

Stewart Udall Interview Wallace Stegner Documentary

Interviewer - John Howe

How did you become acquainted with Wallace Stegner, and why did you want him for the Department of the Interior?

Stewart Udall

Well, I think to be truthful; I became acquainted with Stegner when I was a congressman probably by reading things that he had written. I read *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian* and I read other writings including some of his novels and I just thought he was a wonderful writer, and as a westerner--you know I was the only westerner in President Kennedy's cabinet. I acquired an interest in him. Whether he came by my office for a visit when I was a congressman, I'm not sure, but it was after I became Secretary of the Interior that I really became interested in working with him.

Interviewer - John Howe

What kind of influence did he have on the Department of the Interior? What kind of influence did he have on the Kennedy administration?

Stewart Udall

Well, we were making new national policies during the Kennedy administration. This hadn't been done to the extent that we did. You know Truman; his main thing was to build dams. President Eisenhower didn't want to build dams, but Connie Wirth, the head of the Park Services persuaded him to approve a program called Mission 66, but Kennedy immediately proposed a wilderness bill. He proposed also, and we modified that at the department, to begin to build a system of national seashores around the country, and we later did a wild a

scenic rivers bill. We later worked on getting additional national seashores approved, so we were making new policies.

Interviewer - John Howe

How did President Kennedy see the role of the Department of the Interior?
What did he think your job was?

Stewart Udall

Well, the truth of the matter is that Kennedy had an interest in conservation. His orientation was more about the sea--that was his life, but he traveled over the country when he was running for president. He loved the out-of-doors. He loved natural beauty, and as you can see from the programs he proposed, he wanted to preserve much of what was left, but he was a very busy president. I didn't get his attention too much. He was busy with the cold war a lot of the time, and he delegated to me a lot of authority, and I sort of used it as effectively as I could.

Interviewer - John Howe

Tell me about your relationship with Wallace Stegner. What kind of a man was he?

Stewart Udall

Well, he was a fascinating person to me because he was a westerner. He was what ten or twelve years older than I was? He had been a writer, and I think he was at Stanford when I first contacted him. He was very creative and an exciting person to work with and I created a position when I became Secretary of the Interior in the winter. I created a position of which I called "Artist in Residence" and by the early fall or late summer of 1961 I thought Wallace Stegner would have a lot to contribute and I asked him to come and work for

me, and he said well he was busy, and I said, "Give me a semester. Give me three months" and he apparently liked what I proposed and he came to work for the Interior.

Interviewer - John Howe

How did President Kennedy view Wallace Stegner? Did he know him and what did he think of him?

Stewart Udall

I don't think President Kennedy...I may have taken Wally to the White House for a meeting or two. I've tried to give him something, or give him an opportunity to see how the government worked, and Kennedy may have briefly participated in one of those meetings, but I wouldn't say that Jack Kennedy knew Wallace Stegner in any intimate way.

Interviewer - John Howe

How did President Kennedy's death affect the Department of the Interior? What were the changes after his assassination?

Stewart Udall

How did my relationship with him change?

Interviewer - John Howe

No, how did... after his assassination, how did things change with the Department of the Interior? How did you learn about the assassination of President Kennedy? Describe how that happened.

Stewart Udall

My relationship with President Kennedy began when he was a senator and I was

a congressman, and I volunteered. I was one of the people that volunteered for his campaign. Arizona only had one congressman, and one democrat, and I was that democrat, and I went to work for him quietly when I went home at the end of 1959 and I organized, with the help of some friends, an Arizona delegation and we had a convention and we took the delegation lock, stock and barrel, and we were a Kennedy state, and President Kennedy appreciated that, and he gave me... I said, "You've got to give me a full day," and this was in April, and we got on his little plane and we went to Flagstaff, Yuma, Tucson, Phoenix all in one day, and that helped him win the Arizona people over. He was giving speeches in all of those places.

Interviewer - John Howe

What role did Wallace Stegner play with your National Parks Advisory Board?

Stewart Udall

I appointed Wallace Stegner to the National Advisory Board for National Parks. I had used him when he worked for me to go out and study national park potentials, particularly in Utah--Southern Utah, so he had a very sharp opinion about things. He was learning the politics, as I was, but he had an opportunity to give advice, and if there was any person that I listened to in my years, it was Wallace Stegner.

Interviewer - John Howe

What did he tell you about the Utah Parks? What was his advice?

Stewart Udall

Well, I had... before he came to work with me, I took a group of journalists--Life Magazine, National Geographic and so on, out to see what became the

Canyonlands National Park. I had spotted it in a flight I made over that area, and I looked down and I said, "My God that's a national park," and I went to the National Park Service and said, "What is this area? What is its status?" And so that became one of our major initiatives, to establish a national park in what became the Canyonlands area of Southern Utah.

Interviewer - John Howe

Talk a little bit about the Dinosaur National Monument and the fight to keep dams out of Echo Park. What was Stegner's role in that?

Stewart Udall

That's one of the places I got acquainted with Wally is the fight over Dinosaur National Monument because I was in Congress and this was a major controversy that developed, and the conservationist won that fight and Stegner wrote a brilliant defense of the area and how irresponsible it would be to have the... to convert that into a dam. It was an anti-dam controversy.

Interviewer - John Howe

Talk a little bit Glen Canyon and how Glen Canyon dam came about, and maybe just a little bit about how you worked with Floyd Dominee from Reclamation.

Stewart Udall

Well, I was a congressman for six years. I was a junior congressman from Arizona, and the Glen Canyon dam after the Dinosaur National Monument argument, the six states that wanted a big control dam moved their planning, with the help of the Bureau of Reclamation, down to the--what was it called, the park? I mean to build a dam at Glen Canyon--that became the focus of the effort. All of the congressmen and senators from these six upper basin states were in favor of it. I was in favor of it. I was for it because it was going to be

built in my congressional district, and it would provide jobs, and so I voted for it and that was done in 1955, and then construction started in 1956 so I was just a junior congressman. I had one vote and I voted for the project. I've regretted it in my later years, but I voted for it.

Interviewer - John Howe

How do you think Wallace Stegner would react to the current state of the environment today? What do you think his reaction would be if he were alive?

Stewart Udall

Well, I regard him as a major guardian of the West, and I think he would be dismayed. I had a conversation with him. He and his wife stayed with us on his last trip when he had the accident and lost his life, and we discussed... his concern was that the population growth exceeded what we had expected. He was concerned about the expansion of cities in the region. He was concerned about whether there was enough water to sustain the urban growth that was taking place, and he was concerned about the controversies that were developing over growth--big developers, rich people wanted to live in the parts of the West and they were succeeding in acquiring private land, and we were dismayed by what was happening.

Interviewer - John Howe

In his famous wilderness letter--the letter that he wrote, he talked about the geography of hope. What do you think he meant by that?

Stewart Udall

Well, I was attracted, and that's one of the reasons I went to Stegner in the late summer of 1961, my first year, by that letter that he had written. Somehow it came to my desk and I thought it was very powerful. I memorized it, as I'll

demonstrate for you because he said, "We need that land. We need that wilderness. We need it even though we go there to the edge and look in, because it is proof of our sanity, and it is part of the geography of hope." I thought that was one of the most powerful statements for wilderness that I have ever read.

Interviewer - John Howe

What do you think is Wallace Stegner's legacy? How should he be remembered?

Stewart Udall

Well, I took... the Sierra Club was having a wilderness conference at the end of the summer in 1960. I read Stegner's letter and I think it is still one of the most powerful, potent statement for wilderness that I have ever read anywhere.

Interviewer - John Howe

How do you think Wallace Stegner should be remembered? What do you think his legacy should be?

Stewart Udall

Well, Wallace Stegner was such a versatile person that he left a mini-faceted legacy. He was a teacher. He wrote about the big conservation controversies, so he is to be remembered for his writings, and he's remembered for his statement of pro-wilderness statement, and he certainly gave me valuable advice as Secretary of Interior about what should be done, and what not done, and he lead, or he help me lead the fight to bring Utah, the state of Utah behind the Canyonlands National Park. That is kind of a monument to him and to the other people that worked on that project.

Interviewer - John Howe

As you mentioned, you knew him personally. He stayed with you etc. Tell me a little bit about the kind of man he was. What kind of friend was he?

Stewart Udall

Well, as a friend and advisor he was very direct. He had a sense of humor. I always remember the smile he had on his face and he (interruption)

Interviewer - John Howe

I had asked what kind of a friend and man Wallace Stegner was. You were talking about his sense of humor.

Stewart Udall

Well, he was one of the best and most influential advisors that I had, not only the three months he was with me, he gave me the idea for a book.

Interviewer - John Howe

Start that over one more time. I think I might have stepped on your first word there. I don't know if I did or not. Same question. We were talking about what kind of friend and man Wallace Stegner was and you were talking about his sense of humor.

Stewart Udall

Wallace Stegner was a very exciting friend--the kind of person that you look forward to meeting him again because you knew you'd have interesting conversations. He cared about the land. He cared deeply about the mistakes that had been made, and he had... he always had a subject that bothered him and he wondered whether there could be a change in policy. But he had an intimate way of communicating his point of view... a wonderful person.

Interviewer - John Howe

How did he feel about the Utah Canyon Country?

Stewart Udall

Well, what we... the problem we had when he came to work for me is that we had a senator, Frank Moss, who was for a national park in the Canyonlands, we had a governor who was opposed, and this took us four years to get the law passed and that whole period was very controversial and Wally knew all about Utah politics. He was always, in an amusing way, wondering whether we had resolved some issue that was political, and we essentially got a governor, Calvin Rampton, who became a champion of the Canyonlands, and he had a lot to do with it, but the national press had seen the area and they thought it was a magnificent area. It really is, in one way, a small Grand Canyon. It has more features than the Grand Canyon in my opinion.

Interviewer - John Howe

We were talking about Lyndon Johnson. How did things change with the Interior?

Stewart Udall

Well, of course he kept me in the cabinet. I think he did so with reluctance, but after he saw what I was accomplishing...

Interviewer - John Howe

Could you start that off and talk about Lyndon Johnson so we know whom you're talking about.

Stewart Udall

President Johnson was really a westerner. He really liked what we were doing at the Interior Department, and he gave me, pretty much as Kennedy had, free reign at the Interior Department to complete the work that we were doing. He never proposed anything very new, but he liked what we were doing, and he said so, and then I became a partner with his wife on trips I made around the country, and he was a solid supporter of me until the very end, and we had one big stupid argument.

Interviewer - John Howe

Let me ask that one more time. Look right at Jeff this time. How did things change with the Kennedy Administration and Lyndon Johnson? How did your role take place with Lyndon Johnson?

Stewart Udall

Lyndon Johnson actually was a conservationist, but he was suspicious of me because I had opposed him in the 1960 election, but he said, "Well this guy's doing a good job, lets keep him and try him out." I was on trial in those first months under Johnson, but he praised what we were doing in a press conference before the election in 1964. That's the highest praise I ever received from a President of the United States. It's in the books.

Interviewer - John Howe

Tell me how you heard about the Kennedy assassination and then what the effect on you was.

Stewart Udall

I was on playing with five other members of the cabinet when we heard about President Kennedy's death, and we were headed out of Honolulu for a meeting

with a the Japanese cabinet, and it was one of the most shocking things of my life and it took me a long time to get over it because I loved Jack Kennedy. I loved what he was doing. I liked him as a person, and he was a young man, and it was devastating.

Interviewer - John Howe

We were talking about Robert Frost and the relationship that you and Wally had with him and why.

Stewart Udall

When Wally came to work for me, in our discussions I learned for the first time what a close relationship he had had with Robert Frost, and we discussed it further, and we decided... we talked about it for a long time, and we decided we had grown up in small towns as he had, and we had the same interest in nature and the preservation of the human relationship with the land, and that was one thing we had in common with friendship with Frost.

Interviewer - John Howe

OK, you were telling me about Wally's death and that Mary was here with you. Tell me that story.

Stewart Udall

Mary Stegner, Wally's wife, after the accident... the accident occurred in Santa Fe. She stayed with us, and later they put him on a ventilator and we went with her to the hospital to talk with their doctor, and when he told him that... told her that he was probably being kept alive, that his body was not functioning, and she had to make a decision, she told him, "He wouldn't want this, turn it off" and I said to her, "Mary that's an act of love."

Interviewer - John Howe

What kind of person was Mary? Tell me a little bit about Mary.

Stewart Udall

Mary Stegner was a perfect wife for Wally Stegner in my opinion. She was a gentle person. She was a thoughtful person. I'm sure she influenced his life in many, many ways, and I will always remember her as a wonderful human being.