

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF



CREATED & DIRECTED BY
jesikah maria ross
jmross@ucdavis.edu

restore

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CACHE CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

restory

AUDIO TOUR INTERVIEW WITH

Ben Adamo

STOP 5:

Memorial Grove



Stop 5: Memorial Grove

So can you tell me where we are now and if this place symbolizes anything in particular to you?

Well, we're currently seated in the amphitheater in the Jan Lowery Memorial Grove and it's a very special place not only to me, but I think to almost everyone that's associated with the conservancy and/or the nature preserve for any length of time. Jan was one of the original executive directors for the nature preserve and the conservancy group and just probably, oh I don't know, he was a very special person to me. He was a friend. We worked very well together. I really appreciated his sense of humor, his ability to bring people together. Jan was a very special person and I think he was instrumental in early success that the conservancy had in reaching out to the property owners and land owners along Cache Creek just because of his linkages to the community and his understanding of both the farming community and the industry and just his overall personality fit our needs at that time of an ambassador for this effort.

So I'm going to use a term that I know is not one of your favorites but it seems to be the term that most people know and understand so I'm just going to give you that caveat as we start. You were around during the gravel wars that led ultimately to the creation of this place. What were the gravel wars? Not necessarily the nuts and bolts, but what was the gist of the gravel wars?

Okay. When people reference the gravel wars to me I think it's a term that was handy for people to use at the time to talk about a situation that had developed through a lack of understanding on a lot of people's parts and there were a lot of people that could be blamed for that. Some of the angst probably was just because the county wasn't sure how to deal with the issue of the need for the reserve or the aggregates in Yolo County and balancing that with a perceived impact from mining operations and certainly there is an impact from mining. I don't think anybody wants to say that there isn't, but I think that we found over time that people's perception at that time of what the industries activities really would mean to their daily life and the environment were a lot different than the reality and it's nice to be here looking back and say that a lot of the fears that people had were unfounded.

Certainly at the time it was very difficult to convince people that we could do our work in harvesting this material and providing the construction material that's our livelihood and not impact their lives negatively. Especially the majority of the concern seemed to be at the time water quality. And there's been ongoing monitoring now for well over 15 years without any sign that there's any water quality impact from our operations and the science at the time supported that, but that doesn't mean that people's fears are always answered by the scientific answer.

Who was afraid and what exactly were their fears? What were they afraid of?

Well, people were afraid of a variety of different things. Number one, for people that aren't familiar with construction activities in general, the equipment that we've described as part of our operations; large earth-moving equipment, paddle wheel scrapers, bulldozers, front end loaders are intimidating and at the time in the early '70s, '80s they were noisy. The industry has developed since then, but people's perception of that power of being able to move that kind of volume of material is somewhat scary for someone that's not familiar with the industry.

Memorial Grove, continued (p.2 of 8)

And then it's difficult to imagine looking at an active mine site that does have a bare appearance to it. It's hard to imagine what that site might look like in its reclaimed condition similar to a subdivision that you see under construction in your daily life. You look at that site and it's just a barren site, dirt, rock. It's difficult to imagine what that's going to look like in ten or fifteen years when the shrubs and the trees have matured and developed.

And not everyone had a belief that the industry would in fact do the planting of the trees and things that were part of the plans that they know that happens around the subdivision because it's part of the selling, but they weren't convinced and didn't have the confidence in the industry that it was going to happen on these sites. And the reality is that state law, the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act again, does in fact require that we bond as an assurance that we're going to do the things that are described in the plan. So if we don't do them, the bond is going to assure that they are done.

So from our perspective we couldn't understand the lack of confidence in the final performance, but from the public's perspective, they had never seen the type of reclamation that is now required implemented and it's very helpful for us to have a site like this and other sites similar to this throughout California that people can go to now and understand better that in fact the industry can do their work and at the end of the day provide a beneficial site.

I don't know, the way you describe it, it sounds to me that you understand fairly well why they'd be concerned.

I don't believe, even in the time of the controversy, that there was a complete lack of understanding of the other side's position. I think that there was a lack of trust between the sides that we could in fact work together to a common goal and achieve a beneficial end to the process. And the industry didn't trust the environmental community and the environmental community didn't trust the industry and I believe that this organization that's managing the preserve here, the Cache Creek conservancy, has been a bridge between the industry and the public to a certain degree and certainly the county has been an active participant in that. Their open process, the fact that we have annual reports, public meetings so that everyone is able to keep abreast of how the program is proceeding, has been very helpful.

And in fact, I've gone to public hearings in the last few years and public officials have been amazed at the fact that there is no longer a controversy. It's obviously beneficial to the companies and the aggregate producers not to have the controversy anymore, but at the same time, it's a recognition of the fact that we've done what we said we were going to do and we've done it with help. We've done it with help from the environmental community. They've helped us to know what it is that's expected by the community and by the environmentalists themselves as far as what the end product needs to be and continued communication between both sides ultimately got us through that process in 1996 and that continued process of communication has helped to provide areas like this.

Memorial Grove, continued (p.3 of 8)

So let's go back to controversy. What was the gist, what was the fuss about, what was the controversy here and when?

Okay. The controversy that people call the gravel wars I believe were primarily driven again through misunderstanding of what might happen to the off channel areas that were going to be mined for aggregate. People envisioned the fact that the aquifer was going to be exposed, would create pollution that would destroy drinking water and agricultural water and or deplete it. The studies that were performed at the time refuted that, but when someone has a gut feeling, science sometimes doesn't really matter and even though the science supported the program, feelings ran deep and it's difficult to overcome feelings with facts and that was the gist of what the county was trying to do and the producers were trying to do at the time was only use facts and science to prove the point and the reality was that hindsight said we really should have built confidence in the companies and the county and of course it's difficult to build confidence until you're actually performing the work and so now I think today we've had a period of almost 15 years of production that has shown that we can do our work and people can be confident that the end product isn't going to hurt the environment.

So let's help the listeners understand a little bit more. You said what the conflict was about; essentially mining this area, right?

Uh huh.

So who were on the different sides of this controversy and what did each side want?

Well, as far as who was on which side of the controversy and what they wanted, that varied. Certainly the producers seemed to be on one side of the argument and they wanted to continue business and they were going to do business now in what we call the off channel areas. The folks that were opposed really were kind of a mix of folks. Some were very strong environmentally and felt that any change in the natural environment would not be a positive. Some were part of the agricultural community and didn't want any impact to agricultural lands and yet there were some environmentalists that saw in the program where the county's emphasis seemed to be on agricultural reclamation. They felt that enough habitat had been destroyed by agriculture already and really there should be more habitat restoration rather than agricultural restoration. So even some of the folks that were in opposition to the industry weren't necessarily all on the same page and so as in any controversy, it's going to be very difficult to satisfy everyone.

I think that the process the county went through, the very public process of what we call painful negotiation and extended discussion and was referred to as wars, at the end of the day bore very good fruit. They developed a very comprehensive off channel mining plan, a creek restoration plan. There was a recognition in the plan that the impacts on the creek weren't all associated with gravel mining. They were in fact associated with water usage by the agricultural community.

There were a lot of things that came out of that process. I think it educated a lot of people, both the industry and the environmental community, as far as how things are affected in the creek by all the interests that use it. And so anything like this that has that kind of scrutiny at the end of the day can be positive and in fact I think that this program has been used as a model up and down the state and so out of that controversy came a very good end product for the county and the citizens of Yolo County.

Memorial Grove, continued (p.4 of 8)

What do you think makes it a model for other people? Why do you think people up and down the state use it as a model?

I think they're using it as a model up and down the state because of sites like this. You can come here, you can see that there has been mining activity on the site. It's been a site that was actively mined and it was reclaimed to probably a better end use than it was pre-mining from a habitat standpoint. And there are other examples up and down the creek of agricultural reclamation. There's also some sites that are going to be recreational sites for lakes and be more intensive use than this nature preserve.

So again, it goes back to having a plan upfront, having it approved through a public process and then putting bonds in place to assure the public that it's going to be done and that process that's pretty much spelled out in state law now is one that's working and should continue to work as long as everyone is diligent about doing things the right way.

So I'm trying to put the dots together. So, who cares? There's been mining here. What changed or why did people get upset or all of a sudden want to change the way mining was done?

Okay. Well, part of the reason for the controversy I believe was that originally mining in the creek was obviously to provide the material itself, but the county directed how the mining activities would take place and initially they wanted to create a channel to handle flood flows, but they didn't thoroughly analyze the result of increasing the capacity of the creek and when you do that and reduce flooding by creating capacity, you also increase energy in one place. When the water used to come out of bank and flood, it had very low velocities, but if you control that same amount of water and you put it in a channel, you create a lot more energy and it creates erosion and so the downside of creating the channel that wasn't a stable channel was you had erosion at work and the industry basically got the blame for the increased erosion on Cache Creek.

But it's difficult to link that concern to the concern that was expressed about moving off channel. That issue of moving off channel brought a certain amount of angst based on two probably major components. One was a fear about water quality and the other one was the fear of the impact on agricultural land. And so the water quality issue I believe at this point has been put to rest because the ongoing monitoring has shown that there hasn't been any impact to water quality from the mining activities.

As far as the impact to agricultural land, certainly if a land was in agriculture and came back into a wetland area or a lake, there isn't going to be any agricultural activity there anymore, but there is a balancing here along this creek of a variety of needs and at one time this whole area was more habitat than agriculture and agriculture really encroached upon the creek area and cleared a lot of land of some of these oak forests and so there's a balance and the county I think in developing their plan has come up with a pretty good balance of properties that are reclaimed to agriculture and are reclaimed to habitat areas. So that doesn't mean that individuals that had a particular bias towards absolute agricultural preservation are satisfied, but at the same time the county is able to utilize the resource and still recover some of these areas to a very high habitat area of value.

Memorial Grove, continued (p.5 of 8)

So what was the toughest part about the whole gravel wars for you personally?

I think for me personally, the most difficult part of the controversy that turned the gravel wars in the '90s was the fact that people took things personally and rather than just being objective, there were some personal attacks that went on at the time and they weren't physical they were just literal, but and again, it all comes from a matter of trust or a lack of trust and so when a person's integrity or word is challenged, that's a personal thing and that's something that I think should be avoided when there is controversy, but it's difficult. People, when they don't have confidence or they don't have trust, it's something that you can't easily get over and so it's one of those things that you can only cure with time and showing people that you are in fact good to your word and continuing to do business in that fashion.

But you know and again, different companies dealt with it differently and individuals dealt with it differently and it wasn't across the board, but in general people were feeling individually threatened and I think they responded in that same manner.

How many mining companies were involved in this controversy?

There were basically four companies that did the majority of the permitting in the '90s.

Did the mining community feel like it was being ganged up on?

Well, I don't know that the mining community felt like it was being ganged up on. I think that they felt that some of the concerns weren't warranted and again, their position was relying on the science to answer the questions and allay people's fears and yet there are times when feelings aren't going to be satisfied by science and I think if we made a mistake as an industry, it was relying too heavily on the science and not heavily enough on personal interaction. At the same time, some people resist personal interaction and don't – again, it goes back to a trust issue as something you have to build over time and you know, hindsight always better than foresight, but even in hindsight it's hard to think of a strategy that may have been more effective in educating. I think that the industry is doing a better job today with working cooperatively with groups such as the conservancy to educate people as to how we go about our business today rather than having the vision of people looking back at the 1800 gold rush because it's not like that anymore. Most of the companies now are vested in the communities. We're here for the long term and want to continue to be neighbors and do our work in harmony with the communities that we operate in.

Yeah. Can you just list off as many different kinds of constituencies that were involved in the controversy? I asked earlier who were the different sides and you said well, there were these, but this and this, but this. Maybe if you could just kind of give me a little list like during the controversy, the people who were involved in the struggle.

Well, at the time of controversy there were many groups involved in the discussion and some of them were; The Sierra Club, Friends of the River, the League of Women Voters. There was a local group formed, the Cache Creek Basin Coalition, Friends of Cache Creek. Certainly the local Chamber of Commerce's were involved and they tried to be neutral so that they could provide a forum for discussion between all sides. Many groups out of Davis, some of which I've already mentioned, came together to be involved and at least

Memorial Grove, continued (p.6 of 8)

help to shape the process and I think at the end of the day we found that there was support from some of the environmental community for the plan that the county ultimately adopted and that was what really I think led to both voter approval and final board approval of the program. This thing did ultimately unfortunately go to the initiative process.

So those were the environmental community, but there were the other groups involved, right? There was the mining.

The Flood Control District was involved. The mining industry was involved obviously. Support businesses that sell product to us whether it's fuel or equipment, we're certainly in support of the industry. The local businesses that we do business with for steel and tires and all the normal support businesses that we – trucking firms that haul our product. We're all in support of the industry. So yeah, it was somewhat widespread, but at the same time some of the farmers were in opposition and some of the farmers were in support. The Flood Control District saw benefits to our activities, at the same time was somewhat concerned about infrastructure as well. So I think that as long as everyone was at the table, I think ultimately, even though it was painful, we had a pretty good process.

And of course one group you didn't mention but must have been heavily involved is local government.

Well, yeah. Local government was obviously involved in the process because they were the ones that were instrumental in handling the permitting and so it was up to them to make the ultimate decision on whether or not the industry would continue here in Yolo County and anytime government is involved there is a certain amount of politics involved in it as well as science and they were beat upon by some of their constituency as to again going back to feelings rather than science and it was a difficult time for government and the politicians to adopt it when it was controversial.

So it's probably obvious and you referred to it a bunch. I've heard everyone talk about it being painful and bitter and firestorm. Clearly there are a lot of people that you just mentioned. That sounds like so many people had a stake and were involved. What made it particularly icky?

Well what made it particularly icky was the fact that at that time we didn't have anything to show what the end result was going to be and almost everybody in California is from Missouri and you've got to show them and unless you can finally get sites similar to this that are demonstration sites that somebody can actually go out and experience it, we didn't have that.

The Surface Mining and Reclamation Act hadn't been in place for very long and the county hadn't approved any real significant mining plans since it had been in place and it takes time, just as any construction site takes time, to develop after the fact. And so when you look at our activities, they're long term activities. It takes a period of time to do the actually extraction and then it takes a period of time to do the actual reclamation. So people have a hard time with long term visions.

Memorial Grove, continued (p.7 of 8)

And the good thing for us today is that we do have examples to show and at the time there were very few and those that were available to show were not in this area and so it was difficult to get someone to either believe the photographic proof that was shown or to take the time to travel out of the area to see something that would be similar. That was probably what made it most difficult is even though you bring experts in that say oh yes, I've seen this and it's been done. They brought experts from Canada and said oh yeah, you can do this and you can do it well, but unless someone can experience it themselves and see it themselves, it's difficult to convince someone.

And I think that was what made it most difficult was the industry knowing we could do this and do it in a responsible way and not being able to convince people that you could or would. And that's the frustration from the industry's perspective of how the process was because even though you knew you could do this thing, you couldn't convince people that you could do it and that was the frustration I think on our side. From the opponents' side, I'm not sure. I think they were frustrated because they felt that their fears weren't being properly respected and I don't know what the good answer is to that. Certainly the way the ordinance finally was written took everybody's concerns into consideration and the monitoring that's done is extensive to make sure that everybody's concerns were addressed.

How long did this controversy go on?

Well, the controversy went on for probably, I guess there's varying opinions about that, but I know that personally I was aware of it from when I first started work which was in '74 through '96 so that's 20 years. There was controversy about the mining activities in the mid '70s and so it was a 20 year process and it was more heated towards the end as the county was trying to come up with solutions and when it comes down to decision time, things heat up and so it had had plenty of time to stew and ultimately when it did come to fruition in the mid '90s it had had 20 years to bake.

So how did you all stop fighting? Why did the fighting stop?

The controversy pretty much came to a halt after the county adopted the Cache Creek Resource Management Plan, the Cache Creek Area Plan and the Off Channel mining plan. Those three programs are what controls both the mining and reclamation along Cache Creek today and the county tentatively approved those plans in 1996 prior to the election, but withheld final approval until after the voters got an opportunity to speak to the initiatives that were on the ballot.

What were the initiatives?

The initiatives were Measure C and Measure D and Measure C was to basically shut down mining on Cache Creek and not allow the county ordinance to proceed and Measure D was in fact to support the county's ordinance that had been tentatively adopted and Measure D passed with I believe 62% of the vote which was a significant win and after support by the public and through the voting process, the county board of supervisors did adopt it in final form in late '96.

Memorial Grove, continued (p.8 of 8)

I'm trying for the viewer because you named three plans but then the ordinance was adopted. I'm just trying to find one sentence that puts them together.

Sure. The Cache Creek Area Plan has different components; the Cache Creek Improvement Plan, the Resource Management Plan and the Off Channel Mining Plan. So the operators that are mining along Cache Creek are operating under the Off Channel Mining Plan and that is an ordinance. The creek improvement plan and the Cache Creek Resources Management Plan basically are templates for management of the in-channel areas that are no longer being mined. That management activity is partially funded through fees that are assessed on the off-channel mining operations.

So can you tell me something about how people found common interests in the negotiation process? How did they make it work out? Is it just that it really worked out because of the voting process?

Well, I think anytime you're involved in controversy and dispute, if there's going to be ultimate resolution, both sides have to listen to each other. And in any dispute of this nature there are going to be, on both sides, some folks that will listen better than others and the good part is hopefully those that are willing to listen to the other side will reach out to each other and form a bridge between the two sides and I think that that happened in our process. Individuals from the industries and individuals from the environmental community recognized that both sides had valid concerns and had points to be made and so ultimately they were able to come together and meet and work things out. And when those things would be worked out in a smaller group, then they would be presented to the various sides of the issue. And when it comes from an individual that you trust and can believe, then progress is made and that's ultimately how some issues were resolved. And it helped the county get to a point where they had a certain comfort level that everyone's needs were going to be addressed to a certain degree. And again, you're never going to satisfy every individual to the nth degree, but at the same time, when you have individuals that are willing to put themselves in the other persons' shoes and look at it from that different perspective, it benefits everybody.