

BOB HALL, interviewed by Glenn Blackburn on October 3, 2009. Bob has an M. A. in Sociology and Religion from Columbia University. Since 1973, he has been working in North Carolina with grassroots, non-profit organizations that focus on political, social, and economic issues. He was Executive Director and Research Director with the Institute for Southern Studies, which evolved out of the civil rights movement. Then he worked with Democracy South and is now Executive Director and Research Director for Democracy North Carolina. The goal of Democracy North Carolina is to build a more vital democracy by carrying out fundamental campaign-finance reforms. Bob received a MacArthur Fellowship in 1992. He has been a member of the Coastal Federation since the beginning and served on the Federation's Board for 25 years. He is married to Jennifer Miller, Todd's sister.

Bob said that Jennifer Miller introduced him to Todd Miller in the late 1970s, before the Coastal Federation began. Jennifer worked with the Institute for Southern Studies for several years in the 1970s and edited a special issue of its journal *Southern Exposure* called "Coastal Affair" (1982). Todd traveled with Jennifer on research trips that led to producing a state-by-state analysis of the Southern coastal environment, which appeared in the journal. Jennifer and Bob talked with Todd about his idea for forming an advocacy organization for North Carolina's coast, drawing from some of his experience seeing how other groups in the southeast operated. Because Bob was already very experienced in how to make a non-profit organization work, he attended the Federation's founding meeting and was quickly invited to join the new Federation's Board.

Bob said further that the Federation's Board worked well with Todd, because Todd clearly knew what he was doing and was the basic driving force in the Federation. Todd was good at using individual Board members to do particular jobs (for example, asking John Runkle for legal help). Bob said that his role on the early Board was to introduce the world of foundations and fund-raising to Todd and provide background and act as a sounding board for ideas about non-profit finances and operations. The Institute for Southern Studies and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation were for Todd two models for how a non-profit organization could operate and survive for many years.

In 1987, the Federation's *Coastal Review* published two articles by Bob. The articles were reports on research done on the topic of the concentration of land ownership in North Carolina. One article stated that about 3000 large landowners owned over 30% of the land in North Carolina, giving them great political clout and influence. The other article said that the concentration of land ownership was greatest in coastal North Carolina. When asked about these articles, Bob pointed out that the Federation had spent much of the early 1980s fighting with large landowners in the Albemarle-Pamlico peninsula (the peat mining struggle, etc.) and

that publication of his articles on the concentration of land ownership was a natural follow-up. He added that developers who are large landowners are the major source of money in local elections. So, information on how much land developers own in the coastal area and how much political clout they have is directly related to all other coastal issues. Todd recognized the power of the developers and used the power of citizens, the general public, to counter them. Getting people to public meetings and hearings is a good way to counter the power of the developers. Bob said that Todd is a "careful agitator," who is willing to take some risks such as naming the influential developers who abuse the coastal area.

Bob emphasized that one reason for the early success and strength of the Federation was the campaign against peat mining. The campaign got the attention of the media, the foundations, and policymakers. Important people became aware of the new organization. A crucial point is that the new Federation quickly learned how to find good lawyers and use the court system effectively. A lot of non-profits do not know how to use the court system.

In commenting further on Todd, Bob said that Todd knows how to find good people to do the things that need to be done. In particular, he has been good at bringing a variety of people -- businesspeople, scientists, fishers, second home owners, etc. -- into the Federation and getting them to work together. Furthermore, Todd is good at planning how to get things accomplished.

Getting people on the coast to work together is very important and sometimes difficult, according to Bob. The irregular nature of the North Carolina shoreline, with all its sounds and bays and creeks, encourages the development of small communities and an independent-minded people. Many people, notably fishers, tend to work apart from others and to be very individualistic. The barrier islands and broad shallow bays meant the absence of a big, deep-water port, which means the absence of any large urban area.

An important point, according to Bob, is that the Federation has gradually made a transition from being just an advocate opposing the actions of powerful developers to deliberately being more constructive in its approach. Being more constructive means showing people how to protect the coast through building living shorelines, restoration of oyster habitats, conservation of endangered areas, etc. The Federation began with a focus on advocacy, including grassroots organizing and legal challenges, and then added more education programs and a conservation program to buy fragile eco-systems and create demonstration projects that helped the environment and economy of the coast.

A chronic problem for the Federation, in Bob's view, is that they need more eyes and ears on the ground, whether it be schoolchildren or coastkeepers or shorekeepers or whatever. They need more advocates on the ground.

On a more positive note, Bob said that North Carolina is a "green" state, if you think in terms of "conservation" rather than "environmentalism." There are many people who want to conserve natural areas but do not want to be called "environmentalists." Bob edited a book in 1987 called *Environmental Politics* that featured several North Carolina case studies where grassroots groups mobilized widespread public support to defeat threats to their community's natural surroundings by tying the threat to people's (a) physical health, (b) economic livelihood, and/or (c) traditional way of life.

The Federation should be thought of, in Bob's words, as "a conservation organization with a holistic approach." It is not really a "community" organization in the full sense of being concerned with all aspects of community life, such as poverty or race relations.

On the question of whether there is any connection between people's religious beliefs and their environmental concerns, Bob said that there is a spiritual or emotional aspect to people's experiences of the coast which he called "primordial." On the coast, people find a sense of connection to something more lasting, more eternal, than they find in their everyday lives in cities. Many people in the Piedmont go to the coast to get re-connected to the natural world, to go back to something pure. This desire to reconnect is a basic human urge. So, the Federation's work to protect public access to the beaches is very popular with the general public. (He added that Thomas Berry is a good source on the connection between religion and the environment.)