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Interview with Doug McClarnan

Michael Davis

Doug McClarnan

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Researcher's Name: Michael Davis
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Place: Rural Life Center in Gambier, OH

Interview was Monday night, so the transcription is forthcoming. Talked about why people go canoeing and what the attraction is to canoes. McClarnan also said a little bit about his connection to the river and how he thinks people need to slow down their lives and appreciate nature a bit more in order to be happier people. He said a little bit about the aesthetics of a canoe—unfortunately his comment was probably a little too chauvinistic to be included on the recording, as he said himself.

…picking up on side two…

MD: If anything at all, what do you think the scenic river designation does for the community's relationship with the river today? Has it changed?

DM: Has it changed? I think, hmm, no, I think we're still pretty indifferent to—the general population is still pretty indifferent and don't get the connection between parking lots like Walmart's, things like that—new roads, bigger streets, and things like that—and how that can damage the river. So I don't think—I think that's an education thing that people need to know about. I think it has made them more aware of what kind of resource—if they're interested—they have, and appreciate, you know, appreciation of the river as a resource. Sort of like—I kind of liken the status of the Kokosing being a scenic river to—well, the first part of it is an honor and a recognition kind of what the agricultural community left it in. Now as we go into the next millennium, what's going to happen? What I see happening is that in a strange way just as the farm community pretty much took the area from the indians and from the natural habitat, now the farmers are the next indians. You kinda get my metaphorical drift? There the land is not being always taken from them but they're being forced either through bad crop prices and things like that, or through development, you know, if you've got property, you know, one of the ways to make money is to chop a little piece off and sell it this year so you can make up for whatever it was or sell a lot of it and move on to someplace else. In a way, I think that the, it's sad but the farming community and the rural community is being changed a great deal by the general development. And before I even come up here tonight there was something on NBC news about satellite imagery. I think it's probably in relationship to the shuttle is up there doing some mapping right now, how much more they noticed the spread of, you know, we don't see it as much even here. You know, I spent the whole day in the eastern part of the county, and you don't see a lot of it. And you see still a lot of rural areas but even there there's a lot of houses creeping in here and there and development creeps out of Mount Vernon. So how long is it going to be like this and what do you lose? I think that was the whole point of the rural farm, what was it, the rural farm project. Life about the, rural life and the differences. We're in danger of losing a lot of that.

MD: OK, this is two questions spliced into one here. Talk a little bit, if you could, about water quality and then again if there is any connection between water quality and the community. I think a lot of—

DM: Some of, well, ah, my mother's people were mainly Welsh and when they came to the United States in the West Virginia area, I believe, is where they ended up, and they were coalminers. One of the things they were—they didn't have a lot of technology—but they had canaries. Canaries, if the canaries stopped singing and started drooping, it meant there was a lot of gases in the mine. When you start losing the quality in your river, because everything ends up in the river—you've seen it, tires, cars, refrigerators, when you go to the bathroom, it ends up in the river. So I think it's a good indicator of the quality, of how carefully you are treating your environment. And the sensitive creatures that are in there—the things that Ray knows a great deal like about and I don't know very much. But the diversity of that little community of the creepy crawlies, as I call them. And how much quality there is really affects the whole food chain. The water quality, the ability that you can swim in this river and not have to worry about being killed by some kind of plague being washed down the river like in Romania right now where arsenic is fouling the river and killing things. So it's sort of an indicator of the health of the community, I think. And it takes effort. It's pretty easy to just dump it out on the ground. So it takes effort and dedication. Some of that's laws, but never, but the laws are never going to be enough. And there's never going to be enough people to enforce those things, so it has to be the people that are living along and in the community. And I think it's kind of the same for air quality, too, but water quality is what I'm most interested in. And I think water quality's going to tell, I think it's an indicator of how respectful your community is to taking that effort—and it is an effort. Is it a major cost? Well, when you go out and build a big parking lot, what're you doing? You're trying to make a profit. Well, that's fine, but why affect me down here to pay for it? Why should I pay for your parking lot in the fast—you know, what happens when you have, when you harden up the watershed by putting in parking lots and roads and streets and development and everything else? You get tremendous surges in water and that in the ecosystems, that can adversely affect ecosystems. That's why you have these storm water retention ponds and things like that, so the river has a chance not to get all that sediment, first of all which coats and kills everything, and second of all that surge, which is probably as bad as anything else. Again, remember the story that we started out with. People used to be able to paddle downstream from Fredericktown to the confluence with the West Branch and you really can't do that because they put dams on there. So that natural flushing, flooding, you can't, while all the time you're still getting a lot of the soil erosion coming off the normal stuff and not getting it to flush out. And two years ago, when we had a very large storm event here, up to eleven inches of rain in twenty four hours, it changed to the river a great deal. It cleaned it out, it scoured (sp.?) it out. It was really a very healthy thing for the river. In fact, we went down not long afterwards, and did some saning (sp.?) and found out that it was remarkably healthy, that it recovered a great deal, very fast. And that was always a good indicator.

MD: What do you see as the future of the river? Ten years from now?

DM: Still be flowin. How clean will it be? I don't know. I think this is where we've got to make a lot of efforts as development occurs, as we try to limit development. Do you think we ought to have more hard roads or gravel roads? Should we have sidewalks or gravel paths? Look here in your neighborhood right here. What happened in Kenyon? At Kenyon. Somebody come and put a whole bunch of hard sidewalks in. But Middle Path is still gravel. Shouldn't we have gravel? Wouldn't that be better? Let the water soak in. But it's not very convenient for people who are handicapped, though. So there's all these trade-offs that you have to make. So what do I see in the ten years for this river? I think it will be much like it is now. I think over the last ten years we've seen a lot of hardening up of the watershed—it's a fairly large watershed, so proportionally with only Mount Vernon and Fredericktown as main areas of urban growth of any kind. We don't have the threat you have in a lot of watersheds like the Darby or the Si-o (sp.?) or some of those areas where you're very urbanized. Where you have vast tracks and no place to put… So I think we're going to make efforts. There's a really great book.