

Seth Adams

*Seth Adams: Save Mount Diablo's Land Conservation Director*

Save Mount Diablo Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Shanna Farrell  
in 2021

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Seth Adams, Save Mount Diablo, 2018

**Abstract**

Seth Adams was born in 1962 in Fort Bragg, North Carolina and was raised in Hope Mills, North Carolina. In high school, he moved to Italy and Germany with his family for his father's job. He attended Michigan State University for a year before moving to Berkeley, California in 1981. He attended classes at UC Berkeley and formed the California Water Policy Group before he was hired by Save Mount Diablo in 1988 as its first staff member. Since then, he worked tirelessly for the organization and is now the Land Conservation Director. In this interview, Adams discusses his early life, family, education, travels, move to the Bay Area, interest in the environment, becoming Save Mount Diablo's first staff member, learning from its original six founders, working on real estate acquisitions and fundraising, the organization's partnerships, land stewardship, advocacy, his colleagues, leadership of the organization, and his efforts to expand the Diablo Range into public land.

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## **Project History**

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

## Interview 1: July 29, 2021

01-00:00:08

Farrell:

Okay, this is Shanna Farrell with Seth Adams on Thursday, July 29, 2021. This is an oral history interview for Save Mount Diablo, and we are talking over Zoom. Seth, can you start by telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:27

Adams:

Well first, actually, I want to tell you the zoom view behind me is of the Tassajara Valley and the Highland Ridge. Highland Ridge is taller than Mount Tamalpais, but it's next to Mount Diablo, so a lot of people don't know that. Two weeks ago, we created an 18,000-acre agricultural preserve including the valley and all the land leading up to that ridge with a project called Tassajara Parks and a thirty-acre adjustment of the Urban Limit Line. It's got a couple more approvals that are maybe fifty-fifty, so it might not happen, but the agricultural preserve will. It maybe will end up being one of my proudest accomplishments and so I chose the picture on purpose.

01-00:01:16

Second, I grew up in Hope Mills, North Carolina. I was born in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I'm an army brat, and I had a really rich childhood with incredibly supportive parents in an area with incredible biodiversity. All of my early stories are about outdoors, and catching things, and taking trips to catch things, and collecting, and reading. I was a voracious reader from a really young age. There are all kinds of family stories about animals getting out and scaring my mother and, et cetera, et cetera. I was all about animals and zoos and conservation from an early age.

01-00:02:08

Farrell:

Awesome, and thanks for describing your background as well; we'll definitely get to that in the interview. You mentioned Hope Mills, North Carolina. I know North Carolina is a pretty lush place, and you mentioned a lot of biodiversity. Can you describe what the community that you grew up in or the neighborhood, what it looked like, maybe some sights or sounds or smells that you remember?

01-00:02:33

Adams:

Sure. Hope Mills is a little historic town like a lot of things are in the south, and Fayetteville was historic, the center of a town is a slave marketplace. Hope Mills was going through really rapid growth based on Fort Bragg, and just North Carolina being a relatively vibrant place compared to other places in the South. The Research Triangle sort of fuels the state, but it's also incredibly rich, and like California, it goes from a rich coastline, lots of barrier islands and marshlands to the piedmont in the center of the state, sand hills, and things like that to really old mountain landscapes in the Appalachians, the Smoky Mountains, so it's got that coastal-plain-mountain dynamic that California has also.



01-00:03:27

It's also subtropical in the summer and so historically, alligators and manatees would come up from Florida into the North Carolina sounds. The barrier islands make lots of sounds along the Outer Banks, and it's just a really rich place, four different kinds of poisonous snakes. I collected all of those things, from summers along the coast where I would collect things in tide pools for saltwater tanks to rattlesnake collecting in the Smokies to everything around where I lived.

01-00:04:09

Farrell:

You mentioned that you were an avid reader, and I know that David Brower was somebody you really liked when you were younger. And also you've mentioned in your last oral history that your elementary school librarian was one of your heroes.

01-00:04:22

Adams:

No, the town librarian.

01-00:04:24

Farrell:

The town librarian, okay, okay, town librarian.

01-00:04:27

Adams:

And I also had a string of teachers who were incredibly supportive.

01-00:04:30

Farrell:

Okay. When you were in school and then on your own when you were reading, how much of the nature books that you were reading were you then going out and looking for things, like trying to identify?

01-00:04:45

Adams:

There was one book in particular, which was seminal for me, which is a National Geographic book about endangered species, *Vanishing Wildlife of North America*. I still have my original copy from childhood, and I found a second copy later, and so it was one of my search manuals for our trips to go look for things. I wrote to fish and wildlife personnel with my ideas about things, and it led me towards various conservation groups. By the time I was in high school, I was a member of fifteen or twenty different environmental groups and so that book was helpful. Importantly, a lot of the species that were going extinct in the book have recovered—alligators, peregrine falcons, brown pelicans, gray whales, and so on—so what could've been really apocryphal has been really helpful.

01-00:05:49

Farrell:

And so your father who was—is his name Dumas?

01-00:05:54

Adams:

Dumas.

01-00:05:55

Farrell:

Dumas Rodney Adams and your mother Brenda Kay Campbell Adams, you mentioned were really supportive, and you also have a sister, Crystal Lee Adams. I'm wondering how interested in nature they were, what their relationship with the outdoors was?

01-00:06:12

Adams:

Well, my dad was the son of a poor white sharecropper in Mississippi and so I'm sure he was surrounded by it. Ten kids, poor, I know that he must have hunted on a regular basis. He was very familiar with firearms both before and after Vietnam, I saw him slaughter hogs at my grandmother's house and I know that he was a regular hunter. The area, the hill country of Mississippi where they grew up is pretty lush and so he was pretty comfortable with it. He obviously spent a lot of time outside in Vietnam doing four tours there, and when he came back, he was really comfortable with being a scout leader for me and that whole range of things. It wasn't just like, "Let's go camping," it was full-scale rafting trips and things like that, so he was very comfortable in the outdoors. What he really thought about nature, I don't know because in the South, things grow so fast you're kind of at war with nature. He grew up from the time of the Depression, so I remember him scattering poison on our vegetable garden by hand, no gloves. [laughs]

01-00:07:34

My mother, I don't know of a really specific connection to nature, but she was a gardener and so I spent a lot of time with her gardening. I hated some things about nature when I was a kid, or about yards and gardens. Because we had a huge yard, I had to rake pine straw twice a week, it was a chore. Especially as they got more comfortable financially and into high school, they took lots and lots of trips to beautiful places in Europe when we were there and so they definitely had an aesthetic appreciation. But they came from poor backgrounds, and it all developed through the course of their lives. The army was my parents' escape from the South and then they went back to the South to retire. What was really unique is just that they were so supportive of going anywhere I wanted to, to chase things down.

01-00:08:38

Farrell:

Yeah, and I know that you were encouraged to plan family vacations when you were growing up. What kind of trips were you interested in going on, and also what was your sister's reaction to that?

01-00:08:49

Adams:

It wasn't that I was encouraged to plan, it was just what I did, I suggested the places. It would start with hitting my grandparents and then continuing on to some place, and usually it was like twenty places that I had mapped out from my books and reading. We never got to California, but we got to the southwest, all over the country. My sister didn't care about where we were going. As you probably read in my oral history, she cared about tanning in the pool, and she was a cheerleader and popular, and her brother was an eccentric

nerd who was also very persuasive. I had lots of friends; I realized that when I needed to make things happen in order to achieve what I wanted. But from a really early age, I was selling things to make money, especially in my mother's beauty shop in North Carolina when I was a kid, and so I developed myself and my salesman skills at a really early age as well.

01-00:09:55

Farrell:

What kind of things were you selling?

01-00:09:58

Adams:

Flowers, seeds, Christmas cards, magazine subscriptions, things that came out of the backs of magazines and you'd get a percentage of. I was very frugal, and I saved all my money and bought things or saved it.

01-00:10:16

Farrell:

Got it.

01-00:10:17

Adams:

Bought animals, conservation memberships, things like that, and animals for my aquariums.

01-00:10:26

Farrell:

You mentioned conservation memberships as a child, what kinds of conservation groups? I mean so you're also growing up at the start of the environmental decade when lots of regulations are being passed and there's more of an interest in [the environment]—it's the time of activism. What kind of groups were you interested in when you were young?

01-00:10:50

Adams:

All the big ones, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, Audubon. But I was really focused on wildlife, so save the sea otter fund, save the snow leopard, the manatee fund. They were all about endangered species all of the specific ones. The big ones are because I wanted to read as much as possible about big issues.

01-00:11:18

Farrell:

Okay, got it.

01-00:11:19

Adams:

This is before the internet, so books and magazine subscriptions through environmental organizations are how I got my start.

01-00:11:28

Farrell:

Right, right, okay. And then you later moved to Italy—well first, El Paso and then to Italy and then Germany with your family for your dad's job in the service. What were some of the differences in the landscape that you were absorbing as you're starting to move from the US abroad?

01-00:11:50

Adams:

Italy was wild and beautiful and not much wildlife because everything got hunted and eaten, and Germany was incredibly well managed before the fall of the wall, regulated and groomed and lots of wildlife. When you think about Italian personalities versus German ones, so in Italy, I could range widely and see things in streams and in farm fields. In Germany, there were city forests and zoos and arboretums and organizations. I went on Volksmarches with teachers and learned to hike formally, versus growing up when what I did was just range widely from early childhood till now.

01-00:12:48

Farrell:

Were you also interested in conservation issues in Europe while you were there?

01-00:12:56

Adams:

Well, absolutely, I was, but a lot of that was land use planning-related stuff. I mean I was still involved in all the environmental organizations and even more of them because I had more money as I had more jobs. From the age of fifteen, I always had one, two, or more jobs because I was planning for college. Europe was a great exercise in learning about different kinds of land use planning issues and different ways of handling different things—places that were well regulated, places that were relatively unregulated. And traveling by Eurail Passes a lot and seeing how different countries did things.

01-00:13:47

Farrell:

Okay, and one other thing that I read in your previous oral history was that when you were growing up, you would test yourself, you would play outside and test yourself. I'm wondering how you would do that and what you learned from that or how that impacted you?

01-00:14:03

Adams:

Physically, psychologically. I might have put this in my oral history, but I went on a three-month trip with \$200. My mother soon before I left said I'd spend all my money and be back in a week. My whole family is Scottish background both sides and the term "cut off your nose to spite your face" is a real thing. When my mother said that, it became an absolute point of my will that I would not be back a day earlier than three months. If I saw a cliff, I would climb it. When I got to Saint-Malo to go to Mont-Saint-Michel, it was a nine-mile walk with an eighty-pound pack there and nine miles back, and that was just what I did. Sometimes, I was intimidated by things, but I would force myself to do them. Running was really a gateway to the environment for me and to my willpower because when I was fifteen, I decided to get in shape, and I did it really progressively and to the point where I started one year not being able to run a mile and by the end of the year, I was running twenty miles a day. Outdoors and exercise was my training for, "I can do anything." If I just put my mind to it and do it progressively, I can accomplish anything.

01-00:15:43

Farrell: How did you carry that with you as you entered college and the workforce and moving across country?

01-00:15:53

Adams: I was fearless. I learned to face fear in El Paso and various other places. Every time I did it, it worked out right, it worked out better and so it trained me to address things that I feared head on.

01-00:16:12

Farrell: Great, okay. After high school and Europe, you ended up going to Michigan State for a year, is that right, you were there for a year?

01-00:16:24

Adams: Yes I was.

01-00:16:25

Farrell: You decided to move to California. I did read that you rode your bike from Michigan down to the South where your parents were; I'm assuming another one of the tests that you would put yourself through. I know you talked a little bit about what your interest in California was, David Brower was here, it was either you were thinking about college either at Cornell because of ornithology—

01-00:16:52

Adams: Cornell was when I was younger. As I got older, UC Berkeley and Stanford were at the top of my list. But I applied to a bunch of different places, got into all of them, and Michigan gave me the most money at the beginning, but I never intended to stay there more than two years. But after one year, I wasn't going to go back because of winter. It felt like a backwater, it was so disconnected from what I had been doing in Europe where I was able to get around with trains everywhere. I felt really, really confined in Michigan. I'd handle it much better now.

01-00:17:35

Farrell: Mm-hmm. You officially moved to Berkeley in 1981 and I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about what your first impressions of the Bay Area were then?

01-00:17:46

Adams: I was in love from day one. It was a wet winter, it was green early. December 7, 1981, I got off the plane at San Francisco International, took a bus to Menlo Park where my buddy was going to Stanford, the only person I know in California. He wasn't going to be available for some number of hours and so I ditched my stuff, I guess, on the porch of the house he was staying at, and I ran up to the Dish and into the green hills on the Stanford campus and it was love at first sight. I looked at Stanford for a few days, it wasn't really my cup of tea, and comparatively speaking, it was also still isolated, harder to get to other places. The couple he was staying with, the husband worked in the financial district, he would drive me to the BART station, and I'd go over to

Berkeley. I was a little afraid of San Francisco initially because I had subscribed to the *San Francisco Chronicle* for some months in Mississippi before I came out here, and they were having Tong Wars in Chinatown and so I was a little intimidated by San Francisco, so I would go underneath San Francisco in the BART train to Berkeley.

01-00:19:09

Inside of two days, I knew I was going to go to Berkeley. I didn't know how tight housing was. I looked at two houses, liked the second, assumed they would pick me as their sublet roommate and went to Monterey to go whale watching because I've never been to the Pacific and was just assuming they would pick me, and they did. I didn't even try to find a job until after New Year's because I wanted to get to know the Bay Area. Inside of three weeks, I was hiking from the BART station in San Francisco, across the Golden Gate Bridge, into the Golden Gate National Recreation Area to the northern tip of Point Reyes for four days before Christmas. I was in love, and I'd spend the next year, deep immersion, working four days a week, getting residency to go to Cal, and riding my bike or hiking three days a week.

01-00:20:24

Farrell:

A lot of what you've described so far is a fierce sense of independence, and I'm wondering when you moved here how you went about cultivating community?

01-00:20:37

Adams:

Well, I was connected to everything, so I started working on environmental issues immediately. I got to know lots of people through my roommates and school. I'm trying to think. I mean Berkeley is a rich, rich place, and I went wild just getting involved on all kinds of stuff, and again before long, I had multiple jobs. Pretty quickly coming out of—I mean figuring out I was gay. I had a girlfriend initially who helped introduce me to various things. I met lots of people through my jobs. I was back in Berkeley yesterday just by chance, I mean forty years ago a piece of Blondie's Pizza was a dollar a slice, and I would get one on payday as my splurge for the week. But professors, other students, all classes, and lots and lots of diversity.

01-00:21:50

Farrell:

As you were working your multiple jobs, and before you were at Cal, I know that you were auditing some classes through the law school. I also know that sometimes professors can be hard to convince to let you audit classes, how did you negotiate that with them, how did you get in those classes?

01-00:22:12

Adams:

It wasn't before I started; it was after I started and during breaks from school too when I was just working. I never had any problem. I didn't audit classes in any official way; I just sat in. I asked professors if I could sit in, and I would take the whole course.

01-00:22:35

Farrell: Okay, okay.

01-00:22:36

Adams: I wasn't that concerned with the normal kinds of trappings of education, and even after I stopped going to school, I functioned as a TA [teaching assistant] for one professor who's a famous Bay Area geographer, Dick Walker. I had access to the computer labs and then I started an environmental group, and I was working with people in various kinds of disciplines. UC Berkeley was my base for doing all the things I wanted to do whether I was enrolled or not.

01-00:23:20

Farrell: Thank you for clarifying that. What kind of classes were you auditing through the law school specifically?

01-00:23:28

Adams: Water law, public interest law. I audited a water law class with Joseph Sax who's famous for public trust. He wrote a book called *Mountains Without Handrails* about liability issues and so on, and he was the Boalt Law water law professor, and, you know, I can speak authoritatively. I worked on the Peripheral Canal referendum before that, I had a water policy group that I had started, and I never remember anybody turning me down for anything, so I was really used to talking my way into things I found interesting.

01-00:24:23

Farrell: Where did your interest in water policy come from?

01-00:24:27

Adams: It's a key to California, to the environment, to the state, to the politics and the policies of the state and how all the natural places fit together. It's the most fundamental environmental issue in California.

01-00:24:46

Farrell: You developed that interest after you had moved to the Bay Area?

01-00:24:50

Adams: Yeah.

01-00:24:51

Farrell: Okay, okay, got it, all right. When you were starting the water policy group, what was the demographics of that group, who was joining?

01-00:25:01

Adams: It was more about who was the board of that group, the steering committee, and all of whom went on to environmental careers or political careers, and it was people who showed up and showed a sincere interest. We did a number of years of water policy lectures, and they attracted people and people of a high caliber. I mean these are water policy lectures, right? They're things like Marc Reisner who wrote *Cadillac Desert* speaking opposite Gerald Butchart the head of the Westlands Water District. Because the name of the group was

simple, no one really knew that we were big or small or anything like that, and I again, I only received one rejection from a request to speak at that group, which was Wallace Stegner. They were impressive lecture series; I'm really proud of them.

01-00:26:09

Farrell:

There's a period of about seven years when you moved to Berkeley and then [before] you start at Save Mount Diablo, and I know that so much of that was driven by your activism, your involvement, working all your jobs; how did you balance everything?

01-00:26:29

Adams:

You said before I started Save Mount Diablo, and what you mean is before I started at Save Mount Diablo.

01-00:26:33

Farrell:

Yes, yes, sorry, yes, yeah.

01-00:26:36

Adams:

Because it had been around since 1971, and I was hired in 1988. I didn't balance things well. I was hardworking and intense, and I was doing a hundred different things at a time. My philosophy which worked well sometimes and not as well as other times was throw a lot of balls in the air and you'll have constant accomplishments. But that doesn't mean that I executed all of them flawlessly or anything like that. I lost jobs because of competition for my time with other things. I lost a job because I was habitually late. I had grown up with a very free set of rules, so I didn't have the normal kinds of constraints or discipline that other people had. I got through high school with high grades because I was smart, but I didn't have good study habits. I got to be very deadline-oriented and focused on the next thing. But part of the thing that developed was rather than a real focus on a single thing, I was interested in so many things that it was kind of renaissance man stuff.

01-00:28:12

When I was hired at Save Mount Diablo, I didn't try to just focus on getting two things done. I threw fifty things up in the air and wanted to work on all fifty. That's sort of the structure of an entire organization, which is what I helped to create in terms of going from all volunteer to professional. It turns out that starting things, for me, I think is the most important thing, and scaling up just happened through a lot of work through a lot of people, but if you get things rolling, they take on a life of their own. I was laughing with one of our—my coworkers who just moved into The Land Trust of Santa Barbara, the executive director there now, Meredith Hendricks, yesterday. She said, "I saw the tree program in your e-blast, and that had you all over it, right?" It's like we're going to protect or plant 10,000 trees in ten years, and it was a bit of messaging that I developed. The idea was I want us to do this, it sounds great, and now we're going to develop the program to support that slogan. Because it's part of our climate change action plan, plant trees, build ponds, protect



lands, all those kinds of things, and I'm really good at messaging and so if you read it, you'd be caught by it. It's like, wow, this is ambitious, it's obvious what it means, and it helps accomplish the goals that we're trying to do, but it's the sort of thing that people will like. Reintroduce peregrine falcons, easy to explain. Defend an urban Limit line, the property that we just finished funding two weeks ago, it's 154 acres, it's in a mile of private land on the side of North Peak, which I immediately dubbed the Missing Mile, and it's a mile wide. You can get how I would describe the mile-wide trail ride property and the Missing Mile on North Peak, and the stories write themselves.

01-00:30:41

Farrell:

How did you learn to message like that?

01-00:30:47

Adams:

I think it was partly salesmanship, I think it was partly that I was well read, and I worked so much with free media over the years that I got really good at developing hooks for news articles. It's kind of like in the movie *Bull Durham* after the young pitcher develops his baseball skills, he's excited at winning. He talks to Kevin Costner, he says, "Teach me more," and Kevin Costner said, "Okay, it's time to work on your clichés," and he says, "What do you mean?" He says, "I just want to help the ball club any way I can, and the good Lord willing, we'll get through it." Clichés and hooks for media articles, one of the ones that I used to try to get in with any new reporter I work with is "It doesn't take a rocket scientist... to know that this is a good idea," some good idea. Developing messaging hooks, and it can be chicken and egg, right, develop the hook, develop the program, develop the program, capture it with the messaging hook. Because I started as the only staff person and got to do everything whether it was fundraising or land program or communications or education. I was plugged into the organization in every direction.

01-00:32:33

Farrell:

Yeah, so that leads to your hiring at Save Mount Diablo in 1988, as you mentioned, the first staff person. Bob Doyle led that charge, and I know that you had met him prior to that, and also you had already been friends with Bob Walker and met him through his photography of the East Bay parks and ranges. I'm wondering what you knew about Save Mount Diablo—because I also know it was between Friends of the River and Save Mount Diablo that you were trying to decide between. What did you know about Save Mount Diablo, and what ultimately made you choose them?

01-00:33:14

Adams:

I just heard a few things from Bob, but then as they started talking about hiring a staff person, I did what I always do, which is I researched them. I found out more, I talked to people, I met board members, I went on hikes with them, I went to an editing session of their new membership brochure, so I positioned myself for success. Same deal, if I were going to meet with a politician or with a donor, by the time I got there—not knowing anything

about them at the beginning, by the time I got there, I would know whether they liked dogs or cats, so quick study, lots of prep.

01-00:34:08

Farrell: And your decision to ultimately work for Save Mount Diablo over Friends of the River?

01-00:34:12

Adams: They offered me the job first. I don't think Friends of the River did offer me the job. I still know who they got, he's a great guy, and it was the right choice for everybody around. I wouldn't have done well in a hierarchical environment at that point in my life, and Save Mount Diablo was brand new. It was to create everything, no one knows clearly what they want, so I get to fill the space and occupy it.

01-00:34:42

Farrell: They have been around for seventeen years at this point, but almost like a start-up where you get to drive the direction that they're going in. Did you feel like that?

01-00:34:54

Adams: Absolutely. I put them through intense growing pains for years. Board members retired because the pace of things was picking up incredibly dramatically, and they were tired. They had been doing it for seventeen years and decades before that with other environmental groups. Bob Doyle was my cheerleader urging me on, and other people were trying to slow me down and or regulate me or moderate me. I was learning from a bunch of different types of personalities from all the different people I was dealing with and having to deal with the board of directors on a constant basis as well as the people I was most close with.

01-00:35:47

Farrell: What did you learn from both Bob Doyle and Bob Walker especially in terms of working with the board?

Adams: From Bob Doyle, intense negotiation skills, political skills. I could write his speeches, I know his voice. From Bob Walker, empathy, sensitivity, humor. I could already read the landscape like a map, but Bob Walker was this amazing collection of photographic talent, understanding the land, sense of place, and connecting with people, he was a rare individual. But it wasn't just them, I mean those are the most important, but scientific integrity and integrity in general and getting it right from Mary Bowerman, hard work from Art Bonwell, writing skills from one board member, grace and dealing with all kinds of people, from Sue Watson. Because in a small organization like this, whether you were dealing with a landowner, a volunteer, a senator, an agency official, whomever, we were dealing with all levels of people at all levels of intensity. You have to learn to navigate between that diversity—Republicans, Democrats—and a lot of intense issues over that are urgent.

01-00:37:32

Farrell:

One of the first things that you were tasked with doing when you were hired was to raise a certain amount of money, and you were aware that grant writing was a way to do that, but also I think you've made quite a few asks over the years for donations. How did you learn how to make those asks? That can be a hard thing to do and so I'm curious how you learned how to do that?

01-00:38:00

Adams:

It's not hard at all; it's that salesmanship. What you learned pretty early in fundraising is you're not asking people for money, you're giving them an opportunity to be part of something great, part of something cool, part of something successful, and they're your partners, not your charitable benefactors. I took a grant writing course, I called the environmental program officer at the San Francisco Foundation, and I said, "Let me take you on a tour," and by the end of the tour, it was a sure thing, I knew we were going to get the grant.

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I wasn't tasked with raising a certain amount of money, I was tasked with raising the money, and I mean there were varied expectations of how well I would do, and I blew it out of the water. I quadrupled our budget in the first year or in the first nine months, in the first nine months, and from there, we never looked back. Fundraising for me is easy, and I still do a lot of it. We just had someone this morning who gave us \$50,000 out of the blue and told us she would do that every year as long as she's alive. That's from developing relationships over the years. We have donors who have been giving for fifty years, we have donors who—and we have a very visible, understandable cause that people love, so fundraising is easy.

01-00:39:43

Farrell:

I appreciate that perspective, I'm going to try to channel that into that my own work.

01-00:39:48

Adams:

The biggest hurdle for fundraising is making the ask, and if you prepare, it's almost the foregone conclusion that you'll get what you want, at least for us. But getting over the hurdle of making the ask, thinking that you're going hat in hand to someone, setting up roadblocks for yourself as opposed to it's just a step-by-step process, and that's true of everything I worked on. Everything is just a step-by-step process. I'm a pretty good strategist, but you don't have to be a strategist, you just need to do the next thing and then the next thing and then the next thing.

01-00:40:32

Farrell:

Well, speaking of strategizing, you have mentioned that you had a lot of balls in the air, thinking big, very ambitiously, and you referred to yourself as all over the map when you started at SMD. At what point did you start to focus your efforts on the things that were achievable?

01-00:40:53

Adams:

Focused my efforts on the things that were achievable? The things that were achievable were just the background noise. That was just the stuff you do day to day and we still do, another project, another acquisition, another land use project. The bigger picture stuff is when you start thinking about policies and funding measures and new programs and expansions and things that you haven't done before. All of these things, once you start them, you scale them up, so you go from thinking about single properties to thinking about systems of properties. Nothing we did was genius; there are lots of examples out there of the sort of things we do. We do it in a very unusual way given where we are geographically. But if you read widely, you learn about other cool things that other people are doing and you apply them. Save Mount Diablo is basically environmental real estate and lots of people know details of how you buy a house. It's the same thing for buying a piece of land; it's just got different parameters.

01-00:42:12

Farrell:

Yeah, I want to talk about that a little bit and understand what those parameters are. You had mentioned everything is a step-by-step process, but it might be useful to lay out what some of that is. The mission is at this point the Diablo Range, but as you're identifying those geographic parameters, how do you identify the land? What kind of qualifications does it need to meet in order to want to acquire it?

01-00:42:45

Adams:

Well, the Diablo Range is not the current goal; it's one of our goals. Our major activities are confined to the northern three of twelve counties, and we're popularizing the entire twelve-county area. I just drove all twelve counties on Friday and Saturday, which wasn't a first, as one sort of tour but 150 miles long, 800 miles in two days so that's an exciting thing that's going to have long-term major implications. But in terms of doing real estate, we started at a relatively constrained scale, the main peaks of Mount Diablo and connections to a couple of regional parks. That's a defined number of parcels and so we did. We basically made a list of all the parcels, and Mary Bowerman had had key priorities from the very beginning, and they just worked on them step by step. What I did almost immediately was I started defining larger areas based on principles of wild life biology rather than botany and so the number of parcels got bigger.

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But on the main map of the area north of Altamont Pass, we defined about 1600 parcels, and we're working on them step by step. We talk exhaustively month by month, week by week, about what our priorities are and different sets of priorities for different agencies if we're going to acquire them directly. What it all is about is a lot of flexibility. Our area is so rich that everything that we're talking about has lots of high conservation values, so you don't necessarily have to set priorities, but we did. You can just work opportunistically. If you're going to start new initiatives, and new areas, things

like that, you have to think about priorities in different ways. It's this continuum of effort from the area that you're most intensively involved in the historic area to some of those other areas.

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Let's say we know that our priority list has 180 properties on it, and we have a landowner outreach subcommittee that meets monthly, and we go over to the top twenty of those priorities or if one of them appears for some reason, this landowner's husband died. It's really just like working with donors, you keep track of information, you develop relationships, you create relationships, and then you wait for those times in people's lives when they either put it up on the market or you know something is going to happen. This landowner's husband died and so that's a life change, which probably is going to result in opportunity. It's the four D's—death, disease, disaster, divorce, and those are the times when conservation is most likely to happen. It happens at other times too but last week, we had a landowner, we had brought a property from her. She's not really an environmentalist, but she's in her eighties, and she called us out of the blue and said, "I'm thinking of donating my house and property to you, next to the one you bought from me," and that's unusual. I knew immediately the property we were talking about, I know its values, I have a very deep sense of place for this area that we worked on, which I don't have for the rest of the Diablo Range, but I'm developing it very quickly.

01-00:46:40

Then it's basic real estate, and it used to be simpler, one funding source, et cetera, but you negotiate a deal often with a down payment or an option price, you develop a term, a length of time in which to pay it off, and you aim for as long as you can get. Six months to eighteen months is often the norm. It's not like houses where you got twenty-one days, right? A lot of these properties, you've positioned yourself over years with the landowner, right? I have properties that I know we will eventually protect, they're not ripe yet, but at the right point, we will. The most work comes not from the real estate functions but from the fundraising functions to raise the money to pay off the property. We built up a fair bit of money before the Great Recession, and prices dropped precipitously and so we acquired a lot of properties very quickly because we were the only buyer in town. That's the basic parcel-by-parcel kind of thing.

01-00:47:56

Systems of parcels, doing a new thing like we want to connect these two parks, we want to protect along Marsh Creek, we want to establish corridors in other areas. When we're expanding into the Diablo Range, the idea wasn't go down and do the same thing down by Henry Coe that we're doing around Mount Diablo; it was look for partners we can help and identifying potential partners. And then like clockwork, one of them called us and said, "Could you help us understand how to do real estate?" That's exactly the place I want to be. Another place outside of the area that we're working in but the next county down, I heard from a scientist that there was a proposed reservoir, and it's

proposed in a very bad place, and even though it's outside our direct three-county area, we talked about it. We gave them seed money for their lawsuit against the project. I mean \$1500, maybe it's \$5000 in another case, but just small amounts of money that can lead to big outcomes. Again, start small, scale up, buy a parcel, a few years later, buy another parcel, buy two parcels that year, work on multiple parcels, work with all the agencies to influence their decision making, work on their master plans to include your priorities, working on things on system-wide and region-wide kinds of bases. The more you do it, the easier it is to scale up and do more of it. Did that answer your question?

01-00:49:54

Farrell:

Yeah, that was fantastic, thank you. I'm also curious about how you work with people who decide that they don't want to sell their property to you or to another, like land trust?

01-00:50:06

Adams:

Well, the unusual thing about Save Mount Diablo is that we started as an advocacy organization and then added acquisition functions. The gospel in the last trust community was you couldn't do both, and we proved that you can, and there are a few land trusts that proved that as well. We've often stopped the development on a property years before we help to protect it. We developed information over long periods of time, and ultimately, it's like I stopped the development on a property we bought last year, another one the year before, we held off a development for forty years, and then when the owners decided to put them on the market, money talks. We had the money, we positioned ourselves right, sometimes we'll use an intermediary. It hasn't gotten in our way that we do the controversial land use advocacy functions. If we hadn't done them in hundreds of places, those places would've been lost to preservation in the future. When a landowner is going to sell their property, they typically want the highest value. There are some that are really enlightened, and they have come to you because they want to see their properties protected, and that's growing, but it wasn't the norm in the early years. There are a lot of land-rich, cash-poor landowners around Mount Diablo. Excuse me one second.

01-00:51:44

Farrell:

Sure, sure. [pause]

01-00:52:04

Adams:

I'm filling up my water bottle; I'll be right back.

01-00:52:07

Farrell:

No problem. [pause]

01-00:52:58

Adams:

Sorry about that.

01-00:52:59

Farrell:

No problem at all. I do have a couple more questions about this because I think that this is kind of a foundation to the conversation about expanding the range. Stewardship is a really important part of when you acquire land, you have to take care of it. For those people who are not quite ready to sell their land or you're working on developing those relationships with them in advance of maybe acquiring their property, how do you communicate the role of stewardship to people that you can't quite control but you're working with?

01-00:53:45

Adams:

I think you communicate the role of stewardship to people who are paying attention and who are more deeply interested. In terms of acquisition functions, if we buy a piece of property, we're going to be in contact with the neighbors, and more likely than not, we're going to protect land next door to that property because they get to know us, and they see that we're upfront and do what we say we're going to do and we're nice and we're not confrontational. Buying a property is always a gateway to the surrounding properties.

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Stewardship is landowners are on their land for a long time usually, and they pay attention, and they've got long memories, and if you trespass on their property, they're going to remember thirty years later. But if you responsibly manage your fire breaks and keep people from trespassing on to their property, and one of the things we do anytime we go out on to one of our properties is we call the neighboring property owners and tell them we're going to be on our property. There's kind of a no-surprises aspect of it and just respect. That's why this person just offered her property, which is going to be worth a million and a half to two and a half million dollars. Out of the blue she offered it to us because even though she's not following us in our publications or things like that, I assume she gets a call when we're going to go out and be on the property she sold to us, and she's gotten a sense of us over the years.

01-00:55:27

Farrell:

So lots of transparency as well?

01-00:55:29

Adams:

Yeah.

01-00:55:30

Farrell:

Yeah. How would you describe Save Mount Diablo's relationship with developers like Seenos and Hoffman?

01-00:55:40

Adams:

We don't really have a relationship with Hoffman. He was basically leaving the development business by the time I came along. These sort of patriarchal developers led local developers, often led by a single individual. Sometimes they go into future generations like Seeno, often they don't or they shift into

asset management or something like that. The big national developers are a completely different story, the ones that are publicly financed or however. Save Mount Diablo and landowners and developers have a lot in common because we buy and sell and manage land and deal with the land use planning process. Just like anybody else if you deal with them upfront if you have integrity, if they have integrity, you can develop a relationship, and you can streamline things in various ways.

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A friend of mine who we worked on a big development with, a conservative Republican, I mean he's in the Fox universe and I'm in the *New York Times*, but we work on the same level relative to land and being pragmatic and problem solving and so we have a relationship of really high integrity. If he says he's going to do something, I trust he's going to do it and same for him trusting me. Good developers are who you work on, on multiple projects over years. North of Altamont Pass, the days of the big-sprawl developers, the dinosaur developers, as I call them, versus infill development are coming to an end. We've helped define the lines, and there are game changers that could happen, and things could reorient in whole phase shifts, like before solar, after solar. Alternative energy is the big threat now for huge areas as opposed to sprawl development in the East Bay. There are game changers that can completely change the way land use happens in very short periods of time, but residential development is something that we're expert at. We've got lots of relationships and lots of influence, and the regulation mostly goes our way. There's a recent example where the housing crisis is peaking again, and lots of laws are being passed to make it easier to develop rather than to regulate them more, and that's changing some of the dynamics, but we roll with it.

01-00:58:49

Farrell:

Yeah, it's going to be interesting to see how those things [change].

01-00:58:52

Adams:

We're suing Seeno on a ridge line development between Concord and Pittsburg called Faria and partly to influence a neighboring project; he wants to be the master developer at the Concord Naval Weapons Station development, which we helped define as 30 percent of the base. We don't want them, so we're doing a communications campaign basically citing newspaper articles and lawsuits that he's been in dozens of times, and we're blasting him for two solid months every day to remind people who he is. But whether we're successful or not, we'll move the dial.

01-00:59:37

Farrell:

Great, okay. I think this is a good segue into the expansion of the Diablo Range. The goal is to protect the entire 200 miles of the range, what you were just describing that you drove a couple of days ago, the 800 miles over a couple-of-day period. You've called this California's next great conservation story, and I'm wondering if you could just tell me a little bit more about how this priority or this goal developed?



01-01:00:14

Adams:

Well, first of all, that's my goal, but that's not the organization's goal. The organization's goal is to do the kind of work we do intensively in the northern three counties, Contra Costa, Alameda, and San Joaquin. We've doubled the area in which we do those intensive activities two years ago down to the Santa Clara County line, right? That's the northern three counties. To go for the entire range is to popularize the entire range because almost no one knows anything about it. The key to people understanding it is developing a sense of place and revealing it as a geographic feature.

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There are lots of places along the 200 miles where people are doing this kind of work or where there are parks or things like that, but we're 75 percent protected north of Altamont Pass of what we think is important; and overall, the whole 200 miles, we're at 24 percent; and it's working. We know that the work that we're doing has taken the Diablo Range from something that would have a few Google responses to tens of thousands of them in two years. We're making it a conservation priority for the public and for decision-makers, and they'll do a lot of the work for us. Once we set the goal, it'll help play into all these things like Governor Newsom's "30 X 30" Executive Order to protect 30 percent of the state by 2030, and other statewide goals, and we're revealing it to be this incredibly important place relative to biodiversity intactness. It's not fragmented like lots of other areas, but very little of it is protected compared to other areas, most of it's in big, huge ranches. We'll change the whole dynamic of the way people are thinking about it because they weren't thinking about it before despite all of its amazing attributes.

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But from the beginning, I've been focused on basic gap analysis that if Mount Diablo is important, then connecting it to other nearby parks will help protect that importance, right. Bigger parks are better than smaller parks. Rather than thinking about parks as islands where you go to see some relic of what was there before, the cities need to be the islands surrounded by protected lands for basic ecosystem functions and beautiful views and proximity to open space. Rather than a park here or there, we need to connect all the parks across the entire statewide, landscape-level distances. The Diablo Range is ready-made for climate change because it's got changes in elevation, and it's north-south over 200 miles, so there's room to roam for wildlife and people.

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The way that we're handling is not, okay, we're going to scale up in this really huge, dramatic way and so we need to double our staff or triple our staff. It's that we're going to be opportunistic just like we have been around Mount Diablo, and we're going to look for projects where we can add a little money or add some expertise and help amplify the efforts of people who are already working on it or connect them to us and in various kinds of ways, urge them on, push state parks to acquire land around Henry Coe too, that kind of thing. The idea wasn't a huge scale-up of projects; it was more along another

program in which we do this thing to make this place better known and educate the public. Opportunities will come along and then gradually, we'll again expand the area in which we do our intensive activities over and over again.

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That's what I've done my entire history—expand the geographic area in which Save Mount Diablo is working over and over. Initially, it was small pieces, and now it's—small expansions, and now, it's big expansions. Inside of the next year or two, I'll be proposing that we extend all the way down to Pacheco Pass to include all of Santa Clara County and Merced and Stanislaus, and so on, and eventually, we'll be dealing with the entire range on an intensive basis. We're used to being the experts about the area in which we worked with a lot of integrity, a lot of connections, a lot of information, and so what we're dealing with right now is the exploration phase where we're getting to know the Diablo Range at increasing levels of intimacy and finding the partners, finding the connections, developing the relationships so that we can do what we do here in these larger areas as we head South. The way that we did this was I'm always working on the edges of our area of interest to begin with before we expand it. When our boundary was Patterson Pass, an off-road-vehicle issue was happening at Tesla in Corral Hollow, the next drainage south, and a group was working there, and we started helping them. The same with the recent connection to an organization at Henry Coe that wants to learn how to do acquisition. That's not in our northern three counties, but we'll help them.

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The first thing we did was we mapped it. We mapped the whole Diablo Range for the first time and at increasing levels of scale. We started talking about it with people and so we decided—there is no single thing published—before last year, there was no single thing published about the entire Diablo Range as a geographic or an ecological feature, right. It's overlapped in lots of things, it's included in things in various kinds of way. I even did a search for Diablo Range in the masterplans of all of the agencies along the Diablo Range, and only one even mentioned it, and that was the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority. The East Bay Regional Park District, most of its land is within the Diablo Range, it mentions Mount Diablo a couple of times in their masterplan, but that's it. We wanted to put it on the map for people, we mapped it, and then we sponsored a supplement to *Bay Nature* magazine about it in which I did the great messaging of "California's next great conservation story," and it really is. It's the biggest missing piece of the state's conservation story, and given its biodiversity, it should be way up the ladder, right, but it's a good piece of messaging. We published that piece with the first published map of all the public lands of the Diablo Range, and we did the calculations of how much had been protected and—versus up around Mount Diablo, and we started talking about it.

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Since then, this is just coincidence, but state parks was already going to reorganize their districts, but the one that includes Mount Diablo, they designed around the Diablo Range, and it's the Diablo Range sector, right? That's happened in the same period of time that we redefining the range for people, and it makes sense for state parks, and it makes sense ecologically. I was thinking about how are we going to—what's our next step in terms of how we're going to popularize the Diablo Range. We had a big fire on Mount Diablo in 2013 called the Morgan Fire, and for three years, we studied it and communicated about it and used it as a locus for—what—all the things we were doing, right? BioBlitzes, small grants, all that sort of stuff. Last July, I was thinking, fires are great, the huge wildflower patches, rare species, things like that. I was looking for a fire in the Diablo Range to focus on, and the Morgan Fire, which we made a really big deal about, was 3000 acres. I see that there was a fire west of Coalinga called the Mineral Fire that was 30,000 acres, right? It's like, okay, this is cool, and I sent information to our GIS volunteer to map the public lands relative to the 30,000-acre Mineral Fire. The next day, the SCU fire started, the big lightning storms that created big fires all over California. Mount Diablo fire, 3000 acres; Mineral Fire; 30,000 acres, the SCU fire, ended up 396,000 acres. So Mineral Fire was 10 times bigger than Morgan Fire, and the SCU fire was 125 times bigger than the Morgan Fire stretching not just across the northern three counties, but 3000 acres east of Mount Diablo and then down the Corral Hollow, all the way down past Henry Coe to Pacheco Pass. This huge area, third largest fire in California history and closer to us geographically and in terms of miles driven in cars, than the Mineral Fire down west of Coalinga.

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I immediately mapped out a program again starting with the name "Diablo Range Revealed," to interpret the 396,000 SCU fires, Santa Clara Unit fires. Eleven or eighteen fires, I forget, that merged into one giant, huge fire wrapping around the San Antonio Valley, which is a little unburned island. For three years, we're going to interpret the SCU fire and the regeneration afterwards, and while doing so, we're going to get to know that area at an intimate level.

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We've done camping trips in Henry Coe and toured the park with state park officials. Any ranch landowner who will let us see their 15,000-acre ranch, we go down to see it, and we're making connections in fifty different directions, and we're getting to know the area. Things will synchronistically start happening as a result of that. A landowner calls me, "Are you interested in my land down here by Henry Coe? I never realized you worked down here," that kind of thing. But that's still just the northern third of the Diablo Range.

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I found a wildlife biologist who wrote a book, his name is Joseph Belli, who wrote a book called *The Diablo Diary*, which is focused on the central Diablo

Range and wildlife. It's like finding a Stephen Joseph, our most famous photographer, right? But when we were doing the *Bay Nature* story, they were looking for the John Muir of the Diablo Range to write about it, and I said, "There is no John Muir. What we're looking for is the William Brewer doing the initial exploration up and down California in the 1860s." We're at the initial exploration level. Well, Joseph Belli at least for part of the Diablo Range might be the John Muir of the Diablo Range. Now, I'm doing monthly trips with him, one- or two-day trips exploring other parts of the range while searching for rare and unusual species and blogging about them. While we're doing this intensive thing in the northern third of the Diablo Range and even more intensive things in the northern three counties, I'm developing the sense of place for the rest of the range as well. We'll start small, be opportunistic, and scale up.

01-01:13:13

Farrell:

I have a few questions about all of this, and first, one of the things in that, I think it was in one of the 2020 newsletters that you wrote that did refer to this as California next great conservation story. I think that was around the time that the *Bay Nature* article came out. You expanded the scope in 2019, and the Altamont Pass is one of the most critical and constrained wildlife corridors in the state. Can you tell me a little bit more about that especially because I think it does give people a sense of place, and what's at stake as you're expanding?

01-01:13:51

Adams:

Well, Mount Diablo has a set of plants and animals that live on it, right, but it's of a limited size. If it's cut off from the rest of the Diablo Range, we'll lose some of that distinctiveness. We'll lose mountain lions, we might lose bobcats, we'll lose golden eagles, et cetera, if it gets cut off. Even before I was thinking about the Diablo Range as a concept, which came out of my historical research, I was thinking about connecting south to Henry Coe State Park, 90,000-acre state park further down the range. It's a hop, skip, and a jump to get to Henry Coe with the regional parks that are being created, et cetera. Connect to Del Valle, connect to Corral Hollow, connect to Henry Coe. The Diablo Range thing was just revealing the endpoint at the beginning. We're going to try to promote protection the entire 200 miles. Remind me of your question again?

01-01:14:56

Farrell:

Thinking about what makes it one of the most critical—

01-01:14:59

Adams:

All right, so Altamont Pass—the Diablo Range is forty or fifty miles wide and 200 miles long. It's basically defined by Carquinez Strait on the north, the Antelope Valley and Polonio Pass on the south, which is not the same as where the poppies are. There are lots of Antelopes Valleys in the state, and I was just down there on Saturday. It's defined by the San Joaquin River on the east and the Bay and the Salinas River on the west. Depending on how you define it from where it starts rising quickly or from those rivers, it's between

5400 and 10,000 square miles, right. We defined it in our work with *Bay Nature* and revealed it in our work map with *Bay Nature*. But there's only two major highways crossing it, Highway 580 at Altamont Pass, which is only ten miles wide and a basically a grassland corridor with lots of windows and a limited number of undercrossing and overcrossings. Making sure Mount Diablo doesn't get cut off is one of our high priorities up here at the north end because we care a lot about Mount Diablo. The next big highway crossing, which is a freeway, is Highway 152 and Pacheco Pass south of Henry Coe and then that basically defines the northern Diablo Range from Pacheco Pass to Mount Diablo.

01-01:16:26

But when you're in ten-mile wide Altamont Pass, you get this feeling of the corridor is not that wide, it's mostly grassland, and it's deceptive because further south in that forty- or fifty-mile width, if you go five miles in from the east or the west and 500 or a thousand feet up, it's Mount Diablo multiplied in terms of biodiversity and et cetera. As you go south, a lot of that area is dark, and a lot of it has no cell coverage, which the *Bay Nature* article mentioned, and that's a sign of how intact it is. That it hasn't been fragmented up so that if you look at it from a satellite at night, there are very few lights, right? It's intact, which is really good for wildlife and ecological function and why is that? Because it's the inner coast ranges, it's in the rain shadow of the outer coast ranges, it's arid, water sources are limited and so that's helped to slow down the fragmentation that would happen in other places and kept it intact, which is really good for wildlife and species and allows for that room-to-roam thing especially over 200 miles north-south and then on to other big open spaces even further south that are also still intact—Carrizo Plain, the Tehachapis.

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Mount Diablo State Park, 20,000 acres has 10 percent of the state's native plants. Mount Hamilton is the same, so, and it's not just those two spots. Over and over again down the Diablo Range, small areas have incredible biodiversity, species we haven't even discovered yet. Because so much of it has been locked away in private hands since the Spanish got here that it's intact, it's unexplored, it's unknown and so a big part of what we're doing is making it known. That level of intactness, that level of biodiversity, it's one of the two or three hotspots for the entire state. Scientific research papers are showing that as they start focusing on it more and focus on the whole state as we look at these big statewide initiatives.

01-01:18:50  
Farrell:

You mentioned some of the fires that are happening and climate change, but one other side of that is the role of water. You also just mentioned that water is a little bit limited, and the range is connected to Kern County, it's connected to San Joaquin Valley where there's a lot of competition for water because of the agricultural activities that are happening there. This is all tied to politics as well and working with some of the state and county or local and county

officials. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit—especially given your background in water policy—about how this is connected, if it is, to this larger story and the expansion?

01-01:19:37

Adams:

It's somewhat protected by water policy because every place is overdrafted and overcontracted and things like that, so there's less water to expand into the Diablo Range than there would be otherwise. It's at risk because there are lots of big areas, big sunny areas in larger ownerships that can be picked up for specific purposes whether it's a big solar farm in Panoche or a proposed reservoir in Del Puerto Canyon. It used to be reservoirs were where you put a dam on a river and water backs up. But increasingly, you have off-stream storage facilities where you take a big, dry valley, you put a dam on it, and you pump water into it from a canal or a pipeline, and it's called off-stream storage. That's what they're proposing at Del Puerto, which has a small stream going through it, which is really important, but they want to put a three-mile-long reservoir there with water from the state water project to use for agriculture in the Patterson area for that water district.

01-01:20:44

These small reservoirs have gotten astronomical in price. I think the price tag, which always goes up, was \$500 million to start, for a three-mile-long, small reservoir. They had basically ten alternatives, most of them in the Diablo Range, one canyon after another in the Diablo Range. Water has helped to protect the Diablo Range, and it will continually threaten any drainage that can be dammed as we go south because they always play the mantra of protect the excess water in the wet season for use later, but there's no excess water. California has over contracted everywhere including groundwater, but that's one of those intense political issues where people think—where the agriculture district needs water for crops, but they describe it in terms of drinking water, and people vote for it, it's the Chinatown story. Water takes undervalued land and makes it overvalued, so it'll be a continuing issue.

01-01:22:03

I'm actually far less worried about the threat of water development in the Diablo Range, even though I can pick out three different proposals off the top of my head, than I am of alternative energy dragging roads and powerlines into big, flat sunny areas the entire length of the range, and like the project in Panoche. When those things get away without mitigation, protecting endangered species habitat, they're just a loss. At Panoche, a 4,300-acre solar farm became a 1,200-acre solar farm with 25,000 acres of protected land, and that's the kind of mitigation that we're very familiar with, playing in that arena, and pushing the scale towards nature.

01-01:22:54

The other issue, of course, is just that water sources, springs, creeks, ponds are limited in the Diablo Range and directly connected to wildlife in some cases. There are other areas like the San Joaquin Desert, the eastern edge of the

Diablo Range where the species are adapted to little or no water, and that's important. I was chasing a San Joaquin kit fox this past weekend and found them in the Carrizo Plain. They live in places that are best without water, where their prey species don't ever drink, antelope, squirrels, and kangaroo rats, and so on. Shall we move on?

01-01:23:45v

Farrell:

Sure. As you're getting to know some of the local and the county officials that you're going to have to start working with, what are some of the issues that they bring up that maybe reservations for them in terms of helping to expand the range?

01-01:24:04

Adams:

I'm not at that level yet. I'm not at that level yet in terms of working with county officials. I'm analyzing the geography, and we're working in two really urban counties, barely working in San Joaquin County, which is a mix of urban and agriculture-intense development pressures. It's basically a part of the Bay Area in terms of commuters and so on, so the issues there translate really directly. But we're only working on the preservation side of San Joaquin County yet while tracking a couple of big developments to make sure the preservation that goes along with them happens.

01-01:24:43

What I'm looking forward to is working in San Benito County and Santa Clara County—Santa Clara will be very similar to the Bay Area or to Contra Costa and Alameda—and I already have contacts [to get started. Save Mount Diablo's Board of Directors approve a further expansion of its geographic area in Spring 2022 to include the seven northern Diablo Range countries—Contra Costa, Alameda, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, Stanislaus, Merced, and San Benito.] What I'm really looking forward to is San Benito County, which will be dominated by agriculture. It's a small county where in small cities, small counties, we can have an outsize impact because we know how to run campaigns and use money as a catalyst for lawsuits and things like that, and we'll be a big splash in that particular area. I think San Benito County is the most important county in the Diablo Range in terms of habitat, size, location, stretching from the west side down into the center of it including the highest peak, San Benito Mountain.

01-01:25:42

Working on in some of those agricultural counties that are very Republican to the south will be a different stripe of thing, but we've pretty much subscribed to positive work with the idea that everybody loves some place. I'm working with a new council member right now, he's very conservative, but he loves where he lives. He loved running around in the hills; he and his wife ran around in the hills around their town. I can already tell he's going to be a great ally even though you might pigeonhole him into a pro-development stance. We'll find those leaders, we'll find those people who care about conservation as well as economic development.

01-01:26:29

Farrell:

Yeah, and I guess that's where the sense of place will be a bit of an equalizer and some common ground that will help move these things forward.

01-01:26:36

Adams:

We work with everybody around us, whether they're liberal or conservative.

01-01:26:50

Farrell:

Sense of place.

01-01:26:54

Adams:

Oh, the biggest thing we have on our side is we've been doing this for fifty years, and we're planning for perpetuity. Just like you asked what if somebody doesn't want to sell their land to us? Then we'll buy it from the next person who owns it. We'll be around for decades, and it's like our Marsh Creek program, we'll buy any property that has a section of Marsh Creek on it pretty much. But if somebody else buys it, we'll buy a different piece further down the creek, and we'll get another chance at that first property, maybe after I'm gone, right? We're in it for the long term, we'll build influence, we'll build relationships, we'll scale up, and we'll just keep plugging away at it. Like Art Bonwell, our cofounder, said, "You do anything for twenty or thirty years, you'll make a difference." Well, we've been doing it for fifty years, and as we do it for another fifty years, we'll make a bigger difference. I have no doubt what will happen the entire length of the 200-mile Diablo Range. It's take the next step, take the next step.

01-01:28:10

Farrell:

On the note of playing the long game, I do want to talk a little bit about land management and your land team and in terms of what their role is, how they help. You buy the land and then you have to manage it. If you could tell me a little bit about more about the land team and maybe Sean Burke in particular and how they operate?

01-01:28:37

Adams:

Well, you think about your questions that you want to ask about Ted, because I want to talk about Ted, but I'll start with the land team. The real standout after me because when I started, I was everything and then we got someone to work part-time on stewardship and part-time on land use, a guy named Troy Bristol, and we joked about having departments, and now, we have departments, right? We hired a guy to work part-time on events with the idea that he would transition into stewardship, a guy named George Phillips. When you find somebody with the same passion you have, who anticipates your needs, it amplifies everything you do. George was a standout, George Phillips was the leader of what became our stewardship efforts, part of the land department.

01-01:29:38

About seven years ago, the idea was hire somebody to help make the trains run on time while I do what I do best, which is not our employee evaluations



and administrative stuff but land-related things. We hired Meredith Hendricks as the land programs director, which is what I had been, and I became the land conservation director. I work more cross-departmentally than anybody except Ted himself, Ted Clement, our executive director. Meredith Hendricks really did help define the land department, and she's now gone on to be the executive director of The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County. I just saw her yesterday, and we worked so hand-in-glove, everything started going well where my flaky aspects or focus—unfocused aspects might have been hampering things before. She really brought the department to a professional level.

01-01:30:45

We hired a young guy, Juan Pablo Galván Martínez to work entirely on land-use issues. He's the only person I directly supervise, although I tell lots of people things to do. He follows fifty-two planning agendas every week, he responds to all kinds of development proposals, and he's helping with increasing numbers of policy-level things. He helped do all the management plans for all of our properties. With Sean Burke, JP helped develop our climate action plan, and he'll be the heart of our climate efforts in the years to come, if he stays.

01-01:31:38

Our other three staff people are Roxana Lucero who's the second in charge of stewardship and lights up any room she gets into and makes positive relationship building with landowners really easy. She gets to know all our neighbors, and she's doing all the stewardship projects on our property. Denise Castro is working on educational stuff, on our science program, and BioBlitzes and school projects, and she brings a great scientific base. She's a good botanist, and we love botanists because of our start with Mary Bowerman. And Haley Sutton, Haley is our most recent land department person, and she's helping with the stewardship efforts as well and just brings great energy. When you have as well developed a set of people working on these issues as we do, you stop worrying about the future, right? When Meredith left the organization for one job and then to go to Santa Barbara, we hired Sean Burke and—

[break in audio]

01-01:33:03

Adams:

I can't say enough about him. His first day was the first day of sheltering in place. I think it was March 16, 2020, and he was a ranger in East Bay Regional Park District and had done various things there, and Ted met him up in Pine Canyon, he's a climber, not just local climbing but big wall climbing in the Sierra, part Native American. When we were hiring him, we were really looking for somebody with land acquisition skills and stewardship skills not necessarily to have to handle land use function since Juan Pablo and I do that so much. He didn't have the land acquisition skills, but we hired him in a hot second because he had the personality and the stewardship depth that was amazing. We knew that as Ted learned, as I learned, he would basically

apprentice in acquisition while managing the hell out of stewardship. He had the passion and drive to accomplish an incredible numbers of things with never a negative word, right. I mean his passion, he's got a great sense of humor, and we've become a great team over the last 16 months. He took over Meredith Hendrick's job, and he's kind of like George Phillip was for me in terms of having the deep passion and just working at living it every day. Any questions about any of that?

01-01:35:03

Farrell:

I think that was a pretty good overview of that, so thanks for going over that. As you mentioned, we definitely wanted to talk a little bit about Ted Clement. He was hired in 2015, and I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about his leadership style and what some of the changes he brought to the organization have been?

01-01:35:27

Adams:

Yeah, I can't say enough about Ted. He started as an Outward Bound kind of guy, climbing in the Himalayas, did the Peace Corps, thought he was going to get sent to Nepal or someplace like that because he knew Nepalese and ended up being sent to Thailand where he didn't know the language, where he met his future wife working in a national park there. From Vermont, went to Vermont Law School, worked for the Vermont Land Trust. He's a big, tall guy, always positive. He worked at the Vermont Land Trust even while he was in law school, and afterwards he worked at the Aquidneck Island Land Trust, which is Newport on the East Coast, a big, wealthy area. He was the executive director of the Hawaiian Islands Land Trust, statewide land trust but still an area of about the size of the Bay Area. And then he came here because his son was going to go to Sacramento State, and he wanted to keep his family as close together for as long as he could, so his sons would know each other really well.

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His initial focus was immediate—was really clearly about family and about team, and he really functions on that level. His watch words are compassion and gratitude, and he took an organization that had been dealing with growing pains and all kinds of difficult issues and made it a place where you want to come to work every day. It was the light at the end of the tunnel, it was a game changer, and it was where Save Mount Diablo matured to the next level of professionalism. We got past the growing pains where various people were at the edges of their abilities, and after having run a number of different land trusts, he came in knowing how to do that at a professional level. He's an attorney of course, so he brings those kinds of skills. He's deeply involved with land acquisition; he's deeply involved with everything. He works harder than anybody in the organization, gets up at 4:00 in the morning, is here by 6:00 or 6:30, works all day. He goes to more committee meetings than anybody, and he's happy and positive and involved, and we've really seen it over this last year of the pandemic, flexible. Among his chief goals were nobody has to worry about their job, nobody is getting laid off, we're going to

get through this, and we've gotten through it stronger than you could ever imagine when we didn't know what was going to happen.

01-01:38:41

What he brought were structures and programs he had developed at other places, which are basically implemented step-by-step, progressively. None of it is rocket science, it's just predictable, uniform, keep doing it, keep communicating about it to the board and to the public. Our weekly staff meetings are one set of the hierarchy; our manager staff meetings are another set of the hierarchy. Our strategic plan is a three-year-old strategic plan, which we update every year to the point now that it's easy and it's predictable. We report the accomplishments based on the items in the strategic plan and so every quarter, the board gets a really positive report about all the things we've accomplished, and it's just very step-by-step progressive.

01-01:39:38

The real difference between Ted and the previous two executive directors, besides having a lot of experience with land trusts and land trust credentials and things like that, standards and practices is that Ted is a dyed-in-the-wool environmentalist with a huge knowledge of conservation like me, but he came from a land trust background, I just developed in the land trust background. He brings that conservation ethic to everything. When he was hired, anytime you have an executive director change, it's going to be fraught with concern about what may change. A big part of my concern was we're one of just a few land trusts that does land use advocacy at the level we do. As I said, a lot of land trusts, they're picking it up now as another set of tools, but it's not as deeply ingrained in other land trusts including the three that Ted worked at. My concern was that he would not understand, respect, or get it, and he adopted it immediately. He deferred to me on understanding it and picked it up really quickly, and now he's sold on it.

01-01:41:01

Another part of it was in the past where I was talking about geographic expansions, there was a sense of constraint, but Ted has worked on statewide land trusts, right? When I started talking about Diablo Range expansion, he was full steam ahead, do it in a methodical way, explain it, take it through the process, plan it thoughtfully, and so on. But working at a statewide level is something that he's very comfortable with and again, nothing but positive, full steam ahead. He's as excited by it as I am, and the Diablo Range expansion that we're talking about, which will have lasting significance for the state of California, will be because of my vision in part and because of Ted's commitment to positioning in the organization to support a project of statewide significance. He's got confidence, huge confidence, which probably comes from his outdoor climbing background like Sean Burke. We are so lucky that he came here, and I hope he stays forever.

01-01:42:39

Farrell:

How has the role of the board changed under his leadership?

01-01:42:45

Adams:

We started out as a really intensively working board involved in everything. Board members lead committees, and work on properties, and are deeply involved. It shifted a little bit more towards the policy board, but they're still really hardworking and deeply involved. We have a few less board meetings and things like that, but the board's deeply involved. That's part of what Ted had to face coming in was here, "I'm proposing a lot of change, things I'd worked on in other land trusts and structures that are different and shaking things up a little bit." But he works his process of weekly meetings with the president of the board and so on, and sometimes you get a little tired of communication because, okay, we talked about this issue at manager's meeting and then we talk about it the next day at staff meeting, and we're going to talk about it at the committee meeting, and we're going to talk about it at the board. But everybody is on the same page, everybody gets the information, everybody feels involved, and we celebrate everything. We have staff outings on a really regular basis. When we finished our capital campaign, we scheduled the party to celebrate it. [Regular staff outings.] Gratitude has gone from an occasional thing in the organization to a pervasive thing. It's an item on our weekly staff agenda—gratitude for others, anything special people want to thank somebody else about. He's deeply ingrained gratitude in the organization. [He's deeply committed to team members supporting each other.]

01-01:44:42

Farrell:

From what I understand, he's known for his strategic plans and writing a number of pages in that direction, and one of his priorities is the climate action plan?

01-01:44:55

Adams:

Yeah.

01-01:44:56

Farrell:

I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about that and where Ted wants to go with that and also how that relates to someone like Bob Doyle thinking that every acre counts in terms of climate change? I think these are going to be really big issues moving forward. They're only going to get more important.

01-01:45:17

Adams:

Well, Ted's a big believer in big policy-level information things and promoting them like 30 X 30 or like the UN intergovernmental panel on climate change. He's well read and widely read, and he grabs policy initiatives to help promote what we're doing. He understands nature is the cure, [connecting kids is the key], and land is the answer in a lot of cases. It's deeply related to carbon and how we handle climate change positively or negatively, but he's also big at picking up successful efforts from other land trusts. He heard about a Massachusetts land trust, climate action plan and said, "We should be doing that too," and we were headed in that direction as well.

For some unusual reasons—I'll just tell you flat out. There's a bunch of refineries in the East Bay, and they haven't been involved with issues that we've been related with in the past, but divestment is definitely coming up as a topic, not unlike divestment from other kinds of sponsors and things like that. They've provided us with lots of funding in the past not so much because they're looking at greenwashing as they're involved in the community, they're local, and so they like to support local organization, and it's been an easy place to find sponsorships for us.

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But we've started thinking about that in a more nuanced way, and that led to the climate action plan, doing things in a thoughtful way. We were dealing with climate change issues a lot earlier than lots of people, and we were dealing with alternative energy issues a lot earlier than people because the repowering of windmills in the Altamont Pass, solar projects, things like that. We were early adopters of dealing with those things compared to other land trusts, right. Their issues with solar weren't on a land use levels; they were about someone putting a solar panel in a conservation easement area. We were dealing with alternative energy land use issues on a much larger scale.

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As an example, a windmill repowering project, 990 windmills on a thousand acres, smaller windmills, they repowered to 99 windmills, one-tenth on that thousand acres, but they're taller than the Statue of Liberty and we are dealing with the terrestrial issues and the avian impacts and things like that. We were dealing with a lot of climate change solutions, alternative energy at a land use level, and that led in this direction as well. Anybody who's paying attention knows climate change is going to be the biggest environmental issue every day for the rest of our lives and for generations, and it was just inevitable, but we're doing it in a thoughtful way.

01-01:48:36

Farrell: Yeah, and I want to ask you a couple of—

01-01:48:38

Adams: It's with urgency, with urgency.

01-01:48:39

Farrell: Yeah.

01-01:48:40

Adams: Ted's got a real focus on youth and conservation collaborations with youth and youth education, and the solution to a lot of our problems has to lie with educating the youth, and that leads in every direction too.

01-01:48:56

Farrell: Yeah, and how engaged are you with the up-and-coming environmental activists or the next generation or how involved is Save Mount Diablo with that?

01-01:49:07

Adams:

Save Mount Diablo is really involved, and I'm a little involved. I answer any inquiry and that sort of stuff. I'm involved more a little bit at the programmatic level of coming up with some of the programs that are going to involve youth. We're going to provide opportunities in various kinds of ways like we've got a program to protect and plant 10,000 trees, right? That's going to involve a lot of youth days and helping to plant them. It's Ted's bailiwick, and he's so comfortable in it. I don't really need to focus on it, just plant ideas. What I'd say, we're really involved in with youth otherwise is a little bit older, our internships. I mentor our staff organization-wide, our younger staff people, and I'm kind of the institutional memory. At the staff meeting, I'm the guy who talks too long telling them why something is important, clueing them in, and giving them the history, and so on, and so forth.

01-01:50:18

Farrell:

I do want to ask you a couple of questions about your legacy, some reflective questions, but before we go into that, is there anything else that you want to add about Ted that we haven't talked about yet?

01-01:50:31

Adams:

Yeah. Ted really understands the level of protection. He's seen what a local ordinance might do versus a scenic easement versus a really secure conservation easement versus owning the land in fee, basically owning the whole property. He understood the land use stuff we're involved in at some level when he came. For example, the view behind me is an area that's outside of an urban limit line, and we allowed thirty acres to be brought inside the ULL in order to protect 727 acres as a dedication to regional parks while creating a surrounding 18,000-acre agricultural preserve. We have an urban limit line and an agricultural preserve, two levels of protection, neither of which is as secure as the 727 acres, which is getting added to the regional park district. He really understands that laws can change, that conservation easements can be changed by future laws or policies. As he would put it, if you don't keep educating people, their values can change, and if they don't love open space, the areas even protected at the highest level could be threatened, right, or you'll be less successful at protecting more areas.

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That continuum of levels of protection where we take whatever level we can get and we keep upgrading, right, if we can go directly towards parkland, the highest level of protection we'll do it, but if all we can get is a scenic easement, that's where we'll start. Understanding that this is the work of perpetuity, not the work of we'll do this for fifty or a hundred years and then we'll be gone. Even after we protect hundreds of thousands of acres, we'll have to watchdog it in terms of how it's managed so that it's not threatened or encroached upon. Conservation easements are in perpetuity and so when an organization—land trusts become more stable over time if they're successful because they own land, they have to manage it at long term, they develop the financial resources to do that, and so on—versus advocacy organizations

which can go through boom, bust based on economic cycles and changes in the market. Well, by the same token, the next level for a land trust is we need to get to the idea of we're going to be dealing with land in perpetuity. When you think about forever, right, you have to prepare for forever, rather than just thinking of it as a onetime thing that you do and then you're done. That's one of those kinds of board education things that Ted really emphasizes and understands but that's not where Save Mount Diablo started. The founders thought they would be done in five years, and so perpetuity is one of the big policy issues for our organization. Most organizations don't plan for forever.

01-01:53:56

Farrell:

You've been at this for a long time, it doesn't seem to me—

01-01:54:00

Adams:

Thirty-three years.

01-01:54:00

Farrell:

—like you've slowed down all that much, so what keeps you motivated to keep doing this work?

01-01:54:07

Adams:

It's not that I don't necessarily slow down. It's more like over thirty-three years, there have been times when I was obsessed and intense, and there were times when my efforts, my energies might have waned for a while related in some cases to things in my personal life. In thirty-three years, everybody goes through something, right. The day-to-day, parcel-by-parcel, project-by-project stuff, I can do that forever, and I will, I'll never retire, they'll drag me out of here. But I can do that forever, and what fuels that is protecting a piece of land is just so positive. Stopping a project, so you can protect a piece of land is positive, and we get huge accolades for doing it. We get so much positive reinforcement, it's crazy, and we're grateful for it now. Versus there was a time when gratitude wasn't a big part of the organizational culture. [With a good executive director and board,] I can do this forever.

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I'm really noted for my work and appreciated for my work; I've gotten lots of awards, and things like that and so the project-by-project stuff is sustainable forever, right? But what really fascinates me is being wide ranging, working on a hundred different things, always learning, developing a sense of a place of a much bigger area, and not feeling like I have to invent something new, but I never want to be bored, I never want to be bored. I'm kind of a classic Gemini, wanting to do lots of things and as long as I can do that and learn lots of new skills, new areas, that's a great life. That's a great life for me, and that's really been my trajectory. As much as we're working most of our efforts on the northern three counties and around Mount Diablo's main peaks, the Diablo Range stuff, which I'm not the person who discovered or invented the Diablo Range but making it a conservation priority is something that I'll be

remembered for. That really excites me and that's what will keep me going for the next twenty years or so, health willing.

01-01:57:16

Farrell:

Do you feel like you've had your proudest moment yet, or that's something that's still on the horizon for you?

01-01:57:24

Adams:

It's not one that comes in terms of time or scale. Some of my proudest moments happened in my first year and are still my proudest moments, and others are yet to come. Some of the proudest moments are ones that were just really complicated and hard, right, or where the stakes are really high. So when I say my first year, peregrine falcon reintroduction, that's one of my proudest moments. There's a little, thirty-six acre property that was the most complicated transaction we ever did. I'm really proud of that one, along with for example the huge 2,500-acre brand-new regional park at the Concord Naval Weapons Station, the idea for which I came up with in the beginning and mapped out what should be protected and helped to accomplish; that's a big one that I'm really proud of. The 18,000-acre Tassajara agricultural preserve I mentioned, I'm really proud of. It might not happen, but a 50,000-acre ranch that's being worked on right now, the downside of working around Mount Diablo in an urban area is there's only a half a dozen thousand-acre properties left around the main peaks of Mount Diablo, right? But we're working on a 9000-acre ranch, a 15,000-acre ranch, the 50,000-acre ranch further south in some way at some level even if our involvement is minor. [A conservation deal on the 50,000-acre N3 Ranch subsequently fell through, but it's not over till it's over.]

01-01:58:52

Imagine helping to protect a property 50 percent larger than San Francisco, but even those, even those things pale compared to we will help define the situation where others working on legislation, working on big statewide efforts, working on funding will help protect property the length of 200-mile Diablo Range. That will be one of my proudest things, whatever amount of effort or accomplishment we have in that. Addressing climate change is something that we're all going to be proud of, but there are some people working in the trenches. The climate activists really are in the trenches, the land preservationists are working at a different level, but at some of the stuff that's most important, helping to preserve the biodiversity of the state in the face of climate change. You can be just as proud of small things as of huge things.

01-02:00:12

Farrell:

You've described yourself as endlessly optimistic, do you still feel that way?

01-02:00:19

Adams:

Absolutely. We will address the climate crisis; there is no choice. We have the tools to do it. It's not a question of whether, it's a question of how fast, and the



faster we do it, the fewer the long-term impacts will be, but everybody's going to be dealing with it forever, certainly for the next few hundred years. I have no doubt we will get there, and we will get to sustainability.

01-02:00:59

Farrell: Do you have an exit strategy?

01-02:01:03

Adams: From Save Mount Diablo or from life?

01-02:01:06

Farrell: Save Mount Diablo.

01-02:01:08

Adams: I'm older than both of my parents when they passed away young, and so I've never had much idea that I would live much longer than that, so everything is icing on the cake for me. I've mapped out years at Save Mount Diablo till I'm seventy-five in my head. I'm the guy who will be the white-haired guy who takes people on tours. I'm really focused on mobility. I snapped my quad tendon two years ago and couldn't walk, and rather than it being a—it was a scary thing for a micro second, and by the time I was leaving the emergency room, I was increasing mobility every day. I took this big unknown and turned it into an optimistic, really positive, progressive thing that I was in control of. I would be as mobile as I made myself, as quickly as I made myself. If you read the *Bay Nature* article about the Diablo Range, I talk about the idea that as I was falling, as my quad tendon snapped and I fell, I was thinking about will I ever walk again, will I ever hike again, and I was pretty quickly figuring out that I was going to use the Diablo Range as the impetus to get even more mobile than I had been before.

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I don't have an exit strategy. The uncertainties come in things like if Ted leaves and there's a new executive director, what happens then. Or I think the thing that most people fear is not dying but getting Alzheimer's or something like that, dementia where you gradually lose your mind. I'm really dispassionate about life and death for myself compared to others. I have a friend who had exactly that sort of thing happen, and he planned his own exit strategy, and I would do the same. [laughs] But I don't have any intentions of retiring, and I don't think anybody expects that I will ever have any intention of retiring. I love what I'm doing, I'm at the peak of my abilities, and I'm just going to keep that going as long as I can even while I've got a better work-life balance than I did before. I think we really owe it to Covid and the sheltering in place here despite all the tragedy. We really owe it to this, going through this shared global crisis both in terms of how we're going to deal with the climate crisis and in terms of giving us all a chance to reset and think about how we want to live with our work-life balance. If you can take a worldwide pandemic and you're privileged enough to come out of it better, you're a pretty lucky person. We are so lucky.

01-02:04:27

Farrell:

Well said, well said. I guess also asking you what characteristics you want your successor to have might be slightly moot since you don't plan to retire?

01-02:04:39

Adams:

Oh, no, no, no, there will be successors. My role may change, my role may change. There will be people doing everything that I'm doing as I'm doing it and as I get closer to death. What attributes do I want them to have? A deep love of the land, an intense conservation ethic and background, and passion, passion. There are people who do this stuff as a job, it's a cool thing to do, I can get paid for doing it. There are people who do this stuff because they have no choice, it is their passion, and I didn't come at it with the passion for land conservation, it developed over time. I had a passion for conservation and the environment. Like Mary Bowerman, like Bob Doyle and like lots of people, I've developed the intense relationship and the passion for this specific thing, this place over time. I fell in love, I didn't—yeah. When George Phillips left the organization, that was a sense of loss because I saw him as a potential successor. But now, we have multiples of potential successors, and mentoring Sean Burke who already has the deep passion, teaching him is just a joy.

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Farrell:

What are your hopes for the future of Save Mount Diablo?

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Adams:

The next step and the next step and the next step, more, more over time. My hopes are that we don't get overwhelmed by some of the major issues that are unpredictable like chronic refugee migration, that we don't lose major things that have phase shifts based on short-term things like the housing crisis. My biggest fears are for democracy not for California. The Trump era was a wakeup call for how quickly you can head toward authoritarianism. I'm really proud of our country for getting past that, but we're not on solid footing at all. What are my hopes for Save Mount Diablo and the future? That we are part of the change, that we are part of the solution, and that we help use all of our tools to address climate change so that these places, which may change dramatically, that ridge behind me may become more like San Diego than the Bay Area with the effects of climate change. But we will be part of its resiliency and its sustainability and its adaptability and trying to minimize the bad things and helping with the positive things.

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It's going to be an environmental roller-coaster, and it's also going to be exciting and interesting, and we will stay optimistic. Four hundred thousand acres just burned, and we get to focus on science, regeneration, and wildflowers. [The Santa Clara Unit (SCU) or Diablo Range fires were] about 400,000 acres. Unlike the LNU fire north of the Delta or CSU or CZU over at the Santa Cruz mountains. Because the Diablo Range was more arid, there was no loss of lives in that fire, there were very few structures burned compared to the other fires, and it's really a template for what should be

protected, the areas that are likely to burn that have high biodiversity. In this case, fire wasn't a tragedy. Dealing with climate change is going to be incredibly complicated. It's going to take a nationwide, international-wide effort to do it, but it's going to happen in lots of local efforts, and we're going to help lead the charge.

01-02:09:41

Farrell:

My last question for you is what advice would you give to the next generation of environmental advocates or activists?

01-02:09:57

Adams:

"Find something that you're passionate about and devote your whole heart to it," that's a Bob Walker quote. [laughs] If there's a life lesson for me, it's push past boundaries, and it's the Save Mount Diablo expansion ark that I've helped create. It's also the have no fear, surge forward, and don't let things stop you. There are hurdles, there are challenges, that's just problem solving. I talked to our staff people, and I say, "We are so lucky to have an organization as flexible as this one, as well supported as this one because you can find an interest related to the Diablo area in some way, and you can run with it." Think about what that thing is that you're most interested in related to what we do and how you can develop that into a whole thing and so that's like Juan Pablo Galvan with climate change. Everybody has that ability here to help develop their own job, to promote some aspect. If someone in finance really loved planting trees or working with kids, we'll find a way to help them do that.

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This organization has incredible bones and incredible flexibility. Our work style, we're never going to go back to a forty-hour week, a forty-hour a week in the office. We're going to work in the office primarily two days a week and at home or offsite three days a week and with incredible flexibility to help people with the work-life balance, to increase their quality of life, to support their families. We were in no way less successful over the past year than previous years. We have been nothing but more successful as we gave people the flexibility and the support to deal with whatever challenges they were facing. Everybody had challenges in some way, and working for Save Mount Diablo was nothing but positive.

01-02:12:57

Farrell:

Is there anything else that you want to add before we wrap up?

01-02:13:01

Adams:

No, we hit all my issues.

[break in audio]

01-02:13:10

Adams:

Anything else I would say? I really spoke almost not at all about individual board members because I've done that a lot in other things and other people

are doing that to some extent. But we could not do the work that we do without our incredible board of directors, each individually doing amazing things, or without our really devoted and passionate staff. Same with our donors; we are so lucky to have people who love what we're doing and are willing to do the work and do the financial support to help move it forward. You can never say enough about that. When Ted is interviewed, he will emphasize that without a doubt because he always emphasizes that. Thank you to anyone who ever sees this or reads this for your devotion to Mount Diablo and our area. I know this is a snapshot in time, and somebody will use it for research project later. We've been in the golden age of East Bay conservation for decades now that we're at fifty years, the doubling and the doubling again of East Bay Regional Park District, the tripling of public land acres. We've been in the golden age of land use advocacy in the East Bay where everything was threatened, and we've now constrained it with urban limit lines and lots of other protections. There no more 6000-unit projects other than the naval weapons station, but we've really reined in development in terms of being all over the place and how much it was going to impact. For the East Bay this has been the golden age of conservation, and we will propagate that success south down the Diablo Range over the next fifty years. But to have been involved during this golden age, tripling of public lands in the East Bay just during my thirty-three years, how lucky is that? Who can say that their job did something that will last forever? I just feel lucky.

01-02:15:41

Farrell:

Well, thank you so much, Seth. I really appreciate your time, I appreciate your thoughtfulness and, yeah, being willing to share your story, so thank you for all of this.

[End of Interview]