guys in the eye and be able to say that, "okay you're an expert and this is what you think needs to be done, the proper way to manage these." So, Paul and I guess his committee contacted some of the best hardwood silviculturists in the whole United States. And I remember it was Dr. John Hodges. It was Dr. Sid McKnight, and it was Dr. Frank Shropshire and those were all, when you talked about the eastern United States, those guys were considered the best hardwood silviculturists. And they made trips out there and they together wrote a hardwood management plan that Mr. Temple, from what I understood, finally accepted. Now I'm not...I'm not...

JG: That was before you were hired, right?

ND: I'm not sure how long the moratorium was, but all I know is that the foresters at Temple did not cut in those hardwood bottoms prior to that management plan. Then I was hired to implement that management plan.

JG: Okay, you were hired to implement the plan, okay.

ND: Correct.

JG: So that would have...you were hired in 1990, is that correct?

ND: Yes, September of 1990.

JG: Do you recall how recently the plan was written? I mean are we talking a year or two years prior to you...?

ND: Oh I would think the plan was probably, you know how slow things move in a corporation, probably 5 years old.

JG: Okay.

ND: The plan was 5 years old. I do know that Paul and them also consulted with a wildlife biologist that was named Bill Tomlinson, and he and I had worked in the same company, Anderson Tully Company. Bill left the company after a few years to go out on his own and Bill was the one that, you know, the hardwood management plan talked about relatively small clear-cuts as the best way to regenerate the bottomlands to the good species composition that it was. And then I think Bill came in, and maybe it was Bill that put a 30 acre maximum on those. And anytime you have adjacent clear-cuts you need wildlife borders. So Bill kind of put the wildlife spin to it all and Bill was the one, I don't know this for a fact, but I'm sure Paul asked Bill's opinion, "hey since you come from over that way, you got any names that we could call and see if they would want to come do this?" and he gave them my name, you know. That was when I came out and interviewed and got the job.

JG: How did the Boggy Slough hardwood bottoms compare to other Temple owned lands in say, 1990?

ND: Well the timber in Boggy Slough was mature to over mature and big. I just remember it was big timber and that was kind of the...they were past their prime, and again you're talking to a production forester that is not too sentimental when it comes to looking at a forest and it's need for management. I mean I wasn't...

JG: I noticed awhile ago...

ND: I wasn't ready to cut the whole thing down...

JG: Right.

ND: ...in two years time, but it had, from a quality standpoint, I mean from an environmental standpoint it was a wonderland. Don't get me wrong. It would have been the type of area a black bear or something like that would have loved, but from a timber guy's standpoint, vigor and all that, it was way over the top of the bell curve.

JG: Okay, so that was your first impressions of seeing the land? And like I said, I know those particular lands were actually logged in say 1907 to 1910 – we know that is when it was logged and just not sure if it was logged or how much logging was done after that. Would that...

ND: Well, and probably the trees I was looking at in the 1990's were the natural regeneration from those cuts.

JG: Okay, that was the question I was getting to.

ND: Absolutely! So, now a 90...let's just say a 90 year old willow oak or a 90 year old nutall oak it may not be biologically mature, but it is already starting to probably have issues when it stays in those moist bottoms. Now it grows fast as heck, but it also...anything that grows fast will die fast.

JG: Okay, yes.

ND: So 90 years, it was probably well into being called over mature.

JG: Would you say that most of those trees were about that? I mean do you recall any in particular that would be out of that little assessment?

ND: No, I just remember, I mean what you had was a bottomland. My remembrance was very little, very little wildlife appeal outside of acorns. In other words, there was no break in the canopy, just old mature timber in there, and so it excluded light to the forest floor so, you know, the deer that would use it would probably just be going through it. They wouldn't be using it to eat in; they were probably eating in the upland areas and things like that, because other than acorns there just wasn't probably much food for a white tail deer. And that was one of the selling points, if you will, for the hardwood program, is that look, we are going to get down in these bottoms. I can remember carrying Don Dietz with me on some because I would actually go to these hunting clubs prior to the cut, with my little slide projector and my slides, and I would carry Bill Goodrum or Don Dietz or Darrel Stanley, and they were basically just amening what I said, because nobody ever wants to talk to the forester. The forester is just coming to cut the trees, but they love the wildlife biologist, they love. (laughter) When they could honestly say, "Guys, in this bottom with a couple of clear-cuts in it and all the stuff that is going to be growing in there, you're going to have a draw for these deer." So that was really one of the selling points to the clubs.

JG: Was there any logging of the Boggy Slough bottoms while you were here?

ND: Yes.

JG: Okay.

ND: Yes, there was and it was, and I remember the district manager at the time was a big help in that, and his name was Butch Miller. He was...

JG: I know Butch.

ND: Excuse me?

JG: I know Butch, yes.

ND: He was a big supporter and a helper and really, these are some of the facts that I may have a little wrong, but anyway this is my memory. I don't think we did anything out there while Glen Chancellor was with the company. Now he was a great guy, he was very helpful, but it was like, "I don't know if we want to go that far," but you know, unusual as it may sound, I don't think it was till Jack Sweeny came in.

JG: Okay.

ND: I remember walking through those bottoms, taking Jack Sweeny walking through those bottoms, and just talking about what I was seeing. He was interested and you know, it's funny how little things make a big difference. One of those clubs, it was not in Boggy Slough, it was adjacent to Boggy Slough. I can't even remember the name of it now, but I was down there doing my work one day, whatever I was doing. But I was in the woods and I came out and this old gentleman came along in a little jeep. He said, "Son, whatcha' doing?" And I just proceeded to tell him what I was doing. I felt like I was evangelizing my little program and I must have talked 30 minutes to that guy, just telling him what I was about and all that. Well he turned out to be Jack Sweeny's father, and Jack Sweeny's father told his son, "You know that kid, he told me that guy is alright." I don't know, but from then on Jack seemed to appreciate. Jack was a communicator and he seemed to appreciate the fact that I stopped long enough to talk to this old man about what I was doing. And then Jack had an interest in that and you know, he probably had preconceived notions of raping and pillaging, what we were going to do to those bottoms, and it was just a matter of education to say, "Yes, Jack. It doesn't always look good that is for sure. But, this is kind of, we've gotten to the point of major surgery in some of these. The preventive medicine hasn't been taken for 30 or 40 years so it kind of gets to major surgery." But Jack was very supportive. He held you to what your task was, he didn't have much leeway, but he was very supportive. But I was able to make a couple of cuts in South Boggy and I think North Boggy as well.

JG: Do you remember particularly the areas that were harvested?

ND: I do remember one area in South Boggy. It was, and I don't remember the river or creek that seemed like it was a river or creek that separated.

JG: It was Cochino Bayou.

ND: I made a cut on the south side of Cochino Bayou.

JG: Okay, by the way you may remember there was a big loblolly there, actually just north of Cochino, that just got the Texas State grand champion loblolly.

ND: Oh wow!

JG: Yes!

ND: I would not have remembered that, but I know I was on the north end and I was on the south side of the creek. We cut there and then I believe you mentioned the southwest corner of South Boggy, and I cut an area over there and the soil type was horrible. That is where I believe your saline prairie was. And I remember that I had never heard, I was down there with a silviculture professor from Stephen F. Austin, his name was Mike Fountain, and there were just the ugliest trees in there and I didn't even know what they were. Here I am a hardwood forester and I don't even know what it is because I had never seen them. And he said, "Oh that is a Delta post oak." I said now I know post oak but post oaks are on the hills. He said, "No this is a Delta post oak."

JG: Would that be like a bottomland post oak?

ND: Excuse me?

JG: Would another name be a bottomland post oak?

ND: Yes, I didn't know there was such. I had never seen them and they're very...they compete best on those types of sites and you know, there were thorn locusts in there and all that. So I was going to change species composition on there. I wanted to see if it would regenerate to red oak, so I went in there and did a preparatory cut, which was kind of removing a lot of the midlevel pulpwood, and thinned it out a good bit. And we bought, like I say I could be wrong on exactly where, but we were down in that part of the world and we brought in tree planters and planted red oak in the under story. And we left them to grow and increase their root mass in over a three year period. Then I came in and cut the post oaks and stuff over the top of them, and so that is one thing I remember. I remember a couple of cuts in North Boggy, but I'm just not going to be able to locate where they were.

JG: Do you remember there was an old railroad right-of-way that came in and sort of paralleled that Cochino Bayou or Cochino Creek? It looks like the timber in that area is not very old and I'm wondering if that might have been the area that you would have logged. When you did log those hardwoods was it pretty much getting, a term in the old

days was merchantable, did you get everything that was merchantable or did you leave a few or what was the?

ND: No when we did...normally I would do two types of cuts. I would go in and cruise the entire bottom. And I would really, I would do what was called type mapping. This was all pre-electronic data recorder in the woods. This is me with a tabular pad and you know, having drawn the bottom to scale. In other words I would take...because Temple's mapping system was they called it Comark and it was before they had Arkview and Arkinfo and all that. They had zero information about their bottomlands, and I'm saying zero. When a district forester printed out a map of his district, all of his upland areas it would show all the creek bottoms and all the topography, but when it went down to the river bottom it was just lines with a blank space in the middle of it because they were told they couldn't log there, so they obviously didn't spend time trying to map it. So I would go in and start cruising and mapping, and what I would do is I would find where the timber was the worst. I mean it was falling down, it was rotten... well it wasn't always rotten. I shouldn't say that. That is too critical. But it was bigger than it should be and it was at high risk for the next tornado or whatever. So, when I would come out, that is where I would put my clear-cuts where the timber, where I thought the timber needed to be regenerated the most. In between those areas I would do some timber marking and that would mean I would do a partial cut. I would take out just a portion of the timber, but I never called myself high grading, which is the term given to just taking the best trees out and leaving the worst trees. I actually tried to do just the opposite, thinking well I'll come back here in 10 years and then do the final harvest on these other areas. So, there were areas, and when we clear-cut we actually paid the contractor to cut every stem in that 30 acres regardless of size. We wanted everything cut down because the research was that if you leave the poorest trees or something, you just create umbrellas that are going to keep your area from regenerating the way it should. So we did what we call biological clear-cuts. We wanted it all cut.

JG: And 30 acre tracts is...that was the management plan?

ND: Thirty acre maximum. I remember being a part of a group when one time Buddy Temple, when he was on the Wildlife Commission he invited all the other commissioners to Scrappin' Valley to show them what East Texas hunting was about. You know, they were from all over Texas. He brought them in and for like two days in the evenings... they would go out and hunt whatever the season was during the day or shoot sporting clays or all the things Scrappin' Valley had to offer, and then in the evening he had lined up some of us to come in. Obviously the Wildlife Biologist was talking about his quail project in South Boggy and I was talking about the hardwood program and somebody else was talking about what they were doing with pine tree improvement. It was one of the first times I had ever met Mr. Temple. And what is the name of the club directly north of north Boggy?

JG: Malibu?

ND: Malibu, Malibu was the first clear-cut I put in, the very first and of course the club hated it. They just hated it! It was an old line club and they still had ties to the company and I'm sure some of them wondered, "that kid is out here and he is making big clear-cuts out here," and boy I had worried with that. I mean there was no GPS at the time. I mean I was literally compass and pasting to lay these 30 acre clear-cuts out on graph paper. I was very cognizant that the management plan said no larger than 30 acres. And I remember Mr. Temple came over and introduced himself very politely and he said, "son is that clear-cut at Malibu really just 30 acres?" And I said, "Yes sir it is. I can guarantee it." He said, "It better damn well be, and we went out and had that management plan written and you better put it into place the way it is written." I don't guess I've ever felt like my job was literally hanging by a thread at that moment if I had answered differently. If I had said 30 or 40 what does it matter? (laughter) But I could attest to him and assure him to the best of my ability it was no bigger than 30 acres.

JG: Twenty eight just to be safe huh? (laughter)

ND: Yes, exactly, exactly. But anyway yes, that was...but I don't remember...I do seem to remember an old railroad right of way but I don't remember if I had a cut along it or not.

JG: Okay, okay, that was awhile back and you've done a lot of things since then so that is perfectly understandable.

ND: A couple.

JG: Do you remember Boggy Slough Island, the island itself?

ND: I do not. And that was the thing. There were eleven other districts that I was trying to see different parts. I mean when I first got hired I was responsible for everything, and then in a couple of years and we were seeing you know, this is throwing off a little income this is not bad. I said, well I would certainly love to hire somebody for the southern end and you know, so we could obviously have an effect on more acres, so they allowed me to. But we would literally try to have jobs in each district when time came to log.

JG: Did Paul Hugon hire you?

ND: Paul Hugon hired me, yes.

JG: Okay. Is that who you reported to?

ND: I reported to Paul pretty soon, I mean for two or three years and then in '94, the company, and I'm getting off track here so when you want to bring me you just say the word, but in '94 the company was doing, spending a tremendous amount of money down at Evadale. I remember the figure, \$600 million they were spending inside the fence at Evadale and that was going to allow them to make a whole different quality kind of

bleached paper board that was going to set them apart in the bleach board business. But to do that, the process, I remember, was going to be able to use up to 2 million tons of hardwood pulpwood a year. Hardwood pulpwood a year, yes. Well the company commissioned a group to look at the growth drain issues in east Texas and because they were sending 400 thousand tons of hardwood a year out of the Port of Beaumont to Asia, they found out that, hey there is not going to be enough hardwood in East Texas or the cost of it is going to be so prohibitive that we're not going to be able to feed Evadale. Does any of this ring a bell with you?

JG: A little bit, it's a little before my time but...

ND: Well they actually had a hardwood summit in Diboll.

JG: Okay.

ND: Mr. Temple got Charlie... our Congressman...

JG: Wilson.

ND: Charlie Wilson to host a hardwood summit to try to show that there was probably too much wood being shipped out of Beaumont going to those Japanese, you know, and so it was trying to give both sides of the export. Do you export it or do we use it here? But that was all interesting, but what came out of that is Clifford Grum was personal friends with a guy by the name of Thurman Mosley. Thurman Mosley was the owner, his family was the owner of a company called Simpson Timber and they were out of Seattle, Washington. And Simpson owned all this land in the northwest. It had douglas fir and redwood and all kind of stuff on it, but they were family owned business, very entrepreneurial. Their MO was they would buy old papermills and just run them. They wouldn't fix them up much, they would just run them until the EPA said you got to spend a gazillion dollars here. But they had mills in California, Anderson, California and they planted 10,000 acres of eucalyptus in California in the 80's, and they were drip irrigating this 10,000 acres of eucalyptus. So with that eucalyptus knowledge they were doing eucalyptus operations in Chili and they were doing operations in Guatemala, very international group, and they had a papermill on the ship channel outside of Houston, I think in Sheldon or something like that.

JG: Sheldon yes.

ND: So, Thurman Mosley, in a conversation with Clifford Grum said, "look if Temple's ever interested in any kind of joint venture, you know, let's talk about it." So Simpson was wanting to do a project in Southern Mexico for eucalyptus and they were actually thinking on the Pacific side, and they were thinking they were just going to grow fiber and ship it and sell it to Asia and because of this "alleged shortage" that was coming with all this money being spent at Evadale, they decided they would do a project in Southern Mexico, but on the gulf side. And I was asked by Glen Chancellor to go down and be the company's representative in that project. Simpson owned 51% and Temple owned 49%,

we were mostly just an equity investor, but we were going to split the proceeds. So that was another reason for the hardwood program that was in the Temple bottoms.

JG: I was actually at the time living in Beaumont and I remember, say '94-95-96, and I remember it was in the newspapers a lot because they were having to do some modifications at the port, some rail connections and things at the Port of Beaumont to haul that eucalyptus to Evadale I guess.

ND: Yes, we were doing all sorts of things. Obviously we were just on the plantation side of it where I was, but you know we were already looking at putting together a harvesting system down there and all of that.

JG: So you travelled down there a good bit then, huh?

ND: I was down there a lot. See after two years, Simpson in the contract with Temple, and that wasn't my area of expertise, all I know is they had an option. They had until the end of the 2nd year, they could exercise an option to put the entire project to Temple and get paid back for the expenses they had in it. And that is what they did at the end of 24 months. They put the entire project to Temple and all of a sudden I became the lead forestry guy down there. (laughter)

JG: International forester.

ND: A hardwood forester used to growing trees to 70 and 80 years and all of a sudden we were growing them to 6, so I had to grow up pretty fast. Plus there were a couple of...Rich Standavon who was kind of in the...he was an accountant, he was just a numbers guy for us and one of the accounting guys. We would go down there and I would go to the field and look in on things there and they would be in the office looking at all the books there, so it was certainly a team effort.

JG: Now how fast did eucalyptus trees grow?

ND: We were cutting these things in six years and in six years they would be ten inches in diameter and 80 feet tall.

JG: Wow!

ND: Can you imagine? You could see the darn things grow.

JG: You could watch them grow. (laughter)

ND: It was the most amazing thing you've ever seen.

JG: Wow! Hey now it's interesting I was in Tyler County, which is just south of us, a year or so ago and I don't know who did it but they had clear-cut at least 10,000 acres all through there and they were planting eucalyptus in Tyler county, just 30 miles from here.

How common is that getting now and is that going to be common to plant that stuff up here now?

ND: I know that the company that bought Evadale from Temple, at the time they were Mead Westvaco (**JG:** yes) and are they still that or do they call themselves something else?

JG: I'm not sure, I'm not sure.

ND: Well that company planted 3,000 acres of eucalyptus down just north of Evadale on the Louisiana side.

JG: Okay.

ND: I've not seen it but when you go to California, eucalyptus, is all up and down the coast of California. It's been there for a hundred years and the reason it grows there, is because those prevailing westerly winds across the Pacific. Yes, it will get freezing in California, but it never does do like it does in Diboll where it is 65 at noon and it's 35 at midnight, you know. It doesn't have those dramatic drops in temperature. That is what eucalyptus can't stand. But like with anything else like the thousands of varieties of eucalyptus they have found those that tolerate those better than others and those are the kind of species they're planting.

JG: Okay.

ND: I don't know the name of the variety but I'm sure that is what they're planting and it probably will do fine.

JG: So do you see that as a growing trend?

ND: I don't...probably yes. I don't keep up with it that closely, but probably so, because these paper mills are always looking for a good source, steady source of fiber and the ones that use the short fiber, the hardwoods yes, I would think it might be a growing trend.

JG: I'm kind of jumping back a little bit (**ND:** sure) but wanted to ask you about the hardwoods that you were harvesting in Boggy Slough. Do you remember where they were going? And by that I mean was that going into pulp or going into other things or what?

ND: No, there was, I was able, just because I had worked for a company that understood grade... I mean that is what we try to saw at our company is grade hardwood. I understood what made grade, what didn't make grade, so at all of our log jobs we separated what we called grade saw timber from the lower quality logs, which went as tie logs, from the pulpwood. So there was a mill when I was out there, there was a mill at Mt. Enterprise, Texas that only wanted grade hardwood and I visited with those guys. We

knew each other personally and we would instruct the logger to separate these logs out and we're going to sell them there. And then we would take the tie logs and we sent the tie logs up to the mill on the south side of Nacogdoches more than likely, and then the pulpwood probably went up to the chip mill Temple had up toward Alto. There was something up that way; I think that we had a chip mill. So three different products, and obviously if there was pine in our areas that would go to Diboll.

JG: Did you make those decisions while the trees were still standing or did you do that at the time they were logged?

ND: No, I had a good indication while they were standing.

JG: Okay.

ND: I knew this one was going to yield half the saw timber volume could go as grade, the other half is going to have to go as tie logs. But the interesting thing about it, because there wasn't that ready knowledgebase in Temple, what we started to do, the guy I hired, you know, we knew we had high quality trees. Most of the trees were high quality, they were just big and they were just older growth, good bottomland trees. So we started getting buyers in from...the first one I went to see...what I would do is, before I cut the first tree I started going around and visiting sawmills to try to understand what they took and you know, tried to tell them, "look we are going to start producing this type of quality, and that type of quality." And so one of my first visits was Bruce Hardwood Flooring up at Center, and I met those guys and took them to the woods with me and let them show me this is the kind of logs we like and oh yes. I remember logging at Boggy Slough and sending tree length sweet gum, I'm talking about huge sweet gum up to Jacksonville, Texas to Texas Basket Company. That guy had a great price and I never will forget, sorry for my little rabbit trails.

JG: No, go ahead.

ND: I was...what was John Ralph Pouland's son's name?

JG: Roho?

ND: Roho, alright, we were on a job and I believe it was Boggy Slough. If it was not Boggy Slough it was something right next to Boggy Slough. But I had put him in this hardwood bottom and I'm going to say this sweet gum we were cutting was 30 inches at DBH [diameter, breast height, usually 4.5 feet from the ground or the base of the tree] and lord it was 50 feet. So there were about 8 of these stems on one of Pouland's trucks and he never had hauled anything up to Jacksonville and I hadn't at this point, you know. I sought that guy out, what do you need and he had a great price. Like I can remember the price being like \$20 a ton at the gate at one of these tie mills, like the tie mill south of Nacogdoches and the guy's price up at Mt. Enterprise or Jacksonville was like \$50 a ton, you know. You just had to know what they wanted, and you had to have it. I can remember he sent this truck off at daylight to go up there and I got there about, you

know, 7:30 or 8:00 o'clock and Roho said well, "I sent so and so off an hour and a half ago and he ought to be in the next hour or so." Well he didn't come back. And you know, Roho, the whole thing about logging is you want those empties back, you want to load them back up and get two, three, four loads a day if you can, and that guy never came back and he was just saying that sorry so and so... About noon here he comes and there was something all in the cab and Roho said, "where the hell have you been and you should have been back here two hours ago." And the guy's whole cab was full of baskets because he had gotten up there and that little mill didn't have any equipment big enough to unload those big tree length logs, so he wound up having to go rent a bigger piece of equipment that came up and had to wrap a chain around them and pull them off, they were so big. So, he had sent those baskets back knowing the guy was going to be ticked off at him hoping they could send baskets to the crew that would make them not be so angry, just one of the funny tales.

JG: Were you able to send any more big ones up to him?

ND: Oh yes he found a way to do it and yes he was a good customer all throughout!

JG: There is a lot of difference between twenty and fifty dollars a ton.

ND: Oh and this was for sweet gum, sweet gum. I mean you know, but when you knew what you had, and I'm not trying to toot my own horn, but that is why Temple... Temple had the good sense to go outside of this area and seek out someone who understood hardwood bottomlands. It was wise on their part.

JG: So what was your background before you came here?

ND: I was with the company I'm currently with. I came out of the University of Tennessee in 1977 and went to work for Anderson Tully Company, which is also a family owned company that owns, at the time owned 300,000 acres of bottomland hardwood. My job was to manage those bottoms along with the other foresters.

JG: Is a lot of that in the Mississippi river valley?

ND: Most of it is yes.

JG: Okay.

ND: That is just what I had always done.

JG: How did the timber compare? You were talking earlier about the lands that Temple Inland owned, which were composed of Southern Pine Lumber Company lands, Temple Lumber Company lands, but then Owens-Illinois and all these other companies that they had acquired over the years, and you were talking about those comparisons. How would some of the stuff that you were used to at Anderson Tully and that region compare to what was at Temple lands here?

ND: Oh very favorably, very favorably. It was...what Temple had were bottomlands that were primarily red oak, sweet gum.

JG: Would that be Boggy Slough as well?

ND: Yes, Boggy Slough was a red oak, sweet gum type. The Neches River bottoms are red oak, sweet gum types, you really didn't get out of that. The Sabine River, you wouldn't get into stands of cottonwood and sycamore and things like that, so it was pretty much the same throughout Temple's ownership. Whereas the Mississippi alluvial valley is still a developing river system, where you are having sand bars formed. I'm talking about a thousand acre sand bar formed, and that gets a lot of black willow. So, a little bit different, but quality-wise it was as good as any southern bottomland.

JG: Okay, and I'm not a forester and I have been having to read a good bit of forest ecology books to kind of get up to speed on some of this, but I'm just curious. You described it as a red oak, sweet gum type, so I guess those would be the dominate trees, but would you have seen many like overcup oaks, hickory's, elms, things like that?

ND: Those were there, not a lot of overcup. There was overcup in South Boggy, I remember that, and anytime you had these bottoms were there because they were part of the flood plain, and as you have read in riparian ecology, those rivers have moved over time and as they move in this old river channel, after about 50 years you're probably going to see some cypress start. So, you would see runs of cypress in there and sometimes tupelo in there, but yes, there would be elm, ash, sycamore, but they would all be in minor proportions in regards to...

JG: Yes, ash was a tree you saw a lot in those river bottom surveys. I mentioned earlier doing those original land grants when they would run the survey lines, ash was always in those, anything bordering on the Neches River they would typically use an ash.

ND: At the time I got there, there probably wasn't as much ash because as those, you know, the types of cuts that were probably done in 1910, were just about probably as close to a clear-cut as you would get. The oaks would dominate those stands. The oaks would be...the sweet gums had quicker juvenile growth than the oaks, but the oaks are the steady freddies. They would stay in there and by the age 20, the oaks would get above the gums and then if there were little cracks in the canopy you would find an ash or an elm or something like that. Yes, there were definitely other species, but probably easily 60-75% of the bottom was going to be oaks and sweet gum.

JG: So, there probably... I guess what I'm hearing you say is the oaks come back quicker, stronger than maybe what was there 100 years ago.

ND: If it is full sunlight yes.

JG: Okay.

ND: The pH of the soil is just what oak wants and with the way the natural regeneration does when there is a seed source, which I'm sure there was plenty of and full sunlight, those oaks are going to be your dominant species.

JG: This is kind of a general question but also very specific to Boggy Slough, but... and you can answer it both at the same time; it might be the same answer. I don't know. But is there more sweet gum today than say a 100... before the commercial harvesting began?

ND: The only reason... I doubt it, but the only reason there could be more sweet gum is because of... you heard me refer to past cutting practices. Most of the time when someone was just allowed to go in and cut whatever they wanted, they would definitely cut the oaks. Oaks in hardwood circles have always been the more desirable species.

JG: I guess especially the white oaks.

ND: They cut the oaks out and left the gums.

JG: Okay.

ND: That would be the only reason would be past high grading.

JG: And the gums I see, especially in those early days the stuff that was written about, it was always a red gum that would be mentioned. You hardly see the term, they would either say gums or be specific and say red gum or maybe black gum.

ND: And here is the reason you see that. Every hardwood tree has a hardwood and a sapwood and if you cut down a 50 year old sweet gum that is 18 inches in diameter at breast height and the small end of the first log it's going to have about a six inch diameter dark heart, that is the hardwood and the rest of it will be really light colored, that is the sapwood. Well if you take that 50 year old tree to 150 years old, all of a sudden now it's 60 inches DBH and the top of that first log is 40 inches, I mean it's 40 inches across. Well at this time the sap wood, the white, is just going to be about a 2 inch ring around that whole thing. So that whole 38 inches is going to be red heart, what we call red gum, so that was what was sought after was that dark heart. Our company was famous for it but...it was still a sweet gum.

JG: Okay.

ND: It obviously didn't change species, but it referred to the old growth sweet gum trees where the heart was. When I came along we were still selling red gum to veneer buyers and what they would do is they would put it on a rotary lathe and that beautiful figured red gum they would put it on veneers for doors and stuff so that is what is referred to it's just the older growth red gum. And it was valuable.

JG: Okay and sweet gum grows pretty fast doesn't it?

ND: It does grow fast, but it's a long-lived tree.

JG: Okay.

ND: It would not be uncommon to see 150 year old trees in there.

JG: Okay. What about Chinese tallow? Was there any Chinese tallow in these lands?

ND: Yes, and it was horrible and it's doubly, triply horrible by now.

JG: Yes.

ND: That is a species that is there, I mean it's going to be there.

JG: It's all over your lands where you are too?

ND: Not over here. They are worse on the coast and in from the coast because they're worst down there next to Silsbee, Buna, you know, Sour Lake, all down through there, Beaumont. They are just the worst down there, in what I call coastal flat woods. They compete best on those saturated soils.

JG: Yes I mean they're everywhere, anywhere there's water or moisture, all the creek bottoms, the low lands it's yes it's...

ND: And the seed just floats through those bottom lands; when it floods it just spreads it out everywhere, the birds eat it, excrete it, and all that.

JG: Is it going to be...I'm asking you to predict the future, but do you think it is going to be something that is not going to get better anytime soon? Is it going to be something that is just going to get worse?

ND: Well what... the way we looked at it in our management plan is that it was all around us. We couldn't escape it.

JG: Even if you had your lands clear of it and the other guy on the other side of the river doesn't, it is just going to come right across the river isn't it?

ND: Yes, when we did a clear-cut it would come in like hair on a dogs back, but it would not exclude the natural regeneration and it slowed the natural regeneration down. But I remember walking through stands with my guy that helped me down around that Cooks Lake. You remember that exit down there between Silsbee and Beaumont?

JG: Yes. I haven't walked it on the ground, but I'm familiar with it on a map, yes.

ND: That was a lot of those low bottomlands down there and we walked on acres that were owned by someone other than Temple, but Temple had acquired, and you could tell we were walking in relatively young timber. It was probably 30 year old timber and you could see the tallow tree that was as big as the oak. But that was all that was left when that clear-cut was done. There was probably just as many tallow trees in there as we were seeing in our current cuts, but the natural timber had just overtaken it and it finally was just a remnant almost in the stand. We just didn't think too much about it, but where it was worse is when we tried to do a partial harvest and just let a little sunlight in. It would thrive in those areas. So, it is a nuisance and it is not going to go anywhere soon.

JG: Okay, probably again the focus is Boggy Slough, but what about hogs and beavers? Were they an issue in the 90's?

ND: Yes, I remember getting out and seeing the condition of the bottomlands, and yes the beavers were fairly well unchecked and I started a relationship with the agriculture wildlife services. It was a federal agency, animal damage control, and they actually had full time trappers and I had full time trappers working on Temple lands and I'm sure he was on Boggy Slough, no doubt about it.

JG: Okay.

ND: I don't remember hogs being that big a problem. I know they were there – they've always been there, but I don't remember them being the sort of problem that beavers were.

JG: Okay, I don't really know a whole lot about it, but I know there is lots of hogs out there and I've heard talk that they are starting to interfere with the prescribed burns because they tear up the grounds so much they are interfering with the burns even.

ND: And I think we brought in contract trappers too for the beaver. I just remember I would go over and put in a budget for beaver control and the accounting department thought that was pretty funny to have beaver control, so anyway had a good laugh.

JG: (laughter) Well you have been so helpful. I've learned an awful lot today and I look forward to going back and listening again to this recording. I am just trying to think if there is anything else that I need to ask or is there anything that comes to your mind in the conversation that you wanted to talk about more or were you reminded of something?

ND: I do remember when I first was hired that there was a tree improvement guy for Temple, was a guy by the name of Larry Miller. Larry was out of the Pineland, no the Jasper office.

JG: Now is this the timber stand improvement or something else?

ND: No he was in charge of all the seed orchards for the company.

JG: Okay.

ND: The pine seed program. And he was in charge of the nursery that grew all their pine seedlings. And so Larry was a member of the Western Gulf Forestry Improvement Program, which was headquartered out of College Station over at Texas A&M and they actually had a pine division, which was the major part of the whole operation, but they also had a hardwood division. And Larry was able to get the Western Gulf Tree improvement to put in some type of study, and I believe it was on South Boggy. I can remember there was a cleared area, this is when I first got there, they already had this in the works. There was about a 20 acre cleared area down in a bottom and we were planting different species of different clones of different trees to just kind of trying to find their way on, “are we going to need to replant these hardwood bottoms?” And there were other companies wanting, it was a cooperative, so there were other companies that were part of the cooperative that wanted to know this. So there was a study in East Texas and probably a study in Alabama and probably a study in South Carolina. So, that was one of the studies that was actually on South Boggy, so just another interesting point I wanted to make.

JG: I just thought of another thing, we have been talking mostly about the bottoms, but did you do much work with the upland hardwoods? I know there is still on some of the slopes, on some of the dry creeks and stuff, there is a good bit of white oak and some hickory, but you know, again the middle history of all this was the TSI (Timber Stand Improvement) and all the hardwood deadening and the girdling and Temple did that just like everybody else did in the '30's, the 40's, the 50's, up into the '60's, but did y'all do much management of upland hardwoods? And again I would be interested to know in general, but also specifically at Boggy Slough.

ND: No, we did not, didn't do any of that. Seems like to me there were about 150 to 200,000 acres of creek bottom and river bottom, and that was my first priority, so I never did even get to the uplands.

JG: Okay, okay.

ND: Walked through it plenty of times to get to the bottom lands but anyway, no never did do anything.

JG: Well I realize that wasn't the focus, but do you have any memories of them and if you did, I guess it would be what did you compare it to? I'm just curious. I'm still trying to grasp what the land is today and compare it to what it was through history in the past, but I am still remarked at just how much hardwood is still there, given the fact that we know they discouraged it so much. And again you go back to these earlier...before the recording I was telling you about some of the early European, you know, you get a sense it's almost a hardwood forest with pine mixed in rather than a pine forest with hardwoods mixed in, so anyway just any insight into that?

ND: Well, it is one of those things that by the time I got there, I mean you would... I remember especially like over around Pineland, those little creek bottoms that were west of town, and ultimately those little creek bottoms are going to be running into Sam Rayburn Lake eventually. And it was just always interesting to me, as far as Temple went, the past management, whoever the guy up there, and I don't know if you could credit him with this, but most of the bottoms when they had put their plantations in next to their bottom they cleared up just as close to the bottom as they dared. And they didn't want to incur the wrath of Arthur Temple I'm sure, but for some reason up there whoever had been the forester 30 and 40 years before, he had not gone all the way to that first terrace line. I mean he had stopped his site clearing short of that, so that was the place I remembered anything that could be called upland hardwood. I can remember there being magnolia and beach and over in that part of the forest, and they were more of a braided stream bottom as opposed to like the Neches bottom that was just the river and then you had the ridge swell type topography, but up there it was kind of a braided stream bottom. But you know I remember there being quite a bit of upland species over there and it had just been kind of protected a little better than those areas. Of course when you are further away from the heart, heart center of things, you might do things a little differently, but I always appreciated that somebody got a little wide when somebody set those bottoms up there.

JG: You can see not only the history of forestry but the history of the entire company when it was an ownership class that was running things and then in '69 when the company went public and then you had the beginnings of a management class and I was thinking...

ND: That is exactly right.

JG: I was thinking you were saying you came to work in '90, and I asked when you think the plan was implemented and you said maybe as far back as '85. That is pretty close to when Temple Inland was created, was '84 and so I'm sure there was a connection there. Now you have got a new company, yes it has got all these pieces and parts from all over, but it's still a new company, you've got new stockholders, new investors and you know it's just all about that ROI (return on investment). And I even asked...

ND: Well, and I think too you know there the pine plantations had been around for awhile, so if pine plantations had been around clearing primary timberlands had been around, so I think that had been going on for decades so they were just getting to the end of the line. They had excluded the hardwoods as much as they can and there was that big 'ole Evadale down there just sucking up all that hardwood and somebody said, "look we are going to need another source, look at all these bottoms we got, we got to find a way to get into those bottoms." And I believe I remember someone saying Mr. Temple called foresters, professional foresters, necessary evils. He knew if push came to shove they would just run through those bottoms if they needed wood for that paper mill, they would get it. So that is when he said I don't want you going down there, I want a management plan, you are going to manage these things right.

JG: That is a very interesting analogy I think of Kenneth Nelson may have been this forester you were thinking of. You said the guy who was over things before, but he did an oral history interview in the 80's and he tells the story he was working for the company in the late 30's and that is when they were doing the beginnings of, back then they called it selective harvesting, you know, where you only cut certain trees that are marked and you leave some others. And he tells a funny story where management does all this and it got a little publicity, had some graduate foresters come in and help and they cruised all these lands and anyways it was a big deal. Well, Arthur Temple Sr., this would be Big Pops or the Mr. Temple that we have been talking about, this would be his father, he had come down, and they were living in Texarkana at the time. And he came down with some others and I think the head of the Texas Forest Service was there, and maybe someone from the national forest, some big shots maybe, so Mr. Temple said well let's drive on up...it was an hour or two drive from Diboll...he said, "let's go up and show them that land we marked a year or two ago, our first tract of land." Well one of the guys in the party was actually with the marking crew two years earlier. So, Mr. Nelson tells the story they drive all the way up there and visit and talk and they get up there and it was just clear-cut. (laughter) It was all cut down and everybody's jaws drop. Mr. Temple is like what happened here? And finally the story was, they had to feed the mill, kind of like what you were saying. They got down where that was the only place they could get the timber quickly, so they cut it all and Nelson tells the story that all the locals here all the timber guys, foresters, knew what was going to happen they were just trying to delay it as long as they could.

ND: Oh man, oh man! You never want your guys in charge of procurement to be in charge of your management, because they will take the path of least resistance. It's just the human nature.

JG: Anyway even though it's a written out transcript, it is humorous to read. You just put yourself in their places and see what was going on. So that's not new, that is kind of the history of these programs.

ND: No, that has been going on.

JG: You've got the best intentions but it's hard to stick to it and so.

ND: Exactly.

JG: Anyways...

ND: If after you review it and have other questions please feel free. I hope my history is close to what actually happened.

JG: Yes well...

ND: That is what I remember and again I just thoroughly enjoyed my time.

JG: Well I appreciate it and like I said Stan Cook and others have for a couple of years now have been saying just call him up, just call him up and I just never have done it, so I'm glad I did. I appreciate your time and the offer to maybe follow up with some emails or something so thank you again.

ND: You are very welcome.

JG: You have a great day!

ND: Bye Jonathan.

END OF INTERVIEW