

DR. DAVID MCNAUGHT, interviewed by Glenn Blackburn on March 21, 2010. David was Director of the Pamlico-Tar River Foundation from 1986 to 1995. Then, he served as consultant to the N. C. Coastal Caucus for eighteen months during 1995 and 1996. He was the first Director of the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, serving in that capacity from 1997 to 2000. From 2001 to 2009, he was Senior Policy Analyst for the North Carolina office of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).

With regard to Todd Miller, David said that both Todd and the Coastal Federation, the organization Todd “constructed,” “set the standard” for non-profit environmental advocacy. The Neuse River Foundation (NRF) was founded in 1980; the Pamlico-Tar River Foundation (PTRF) in 1981; and the Coastal Federation in 1982, but the Federation rapidly assumed a role as leader and coordinator of active advocacy in the region. Todd and the Federation quickly became models of success for these other advocacy organizations. David said that when he became Director of PTRF, he was told that the Federation and the NC Conservation Council were the groups of broader geographic perspective with which to collaborate. Both PTRF and Neuse River were more local, while the Federation broadened our work to develop regional significance. PTRF was started by citizens opposing a proposal from Texasgulf Chemical Company to extend its mining operations to the lands beneath the Pamlico River.

Todd, David noted, is a master at empowering citizens. He is sort of a “back stage or behind the scenes kind of guy,” who is very effective at creating platforms for public discourse and then letting it happen. His greatest talent is perhaps his appreciation and understanding of the political structures and social processes that govern coastal environmental policy. He knew the leverage points and guided citizens in the efficient engagement of these structures and processes.

Todd and the Federation were masters at “seizing the day,” at responding to whatever opportunities for protecting the coastal environment that were most accessible at a given time. Todd never seemed to be conflicted by the nuances of environmental ethics. Rather, he was an optimist who knew that almost everyone wanted to protect the coast as much as practicality would allow. He began with an assumption that the political process would work, and it was simply his job to facilitate the process. In Todd’s view, the laws governing coastal matters were for the most part good, and the task was to see that they were implemented adequately.

David said that he always collaborated with Todd and the Federation when he was Director of PTRF. However, there was a big difference between him and Todd, in that Todd seemed to be the “driver” of the Federation. McNaught's advocacy was always tempered and refined by his governing board. PTRF’s Board had recruited and hired David and authoritatively "directed" his advocacy. In contrast, David said that he had the impression that Todd “set the tone” for the NCCF Board. The Federation’s Board was always composed of intelligent, capable people, but they seemed mostly attuned to carrying out Todd’s tactics and strategies. (McNaught acknowledged that his view is simply the perception of a colleague who was himself not active with the NCCF Board. He simply felt that Todd built NCCF and naturally was more authoritative in his influence on the organization's activities.) Todd has always seemed to be the virtual incarnation of the Federation.

One example of the routine collaboration between PTRF and the Federation was our effort to reduce the pollution produced by the mining and processing operations of the Texasgulf Chemicals Company. PTRF, the Coastal Federation, the Southern Environmental Law Center, and the Environmental Defense Fund worked together in a campaign that resulted in major modifications of the Texasgulf operation, including a tremendous reduction in their discharge of process waste water. The company ultimately spent more than \$30 million implementing a wastewater recycling process. PTRF, according to David, was the leader on this campaign, but the Federation, EDF, and SELC were essential allies. In particular, Jim Kennedy, the Federation's scientist in the 1980s, was very helpful. Kennedy was an astute scientist. (David noted that one of Todd's strengths is his ability to adapt to the staff or whatever pro bono assistance he had available at any given time. When he had a good scientist like Kennedy the Federation had a focus on scientific analysis. Later, the Federation was adept at deploying Jim Stephenson to do what he did best – lobby the legislature and advocate state policy reform.)

Many PTRF members and leaders admired Todd and the Coastal Federation, hence the automatic expectation that David would collaborate and cooperate with them. In particular, David said he always consulted with Todd on how to deal with the political and regulatory structures in the state. In addition, he always consulted with Derb Carter on legal issues, Doug Rader on technical environmental matters, and Bill Holman on legislation and policy actions. The five of them had a natural and spontaneous collaboration.

David added that both the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), eventually led by Derb, and the N. C. office of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), where Doug Rader was immediately employed as Senior Scientist, were created in 1987-88. From 1980 to 1986, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (ZSRF) was the essential supporter of the early grassroots environmental initiatives, including PTRF, NRF, and the Coastal Federation. But, it appeared to David that ZSRF recognized that North Carolina activism suffered from two basic weaknesses: insufficient legal representation and a shortage of insight on technical environmental issues. Therefore, with the leadership of Tom Lambeth and Joseph Kilpatrick, ZSRF was instrumental in facilitating the development of a NC office of SELC and a NC office for EDF in order to fill those two voids.

David said that he, Todd, Derb, Doug Rader at EDF, and Bill Holman had an effective natural collaboration through the late 1980s. But, by the early 1990s, some of the foundations, including ZSRF, encouraged them to build a more formal collaboration, so they started the Coastal Caucus to formalize their partnership and develop shared agendas. By 1995, when David resigned from the directorship of PTRF, the Caucus while active on several issues was most focused on the exploding expansion of hog farms in eastern North Carolina. (The number of hogs raised in the eastern portion of the state had more than tripled in just a couple of years.) From the summer of 1995 to 1997, David worked as a consultant to the Coastal Caucus. During that time, a major project for the collaborators was preparation for the Hog Summit in New Bern. The Caucus continued after that and gradually added a number of other grassroots coastal organizations, but David said that he had little specific knowledge of how the Caucus continued to mature in the ensuing years.

Senator Marc Basnight was the "creator" of the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF). The goal of CWMTF was to foster the development of the next generation of water quality projects, and David said that during his tenure as Director of CWMTF the Coastal Federation's applications for funds were always among the best submissions they received. Most applications from other organizations were only partially related to improving water quality. Todd and the Federation authored better applications that were solely directed at getting something done about water quality.

Later, during his tenure at the Environmental Defense Fund, David said that he did not work directly with the Coastal Federation except for a couple of wetlands projects. Todd (NCCF) and Derb (SELC) of course had been and still were the leading authorities on the dynamics of wetland protection and restoration, so David and others at EDF collaborated with them on two or three projects to improve state efforts to protect, restore, and mitigate wetland disruption. Other EDF staff also sometimes worked with the Federation on initiatives having to do with the coastal environment, but David was not aware of the details of those projects as he was not personally involved.

When asked how the Coastal Federation fits into the environmental movement in North Carolina, David pointed out that the Federation was one of the original success stories of the environmental movement. It became a model. It was an innovator in the movement and now has a long track record of proven successes.

As for why people love the coast and are willing to work to protect it, David noted that many people have a nostalgic, personal tie to the coast. Everyone loves the beauty and natural splendor of the ocean and the coastal region. But, there is something more primal in the attachment that N. C. people have for their coast. Beach weekends and spring breaks are more than just "good time get-aways;" they are a rite of passage in our culture. Many young people associate coming-of-age romance and emerging adulthood with their times at the coast. Therefore, the coastal region holds a special nostalgic place in their psyches, where their imagination and greatest aspirations can be unleashed. We all want to protect the coast, not simply because it is beautiful and abundant, but because it represents the best memories of our past and the best potentials of our future. Todd and the NCCF get this intuitively. And, the Coastal Cohorts capture much of this feeling, as is articulated in the stage show, King Mackerel and the Blues Are Running. Bland and the other Cohorts remind us of the full "sense of place" that the coast is, and what that place means for almost everyone who lives or vacations in North Carolina.

On the question of evaluating the successes and failures of the Coastal Federation, David said that he sees nothing that could be billed as a failure. The successes are many. The victory in the peat mining conflict during the 1980s was a major success. Other major successes include guiding land use planning reforms through the CRC which ultimately influences residential and resort development projects all across the region, better wetland protection rules and improved mitigation strategies, acquisition of significant tracts for preservation, and education programs for kids. Perhaps, the biggest success is the dynamic maturation of NCCF into the diverse and productive organization that it is today, and we all owe Todd Miller thanks for that. Furthermore, David emphasized that the challenges facing an organization like the Federation will always be dynamic, and it will take Todd and others who can continue to read the tea leaves so well to guide future successes.

Asked whether there is cause for concern because North Carolina is becoming an increasingly urbanized society, David said “absolutely.” However, this issue is bigger than just North Carolina and the coastal environment. We have created social and economic structures that have run amok. NCCF and all activists need to do more than just foster incremental environmental policy advances. We must help transform our contemporary American culture into one that seeks equity and sustainability as much as prosperity.

Finally, on the question of the relationship between people’s religious beliefs and concern for the environment, David said that working out connections between religious groups and the environmental movement is an opportunity for the movement. He suggested that the aforementioned challenge of cultural transformation will probably require some integration of spiritual perspectives with environmental thinking. Many environmental organizations have been building bridges to various religious and spiritual entities. For example, he observed that they made some such efforts at PTRF during his tenure there; and he also spoke of initiatives that EDF and other groups have undertaken to cultivate partnerships between religious and environmental groups on subjects like climate change and energy efficiency.

In conclusion, David stressed that despite the import and necessity of the fine work of the environmental movement as a whole to stimulate incremental policy improvements, it simply isn't enough. American society must learn that "environmental protection" is a fundamental issue that should undergird all our economic and social structures. Too many people think we can protect the environment without changing our values and our culture, and that just isn't true.