

VIDEO INTERVIEW – TONY SUPPA

- Paul G. Wiegman:** Let's just start out – you're Tony Suppa, right?
- [Chuckle]
- Tony Suppa:** Right. That's correct. That hasn't changed.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That hasn't changed? You haven't changed your name to protect the innocent or anything like that?
- Tony Suppa:** No. Nothing of that nature.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, your title with the Conservancy at the time of the Western Maryland- what we always called projects was...
- Tony Suppa:** Director of Acquisitions.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** You were Director of Acquisitions. So, you were the guy that had to go out and do the groundwork. Once all the big guys came up with an idea, you had to bring it.
- Tony Suppa:** That was my job to bring the pieces together, get the information. And, once an area was designated for acquisition to determine what was involved, how to acquire it, what the cost is going to be, what the problems might be, and go from there.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, I would add, an expert negotiator.
- Tony Suppa:** That helped.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That helped. We begin with October '73. And, there was a meeting in Baltimore between the Conservancy. And, from what I see, you were at that meeting. Is that correct?
- Tony Suppa:** Well, I really don't recall, Paul, but I spent a fair amount of time in Baltimore going through their files.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Tony Suppa:** If you looked at Fayette County and you looked at the Recorder of Deeds, you'd see all these instruments that brought title of one form or another into...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What do you mean by instrument?
- Tony Suppa:** Deeds, ordinances...

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Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: ...license agreements, leases...

Paul G. Wiegman: So, it was complex.

Tony Suppa: Yeah. A whole host of instruments that provided some type of use or ownership for the Western Maryland Railroad. At that time, it was owned by the B&O. B&O acquired the Western Maryland Railroad.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, right.

Tony Suppa: So, once it was decided that the Conservancy was going to take title from Confluence to Ohio pyle...

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: ...then we had to identify all the pieces of property that were in that right-of-way. And, unfortunately, the piece of spaghetti, instead of it paralleling rights-of-way – or ownerships – it actually was perpendicular.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: So, there were a lot of little pieces that just went on down. And then, the railroad put together an engineering map identifying every parcel of one form or another.

Paul G. Wiegman: And a parcel would be a piece of land?

Tony Suppa: Piece of land – parcel. And then there would be an instrument recorded in Fayette County Recorder of Deeds indicating that property that they acquired.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: But, when you looked into the property, it made reference to the files and the archives of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Tony Suppa: So, we had to literally pick up our office and go to Baltimore. And, they made available all of their files. An attorney and myself, by the name of Robert McKenzie, Bob McKenzie...

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Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, I- yeah, okay.

Tony Suppa: ...we went through file...

Paul G. Wiegman: Bob McKenzie was from Pittsburgh.

Tony Suppa: Bob McKenzie was an attorney and he worked for the Port Authority from time to time...

Paul G. Wiegman: Port Authority. Okay.

Tony Suppa: ...and was an expert in railroad law, railroad real estate.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Tony Suppa: So, we retained his services as a consultant to help us identify the ownership, identify what the railroad owned, and the quality of title that the railroad owned.

Paul G. Wiegman: What do you mean by quality of title?

Tony Suppa: Well, the railroads came into various communities...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...into various cities and they brought with it an area to go from Point A to Point B.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: Sometimes they did it by an ordinance, a license agreement, a lease, or they could actually purchase the title.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: Well, fortunately, the Western Maryland came later into this 18th and 19th – in the early part of the 19th century...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...so they were acquiring fee title rather than a right-of-way.

Paul G. Wiegman: Which means they owned it.

Tony Suppa: They owned it.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

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- Tony Suppa:** They owned, if I remember correctly, about 80% of their property.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Wow. That's a lot.
- Tony Suppa:** So, that made their gift to the Conservancy – their donation to the Conservancy – a very long corridor, or a piece of spaghetti.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Your job at that time – and it really began in 1973 because that was the meeting that Josh Whetzel and John Oliver sat down with the railroad people and said, "We're going to do this."
- Tony Suppa:** Yep.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, I might add that the railroad people – the Western Maryland Railway people were very, very much enthused about doing this as a trail. They didn't just want to get rid of the land. They wanted to see it become a trail.
- Tony Suppa:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** They were very positive on this whole thing. Now, your job was to see if each of these parcels was really a good title – it was really a true title.
- Tony Suppa:** That's right. And so, we examined the quality of title. We read the instruments. And, they purchased what is known as fee title. They had good and marketable title.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** And then there were some gaps. And, we were able to place them on a map. And so we knew every now and then there was a gap. And so we had to go after that piece of property to fill in some of the smaller places that they didn't own.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What did you have to do in those instances?
- Tony Suppa:** Well, we would identify the owners...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

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- Tony Suppa:** ...where they were located, how large they were, and then make contact.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** Explain the Conservancy's mission and the railroad's mission. The trail- they use the right-of-way. Because, if you had to assemble that right-of-way in today's market, it would be almost prohibitive.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** The cost plus the going through everybody's back yard. So, it was there. So, how can we preserve it and how can we put it to a more prominent use or a continued use into the future?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm. What kind of reception did you get from those owners?
- Tony Suppa:** In most cases, the reception was cordial, but they were concerned. They were concerned that now you're going to bring just hundreds of thousands of people past my back door. And you had to sell the program. You had to convince them that there's going to be a legitimate organization that's going to operate this right-of-way. And, in most cases, is going to be within the state park.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** But, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania also had some prerequisites. They wanted a trailhead at Confluence.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** They had a trailhead at Ohiopyle because of the state park.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** But, there were some areas and some rights-of-ways, or to get from a main street to the Commonwealth property. So, they said, "These are the prerequisites. We need this piece of property and that piece of property in order for us to have a management unit that we can control."

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** I'm going to assume this in the '70s – '75, '76, in there. So, by that time the state was involved and they were doing some of the direction as to what would be the trail and what needed to be acquired to be the trail. And, they were giving you that direction.
- Tony Suppa:** That's right. And, what would be feasible for them in order to take the title from the Conservancy at a later time and then create the trail and build the trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's an important point. All during that period, it was the Conservancy that was buying that property.
- Tony Suppa:** Yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, we – you and I worked for the Conservancy – so we were actually putting the upfront money.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah. The Conservancy would fund it, take title to it, hold the title in kind of a land bank until the Commonwealth was satisfied that there was enough land and you could go Point A to Point B, and there would be no controversy. Also, the Commonwealth was concerned that if there was a gap and it created a problem, they may have to use eminent domain. They did not want to use eminent domain in putting together a hiking and biking trail or converting a railroad right-of-way to a hiking and biking trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** It just was not politically feasible to do that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Did they ever use it?
- Tony Suppa:** I don't think they ever used it for a trail. I'm sure they've used it for park purposes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** But, I mean, for the Western Maryland.
- Tony Suppa:** No, they did not.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** No. It was never used for the Western Maryland. You're saying that this was Ohiopyle to Confluence was the first part that you looked at? Was that the first section?

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- Tony Suppa:** That was the first section- the Conservancy, I think, when the gift was made, I think the right-of-way went from Dunbar to Confluence.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. That's what I've seen.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah. But, the Commonwealth, at that point, was only interested in Ohiopyle to Confluence. So, I think that was the first – in my recollection – that was the first acquisition of the first gift from the Conservancy.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Tony Suppa:** At a later time, there was another conveyance. It went- I don't know if that'd be south?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It's actually north.
- [Chuckle]
- Tony Suppa:** Okay.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It seems like it's...
- Tony Suppa:** Downstream from Ohiopyle...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Downstream from Ohiopyle.
- Tony Suppa:** ...to Dunbar.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, to Dunbar.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** You said that as you approached people, they were cordial. Were there any that weren't cordial?
- Tony Suppa:** There were some that said, "It's out of the question. We believe that we own the right-of-way through reversionary interest."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** And, they wanted to keep it that way. But, it was a matter of trying to convince them that the Conservancy's mission was legitimate, we're not fronting for another company, we're not fronting for somebody else.

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Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: You know, Ohiopyle was very popular...

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: ...as a state park. It was going to enhance and compliment the state park.

Paul G. Wiegman: The people that, they said, “No, we’re not interested.” How did you finally turn them around to say, “Yes, we are interested”?

Tony Suppa: Friendly persuasion.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Tony Suppa: Convincing that- the Conservancy had a very good reputation.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: But, some people just didn’t believe in conservation. But, generally speaking, the Conservancy had a very good reputation. That was something that Josh Whetzel strived – that we would do nothing to taint the image or the reputation of the Conservancy.

Paul G. Wiegman: Now, you got yourself to around Ramcat Hollow, which is about two miles south of the actual town of Confluence. Did you get involved with the rest of that property from Ramcat to Confluence?

Tony Suppa: I can’t recall that, Paul.

Paul G. Wiegman: That would have been the Metheny property, then the Turkeyfoot Rod and Gun Club property.

Tony Suppa: I don’t recall the Conservancy acquiring that.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, okay. That may have been through the state. I’m still looking into exactly who did that acquisition.

Tony Suppa: Metheny is a name that’s familiar.

Paul G. Wiegman: Metheny would have been Ramcat. So, it would have taken it from River Road to the state park line – just a short distance. And, that would have been near Confluence.

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- Tony Suppa:** I don't know if you remember a person named Stuart Vanodeln?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, yes.
- Tony Suppa:** Okay.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, how does Stu fit into this?
- Tony Suppa:** Well, Stu lived in Ohiopyle.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yes.
- Tony Suppa:** And, he was a real estate person.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** Several generations of his family lived in that area, so he knew a lot of people. And, the fact that he was involved as a real estate salesperson – the Conservancy contracted with him to acquire some of the pieces. So, he was active in trying to pick up some of the voids that existed in that railroad right-of-way and was successful.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And was successful for what reason?
- Tony Suppa:** As a real estate person, he received a commission from his broker. He did the negotiating for the sales for the real estate office that held his license. And, the Conservancy would pay a commission to the broker's office and they would compensate him for his services.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Some of these things you and I know intimately. But, this is going to be something that people look at 30 years from now and wonder, "How did they ever do that?" So, we did use people outside of our staff?
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, in many instances, these were local people. And Stu was a good example.
- Tony Suppa:** That's right. And, as part of my program of trying to identify what had to be acquired and who owned it – we also looked at

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who, in the community, may open some doors for us. So, we would look at some of the community leaders.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Oh.

Tony Suppa:

Look at and contact some of the people that were known to be in the community for a long time, or may have even owned some of the real estate that the Conservancy was interested in.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa:

So, we used other consultants – law firms, surveyors, real estate people, people that owned businesses – we'd contact them. They would then open doors and help convey the Conservancy's message.

Paul G. Wiegman:

And, they may be a little bit more trusted than the Conservancy than somebody coming in from Pittsburgh...

Tony Suppa:

Right.

Paul G. Wiegman:

...and being from outside. So, there was local community involvement on this.

Tony Suppa:

In every area where the Conservancy had worked, there was local involvement of one form or another. And, that helped convey the Conservancy's messages and legitimized their mission – give it some value, give it some worth.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Was this considered – and I honestly don't remember this – but was this considered a bicycle trail from the very beginning?

Tony Suppa:

I think so, yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Okay.

Tony Suppa:

The more of a bike trail than a hiking trail because there were a lot of places where you could hike. For instance, the Laurel Ridge Trail...

Paul G. Wiegman:

Right.

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- Tony Suppa:** ...you can hike from Point A to Point B. But, I think it was more of a biking trail than anything else.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, from what I understand and, again, reading the Conservancy files, when the Western Maryland Railway first approached the Conservancy – and they had approached that before that – the National Parks Service and some other organizations, but finally came to the Conservancy. They wanted to go from Connellsville to Cumberland, Maryland. Do you have any insight into how this thing got done, squeezed down, or shrunk down to Ohiopyle to Confluence?
- Tony Suppa:** Well, I think there's several things involved. They were prepared to abandon the railroad use from Confluence to Dunbar. They didn't have a public utility use at that particular point because the Western Maryland was on one side and a B&O Railroad was on the other side.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It goes on the other side. Right.
- Tony Suppa:** But, as you got into Rockwood or Meyersdale into Somerset County, they were still taking coal out...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Tony Suppa:** ...and they were still taking timber. So, the timber was going out by rail, coal was going out by rail. But, they didn't need, sometimes, two tracks or three tracks, they could bring it down to one. So, there was concern about safety.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** You have an active railroad right-of-way...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** ...even though you may have a big buffer.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** And, each railroad had a service line that paralleled their right-of-way.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.

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- Tony Suppa:** So, as you got into the areas where there was active coal and active timber, there was concern about safety. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was also concerned about having to maintain bridges...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** ...and crossings, and viaducts. They were concerned, one, about the quality of the structure. The Conservancy did some engineering studies...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** ...on these bridges and it was determined that the bridges were really over-designed because back when the rail was first started, they had the coal and the steam engines.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm. Right.
- Tony Suppa:** And, if you look on the wheels, you had these great big weights. So, they started a cadence [arroom, arroom]. Well, the cadence also sets up vibration. So, the bridges were built to handle the cadence of the railroad.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Tony Suppa:** So, the engineering comes back and said, "Once you take the vibration – take the weight off of these bridges – they'll last forever.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, a bicycle's not going to...
- Tony Suppa:** that's right.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** But, again, they were not aesthetically pretty.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** No.
- Tony Suppa:** They may need painted...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** ...they may need sandblasted. You may have to replace some of the structural steel from time-to-time. So, the aesthetic

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value was a little bit negative by the Commonwealth. So, you take the safety, take some of these bridges – now, the Big Savage, which was an abandoned tunnel at one time...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...in very, very poor condition.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: They didn't want the responsibility of having to rebuild that tunnel, or rebuild the bridge over the Casselman, or several of them.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: So, it kept getting smaller and smaller. And then, we decided that the best thing to do to start this ball rolling – do it within the boundaries of the state park.

Paul G. Wiegman: Of the state park, okay.

Tony Suppa: That was feasible and everybody was comfortable with it.

Paul G. Wiegman: And Ohiopyle to Confluence – there are no bridges?

Tony Suppa: That's correct.

Paul G. Wiegman: You have two bridges in Ohiopyle. And then, once you pass Confluence, you have four Casselman bridges, the Salisbury Viaduct, and a couple tunnels, and it starts to get – there's a lot of maintenance there. It was interesting that the estimate on the original whole length- well, actually, it was Connellsville to the state line for repair, upgrade, and building the trail was something like \$3 million. That was the estimate in 1975. The actual cost of the Big Savage Tunnel was \$12 million...

[Chuckle]

Tony Suppa: Wow.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...just this past couple of years. We didn't get very close then. But, of course, in 1975 that was a different story. Was it the concern of DEP – well, the state parks and DEP at that time –

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to narrow this down? But, the Conservancy was in concert with that. We were realizing the same thing.

Tony Suppa: Yes. The Conservancy was willing to... I think the ambition was to go from Pittsburgh to D.C. I think everybody had that vision back in the '70s.

Paul G. Wiegman: I think that was Josh's vision, yeah.

Tony Suppa: But, you couldn't go across a ten-foot ditch with a six-foot jump, so let's take the six-foot bridge and go from there.

Paul G. Wiegman: Go from there.

Tony Suppa: And, it grew from there.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. I got a feeling in reading some of the letters and so forth, that there was a concern that if the bridge wasn't being used, that DEP would make us, would make the Conservancy or whoever owned the bridge – maybe the state at that time – tear it down. Do you remember that?

Tony Suppa: Well, if you look at part of the- and I'm not a scholar of railroad law – but the PUC and the ICC – Public Utility Commission, Interstate Commerce Commission – when the railroad would make application for abandonment...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...they were concerned and they would then assess who was responsible for removing the viaduct, removing the railroad grade crossing if it's no longer going to be used. For instance, you have railroads going through almost every city.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: The railroad's not going to use it, who's going to maintain that crossing?

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh.

Tony Suppa: So, when the railroad would petition the ICC and the PUC for abandonment, they would then determine who was responsible to take down the bridge, remove the grade

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crossing, take down the viaduct. But, the railroad wanted to convey everything lock, stock, and barrel.

Paul G. Wiegman: And barrel.

Tony Suppa: So, if it was owned by the Conservancy, or owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, somebody may petition and say, "Hey, it's a hazard, it's unsafe..."

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh.

Tony Suppa: ...and therefore, you have to take it down. Now, bridges that went across navigable streams...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: Not only did you have to take the structure down, but you had to remove the foundation below the water line.

Paul G. Wiegman: Wow.

Tony Suppa: And the ICC and the PUC could assess or could just say who was responsible to do that. So, there was a lot of unknowns. Now, the railroad was an entity – almost like a government to itself.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: And, it operated very efficiently and very smoothly for a long period of time. When it started to come apart by design because of overuse, duplications across streams – that they wanted to reduce their operating costs. They wanted to be able to pass that on to somebody else. Not necessarily operating costs, but maintenance.

Paul G. Wiegman: Maintenance costs. Right, right.

Tony Suppa: And, ongoing. So, when they would make a gift or a donation, like to the Conservancy, they also wanted to end their responsibility for maintenance.

Paul G. Wiegman: For maintenance. And, that was part of the...

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- Tony Suppa:** So, they looked at what was most feasible, what would have the least amount of cost or maintenance for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** ...and also for the Conservancy. The Conservancy's pockets weren't deep enough to handle all the bridges and crossings, and...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's exactly what appeared in one of the letters. That, if suddenly the PUC or the ICC came along and said, "Those bridges have to go," it would bankrupt the Conservancy immediately...
- Tony Suppa:** That's right.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** ...because there's some very large structures there.
- Tony Suppa:** And then, the Commonwealth, also, looking at the fact that they are a political body with the power of eminent domain, and also the right to tax, could be forced to use their taxing power dollars if they took title to these bridges and it turned out they had to be razed or demolished.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** So, they didn't want to be forced into a cost that they never anticipated.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. We move onto March of 1975. And, that's when the ICC gave the permission for the abandonment. It was 1975. And, on May 21, 1975, do you remember what happened?
- Tony Suppa:** Refresh my memory.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** We rode on the train.
- Tony Suppa:** Okay. The last train ride.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right? The last train ride. Yeah. There it is right there.
- Tony Suppa:** That's going across the Ohiopyle Bridge.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The High Bridge – the High Bridge at Ohiopyle.

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Tony Suppa: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Any reminiscence about the...?

Tony Suppa: Yes! Several.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay. Go ahead.

[Chuckle]

Tony Suppa: We started in Pittsburgh behind the Public Safety Building – the old B&O station.

Paul G. Wiegman: The old B&O station.

Tony Suppa: And, we left from there on a PLE and then on up into McKeesport.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: We had several cars. I don't know if you remember, but it got very warm.

[Chuckle]

Tony Suppa: The air conditioning went out on the train.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: And so, it was most uncomfortable. Some of the windows you could open, some of the windows you couldn't open.

Paul G. Wiegman: You couldn't open. Right.

[Chuckle]

Tony Suppa: So, we stopped a little more often and got off the train.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: And, managed to – I don't know how far we went. I forget.

Paul G. Wiegman: Hancock.

Tony Suppa: Hancock, Maryland.

Paul G. Wiegman: Hancock, Maryland. Yeah.

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- Tony Suppa:** And then, we got on buses and things and came back.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, came back. Yeah, yeah. And, we had dignitaries from government, we had state people, we had local people. I think Stu was on it, Stu Vanosdeln.
- Tony Suppa:** Stu was on it? Another real estate person that helped the Conservancy with its program as Al Musey, Musey Real Estate. Al Musey was on that train.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh. Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** Plus many foundation people.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Foundation people were on there.
- Tony Suppa:** And corporate people. The organizations that supported the Conservancy.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm. Right. As I remember, in the photographs I had seen, we had two cars. One was a vintage, Western Maryland Car, and the other one was a newer Amtrak dome car.
- Tony Suppa:** Dome car, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, I've been looking at some photographs though. Was there a train ride before that?
- Tony Suppa:** There was a high-wheeler before that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** A high-wheeler?
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah. What's a high-wheeler?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What's a high-wheeler?
- Tony Suppa:** If you look at trucks or cars that have railroad wheels on them?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** These are vehicles – could be a station wagon, it could be a truck, it could be like a suburban.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.

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- Tony Suppa:** And, hydraulically, you could lower the railroad wheels, and then the back tires would just skim...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The track.
- Tony Suppa:** ...the tracks and provide the propelling and also the braking. So, before the last train ride...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** I know myself, John, Josh, some of the people from the – we were in a suburban-type vehicle. It went from...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Tony Suppa:** ...probably from, maybe, Connellsville...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** ...to Hancock, Maryland.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** To Hancock. Just to get an idea of what you were going to see?
- Tony Suppa:** Right. Yeah. And they refer to them as – I believe the terminology is called a high-wheeler.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, I have some other photographs of, I believe, it was some of the board members and so forth getting off of an observation car. That would have been – if you remember the car we used in the Fallingwater anniversary with the big back window on it. It looks like that was- there was a trip with that train, too.
- Tony Suppa:** You're right. You're right. There was a maintenance-type vehicle...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yes.
- Tony Suppa:** ...which was an observation car. And you rode, and you would be looking from where you were...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** You were looking backwards. Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** ...backwards. Yes. That occurred. The first trip was the high-wheeler.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Was the high-wheeler.
- Tony Suppa:** The second trip was the observation car.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that must have been right around in November of, probably, I'm going to say '74, or something like that because there's a picture of somebody with a deer on their car. So, I'm assuming it was during hunting season.
- [Chuckle]
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah. Well, you refreshed my memory...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** ...that we made that trip.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. Who else was on that – was that the board?
- Tony Suppa:** I think it was the board. Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. And, that would have been to sell the board – the Conservancy Board – on this whole idea.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, it appears to me that the idea started with the railroad, brought in the Conservancy, started with John and Josh in the Conservancy. Then they introduced the board and then we got everybody really rolling.
- Tony Suppa:** Right. And then, the Conservancy and the board brought it to the Commonwealth – brought it to the state parks. Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Who was it take to in the state parks, in the Commonwealth? Would have been Marie Scoddard would have been the...
- Tony Suppa:** Well, that would be DER at that time...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** ...would be Marie Scoddard, yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Marie Scoddard. Okay.

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- Tony Suppa:** And then, down the land a little bit was a former Conservancy employee that became Secretary of DER and his name escapes me right now.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yes, Art Davis.
- Tony Suppa:** Art Davis. Right.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And then, of course, John.
- Tony Suppa:** And John. Well, John- but during the railroad era, Art Davis succeeded Dr. Goddard.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. He succeeded Dr. Goddard.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** There was a couple people in there between. I think Pete Duncan is in there between and some other. I'm not sure. I'll have to look that up.
- Tony Suppa:** But, there was a period of time that he was the Secretary of DER during the later years of the railroad.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** During the time that you were investigating all of the titles and so forth, were you getting support from the state at that point?
- Tony Suppa:** Well, the state was aware. We kept the state aware of what we were doing. We kept them apprised of the fact that we were getting most of the title.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** But, they didn't review the title. They didn't pass judgment. You know, once the Conservancy was confident that it had good title for the property, and we could convey good and marketable title to the Commonwealth, they accepted.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** They accepted that at that point?
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Let me look to see what we have here. I got the impression from the agreements that we sold first from the Youghiogheny Bridge at Confluence to Bruner Run. That was our first sale.

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But, you don't remember the Turkeyfoot Rod and Gun Club, so maybe that was an acquisition by the state.

Tony Suppa: I don't recall the state made any acquisitions on their own. They may have, Paul. But, there was a second conveyance from Bruner Run down to Dunbar at a later time.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, why was it at a later time?

Tony Suppa: Because you wanted to be able to get from Ohiopyle to Connellsville.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, right.

Tony Suppa: So, there were some problems with the acquisition in title with what they called the Wheeler Flat...

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: ...where Dunbar Creek would come into the Yough.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: From there into the city of Connellsville. There was also a bridge there. Because the railroad was higher coming across the creek, then it dropped down into the flats. So, there was a bridge there and they had to assess that. But, I think the second conveyance went from Bruner Run to Dunbar and that's where it stopped.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, that's where it stopped

Tony Suppa: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay. And then, from Dunbar into Connellsville was a whole 'nother...

Tony Suppa: But, I don't think the Conservancy got involved in that acquisition.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: There was a group formed in Connellsville...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh.

Tony Suppa: ...that was working from Connellsville to Dunbar.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** To Dunbar. And Dunbar is Bowest Yards?
- Tony Suppa:** That's right, Bowest.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** And, an individual had the responsibility for that as an employee of the City of Connellsville. But, I don't recall his name now.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Hmm. I'll have to dig around to see that. I didn't realize there was that connection, too.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Where did, actually, the Western Maryland end? Was it Wheeler Flats or was it Connellsville?
- Tony Suppa:** I'm not certain, Paul. When you were going through the Conservancy's files, there should have been rolls of maps that were called engineering drawings.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I saw a few of them.
- Tony Suppa:** Now, the railroads kind of did some things backwards. They were encouraged to come into the communities. And, sometimes they come into the community and they didn't have the right to put the rails or their tracks down. But, they did it anyhow.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Tony Suppa:** In the cities – for instance, in Connellsville, and the City of Pittsburgh, and elsewhere – they got the right-of-way as an ordinance. An ordinance was passed giving them the right to go through the City of Pittsburgh, or through Connellsville, or through Dunbar – whatever it might be.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. You had used that word, "ordinance," and I was wondering. And, they were actually given the...
- Tony Suppa:** They were given a right...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** They were given a right to do that.
- Tony Suppa:** They were given a right to go through the city.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** And then, once the railroad was built, then he went back and did engineering drawings and surveys...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
[Chuckle]
- Tony Suppa:** ...and showed the completed right-of-way from Point A to Point B.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, okay.
- Tony Suppa:** And, we had those maps. I say “we”- the Conservancy had those maps.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Conservancy had the maps.
- Tony Suppa:** And, they were enormous.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I’ll have to dig around to see if they come up. Because they should be something that gets into the mass of information.
- Tony Suppa:** Very detailed. You know, metes and bounds descriptions, lengths of properties, names of properties...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** ...longitude, latitude – a whole host of information. If someone would just blow up the right-of-way, you could take those drawings and re-engineer the right-of-way. That’s how detailed they were.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Re-engineer the right-of-way. I had a question – it slipped by me there. Those maps were done by the railroad, so they knew exactly... What was the right-of-way width in most places?
- Tony Suppa:** A single right-of-way is 33 feet.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** A double right-of-way is 66, 99. That’s...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It always goes in the 30s.

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- Tony Suppa:** Yeah. So, if you see a single line like going up along the Yough from Dunbar or Connellsville to Ohio...
Paul G. Wiegman: Right.
Tony Suppa: ...the right-of-way was 33 feet.
Paul G. Wiegman: Thirty-three feet.
Tony Suppa: Yeah. And then, there would also have to be cuts and fills.
Paul G. Wiegman: Right.
Tony Suppa: But, if it was on a level as far as the tracks, the ballast, and the width – it would be 33 feet.
Paul G. Wiegman: Did we, in the Conservancy, once we had that land do anything at all with it. Or, did we just sit and wait until the Commonwealth had taken it?
Tony Suppa: We just held it until the Commonwealth had... Now, before the railroad made the actual donation, they reserved certain rights.
Paul G. Wiegman: And they were?
Tony Suppa: They were – they had the right to remove the rails...
Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.
Tony Suppa: ...the ties, the switches, the frogs, the connectors...
Paul G. Wiegman: What's a frog?
Tony Suppa: It's the...
[Chuckle]
Paul G. Wiegman: Not the frog I'm thinking of.
Tony Suppa: No, no, no. It connects the switches from the line to switch from one to the other. The tie bars, when they put two rails together...
Paul G. Wiegman: Right.
Tony Suppa: ...there would be a tie bar together.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** But, they had the right to remove the rails which is excellent steel, and they probably used them elsewhere.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Tony Suppa:** And, they removed the ballasts, which was very good stone – limestone.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, it was very good limestone.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, once the abandonment had taken place, we were with a relatively flat, down to the base rock...
- Tony Suppa:** That's right.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** ...trail. And, of course, 2%, 3% grade, which is almost nothing.
- Tony Suppa:** And, the only erosion that would take place is where there were drainages that came off of hillsides.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** And they had little culverts.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** And sometimes those culverts would get plugged up. So, you had that type of erosion. But, it was minimal.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I think something's that always amazed me – and especially when I started to look at the photographs that were taken on the last ride... And then, Bill, and Skip, and I walked it a couple of times around Ohiopyle. It was wide open. It was like walking down a country road. There were no trees around at all. And, if you ride it now, you're in for it. The trees have completely covered it over. It's a tunnel through the forest in that 30 years.
- Tony Suppa:** Whoa.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It's grown in. Now, of course, the railroad cleared beyond their trackage, and they kept the trees cut back, so when the trains

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were going through there wasn't fire. End of Bruner Run – take longer – we went over public reaction. Do you have any good little stories on – nobody chased you with a shotgun?

Tony Suppa: I can't recall somebody being very belligerent.

Paul G. Wiegman: Really?

Tony Suppa: As I mentioned, there was concern. But, I think the Conservancy, along with some of the local people, was able to convince them that this is a compliment to Ohiopyle, Ohiopyle State Park – that it would bring more people in and also, you'd have an opportunity to tie some of these communities together.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: Because if you had to go from Ohiopyle to Confluence – I think, like, nine miles maybe?

Paul G. Wiegman: No. Well, it's 11 miles by train – by railroad...

Tony Suppa: By... Okay.

Paul G. Wiegman: But, I think it's 12 or 13 by road.

Tony Suppa: But, the same thing going to Connellsville.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Tony Suppa: You can go down the right-of-way and be in Connellsville a lot quicker than you can by going on 711 or whatever it might be.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right. Or, up over the hill through Dunbar. That's a long way.

Tony Suppa: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: I figured there was somebody that chased you with a shotgun, or...

Tony Suppa: No.

Paul G. Wiegman: No – didn't? Doggone. I wanted a good story for all of this.

[Chuckle]

Tony Suppa: Yeah.

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Paul G. Wiegman: It takes time, though, to do that negotiation. You probably had to go back to people two, three, four, a dozen times.

Tony Suppa: The Conservancy was persistent.

Paul G. Wiegman: And patient.

Tony Suppa: And patient. Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. And that's negotiations.

Tony Suppa: Yeah. And, you look at conservation – conservation is today into maybe eternity. So, we didn't have to rush. The Conservancy didn't have to rush.

Paul G. Wiegman: Hmm.

Tony Suppa: There was a – I call it a third-generation program. Well, you go back in the 1930s when the Conservancy was formed – if you look in some of the files, some of our board members, some of the founders of the Conservancy – Josh and John dealt with some of the same people that we acquired at a later time. The first generation usually did the pioneering...

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: ...the clearing of the land. Second generation was part of it. They worked it. They enjoyed it. The third generation came along and it became a burden. So, they were willing to convert that burden to cash and the Conservancy had the means to do that. But, they weren't looking just to acquire any piece of property, it had to fit into their program.

Paul G. Wiegman: Had to fit in.

Tony Suppa: By the time the third generation inherited the property, we were very successful – the Conservancy was successful in being able to acquire it. Again, I think that tells the story of the reputation, and the longevity, and the long-term commitment that the Conservancy had.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. That's quite a statement. Do you know of any other rail trail that was before that that we started in 1974?

Tony Suppa: No, I think that was the first.

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Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: I believe that it was the first conversion of the rails-to-trails.

Paul G. Wiegman: At the very least, it was the first conversion of a major railroad like that.

Tony Suppa: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: There may have been some smaller ones. Now, the Indian Creek fits in here somewhere – the Indian Creek Railroad fits in here somewhere.

Tony Suppa: Of course, if you look at Indian Creek – where it goes, and I refer to Point A to Point B – we’re at Confluence with the Yough.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: And then it went into the mountains and terminated. Or, actually, it probably began at Krieger.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Tony Suppa: Yeah. And again, it was used to bring coal and timber out of the mountains.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: The railroad – the public utility – the railroad was a public utility.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: It’s commission – it’s right – was public transportation.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: Either for commercial or for passenger. So, their right to exist was either formed by a deed that gave them the right-of-way for a term called “railroad purposes.”

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: And, when they abandoned their public utility or their railroad purpose, the property would revert either to the adjacent property owners...

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Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...or back to the original property owners. Some of the deeds were written in a way that it reverted back...

Paul G. Wiegman: To the original property...

Tony Suppa: ...to the original grantors.

Paul G. Wiegman: Who may be 100 years ago.

Tony Suppa: A hundred years. Yeah. So, then you'd have to find out who succeeded them – their heirs and assigns.

Paul G. Wiegman: Wow.

Tony Suppa: Then, the other way that the railroad was able to acquire their right-of-way was through eminent domain.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: And, they had the power of eminent domain. But, when they used their power of eminent domain, they did it sparingly.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: But, it was for railroad purposes only. So, it would then revert.

Paul G. Wiegman: Would revert. Okay.

Tony Suppa: But, when you get into the 1910, 1912 assemblage, that's when the light comes on and said, "Hey, we're paying the fair share. Why not acquire fee title?"

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: And then, from that point on, they started to acquire fee title.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, that made it easier for us later on.

Tony Suppa: Right. But, Indian Creek went way back. And, probably 90% of the Indian Creek Railroad right-of-way, when it was abandoned, reverted.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh.

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- Tony Suppa:** But again, we got lucky, because the Municipal Water Authority of Westmoreland County owned most of the land where it went.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Tony Suppa:** Except in a small stretch between Champion and Indian Head.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. And, Champion is the road that goes to Somerset, and Indian Head is the...
- Tony Suppa:** Champion goes to Seven Springs.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Sure, Seven Springs. Yeah. And Indian Head...
- Tony Suppa:** And, Indian Head goes up over the mountain...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Also to Seven...
- Tony Suppa:** ...also to Seven Springs.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** ...Seven Springs. But, it's further downstream.
- Tony Suppa:** So, if you look at the, we'll call, the Youghiogheny end – we'll call that the end and call Krieger the beginning – the Municipal Water Authority of Westmoreland County owned both of them. And who ended up with that ownership? Do you recall?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, the Conservancy had it at one point.
- Tony Suppa:** That's right. Well, the Conservancy acquired it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The Conservancy... Right.
- Tony Suppa:** It was a gift and a partial acquisition from the water authority.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Tony Suppa:** So, 90% of Indian Creek Railroad's right-of-way was owned by the water authority.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Water authority.
- Tony Suppa:** And, they gave the Conservancy a license agreement to use and operate that right-of-way.

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Paul G. Wiegman: Okay. I had gotten a feeling from some of the correspondence that we were going through the Western Maryland process – at that point, it was the B&O owned the Western Maryland. And, somebody in the B&O said, “Oh, by the way, we also have this Indian Creek. Do you want to throw that in?” So, is that the case?

Tony Suppa: They did. But, our research showed that they had nothing to convey.

Paul G. Wiegman: They had nothing to convey.

Tony Suppa: And the term used back then – it’s still used today – they would sell you the Brooklyn Bridge if you wanted it.

[Chuckle]

And, many times they would convey a deed, and the deed was usually a quit claim deed. So, whatever rights, title, and interest they had, you received.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: But, if they owned nothing, you got nothing.

Paul G. Wiegman: Nothing.

[Chuckle]

Tony Suppa: That’s right.

Paul G. Wiegman: That was very generous of them.

Tony Suppa: That’s right. And they did that many times.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Tony Suppa: And not only through organizations like the Conservancy, but throughout the United States.

Paul G. Wiegman: But, although it was offered by the B&O, just kind of peripheral to the Western Maryland, we really ended up through the Westmoreland Municipal Authority.

Tony Suppa: That’s right. And, our research, then, determined that the right-of-way reverted to the adjacent property owners...

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** When they had abandoned it.
- Tony Suppa:** ...and the water authority with the adjacent property.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** So, that's how Wally Colburn got the right to build his little Indian Creek...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Trail...
- Tony Suppa:** ...Trail down to the river.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, right.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** 1978 was the conveyance from the Conservancy to DER. So, we started back in 1973 and five years later, we conveyed the land. Is five years a long time for a project or a short time?
- Tony Suppa:** Short time.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** That was a short project. If you think some of the projects the Conservancy was involved in, they went on for decades.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** They went on for a long time.
- Tony Suppa:** And some of them are still ongoing today since 1930, 1940.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right. Then, in February of 1986, that's when the Bowest was transferred. So, it was another eight years before Bowest went to DCNR.
- Tony Suppa:** Another reason for the piece within the state park – if the railroad didn't own one small piece or three small pieces, and it was determined that it reverted, it reverted to the Commonwealth because you were within the boundaries of the state park.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Even though it may have been a piece that was owned by somebody else originally?
- Tony Suppa:** No, no, no, no. I think that the B&O or the Western Maryland acquired about 80% of their right-of-way in fee title.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** And the Conservancy got that. But, there was some pieces. But, where they were within the boundaries of the state park, the Conservancy didn't have to go out. If they reverted, they reverted to the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth actually owned them before the Conservancy even acquired it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The name that I can just use is, like, Mitchell, because the Mitchell farm was part of Ohio State Park. So, if the Mitchell farm came down across the railroad – and before the park was there – the Mitchell's owned this little piece. And then, when the park was built and the Mitchell farm was purchased, that little piece of the railroad became a part of the park.
- Tony Suppa:** So, let's assume that the deed from the Mitchells...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** ...to the railroad said: "for railroad purposes only." And upon abandonment, it would revert.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It would revert.
- Tony Suppa:** To whoever owned...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** To whoever owned it. And, the park had it.
- Tony Suppa:** So, the successor in title to Mitchell was the Commonwealth. So, you didn't have to go any further.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh. Okay. So, in some ways, it was a fairly easy...
- Tony Suppa:** That's right. And, the duration – you asked the question, was this a long project or short?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** Really, it was a short project.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Short project.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.

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Paul G. Wiegman: February 1991, the last 120 acres was finally transferred. And really, at that point, it ended the involvement of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

Tony Suppa: In railroad conversions. Yes.

Paul G. Wiegman: In the railroad conversions. But, you were involved a little bit further. You worked with the Somerset people a little bit. You want to talk about that a little bit. How that...?

Tony Suppa: Well, I think the excitement – I'll use the term "excitement" that was generated by the Ohiopyle – we'll look at the state park right-of-way.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right. And I would add that it was in 1986 that the trail first opened. And that was from Ramcat Hollow to Ohiopyle. That's the first section of trail that opened – with Larry Adams as the superintendent. And, I'll be talking to Larry very soon. And, it's an interesting story how he did that and how he built the trail. It was kind of done on the weekends and at night. But, there was a lot of excitement then, in '86. So, go ahead. Suddenly...

Tony Suppa: Well, the excitement started to build.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: And it started to filter out from – we'll call the nucleus, which was Ohiopyle – into other areas. Hank Parke, for one.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Tony Suppa: I believe that was the Somerset, or the Meyersdale, or Rockwood...

Paul G. Wiegman: That was the Somerset.

Tony Suppa: Somerset. And then, there were other groups that got the idea. You know, "We'll take it from here and go to here." But, funding was a major problem. And then also, in some of these areas where you had the crossings, and you had the bridges, and you had the Savage tunnels and things of that nature...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

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- Tony Suppa:** ...so you had some costs involved. And, you had some concerns that was avoided in the first conveyance by the Conservancy. But again, people like Hank Parke, and the Steel Valley Heritage, and other organizations came in and recognized that this is a great opportunity to acquire these rights-of-way and put them to a use.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** And then, you also had another organization that helped us immensely. And that was the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Tony Suppa:** ...because now it's working on a national level.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** They were responsible for legislation that was called railbanking.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. Do you remember when railbanking...? I haven't looked that up yet.
- Tony Suppa:** Okay. I want to say that it was the early '80s – '81, '82, '83.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, it was after...
- Tony Suppa:** Yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** ...we did the Western Maryland.
- Tony Suppa:** Because the abandonment of railroads rights-of-way was proliferating all over the United States.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** Because there was such redundancy of these railroads. And, a lot of them were built to bring in and remove natural resources.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** And, the resources exhausted, so...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.

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- Tony Suppa:** ...you headed out west. But, if I remember correctly, Pennsylvania, probably, has more miles of rail conversion than most other states.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I think it- yes, yes.
- Tony Suppa:** But, the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy brought national attention...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** ...to the conversion. It also brought some controversy because the question of reversionary interest...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** ...became a big concern, because some of these pieces of property were very valuable.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yes.
- Tony Suppa:** I mean, they went through very valuable parts of the United States. So, everybody wants to hang onto what their ownership. But, the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy was able to put through legislation which created railbanking. So, if the right-of-way...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** Or, say the use was in operation...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** And the railroad wanted to discontinue that use...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. They wanted to stop trains.
- Tony Suppa:** They wanted to stop the trail, they wanted to stop their maintenance, they wanted to pick up the rails.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Rails. Okay.
- Tony Suppa:** Rather than petition for abandonment, they could convey it into the railbanking. The federal legislation gave them that right – as long as it was not abandoned. And, the idea was if there was an organization, corporation, a conservancy,

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whatever, for nonprofit, who was willing to take title to the right-of-way...

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: ...exclusive of the rails, the switches, the turnouts, the frog...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...all that kind of stuff. The railroad would remove all those assets or the use. And, if it was ever needed for a public right-of-way again for national emergencies, it could then be converted back into a railroad right-of-way.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Tony Suppa: But, that had to take place before it was abandoned.

Paul G. Wiegman: They had to petition for that?

Tony Suppa: No. There had to be an organization willing...

Paul G. Wiegman: To take it.

Tony Suppa: ...take and manage it.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay. So, the railroad would come in and say, "We're going to petition." An organization would come along and say, "We'll take it."

Tony Suppa: "We'll take it."

Paul G. Wiegman: And, if that organization was there...

Tony Suppa: Right.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...then it could be abandoned. But, it could be used again.

Tony Suppa: That's right. If there was a national emergency – a war...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...and you had to get ammunitions, or whatever, from a Point A to Point B, the hiking and biking trail would just stop, the rails would go down, and the trains would run again.

Paul G. Wiegman: The trains would run again.

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Tony Suppa: And Congress provided the legislation for the railbanking. And the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy was the organization that created that legislation. And they also helped provide a lot of funds – ISTEA came into play.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, you might want to say what ISTEA is. I'm sure in ten years, it's not going to be ISTEA anymore.

Tony Suppa: Well, I don't know what the actual – the initials spell out ISTEA...

Paul G. Wiegman: Interstate Transportation Enhancement Authority. I think that's what it is.

Tony Suppa: And what it was is federal legislation for funds that came from – I'm not certain.

Paul G. Wiegman: I think it's from the trans...

Tony Suppa: Oh, the Transportation – Department of Transportation...

Paul G. Wiegman: Transportation Fund. Right

Tony Suppa: ...to be used for the conversion of rails to trails.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, some of the Somerset County is with ISTEA money.

Tony Suppa: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: Some of the work that was done. Because the Conservancy worked on Confluence, Ramcat to Ohio pyle, and then, of course, to Bowest – two bridges. And both of them were in Ohio pyle. One they used right away and the other they tore down and put a new one on. But, when you talked about Confluence to the state line, again, there's four Casselman bridges, the Salisbury Viaduct, the Keystone Viaduct, the Big Savage Tunnel. There's a lot more to be – and the Pinkerton Tunnel – so there's a lot more to be done on those.

Tony Suppa: But, the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy, the ISTEA funding from the Department of Transportation made that all possible – it helped.

Paul G. Wiegman: You stayed right on top of Rails-To-Trails even after we got out of that mode in the Conservancy, didn't you?

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- Tony Suppa:** Well, yes. I was probably one of the few remaining – well, maybe the only one – on the Conservancy staff that I thought that it was something that was going to happen, and going to grow, and grow, and grow. It has.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It has.
- Tony Suppa:** And, I would have hoped that the Conservancy would have played a continued role in that conversion...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** ...in the city's interest, not only from taking title if they're able to assemble it but also for financial health.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** And, that wasn't forthcoming. And, it didn't happen until I'll say the second term of the Ridge administration – or actually, John's tenure as Secretary of Conservation.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** You pointed out that once the Conservancy ended and we had this 1991 trail built, it really didn't pick up a lot of popularity until the mid-1990s. And, of course, that's when John came in. So, before John, the trail was nice. It was nice and you had this bike trail. And the Oil Creek Bike Trail had been built. But then, after that, it really started to pick up. And people were saying, "We want to go further than Ramcat Hollow." "We want to go further than Ohiopyle." And, I think people in Confluence were saying, "Why can't we have all those people coming in and buying ice cream in Confluence, or eating at Sisters, or doing those things?" And then Rockwood started to say, "Well, we want to be part of this, too." And, I think that filtered into the political arena. And, John came in at that time. And, of course, John knew about the trail from way back in the '70s. So, I think John took the interest as DCNR at that point. That was the first DCNR secretary, and I think he took the interest in it and was starting to be able to funnel money towards the various projects. Now, the other thing was – and this is an interesting story that Linda will tell – that you had Steel Valley, you had Mon Valley, you had the Mon-Yough, you had the Youghiogheny North – you had all these groups – Montour. All these groups were going to John and saying we want money.

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And, you and I know John. John, like, put it on one piece of paper.

Tony Suppa: Bullets. Bullets.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, bullets. Bullets.

Tony Suppa: That's right.

Paul G. Wiegman: One piece of paper and bullets.

Tony Suppa: Mm-hmm.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, he said to Linda, "I don't know who all these people are. I can't give that much money out." And, that's where they pulled together, I think – and I'm going to find out, I hope, through these other interviews – this whole idea of the ATA, so you could funnel it through there. Explain very clearly what had been done and what segments, and what needed to be done in what other segments. And, it was clear. It was in bullets, it was clear. John was able to understand it easily. And, the money began to flow in.

Tony Suppa: I mentioned the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy. And, I'm not here to promote their organization.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: Because I think the Conservancy, really, was the catalyst, the nucleus, that started this whole ball of wax rolling. But, the national interest that the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy created all over the United States... And if you look in the City of Pittsburgh, in the last five to seven years...

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Tony Suppa: ...what has happened? You have trails going almost everywhere.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Tony Suppa: So, you also have trail groups within the City of Pittsburgh.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: But, the party that helped us immensely was Mayor Murphy.

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Paul G. Wiegman: Oh. Yes.

Tony Suppa: And, I'm not sitting here criticizing Mayor Murphy.

Paul G. Wiegman: No, no.

Tony Suppa: But, Mayor Murphy was also a board member of the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, right.

Tony Suppa: So, that group grew. It grew in power. It had political clout, not only in the City of Pittsburgh but all over the United States. I went to two of their conferences.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, did you really? I didn't realize that.

Tony Suppa: Yeah. One in Florida...

Paul G. Wiegman: Uh-huh.

Tony Suppa: ...it was actually Clearwater. And, they have the Pinellas Trail...

Paul G. Wiegman: In Florida?

Tony Suppa: ...in Florida, which goes into Clearwater, but it goes north through Dunedin – just beautiful sections along the bay.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, boy. That would be great.

Tony Suppa: Yeah. And then, there was another rails-to-trails in California. That was the first one that I went to.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Tony Suppa: So, as John insisted that there be a local nucleus...

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: ...that would bring all these together...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...the Rails-To-Trails Conservancy brought all the trail groups together throughout the United States.

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Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay. Okay. The Hot Metal Bridge across the Monongahela, from the South Side to this side of the river – the city-side of the river – that is an ATA project. That's an old Allegheny Trail Alliance project. So, this thing called The Great Allegheny Passage really goes from The Point in Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland. That's what they take in. That's the umbrella that they cover. So, they're very much involved. And, Linda is working in Harrisburg to get funds – highway money and other money – to do these kinds of projects. But then, other people are fitting in the South Side Trail. And, you're right, Mayor Murphy was there.

Tony Suppa: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, I will be interviewing him to get this – Pittsburgh into the trail.

Tony Suppa: And, I'm sure that he can bring in the national organization.

Paul G. Wiegman: Mm-hmm.

Tony Suppa: And, it helped to create awareness. And then, other groups have formed.

Paul G. Wiegman: I was going to say, was he on the '75 ride? But, he wouldn't have – he may not have been born then.

[Chuckle]

Tony Suppa: No. I think he was. But, he was a marathoner, he was a runner...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: ...he was a biker.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Tony Suppa: And, with his political clout in the City of Pittsburgh, and as the mayor of a big city, and so...

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Tony Suppa: And, the City of Pittsburgh's been a first in a number of things that go back a number of years.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** The old smoky city, the Redevelopment Authority.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Who you worked for at one point.
- Tony Suppa:** At one time, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mostly we can sit back and say, “We were the visionaries that started the Rails-To-Trails, worked on the Western Maryland, and brought a lot of this together – got a lot of this started.
- Tony Suppa:** We all go back a number of years...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** A couple.
- Tony Suppa:** ...and I think we take – well, I’ll speak for myself – you take pride in what we’ve done and what we’ve been involved in.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** I worked for the Redevelopment Authority of City of Pittsburgh for 15 years during the period of time that the stadium was built. And, my responsibility there was Director of Acquisition and Relocation. So, I helped acquire and demolish the big scrap piles. And, the Allegheny Conference, obviously, it played a major role...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** ...in the City of Pittsburgh. And, they had their annual meeting out there in Carnegie. Bob Pease was the Executive Director of the Redevelopment Authority when I worked there. He was also the Executive Director of the Allegheny Conference. And, when it was decided that they were going to demolish and raze Three Rivers Stadium, his comment to me was, “Something that you had a part in, that was built and operated and now is being torn down just tells you that you have reached maturity, and you’re getting old.”
- [Laughter]
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** How do you feel about being a part of The Great Alleghany Passage – 400,000 people a year now.
- Tony Suppa:** I'm proud of that. I think that it's something that's going to benefit...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** ...and compliment not only the City of Pittsburgh but other cities – D. C., C&O Canal. Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, yeah. Confluence, Ohiopyle. Oh, that reminds me. Somebody asked me about the raft companies. What was their reaction – the various – Ralph McCarty and Lance Martin, everybody that was running rafts in Ohiopyle? What was their reaction on this trail going through?
- Tony Suppa:** I think they were positive. I don't recall them ever being a negative thing, saying that it was going to take away from their use.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** That people are going to use the trail and not want to raft the river.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. I had heard differently, but that's interesting because you were on the ground doing it.
- Tony Suppa:** The party that I dealt with, that was involved with the rafting, was Stuart Vanosdeln...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Tony Suppa:** ...and he was a little bit of maverick in that community.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Tony Suppa:** Especially with the rafting – how he got his location, things of that nature. But, I think they looked at it again as just growth – bringing more people in. If they're going to bike, maybe they're going to raft – or vice versa.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Or vice versa. Yeah.
- Tony Suppa:** Yeah.

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Paul G. Wiegman: And, there's certainly opportunity there. Was Stu in favor of it?

Tony Suppa: Oh, yes, yes.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, he was very much in favor of it. Well, good. Thank you.

Tony Suppa: My pleasure. My pleasure. This gives me an opportunity to reminisce.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. It's always great to reminisce.

Tony Suppa: Yes.

[End 01:11:46]

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