Interviewees Name: Tom Bickel
Interviewed by: Stephanie Bertagnole
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Project: Sonoma Nature Preserves: Galbreath Preserve
Interview Conducted at Tom Bickel's Home

Stephanie Bertagnole: So Tom, thank you so much for meeting with us today—meeting with me today for the interview. I have a few questions for you and we'll probably cover some of the territory, some of the stories you brought up earlier.

Tom Bickel: Okay

SB: But, I'd like to get those in the recording for our interview.

TB: Certainly.

SB: Great, so when and where were you born?

TB: 1943. Palo Alto.

SB: And did you grow in Palo Alto?

TB: Yes I did…well, I grew up in Los Altos and I graduated from Los Altos High School. I spent my whole life, early life, in Los Altos.

SB: When did you move here?

TB: I moved to Fort Bragg in 1970. I was working for the state and I got transferred from Redwood City to Fort Bragg. And that's how I wound up…but my intention and my job was to get as close as I could to here [referring to Tom Bickel's property]. So I could live here and I actually, when I retired I started living down here semi full-time.

SB: What is your profession?

TB: I was a police chief.

SB: Can you tell me little about that?

TB: I started out with the California Highway Patrol (CHP) in 1966 and that's what brought me to Fort Bragg. And after eight years there until 1978…and then I went to the local police department because I didn't want…you have to leave and go to L.A. (Los Angeles) if you get promoted with the Highway Patrol. So, I didn't want to do that because I like the area so I went to the city police department for twenty years and was the chief for ten.

SB: That's understandable.

TB: The last ten (years).

SB: So when did you first visit the property?

TB: About 1954…'55 with my father and when I was in grammar school—grade school.

SB: And what prompted the trip here?

TB: He had bought 200 acres and he took me up to look at it and he was looking at it but I was just along for the ride. I actually got out and walked in this creek [referring to the creek that runs behind his house] a little bit further and I…I actually remember that he actually went out with the person he was buying the property from to walk the property lines and I was probably 11, 10 or 11, and I walked up the creeks—the creek—and got a chance to look at everything in the creek

SB: Exciting trip.

TB: Oh yeah, it was for me then.

SB: A good time with your father. So when did you decide to move here? So your father brought you up to visit…

TB: Well, I always had planned to retire…when he retired he would spend the summers here. He had a big garden in there and then all of the family would come here every weekend. My sister and my mother—she didn't like living out here alone without power and everything but my dad loved it. He was an outdoors person from when he was a kid. I'd actually planned to retired here and build a house here and live here permanently. But I forgot to ask my wife [laughs] and when we finally got down to it she said, "You know I don't mind coming down here, I love it down here, but only for a week at a time and I need civilization and people—my friends to talk to up in Fort Bragg." So now I come down here and she's going to come down here tomorrow and be here for a week and then she'll go back to Fort Bragg and water everything and then I'll go home for a week—we're doing that kind of thing. But basically since 1998 I've been down here, most of the time, about half of my time.

SB: So initially no running water, no electricity…when did that come in?

TB: When my dad…some of the events that were big events when we got hot water. But my dad found a spring. When he had been a ki…[cuts himself off]. When he had come up here, in the '30s [1930s], when he was a teenager, and that's how he knew the area. He came up with some friends from Palo Alto. He had been hunting up here and he found a spring up there and he always…this is what he told me now, okay so [we both chuckle]. Some things you just accept. But he said that he had found a spring up there and that's where he used to drink, way up on that hill up there [gesturing to the hill behind us] and he always thought, "Geez, if I ever owned this place I'd have a cabin down there because here's water." Water is the prime thing that people

used to look for. Now, it's…with technology its' not such a difficult thing. But the water from here comes from an underground spring…that's never exposed to the air and comes all the way down here through a tank and a pipe. And it, it's really good water. So he had that right from the beginning before we had the cabin and then we uh, after five or six years we got a water heater and this little part [gestures to the house] by the big bay window is where we all stayed. Uh, and in the summer we had cots outside where we stayed. But…so anyways, that how that got and then I brought in solar. We had…my dad had a generator that you had to start, gassed in, which was a real pain and couple of lights hanging…in the, you know, on wires in the kitchen and I did the solar and there's batteries and all that sort of stuff as the technology got better.

SB: So you established a very strong bond [with the property] from childhood through this point…

TB: I can't ever remember not wanting to, even when I was in high school, about five or six years after he bought this place. I remember thinking I'd love to live up here, I wish I could find a job that would keep me up here or at least…at least out in the woods.

SB: Definitely. So you talked a little bit about the property, what were your very first impressions? So, I remember talked about…you mentioned walking in the creek.

TB: It was summer, there was pools of water and the creeks were all rocky bottoms—they're solid rock. And, uh, when I was here, they were logging and they had just started logging, okay, so we hadn't had any rains. They had logged the old growth Redwood outta here in ah, in the '30s sometime…I don't know exactly when but the early 30s. And these are second growth [gesturing to the Redwoods surrounding us] but there are some stumps out there that are eight feet in diameter. They really just came down here and clear cut everything—there's not an old growth left. So then they went for the fur in the '50s, after World War II, and the logging practices were deadly then. If they wanted to log they'd drive right up the hill, they'd grab it, then pull it right down the hill and then when the rain would come there'd be a massive erosion. And if they wanted to cross the creek they'd just fill it up with logs and dirt. I could…I could show you spots, you know, where they did that. They had no consider[ation]… I don't know if they even had to get a permit to log in those days but, um, my first impression of that was, gee, these pools that you could go get fish. You know, go look at the fish and catch a salamander and walk up the stream. And about two or three years later after it rained it…the creek and the mud and the silt was that deep [holds a hand about two feet off the deck] it covered up all of the holes. I was here during the winter sometimes when the…we used to describe the creek as chocolate pudding when it…it was that full of silt. Trees came down here, whole trees with the root systems that would fall into the…into the creek, it would come down and we'd have log jams and we'd have… There's some significant erosion in the banks where this happened and now, now it's all healed over but that…but what happened would the trees would block and it would start eating around them and then parts of the meadows would go. We lost about a half an acre right down here that, that was tremendous. Um, a tree came down here and swung under the cabin and knocked all the underpinning out of the cabin…it didn't hurt…the cabin just hung there and we just went and fixed it. But that's how bad it was. It took about, it's taken about, it took about thirty years to really start to get back and the creek is now if you walk over there…that's really a thin layer of gravel over rock. And it's finding its natural course now.

SB: It's a beautiful creek, the water is incredibly clear.

TB: We see…I see… I sit on the front porch and see 10-15 Steelhead [trout] a year. I'm only here a short time but you can hear them when you…they come up when the water's about like that deep and crystal clear in the winter [holds hand about two feet from the floor of the deck]. And you can hear 'em splashing and uh, so….

SB: You mentioned at the beginning, when we met during introductions, you mention that some of the loggers had little 8x8 cabins, back by the entrance to your property?

TB: That was all connected with that logging…the logging mill that was down there. And they, they built the cabins and stayed out there…the loggers instead of commuting or trying to live in Cloverdale, they actually lived in these tar papered…they would, um, build these things out of rough fir [I'm not sure if Tom meant fir or fur but I assume he meant fir trees at the time of transcribing the interview] and then put tar paper around them to keep the wind off of them and tar paper on the roof to keep the thing out and after a year they'd just leave them there and go on their way.

SB: What happened with them?

TB: They just…they were. They did a lot of controlled burning and summer burning and uh [clears throat] in the '60s and early '70s, we did quite a bit even up through the '70s. And uh, they burned them all but the owners didn't want them there and they would make sure they got burned.

SB: So we talked a little about some of the cabins, what were some of the other structures on the property?

TB: Then? On that property or on this one? [During introductions Tom gestured to a location along the creek where the cabins once stood which I assumed were on his property. They apparently bordered his property.]

SB: On your property.

TB: There was nothing on this property except that little cabin and we just added it piece by piece…as we had more relatives, they wanted more space.

SB: And on the other property in addition to the cabins, there was the…

TB: Since I've been here just that one you see across the road which is an old homestead, which is probably the oldest, um, probably the oldest structure that I know of around here. People were living in that, that had built it when I was, I was…. in 1955 they kinda moved out and moved to Cloverdale. We knew, we used to go over there with my dad over there and they talked to him, my dad had know them all through the '30s 'cause they all hunted together and did guy stuff. [Chuckles].

SB: That's great. So let's go back, maybe a little bit, what do you know about the earlier history of the property?

TB: The um…I know that it was homesteaded. I researched the deeds and we tried to go back to find the original homestead. It's kind of hard but we found a lot of it. It was in all the 160 acre parcels and then they became…the ranches became bigger and bigger during the late 1800s because people would come out here and try to improve the land and they couldn't and then they had to sell it to their neighbor and leave. It was kinda difficult out here, there's…if you don't log, or couldn't take the logs off and sell them you really didn't have any way to have an income. I'm not even sure…I guess you could grow your own food and things but there's been numerous homestead sites that we found evidence of, especially of the Cooley Ranch over there, where they were gone around the turn of the century. Just a minute [Tom excuses himself to go inside the house and comes back out with an artifact he found]. This is the kind of stuff we found. That's a steam iron from…I don't know when but they put the water in there I guess and heat this up and then the steam would drip in [chuckles]. So, that's the kind of stuff we found.

SB: You found this on the property here?

TB: Yeah and old stoves…I found a disintegrated stove. Um, it just collapsed, I have the pieces of it, that were way in the back and I packed them in. When I was a kid this was mainly sheep country, by the Cooley Ranch over there which is like 25,000 acres. An um, that went out in the…by 1980 it was…the sheep industry was gone from here.

SB: So you have logging, you have the sheep industry, and really nothing else [for folks to earn a living].

TB: Well hunting has been a big thing here, one of my neighbors [gestures to another property] in that direction told me that he made more money off of the hunters than he ever did off of sheep. I don't know the figures but people pay thousands of dollars to have a place that they can hunt year round.

SB: This is a beautiful area, very picturesque and clearly the game is plentiful just from what we saw today driving around. How have things changed since then [early history]? What kinds of things have you done on your property since you moved in?

TB: Well, we always tried to…my dad always had us on projects and I continue that on as we tried to cut stuff out of the creek when it was going to erode the banks and put silt in. But that's not—according to the latest theories, that's not a good thing. You're supposed to leave everything in because that makes Steelhead spawning. But I'm not sure, I weigh how whether you want a yard or two of more silt in the creek or you want to leave the, you know, leave the structures in the creek as long as you can so we took them out because that was a common, that was a good practice then. That was what people were doing to all sorts of streams, to try to un-jam the log jams from the loggers and make the creeks flow freer and get rid of the silt that was in the bottom. Whether that's really good or not is still a controversy, I think. However, I have a

grant coming that, uh, Patty and her partner there [gestures to another interviewee], Kathy Bailey, and somebody else that's involved in the back away. They're going to put…they're going to re-put in…they call it the "Large Wood Project?" You heard of it? [I shake my head no]. Well anyway, they're funding it and they're going to put logs back into the creek in areas that they've already…that Fish and Game has come in here with them and they did a survey and they're going to put them back in to build Steelhead spawning areas from here…from where you cross the little bridge all the way up to the, right around the corner here, which is my section in this stream.

SB: About how many miles would you say that is?

TB: Oh just about a mile.

SB: About a mile. That's a pretty good section…

TB: Yeah, and this…what I've noticed…you asked me what I noticed…something about twenty years ago. Most of this was not canopied over…here was [gestures to stream running behind us] because the Redwoods have always shaded this part of the stream and we've always had trout. And even in the drought years we've always had trout in here, little tiny ones, uh… maybe up to six inches and I assumed they were Steelhead and when they grew up they went down to the ocean when it rained. But…about twenty years ago, all of a sudden Alders came up, like a forest, all up the stream from here on up. And it's solid. And I had, I wish you could see it but right around the corner…right around that road there and across the road it's so thick that there are clumps of them that are like probably six or seven feet in diameter. And they…maybe twenty? I don't know, I've asked lots of botanists and people what, how…what happened? Why were the seeds so dormant? Or, what spawned…and nobody really seems to know. The conspiracists say that Fish and Game were seeding it from the air in a helicopter [laughter]. I'm not kidding you, somebody told me that once…I almost laughed.

SB: There's always a conspiracy theory [more laughter]…

TB: But, uh…that's really shaded a whole portion of this creek and kept the temperature down. So, and what I've done is, which was not available in my dad's time, was I've received numerous grants from the EQUIP grants? The Environmental Quality Incentive Program, from the U…from the NRCS and the same things that go on in Sonoma. Road sloping, uh, rolling dips, taking out culverts and putting in rock crossings. Uh, I can't think…removing Scotch Broom this year and that's a grand [grant?] I got, which is not..it's gonna…there's so much Scotch Broom there's no way you can get it and I won't spray so…but I'm going to pull it out with an excavator and they're going to replant Redwoods all in here. So that's gonna happen June 15th…so that's what I've been doing. I just kind of…and I enjoy…that's what I enjoy doing. I built, I read a long time ago about piles of brush for quail cover and I do that. Instead of burning it, around the house I might burn it to keep the vegetation around here. But out on the rest of the ranch there's piles everywhere. When you drive along the road, the quail take off and head for those things and disappear in them.

SB: A good refuge for them…

TB: Yeah, I don't hunt here. And also what I did was put this whole place into a conservation easement with the Anderson Valley Land Trust, it can never be divided or improved beyond what it is now. Which may be really popular with some of my family members who want…who thought they were going to divide the place up when I died. [19:24]

SB: So maintain the integrity of the property…

TB: They have to now…it has to be kept exactly…this is a little residential zone that people can build more houses in if they want. But beyond, the areas beyond that…on that side of the road there's like seven or eight hundred acres that will always stay in one piece and can't be improved. There won't be…there can't be any grape growing or do anything that would affect the ecology.

SB: Can you remind me of the size of your property? How many acres?

TB: It's…it's about 800. This piece here in the valley is about 60 acres. And this is probably the only flat area, the rest of it is all goes up into the hills and it's really beautiful up there. You can get on a mountain and look at Mount St. Helena from up there, and uh, look at the steam coming out of the geysers. Pretty neat.

SB: It's a wonderful place. An you manage the property by yourself?

TB: Just me and my sons…my son is very interested in this place and has the same kind of ideas but he also a policeman, in Sacramento, and when he gets his twenty years in he can retire and he'll be down here. Um, my daughter, I don't know. She's talking about going to Italy when she retires so…

SB: So you would say he is ecologically-minded as well.

TB: Yeah, well my daughter, she was raised here too with my grandpa…with her grandfather, my dad. And uh, she likes it up here but she has a career and doesn't get a lot of time. Her husband, my son-in-law, he'd die to be up here. He keeps saying he wants to move up here so... But saying it and doing it, you know, being able to actually pull it off is something… Even I after two weeks of being by myself I get antsy even. I got the internet in here this year. I refused to do it and then I finally broke down and did it and I'm glad I did 'cause I can communi… There was no cell phone here and there's no, uh, I won't, I won't put a T.V. in here but uh... I do…now, I'm now able to use a Magic Jack and get a…so if there's an emergency I can call out on a phone and that's mainly the….that's the excuse I use by the way…maybe I surf the Net at night. [Laughter]

SB: Everyone has to have one…

TB: Netflix and Amazon. [more laughter]
SB: That's modern times for you, right?

TB: Not on FaceBook yet, though.

SB: Um…that's not necessarily a bad thing. [Laughter] Can you tell me a little about the floods or any memorable rain events in the area?

TB: Oh absolutely, there, there's a things that happened here geologically that amaze me. And one of them was we had a big rain around '60, 1960-62, and there's an acre of land right up there [gestures up the hill] that went down like this. It went, they…people describe it as a toothpaste tube being squeezed and it went into the creek. And it dropped down…what happened it got…the soil got liquefied due to the rain and it just, something started it and it's still all there—you can see it. We call it the badlands 'cause you drive into it and it's all eroded and the trees went straight down and they died, of course, but the stumps are still laying where, uh, after all of the…and that was a big thing. We've had that happen a couple of other…not to that extent…that's about an acre that did that. People said they saw, you know, they saw the debris going down. The people that live down at Denny's saw the debris coming down and wondered what happened up here.

SB: That's horrifying.

TB: So there was that and then, um, then sometime around '63 we had the county bridge warshed [washed] out and for the ten years after that we had to ford the creek to get in and out of here. And the county..the county kept a caterpillar there, right at that bridge and they would come in after the rains and bulldoze the gravel across so you could get across 'cause sometimes after a rain...I was stuck in here for two or three days until the water went down. And it didn't bother me but I was supposed to be back at work. [Laughter]

SB: But you had an excuse.

TB: It was exciting in those days. Um, I've been here…last summer I was here when the water came up underneath the house but it never seems to do anything bad anymore. Nothing comes down like it used to, like I said the trees and stuff. But, there was that, we haven't had any fires or anything like that.

SB: You know one thing we saw today, destruction, or I should say evidence of the activity of pigs. Can you tell me a little bit about their abundance on the mountain itself and have you noticed any increase in their numbers?

TB: I've noticed a decrease from, from the '70s. They used to be…we used to be able to get in a jeep and drive out and every night you'd see pigs on the road everywhere. You could go up on a mountain and sit down with your binoculars and look into spaces on other people's land, you know, openings and there'd be pigs milling around. And they kinda went way down, um, in the '80s. They just dropped off and now they're starting to come back but the neighbors have continued to hunt them. I understand that I think they changed their pattern of eating and where they went. We never…my dad hunted pigs and I've killed a few of them myself but we never hunted them to the extent that the Colley Ranch had. They had dogs and they charged people $500 a weekend to go hunting pigs and if they killed a pig it was like $100 more or some fee to

clean it out and give it to them. So they hunted extensively and they used dogs too that also…which I don't believe they can do anymore. I think there was a law passed about that…using dogs…I don't believe you can do it now. Since I don't hunt anymore I don't pay any attention. Yup, people would turn a pack of dogs loose and chase them until they stopped and then they'd kill the pigs and if there were little baby pigs that was too bad. They've never done anything to me except rooted up my lawn a few times which I wasn't happy about but you know…pigs are pigs. Lots of deer, the deer population has increased and the quail and the birds, pigeons and stuff…pigeons have almost disappeared here. In the wintertime here in the '60s and '70s, there was probably 3,000-4,000 pigeons at a time, landed in these trees at night and they'd sleep, they roosted. You'd walk outside in the morning and shut the door and if you didn't remember it, it was like thunder taking off…we saw, did you see? When we went over there just now there was a bunch of pigeons in the tree. I heard some disease got them somewhere else so now they're down to a couple of hundred. That was always exciting. There's ducks that live in the creek. I have three ponds in the back—big ones and there's ducks on them and otters. I see otters going up here all the time. I've gotten a couple of good videos of them.

SB: So a good variety of wildlife here, you would say, on the property?

TB: Oh yeah.

SB: So, I think you mentioned…you briefly mentioned fires earlier. Have you seen fires come through here, in particular?

TB: In all the time I've been here there has never been a wildfire in this area…that I am aware of. An accidental one but we used to try to light 'em but it's not as easy as people think. What would happen was we would…in the early vegetation management…I think 1980. There's still a law on the books called the Vegetation Management Program and CDF is ordered to work with landowners on a cost-sharing basis to remove vegetation with burns and other things. And that's kinda went away with the EPA and air quality—that supercedes what they tried to do so they can't burn anymore like they used to. But we would light a fire trying to get just chemise and brush off the hill for feed for deer and other things. They would burn little strips through there but they didn't burn like you saw on Lake County [referring to the 2015 Lake County Fire] and those kind of fires just don't happen. I really don't know why you'd have to ask somebody from CDF. We don't have the type of…combination of brush like they had in those fires [Lake County]. Other than controlled, oh, they don't say they're controlled—they're managed. They used to say controlled until one got away. CDF did that [laughter]. The last one that they had here was 1998 and they burned 11,000 acres. They had to stop the burn because people were complaining in Santa Rosa 'cause of the smoke and also, I understand, that it went all the way up to the ocean, up the Anderson Valley from here.

SB: And that was a managed burn?

TB: That was CDF burned, they got several…they're program was to get as many ranches as they could together and establish a line they could hold it at and then burn everything in the middle of it to prevent the kind of thing that happened in Lake County. It was a good program as far as fire prevention went, there were bad effects, I imagine some animals were killed. But after

a burn here, the White Thorn would bud out and you'd see deer the next day feeding in the burn or rolling in the ashes. That was always interesting to me. Burning it made more feed for them.

SB: Those burns are important, not only for reasons that you mentioned, but also in terms of increasing biodiversity of plants and preventing pests and disease. Have you seen any changes in biodiversity or increasing pests or disease as a result of not being able to burn?

TB: Not disease. They did a Sudden Oak Death survey here and they did find it but they couldn't do anything about it. So, that's here but as far as anything else I haven't noticed. I don't have diseased trees. The things I do notice is that many areas are inaccessible now due to the brush. You can't hike through the sides of the hills unless you want to crawl on your hands and knees under the brush. And you can't see, the hunters up here used to look for deer and pigs and now it's all canopied over. Almost all of my property is canopied over with large firs now. Well, it's been forty years, so 40-year old trees. Part of my agreement with the land trust is no Redwoods can ever be cut here—ever, for any reasons. I assume that they can enforce that. You're not allowed to cut within sixty feet of the stream anyway and most of these Redwoods are within sixty feet of the stream but I made sure. This is the only place I know that has a lot of them up here. I don't know, are there any of them over there? [Referring to Galbreath Preserve]

Steve Estes: There are some.

TB: Aren't they on the Redwood State Park, though on the other side…Meyer's? [Not sure what or who Tom is referencing here].

SB: I think she mentioned on the west side [of Galbreath], to the west side of the property.

TB: There's not as many as there used to be. It's sad to go down and look at the stumps in my field down there—must've been huge.

SB: I imagine they really took over the area at some point. So I heard talk earlier about sheep and cattle, did your family do any ranching?

TB: No. No, all we did was…because the fences were so hard to maintain and the Cooley Ranch had…my guess…you'd have to check. But my guess was they had 500-1,000 sheep over there and they had 20,000 acres so they had a lot of sheep. They couldn't maintain the fences over here so my dad told them he didn't care. So they gave him a couple of lambs every year, the guy that was running the sheep would kill a couple of lambs and give them to my dad to butcher up at the end of each year. That was the deal. But we never did anything commercially here, like put any kind of animals on it or my dad didn't do any logging after he got it. I have a little sawmill I got so I could make my own lumber. You find a fir tree that fell over and I make a big deal out it and cut it up. I cut all of the lumber for that…there's another building on the other side. I cut all of the lumber for framing out of fir trees that were here on the ranch. So, that was kind of a fun thing but that's over. [Laughter]. What do you do with a sawmill? You're not supposed to sell…if you do that…you don't need a timber management or timber harvest plan or anything to cut down some trees on your own property if the products don't leave the property. But if you

try selling them then you're supposed to have some kind of a plan. Well, I never sold any of it anyway and I don't need any more lumber. That's it.

SB: You've seen some really interesting things in your time here and I've heard some interesting stories from people including yourself. Any stories that you would like to share, any story that you think is amazing or any stories about animals?

TB: Well, I got lots of them about animals but that's where I've had most of my enjoyment. When I'm here by myself, I see some things that I never thought I would be able to see. They're simple little things but you enjoy the…I enjoy nature. I was sitting, right where you are, by myself, [facing the stream] and I looked across and saw some motion about two years ago. It was about five in the evening, it was cool and the shady, and a skunk came down the creek this direction, right off that little thing, going down in the bottom of the creek. And she had three little—four little babies with her, behind her. When she would stop, they'd run into each other. [Laughter] Then they'd back up and they'd kind of organize. I followed her all the way up there and I just stood and watched and those..one of them…they went across this log and one of them fell upside down and held on like a possum, upside-down, and pulled itself up. I try to find that for the younger people to look at, like I'm talking about, ten or eleven years old. It's kind of hard…for somebody to…I'm sorry. I'm looking at somebody coming in—walking in [gestures to the road behind me].

SB: Yeah, I noticed them over there [I point to the road across the creek behind Tom].

SE: I think it's Claudia, I think they just went for a walk.

TB: Oh. Oh, okay.

SB: Okay, alright.

TB: So somebody said, mostly it's when the kids come up here now they whip out that [points to my iPhone] and play a game on it instead of doing something or walking around. I guess that's just the way it is.

SB: Nowadays, unfortunately. So do you think the numbers of the types of animals have changed over time?

TB: I don't believe that the coyotes are as big a problem as these people think [gestures to the other interviewees]. I don't kill anything. I did a lot when I was younger, I hunted and did all that sort of stuff, but I just don't believe it. I don't use the meat and I don't think you should shoot anything unless you're going to eat it. I hear all sorts of stories about oh, we kill all the coyotes we see and we do this and that and I don't see any problem with—I don't see anything in the game structure here that reflects that coyotes are wiping anything out. That's all I can say, there's people that say you should shoot all the hawks because they eat the quail—that's horse crap!

SB: Well, wouldn't you agree that predators are a natural part of the system?

TB: They are!

SB: And keeping that balance?

TB: Absolutely.

SB: Do you feel that they help keep that balance here in the ecosystem and on the property?

TB: I believe they do. I hear coyotes howling, there's a lot of them here. Because I'll wake up in the middle of the night and my three Basset Hounds are in here answering them. You ever seen those Basset Hounds howl?

SB: Yes.

TB: Well, they do that once a day at my house inside there. They have little crates in the house…big crates in the house, in here too and they go off every once in a while. If you're not prepared it's scary but anyway, there is lots of coyotes. I have lots of pictures, moving pictures of coyotes. I set my game camera up inside my orchard down there where I set them up. And foxes and skunks. What I don't see anymore? Come to think of it, there's one thing I don't see. I used to see possums all the time and a few porcupines. I haven't seen a possum or a porcupine here for ten years now. I'm going to ask somebody, thank you for reminding me, I'm going to ask somebody about that. I watched a porcupine once. I sat down for an hour and watched a porcupine on the side of the hill way in the back—feeding. They're golden colored when the sun hits them. Just watching what a porcupine does; they just eat and turn over rocks. They go in…they dig in, or this one does, they dig in half dissolved roots and rotting wood. I guess for grubs, I don't know, but I haven't seen any for a long time. We used to have them here, we used to be able to see them.

SB: You mentioned an orchard, can you tell me about that?

TB: The orchard down there I planted when I retired, just a couple of apple trees and stuff. The Armstrongs have an orchard that is probably a hundred years old. They just control of the property about four years ago from their uncle. There's two homesteads back there that had large apple orchards—I'm talking a hundred trees. We identified… I was friends with the caretaker over there for years before he passed on and they identified like eight varieties of apples. Some of them are old—what do you call them, heirloom apples? They're trying to save those which is a good thing, they'll probably talk about that in their deal. There was a homestead, you know, one thing I didn't mention is that right when I first came up here they were closing down a horse ranch. Somebody tried to raise horses and it didn't last very long because of the feeding problem and the fact that they graze off everything right away. There was a horse ranch in there where the Armstrongs are now—a pretty big one. On their property they have, I spent a lot of time over there with Sam the old man I'm talking about, helping him and doing stuff. They had pre-1900 bathhouse and they had bunkhouses, oh and they would rot. They lost a foot of their height because the bottoms had all rotted down in the ground but there

were sheep and bunkhouses for the hired help with old hand-poured cement, showers, and it runs down there right into the creek! [Laughter] The old days.

SB: Are you upstream or downstream from the Armstrongs?

TB: They're upstream. All of their stream runs through here. The whole basin runs right through here, there is no other way out but right here. If go onto their place and over the hill you're in the dry creek drainage for down into Lake Mendocin… [corrects himself] Lake Sonoma. And we did used to drive, before Lake Sonoma was built, we would be guests of them and drive all the way over to Healdsburg on the dirt roads. And one other thing, this is kinda historical data, I guess. I was told by a guy named Wayne McJimsey [spelling?], who was in his 70s when he was here, when I knew him, and I was a teenager. He said that he drove a mule, they loaded tan bark…how did I forget that? It was a big industry here, a money-maker for people who were trying to live here to get tan oak—tan bark. And they would peel the bark off of the tan oak trees and pile it on sleds. He said he took wagon loads of it over the hill 'cuz you can go over and tie into what's now the Kelly Road and down in Healdsburg…or Cloverdale. Either one, you can go to Lake Sonoma or turn and go to into Cloverdale. That's how they would get it out of here and it would be put on a train in Cloverdale or Healdsburg wherever they took it. It would wind up in Redwood City. The train didn't go all the way to Redwood City but they would take it down and somehow they got it across the Bay to the tanneries in Redwood City. I remember the tanneries, they were shut down but they were huge. Are you familiar with the area?

SB: I am not.

TB: Right along what is now the Bayshore Freeway, whatever they call it now, 101, down through there. They were huge buildings! You wouldn't believe it but they were all red but they were all wooden and falling down like 30 feet high and a couple of hundred feet wide. That was the old tannery and that was a major business. The tan oak bark supplied the tannic acid that they used as a component of curing hides, making leather. Long story to get to that part…

SE: Is that on the San Francisco side or the Oakland side?

TB: It's below San Francisco. So I don't know whether…when you hear those stories, they're influenced by people's memories and their feelings and stuff like that. I believe that he probably did that and he said that it was in the 1920s that they had mules. Four mules or six mules, something like that, on a wagon and hauled that stuff over the hill.

SB: Quite an industry. Do you know what brought that to an end?

TB: Well, the tanneries were closed in the 50s. I just saw them as vacant and I believe that they found other ways to tan, they used other chemicals to tan leather. I know from the beginning of my adulthood there's been a move on to get on away from animal skins. My guess would be the advent of nylon and things like that that you can substitute for leather—leather jackets and things. Unless you're a motor cop and then you have to have a leather jacket by the way.

SB: That's a really interesting observation on a big change in the landscape and how things shifted, not only for the local property owners but also for a larger industry. What other changes have you seen in the landscape? Are there any other major changes that you remember?

TB: Well, the logging industry is gone. When we came up here there was four or five mills in the…along 128. There was different sawmills and all the way in Fort Bragg, especially. That has disappeared. There aren't any more, as far as a I know, there's no really big sawmills anywhere in Mendocino County, because they did exactly what the environmentalists said. They cut all of the timber until there was none left that was marketable. I remember people saying that, "If they keep cutting timber at the rate they're cutting it we won't have a job." And that's the truth. So now they have to wait thirty-forty years to get marketable timber again. I thought one of the odious things I saw was that machine that grabs a hold of these young trees and cuts them off. They grind up…they pulp all of the young trees now for OSB and particle boards and things like that. So they're not even letting the little trees…have you seen those things?! Like grab a tree and the saw blade goes like that [demonstrates chopping with his hands] then takes it over and it goes in the shredder and [makes grinding noise] that's the end of that!

SB: Up in Washington State, yes.

TB: I wish they would…I'm 100% in favor of the...I had to get a timber management plan here and I know all of the rules and everything. I'm in favor of the logging practices…if they weren't in effect this place would still be…every place they logged there would be a disaster after it rains. The rules call for roads with certain grades and not going over certain grades. It's just good.

SB: How do you feel your, I think you've touched on it, but I just want to clarify your conservation efforts—your personal efforts. Do you feel they help the landscape overall? In terms of preventing erosion and…

TB: I think it did. I don't know…it's miniscule for the overall Anderson Valley drainage but my conscious wouldn't be good if I didn't do something. If everybody does something…what is it? Think globally, act locally? I remember that. I didn't believe it when I first heard that dust off the roads causing sediment but I've seen now. CalTrans did a study here and they used my stream for part of their study and they did it about 2002? 2003? They counted the Steelhead and they also had a big part of that thing…I've sent it to…Linda McAway [spelling?] has it right now. Cal Trans commissioned, I think it was Chico State, to come up here and do this survey to find out how their roads were affecting the Steelhead. I guess runoff and things but they did a lot of study on the sediment that kinda convinced me. When I started reading about the amount of sediment that comes off the roads and winds up in the creeks. You know, you gotta do something, you can't…you don't just bulldoze dirt into the creek. You might as well if you're not going to do something.

SB: Well, I'm glad you mentioned the refugia because I have some questions for you about that and I'm really curious to know about what you're doing there. You talked about establishing a Steelhead trout refugia in the area, can you tell me little bit about that and you're goals? [49:38]

TB: Well, they're going to place logs across the creek in several spots. I don't know…there were ten of them originally but they couldn't fund them all so I don't know where they're going to be. But those are supposed to stay there and provide nesting and spawning beds that's for Steelhead. I have a couple of lakes back there and I'm trying to work some way but I can't get Fish and Game to agree to this…to scoop trout out of here [gestures to the creek] when it is going to dry up and put them in the lakes. I don't do anything with the lakes they're free to go over the spillways but it would save them. But the response I got is that maybe there's a reason why, you know, the trout…so. Other than that that's the only thing that I can do with the stream, you're not really allowed to do anything else.

SB: How has the river changed so that development of the fish refugia is needed?

TB: The channels are now down to where they used to be, it's gotten down to the rock. Before I don't believe there was a lot of area, even though it was gravel. Steelhead can tell, I guess they sense where they can spawn. I was in my workshop in that other building about five years ago and I kept hearing splashing. It was in the winter but the creek was a little bit higher than it is now but running faster. I stepped out on the walkway behind my workshop and I looked out and there was a Steelhead there and she turned upside down, she was about that long [holds hands about a foot apart]. She turned upside down and was going like this [gestures with a side to side movement] a big cloud of stuff would go. She was making a nest. So I videoed the whole thing for about four hours and she had two males with her because they're thinner and longer than…maybe three quarters of her size. I've had pictures of them swimming up ahead of her and then backing off and then going around her. Then another shorter steelhead came up, I have a picture of them turning. Their backs were all out of the water and they're turning and chasing this smaller immature Steelhead. I understand they have a habit of eating the eggs that the females lay. [Other interviewees and interviewers join us at the table on Tom's deck]. So that was my big thing here but there's lots of stuff.

SB: I've visited fish hatcheries, farms, and so forth and I understand the difference between a hatchery and the refugia. For clarification for the recording, can you offer clarification regarding the difference between a fish hatchery and the refugia you're looking to create?

TB: Well, fish hatcheries raise fish and place them in the stream. The refuge makes the environment better for the natural fish to breed and live in. That's the best that I can describe it. It's making the natural habitat better rather than trying to dump farm raised fish into the creek. The county, in the 70s, the county had a program here where they took kids from college that needed a summer job. They had a pickup truck with a tank in the back of it. They would go up the creek from that bridge and seine out trout with a net and put them in this tank and take it up to where the water was still running and dump 'em out. To try and save them. They used to dump them in our lake because we had those ponds and they would dump them in the ponds. Those things, if they stayed in the pond they got about that big [spreads hands wide apart] they grew about an inch per month until they reached about 16-18 inches. They would disappear and go back down to the ocean. Those kind of things are things I think we need to do but they've been stopped. And I don't know why?

SB: So I don't have a lot of experience in the field in terms of what you're trying to do. Can you walk me through the process of applying for the grant and establishing a refugia?

TB: I this particular instance, I was approached first. I learned of the grants and I was getting the road grants and other erosion grants because mine were kind of successful. They asked me if I would be interested…it was Linda Macaway [spelling?] and she asked me if I would be interested in doing something like that and I said, "Certainly." So then she took it from there, she told me what is was about and then she took it from there. Equip pays a little bit of it. They worked a joint thing where Equip was going to give a little of the money and the Fish and Game supplies some of the money and then the Resource Conservation District pays for the rest. So that's about all I know about it. It's worked in…they've done this in Navarro in a couple places down near…the south fork of the Navarro [corrects himself] the north fork of the Navarro. They say it works.

SB: So California Fish and Wildlife have they determined that this is particularly habitable for Steelhead trout?

TB: Yes.

SB: An ideal location…

TB: Yes. They came up, their biologists from Sacramento, three of them came over here and walked the entire stream. There's data on the temperature here that was collected for the last two years by a fellow from New York who's writing a paper. He left the sensor in the creek here. When he sent me the data he said he was amazed that it stayed this cold in the…not that it was cold, that it was habitable. They didn't think that trout would survive up here. We can tell them that the trout are here every year. I used to seine them out with a little net all the time put them in a bucket and take them up and dump them in other places when the streams dry up and they become… When the water gets to a certain level when there's a lot of gravel. There's less of that now and more pool…when there was more gravel and a wet spot they couldn't get in or out. Then the 'coons and other things…you'd see tracks around them and they would get the fish.

SB: So the Steelhead trout are native to the area, would you say?

TB: I think they are. I've been told that Steelhead trout are a form of Rainbow trout but I don't know. Then I've heard that's not true so I don't know.

SB: I've heard the same thing and I'm still trying to figure that out. Laughter]

TB: You would think with DNA testing and stuff that they would be able to tell that nowadays. Maybe they have and I just haven't heard about it.

SB: My understanding is that they were two different species but they share similar traits. They can crossbreed?

TB: They certainly look alike…

SB: You hear a lot of stories related to that. So, just one last question, I think you've answered a lot of the questions throughout the interview. I wanted to ask was there anything we haven't covered today, that you feel is important to share that you think would be interesting or helpful?

TB: Well, the thing that affects the environment the most is cutting the land up into smaller and smaller pieces. I think that's the worst thing that's happening to the wildlife. When I was working for the city I read a study that they did…the planning department had this thing and I read it because I found it totally interesting. They did a study in Colorado where people were having five acre mini-ranches and they said that that helped the environment. That the animals would still be around but what they found out was that it made no difference. That five acre or ten acre mini-ranches had the same effect as if you put apartment houses there. That's not the wording but that was the effect. They talked about high density residences versus those mini-ranches. That's why I put this in a conservation easement, I didn't want it divided into four mini-ranches with four dozen kids riding their quads and motorcycles.

SE: What did you think of SSU, when Galbreath gave part of his ranch or most of his ranch to SSU. Were supportive of that?

TB: Oh yeah. I thought it was great when I heard that. [Laughter] I thought it was great! I wondered by Humboldt didn't take it; they offered it to Humboldt first. I subsequently found out why. But I'm glad Sonoma State got it.

SB: We are too. [Laughter]

SE: We are. Can I ask one last question?

TB: Yeah.

SE: You were talking about how you spent a lot of time on the Armstrong property because you and Sam were friends. Did you spend any time over on what is now the SSU Preserve? Do you have any stories of that?

TB: No, I did not. Galbreath was a crusty old gentleman, that's the best I can say, and it was his property and you stay off of it. He was friendly and all that, but don't go over there and don't interfere with anything he was doing. I had dealings with him. Where that green gate is? Didn't used to be there. The county road used to go all the way through my place and into the Fopiano [unclear who Tom is referring to] gate another mile up there. We had to get the four land owners Crawford Cooley, my dad, the Bridges, Fopiano[?]…and Galbreath agreed to it. That's my experience with him and he was a…I believe he was in the insurance business, insuring like maritime shipping in San Francisco, I think. Anyway, he was a crusty old guy. [Laughter] A good guy though—a good guy. An in-charge guy, kinda like Frosty [referring to one of the other interviewees], take charge.

SB: Any last questions?

SE: That's all the questions. Well Tom, thank you so much for meeting with us.

SB: Thank you very much.

TB: I should thank you guys for doing this. Somebody will maybe get some good out of it or listen to what's going on.

SB: Thank you.

[End of Interview]