

**SARASOTA COUNTY WATER ATLAS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA — SPRING 2010**



Dr. Mary Jelks earned the nickname "Myakka Mary" for the amount of time and money she has spent in service to the Myakka River and Myakka River State Park. In 1961, Dr. Jelks moved to Sarasota with her husband Allen to start their pediatric allergy practice. In addition to practicing medicine, Dr. Jelks has collected daily pollen counts from her home for over 40 years. She founded the Friends of the Myakka in 1993 and has been an active member of many different environmental groups in the area. In 1994 Dr. Jelks and her family formed the Jelks Family Foundation, an organization with a focus on conservation of natural resources, helping Sarasota County to purchase the 614-acre Jelks Preserve along the Myakka River. She is deeply committed to Sarasota, which she believes is "a view of paradise."

Editor's note: To learn more about the plants that Dr. Jelks mentions in this interview, visit the [Florida Plant Atlas](#) maintained by the University of South Florida's Institute of Systematic Botany.

Interview with: Dr. Mary Jelks
Date of Interview: March 26th, 2010
Interviewer: David Anderson
Subject of Interview: Myakka River
Transcriber: David Anderson

Anderson: It's the 26th of March and I'm talking with Dr. Mary Jelks about the Myakka River, and do you just want to start and introduce yourself?

Jelks: Well I'm a retired pediatric allergist, and in the early 1990s we had a problem with the river rangers who take care of the Myakka River, had no equipment and they were hired by the state to monitor the river. Yet they had no equipment to do this. No boats... and we thought they needed some equipment so they could do their job better. So that's why we developed the citizens' support organization. Most citizens' support organizations are for the park itself. But I felt this was equally important to help the river rangers. So that's the way we set it up, so that we took care of both.

Anderson: And that was the Friends of the Myakka?

Jelks: The Friends of the Myakka, mm hmm. And right on we were lucky in finding people like Mr. Abraham who liked the park very much and wanted to help in developing equipment to help the park. 30,000 acres of the park is a lot of land and we do have the rangers at the park, but having good equipment to do some of the things they have to do was needed. And we were able to enlist some wealthy donors to help us on this.

Anderson: I read in the *Herald Tribune* that you did a lot of the fundraising in the beginning by yourself?

Jelks: Yes, what we would do is try to get people to help with certain events. We started having events at the park where we would have picnics and that sort of thing. And actually we were lucky in finding people in the membership. If it's individual membership, it's 25 dollars and if it's a family, it's 35 dollars, and we've stayed at that level even today. If you want to be a corporate member, they give 100 dollars each year. And there are some that are lifetime members who give like 500 dollars. Then we needed to get people interested in things like—Meg Lowman started the fundraising for the walk up in the tree tops and that project brought in a lot of people interested in the park. There are some families who have given great amounts over the years and have contributed a lot to the park. The Boylston family gave a great deal to the park. Mr. Boylston was an attorney and he's no longer alive, but his family has given huge amounts to the park. They have one little area there that has his name on it and it's right near the base of the walkway. So that's an area where you can see little bits of different parts of the park in that area. It's a good little walk around that thing to get a feel for the park. Mrs. Boylston was on our board of directors, but she has family spread over the whole country so she likes to go out and visit her family, so she is no longer a director.

Anderson: Have you lived in this house your whole life?

Jelks: No, actually, I was born and raised in Illinois. We lived on a farm there. I had one brother and my father was a farmer who raised corn and other crops and he would feed out cattle. He usually got a hundred head of cattle from Colorado every fall. And then we would feed them out there on the farm. Raising corn and feeding them corn to fatten them up so they could go to the market about the first of July. As time went on WWII came along, my father had served in the First World War, but my brother went into the army at 18, and at that time, every working-aged man was into the service. And there was no help, so I helped my father farm this area and take care of the cattle. And I did that, oh throughout my high school years.

Anderson: What was that like?

Jelks: Well you've worked very hard. And you just had to do it because there was no help, haha. And at that time, horses weren't used as much, so being able to drive a tractor would help pretty much on the farm, once the work became mechanized in that way. So then my brother was in the Army. He came home, finished high school about that time. And I had earned a scholarship to go

to a teacher's college there. But I had an aunt who said, well if you want to go into medicine—and actually, my background is... I helped my father butcher, so I got very curious about what does a liver do, what does a lung do, and what do all these parts of the body do? So I was interested in medicine, and she said if you're going into medicine, you have to go to a university. So she lived in Lincoln, Nebraska. And she was alone; her husband traveled all the time so she needed someone to help her in her home. So I went out there and stayed and went to University of Nebraska in Lincoln, and then I went to the medical school in Omaha. And when I got through there, I applied for Johns Hopkins as an internship. And that's where I met my husband who had gone to medical schools and all that sort of thing in Emory and in the South. But, we met there and eventually we found a lot of common caring about area parks and that sort of thing so after we spent about two years teaching medical students when they were first in their clinical years at the University of Florida, and I enjoyed teaching the field of allergy to the students, and we spent two years in Gainesville. And at that point we really wanted to have our own practice and we moved here to Sarasota in about 1960, and we've lived here ever since. And Sarasota has changed a great deal. It has grown very rapidly and isn't the sleepy little fishing village it used to be. And in the field of allergy, I took a great interest in trying to find what is in the air. And I felt like the public had a right to know what they're breathing. So if they're having problems with allergies to certain things, they know that that's in the air. So that's when I started counting pollens and molds. I did start mainly with Sarasota, but then I started doing it for Tampa, Tallahassee... I did Miami for about four years. They had nobody down there that wanted to sit and count the pollens, so they would collect the slides and ship them to me. Once a week, I'd get a box of slides from there. I did a similar thing for Guatemala. There was an allergy specialist in Tampa, who said, well his people he took care of in Guatemala really needed to find out what was in the air, so I took a piece of equipment down there called a Kramer Collins—it's very similar to what I have here on my roof. I told them how to do the slide, and they would send a box about once a week and I counted their pollen, which was interesting. I spent about a week down there talking with people who understood mold spores and that sort of thing. So I've really enjoyed doing this for other countries.

Anderson: Yeah, that's really neat. How long does it take to count the slides?

Jelks: Well, if it's pretty moist, you have a lot of mold spores, it very often takes at least two hours.

Anderson: Wow, do you do this volunteer?

Jelks: Mm hmm. This is all volunteer. I do it for Tampa on a volunteer—uh, actually just a matter of collecting the stuff and then you sit and count it—takes a lot of time, but I feel like the people have a right to know what's in the air.

Anderson: So you were a pediatrician?

Jelks: Yes, I had a background in pediatrics, but then in Baltimore, I got interested in the field of allergy. They had some very great people there, so I started doing that, and then in Gainesville, they really needed someone to teach about allergy.

Anderson: So you moved here in the sixties, then. I'm sure it's completely changed.

Jelks: Oh yes, yes.

Anderson: Are there any things that you loved to do that were here then that aren't here now?

Jelks: Well we used to do a good deal of fishing. The Myakka River was a good place to go and get a little vacation from the city life. And it wasn't too difficult to go the few miles to get there and put in a little—we had a three-horsepower outboard motor, about 12 foot long, and we'd take that and go fishing. And the four children, we had two boys and two girls, and they all enjoyed learning how to fish.

Anderson: That sounds really nice. What kinds of fish would you guys catch?

Jelks: Well our favorite one was snook. Because they gave a little fight. You had to really work at it to bring them in or they'd get away from you. They'd jump in the air and spit the hook out. But there are a lot of other fish too. So we always enjoyed the snook more than the others.

Anderson: Is the fishing still good?

Jelks: Yes. In fact, when I was doing that clean-up, there was a fisherman there. It was a horrible day, rainy and miserable and this guy was under that bridge, down there under that bridge. He caught a 27-inch snook right there. And they kept saying why do you clean up this river? Why do you care so much about it? I said that's why, because you can still catch a snook in there.

Anderson: You do the clean-up every...

Jelks: About two times a year, since 1993 I started doing it twice a year.

Anderson: And has the amount of trash gotten more and more?

Jelks: It's been worse some years than others. I would say more recently, they're a little less apt to throw stuff away. And I think some of the young delinquents of the neighborhoods have gotten tamed somewhat. There was a time there about 7 or 8 years ago where all the youth from Venice and areas like that would come out there and they had a big rope hanging from a tree. And they would go through the water with that. And at that site, they were throwing their broken beer bottles in there and I thought it was terrible. So one of the river rangers and I would cut the rope down. Within a week, it would be right back up there. And you think about these youth, kind of crazy on drink, would get cut to pieces in that water, but you cut the rope down, they get

it right back up the next week.

Anderson: It's a losing battle. Wasn't there a train called the Silver Comet or something? Was there a train that used to go up north from Sarasota?

Jelks: Oh yeah, well there were two different stations where you could get on the train, and if we took a train trip, we would get a bedroom car, and that way you could be together and enjoy the train ride. This meant you had to take about a week or two vacation and that's pretty hard to do when you're responsible for a lot of people.

Anderson: Being a pediatrician?

Jelks: Yeah, you come back from your vacation, everybody says, we really needed you while you were gone. Why did you go away?

Anderson: Yeah, a lot of people with allergies.

Jelks: They get sort of dependent on you.

Anderson: I used to have allergies as a kid. And sometimes here, I guess there is a lot of tree pollen.

Jelks: Yeah, it gets back in the tree season. Right now the numbers are up in the thousands. It's kind of strange, you know, you become a tree watcher. And one thing I noticed: The oak pollen comes in different groups. The laurel oak is the first one that blooms, usually early February. And about two or three weeks after it's been blooming, then the live oak blooms. And then there are other oaks that come. Kind of a cascade of them, one after another. So at the end of, say, May or June, the last oak that blooms is the little running oak [*Quercus pumila*]. This is a little oak you find out there in the Myakka area. It grows about 18 inches high at the most. That's the last oak that blooms in the year.

Anderson: Why's it so tiny?

Jelks: Um, I don't know. It's a different species.

Anderson: I read that back in the late 70s or something that Sarasota had worse allergies than a lot of other places. Did it have something to do with the phosphate mines polluting the air?

Jelks: Well, probably ozone is the worst thing. And with traffic you get a lot more ozone. That's the one that we aren't able to keep below the level it should be. It's mainly from heavy traffic and cars stopping and starting along the highway. Ozone is very irritating and it's a little bit like when people develop allergies, they can be turned on during a flu—a viral infection. And for some reason the infection makes them more apt to react against whatever they're breathing. So

when people are having viral infections in the winter months, frequently, that's when they start a new allergy to something. And the inflamed respiratory tract from breathing ozone is another instance where you're more apt to get sensitive to new pollen at that time.

Anderson: I've never heard that before. That's very interesting.

Jelks: Well I'm pretty sure, very often a viral infection makes them more prone to develop an allergy. Intestinal infections where you have vomiting and diarrhea, the gastric system is inflamed. And that's a time when very often you get allergic to a new food. Prior to that, you never had any trouble with that, and then after that, every time you eat it, you have trouble. So that's a common finding. I think it's important people realize that when you get one of these viral infections, it's a time when you ought to filter your air more. To keep from being exposed to a lot of the pollens.

Anderson: Wow, I'm learning stuff. So was the Jelks Foundation...

Jelks: We didn't really start that until... well... it was probably the latter eighties. It's when we found this Jelks property. It appeared like they were going to develop that area. And we thought that would ruin the Myakka River to build a bunch of condos along there and overpopulate it with people who might not care for it. So at that time was when we decided we would help the county buy this property and put it in public domain so it wouldn't become a condo site.

Anderson: Can you describe the piece of property?

Jelks: In that pamphlet there, it's got the river along it, and it's one of the winding, pretty areas there. So actually that land if you have that as a buffer, so you don't let people build marinas and things that would detract from the river.

Anderson: What about the other side?

Jelks: Well when we got that land, that started the public to realize you really needed to save some good land. And so then there was other people who decided to sell it to the county. And they started this program S Loc, building up park lands and places where the public would have access, but it wouldn't be done commercially. It started a movement. And it was sort of a wild idea to most people that we wanted to do that, but we got it accomplished.

Anderson: That must feel good.

Jelks: Yeah, it started the whole program of the land purchase for the county.

Anderson: And they're purchasing a lot of land now, right?

Jelks: Yeah. Well our first born, Helen is active in this group.

Anderson: What's the group called?

Jelks: they call it ESLPP [Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program].

Anderson: That's an acronym?

Jelks: That's an acronym. It's a government thing where they're purchasing land. They evaluate it and make sure it's a valuable property and that it won't be misused by any private concerns.

Anderson: I was looking into Chuck Downs. I heard he recently just...

Jelks: Yes, the Myakka River Coordinating Council was made up when—this was part of Senator Johnson's set-up for the Wild and Scenic River—to manage this river so it is saved as it should be. And the idea was to have a corridor along the river that would protect the river from having bad development. And they were required to keep the native plants along the river. A certain width of it had to be maintained as native plants. This is an important part of management and you have to oversee the activities going along there. If someone builds some enterprises—one of the bad things in Manatee County, there is a lot of farming, agriculture, tomato fields, and with that, they irrigate and the river would get really high with water levels when they would irrigate for these tomato farms. And the wash off of the fertilizer wasn't good. There was about 1000 acres of trees that were drowned with this activity. And the Crowley Nature Center was one area that was severely damaged with the overflow of water. And many of the trees died there and if you go there you can see all these dead trees. And then there were better ways of handling this water and they started to try to reuse it so it's not as bad as it was. But if you don't hold them to regulating this activity, you will lose more and more land to this.

Anderson: So do you appreciate—I guess this is kind of a tough question, but do you appreciate the land around the river more than the river itself, or is it hard to separate the two?

Jelks: If you don't have a protective area along the river, you will soon lose it. Like what Senator Johnson said, these speeding boats would cause erosion, and it causes the river itself to be messed up. And then you get a lot of dirty silt, sort of like the Middle West does a lot of farming and agriculture, and they disturb the soil so it's loose and then it rains, all that sediment gets into the rivers. And that's a problem down in the New Orleans area. You know it comes down the Mississippi. And you have dead zones of the land from that.

Anderson: Wow, that's crazy.

Jelks: So it's pretty hard to get people to follow the rules. They have best management practices for farming, but it's hard to get people to regulate those.

Anderson: I'm sure people value their land and their ability to do what they want to it.

Jelks: Of course if you really are smart though, you try to do a practice where the land stays fertile and doesn't wash away. It's very important to follow proper management on that.

Anderson: So just their practices aren't smart. Well I'm interested in why you became so committed to the Myakka River and that area.

Jelks: Well, it's just a wonderful river. And we've enjoyed it so much out at the park. It's always fun to go there and see what the animals are doing, and how it changes each time you get there. It never looks the same. The river itself, it never looks quite the same. No matter how many fishing expeditions you go out there, it's always a little bit different each time.

Anderson: In what ways?

Jelks: Well, sometimes you can't catch a fish for anything. Other times you know, it's hard not to catch them. And you might see a different set of animals along the river than the next time. Now they're seeing—they had a little miniature pony that got badly damaged which they think it might be a young male panther has extended to this area. The problem is panthers have to have a large acreage of land with a lot of different animals that they can predate on. That's the way they make their living is eating other animals. So they have to have a big area so they can do that. And as a male panther takes over a new territory, it can't be in the father panther's and they have to go on their own. They have to go somewhere else

Anderson: Do you think that's a bad thing that we have a panther?

Jelks: No, they're unusual animals. They probably would get rid of the pig population that is so bad. The feral hogs reproduce very rapidly. And you can trap and kill a thousand of them each year, and they still have a big population out there. And they do terrible damage to some of the plants. Like the pine lily [*Lilium catesbaei*], a special little flower that has bulbs that the hogs root and eat them all up. It's hard to keep the plants. You have to trap hogs in order to get rid of their problem.

Anderson: What a mess. How did they get there in the first place?

Jelks: I think the Spanish brought them to this country. They have mixed with the regular hogs in the area so they go on and on.

Anderson: Well yeah, maybe the panther is a good thing.

Jelks: Yeah, you need some panthers and bobcats to keep the hogs out.

Anderson: And the ponies, apparently. (*Laughter*) So how do you take care of the river?

Jelks: Well, it's very important the people don't destroy the native plants along it. You have to

keep a certain amount of normal vegetation there to protect it. The difficulty with having the mechanized boats that speed up and down the river and cause a lot of erosion. That's one of the big problems we run into. And some people have this thing about growing grass everywhere. I guess this is a British idea. Everybody wants to have this wonderful crop of grass. And out on the Myakka if you grow this grass, it's not natural for it to be there.

Anderson: Is that in people's yards?

Jelks: Yeah, they try to do that and then fertilize and do all the bad things that make the grass grow.

Anderson: Yeah, it really is important to keep that—

Jelks: Keep that buffer zone to manage it. The most important part of it.

Anderson: And when did you start the river cleanup?

Jelks: In about 1992 I think was when I first did it. And we try to pick a time when the water is not too deep. If the flood tide is coming along, you can't see all that trash and you can't clean it out. It's better to do that in a dry season. So usually about May. And again, you go through the heavy rains in the summer and everything gets flooded and goes into the river. And so about October you need to clean it up again. That's when it gets low enough that you can see all these things that shouldn't be there.

Anderson: How many people come out?

Jelks: Once in a while you have as many as ten or fifteen boats going along and cleaning it up. It's hard to clean it up if you don't have boats to get to all these different areas. The main place that gets a lot of difficulty is under the bridges. The I-75 bridge and the 41 bridge. And you have people who go there to fish. They take their beer and drink it and leave the empties. They just can't carry out what they carry in.

Anderson: Is that laziness, or what?

Jelks: It is.

Anderson: Their mamas didn't teach them right.

Jelks: Somebody didn't teach them right, that's for sure.

Anderson: I like what you were talking about in that video we saw about how people hide the trash.

Jelks: Oh yeah, they think that if they hide it in the bushes, or somewhere difficult to find, they

think they're doing a favor. Put it out of sight, you know. So you have to go crawling through all these bushes and getting it out. Hide and seek. Easter egg hunt. And it's a funny thing, after you do this for a while if you try to walk down the street anywhere, if you see a bit of trash you run over and start picking it up. People think you kind of got a mania about trash.

Anderson: Well it's not a bad thing to have a mania over. It's useful. My grandfather was always the guy who would stop and pick up trash as he was walking.

Jelks: Oh I just can't—sometimes we go fishing on the beach, and there again people are so careless that they leave their trash.

Anderson: Do you still go fishing?

Jelks: Not much anymore, no. We had two little outboard boats, each were about 12 foot long and we would take those and go fishing. That was a family thing. With four children you really needed two boats to do it effectively.

Anderson: And then you would eat the fish?

Jelks: Oh yes, mm hmm.

Anderson: That sounds nice.

Jelks: Very nice.

Anderson: Now I know that you're very interested in the dry prairie.

Jelks: Mm hmm.

Anderson: Would you like to talk about it?

Jelks: Well it's unusual. In a small space, like the size of a card table, you may have 40 or 50 different species. It's a great diversity of species. And you need all these kinds of little forbs and grasses. Some tiny birds need little tiny things to eat. And that's the great thing about diversity. Being able to meet the needs of all the different wildlife. And not only the birds and the animals, but also insects. It's very important to the insect world. This is another area I've spent a lot of time studying. The different insects. When I went to the allergy meeting in New Orleans, they have a place called Insectorium. It's a great big bunch of series of hallways where they have all kinds of displays of different insects. One of the things that New Orleans... They were proud of their giant mosquito. The tox¹. They call it the tox. It's huge. It's bigger than the other

¹ Scientific name: (*Toxorhynchitus* spp.)

mosquitoes and it predate on the mosquitoes that cause disease. They eat up the larva of the other mosquitoes. And they celebrate the tox mosquito because it gets rid of the yellow fever and malaria type.

Anderson: So there *is* something redeeming about the mosquito.

Jelks: Oh, yes. There are a lot of other predator insects, too, that are very important. And we all like our bees to make honey, but there are a lot of the predators that look like a stinging insect and people will go and kill the poor things, but they're on our side. They get rid of some of these other bad things.

Anderson: Are there any of those in the dry prairie?

Jelks: Yes, there are a lot. And when you start collecting plants you start looking at insects, and it's a wealth of information you can find about this. I get the Xerces² publications that tell you about all the different insects.

Anderson: Is the dry prairie an unusual environment for Florida?

Jelks: Not really. You usually think in Florida that we have a lot of swamps, but one of the interesting things is the main soil is the Myakka fine sand. It's a very fine sand and it doesn't hold water too well, you see. But about two and a half foot down, there's a clay there that is like a bath tub. It holds the water, doesn't go through that. It holds moisture right there. That's why you have water standing in much of the Florida land. It doesn't go to China. It's held there with this clay level. Kind of like a hard pan.

Anderson: So that's the non-swamp ecosystems that have the clay under them.

Jelks: Yeah.

Anderson: Hmm, I learned something else today. So then you were telling me that you volunteer to do that little entryway there into the Myakka Park?

Jelks: Oh yes, that's patterned to look like the dry prairie. And the grasses are the important part of that. Wiregrass [[Aristida stricta var. beyrichiana](#)], and you have your lopsided Indian [[Sorghastrum secundum](#)], that's one of my favorites.

Anderson: What's that?

² A nonprofit organization that protects wildlife through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitat.

Jelks: Well it's a grass that gets all of the flowers on one side. And so it sort of looks like a bunch of flags flying. You almost feel patriotic when you see a tall stand of lopsided Indian grass. And I try to start these grasses here. In a three-gallon pot, you can put your sandy soil and plant the little seeds on the top; and you have to have it open to the sun and you don't want too much heavy soil on top. It should be mainly sandy. And you can grow—I have a lot of grasses that are the wiregrass type.

Anderson: You have them here?

Jelks: Yes, I can show you some in the yard.

Anderson: Yeah, I would like to look at those after the interview if we could. And do you have to bring those into that display at the front or do they grow naturally?

Jelks: Well actually, you go out in the prairie, you can dig up some. But I prefer getting seeds and growing some in these little pots and then bring that little pot that you've carefully watered and kept under the right conditions so they grow.

Anderson: And then you transplant them?

Jelks: Then I transplant them, yeah. So then you don't have to go digging up. Right now it's very hard to go out to the power line trail. It's very wet. And the power and light people have just destroyed it. They have heavy equipment they go in there and they've moved all their lines from one side, so it's only one side that's carrying the cable for electricity. And in the process, they've pretty much destroyed the road.

Anderson: That's a shame.

Jelks: Yeah, well they have all this heavy equipment to do it with, so.

Anderson: Yeah I guess they got to.

Jelks: That's the passageway to get electricity from one part of the state to another.

Anderson: And that takes you to the prairie there?

Jelks: The prairie is along that direction, yeah.

Anderson: Do you have to weed out things from that area?

Jelks: There are certain plants that grow easier than others. So you get a lot of those kind of plants you don't want there. Some of them you try to get rid of. There are certain grasses that are very invasive. And you don't want those in that area. You like to have the diversity of plants there. I never bring any plants there that are apt to be lost in trying to transplant them. There are

some that are very endangered. The pine lily for instance is one which the hogs like to eat the bulbs. They're endangered—certain species are endangered. You don't really want to mess with those.

Anderson: Are you growing some here?

Jelks: I don't have any of the real endangered ones, because I think it has a better chance of growing out there naturally.

Anderson: We just got to get rid of the hogs, huh. Is that where you spend your volunteer time?

Jelks: Yes, well I don't keep track of how much time I spend.

Anderson: Why not?

Jelks: Well, for one thing, one of the issues I have: the head of the department of environmental protection is the head of the park system. The secretary of the DEP should be regulating activities like phosphate mining. They shouldn't allow them to mess with the wetlands and destroy it. And they aren't regulating it. They really aren't doing their job. They're supposed to police this activity and they're not doing that. So I don't report my hours to them.

Anderson: Because why?

Jelks: I just feel that they aren't doing their job right. So why should I make them feel nice and fuzzy about all these hours I spend out there taking care of the area?

Anderson: I like that.

Jelks: It's kind of a sick attitude, but that's my attitude. I'm sort of peeved at them because they should not allow our water quality and quantity to be—they shouldn't let the tomato farmers flood a thousand acres of trees. SWFWMD [Southwest Florida Water Management District] allowed this, too. I mean they should have stepped in and said "Oh, you can't irrigate that much land."

Anderson: So what are they doing if they're not regulating?

Jelks: Well now they're getting them to reuse. When they irrigate they have to reuse the runoff of the irrigated stuff. It costs a lot of money to reuse it, but some of them are doing this very well now. But the phosphate companies are making big bucks for the state. And therefore they don't interfere with anything they do.

Anderson: I know you were telling me when we weren't on recording, but just for the sake of recording it, if you could tell what exactly the phosphate mines are doing to destroy the area?

Jelks: Well they go in and disrupt huge depths of the soil to dig up and get the phosphate rock. And the phosphate rock has a lot of radioactive material with. And this is released into the water. And there's no attempt at preserving wetlands. They just go in and dig everything up and mix it all up, mess it up. And the hydrology is ruined. So they shouldn't allow this sort of—just because they have big machines that can pick up an acre of soil at a time, they shouldn't be doing that. There ought to be a better way of mining than the way they're doing it.

Anderson: That would be a good thing to look into. Does it directly affect the Myakka River?

Jelks: It certainly dried up much of the Peace River. And it's understood by everybody how very bad this is for the little baby fish having this depletion. To grow good fish in an estuary, they depend on having the floods and large amount of rain water coming down, and they really don't tolerate salt water that much. And if you do mess up the hydrology, you're going to have more and more salt water intrusion in certain areas.

Anderson: Is that from the soil?

Jelks: Yeah, you get salt—and some of this is from fertilizer and materials they're using for farming lands.

Anderson: Where is the Peace River?

Jelks: It is just a little bit east of the Myakka River. I mean you have the Peace River and then, actually much of the same thing happens to the Myakka as the Peace if you allow phosphate mining above it.

Anderson: Is there phosphate mining above it?

Jelks: Yes.

Anderson: So they're messing up our situation there, too?

Jelks: Yup, we end up with a water resource that is less than it should be.

Anderson: Have you seen the Myakka change drastically since you came here in the sixties?

Jelks: Not a great deal. Nature is able to rebound certain amounts of this bad behavior on the part of the property owners, but it could be better I think. If you get everybody to cooperate.

Anderson: How do you do that?

Jelks: You make rules, laws.

Anderson: And enforce them.

Jelks: And then you have to enforce them. But, it's hard when it's money-making activity to really enforce it adequately.

Anderson: And that's where... do the Friends of the Myakka help with that?

Jelks: It's pretty hard because here you are, the head of the Department of Environmental Pollution is the head of the park system, too.

Anderson: So that's a conflict of interest?

Jelks: Yes. It's a problem.

Anderson: Why?

Jelks: Well, we have a hard time fighting this activity.

Anderson: Why would they make the head of the environmental...

Jelks: I don't know. I guess the Department of the Interior federally has similar problems where they allow a lot of logging and that activity in the federal parks.

Anderson: Well what are your biggest concerns then, with all this? In Florida in general?

Jelks: Well, it's very hard to get people to do the right thing. And it seems that politically it's hard to get people to play the game fair. We have a group called Clean Water Network and they're in constant fight against some of the activities they're allowing for the quality and quantity of water being changed. And they try to use the federal EPA to enforce this thing. But they're in conflict with what the DEP does in the state level.

Anderson: So your main concern seems to be that it's hard to get, politically, people to protect these things.

Jelks: Manatee and Charlotte County would not want to become part of the Wild and Scenic because they don't want to follow the rules. They want to be able to develop condos or anything they want along the river. They want to not be regulated in any way shape or form.

Anderson: So how did Sarasota get to be so lucky?

Jelks: Well, I think we have politicians who want to do the right thing.

Anderson: Thank goodness for that. We live in a good county.

Jelks: The taxing for the school system is a good example. We tax ourselves to pay for the schools.

Anderson: And we have pretty good schools. Yeah, what do you think of Sarasota?

Jelks: Well, I think there are a lot of people who want to do the things right.

Anderson: I agree. I think we live in a paradise here. A lot of people like to talk about “old Sarasota.”

Jelks: Well it was a little bit like the Old West, you know. They didn’t have to put up with all these rules and regulations. It’s your land, you do as you please with it sort of attitude.

Anderson: And that works if there’s not too many people.

Jelks: Well, if you’re thinking about keeping the land good, that’s one thing. But to abuse it and use it in the wrong way, that’s bad.

Anderson: And that’s when regulation is useful. I would have liked to live here back when Sarasota still had all the dirt roads and there weren’t all the condos downtown. It seemed like a very fun, wild old place. Were you here in time for that?

Jelks: Not really, no. By the sixties people were beginning to clean up their act. And environmentalism became a more and more popular way of life.

Anderson: Was the Myakka a popular site back then?

Jelks: Probably, but you know, you begin to appreciate that as you go places and they don’t have that attitude about their park land. You don’t miss it ‘til it’s gone.

Anderson: And it seems like the Myakka, at least in Sarasota, people have the right idea about it.

Jelks: Most of them do, yeah. Most of them. And we’ve had some good organizations. There’s one organization, the Science and Environmental Group. The parks, Mote Lab, certain groups that care about the environment. They do a lot of watershed studies. We try to get the public to appreciate. Say, don’t pour your paint in the gutter, that sort of thing.

Anderson: Well I’m just still curious about your focus on the Myakka entryway. I think that’s neat because it’s one of the first things people see. I was just wondering if you could talk about why you chose that to be one of your focuses.

Jelks: Well as they come in there, immediately you feel like “We’re out here in the park away from the busy civilized urban area.” And here are these beautiful plants that people in town don’t have that kind of scenery. In the fall, you can see the lopsided Indian grass, which is a very beautiful plant. And it makes you feel like, you know, everything’s growing well.

Anderson: What does it look like in the spring time if I went there now?

Jelks: Right now it's just little green grasses, but later in the fall, it gets the beautiful flower that's one-sided, lopsided.

Anderson: Usually you don't see that kind of asymmetry in nature. When do you go work there?

Jelks: I frequently work on Mondays.

Anderson: Every Monday?

Jelks: Yeah. Sometimes I do it a different day of the week. It depends on the weather. You know if it's going to be a real rainy Monday you go out there and get stuck and you don't get anything else done.

Anderson: So then Mondays are devoted to the Myakka River?

Jelks: Pretty much.

Anderson: What is the typical day in the life of Mary Jelks?

Jelks: I get up and do my pollen count. I get up at about 5 am and go up on the roof and get the slide down and then I stain it and then I count it. It takes about two hours. Then you can sort out what else you can do that day.

Anderson: So every day begins the same.

Jelks: Pretty much, mm hmm.

Anderson: Do you do a lot of other volunteer stuff?

Jelks: I used to do a lot with the county. The Integrated Pest Management Group. We're trying to get people not to use a lot of fertilizer and use a lot of pesticides. And actually, we also try to manage the mosquito control. And try to do larval control. We spend extra money in this county to use larvicidal instead of the adult mosquito sprays, which are poisonous. It's a very important group. We're trying to save bee populations. There's a scare of the Africanized bee population and any time people find a wild bee population, they're worrying about that being Africanized. And we're trying to get good legitimate beekeepers to take over that causing a great fear of bees. I worked for years as the chairman of the solid waste. I spent a lot of time earlier in the years when we were developing the recycling program. And there was a clown and myself that go to the schools and talk to the children about recycling. And the first thing we started recycling was newspapers. And we taught these children, if you can't get your parents to do this recycling pretty much the whole place will be a huge garbage dump. You keep taking more and more land to get rid of your waste, then there won't be any room for playgrounds and parks. So that's the

sort of lecture we... and these little kids got their parents to do this. If you want to change human behavior, go through the children. Get the children to do it. And that worked beautifully with recycling. So our county probably was much better at recycling than other counties around. Because of the way we carefully taught the children to teach the adults. Even grandparents aren't going to disobey a child saying you're supposed to do this. And it worked! Beautifully. As a result, we probably do a lot of recycling. And sometimes at extra cost, but it's better than not doing it. Manatee County for instance, has no mandatory garbage collection. As a result, one area just above that park is always messed up by these Manatee people who dump their garbage there because they don't have to pay for the garbage collection.

Anderson: That's bad. In Sarasota, it's just included in your water bill, right?

Jelks: Mm hmm. Yeah. But you know, you've got to take care of your sewage, you've got to take care of your garbage. I mean these are things you've got to do.

Anderson: And we have an incredible sewage facility. They turn it into compost. We use it on our garden at home.

Jelks: Actually the compost that the county makes is excellent. I go pick it up, oh, just a couple of weeks ago I went to pick it up out on the north end of Sarasota county. I went to pick up a whole bunch of that and I use that for growing my grasses.

Anderson: Yeah that's a great thing that they do.

Jelks: And it works great.

Anderson: Well, what's your opinion on using human manure?

Jelks: Well they've been using the sewage effluent for some time. The sludge is another thing. You shouldn't use that. It will have a lot of chemicals in it. And we've banned the use of sludge in this county. Some counties they're still spreading sludge

Anderson: Well, we take the sludge and add sawdust and microbes to it and they break it down, and it comes out like dirt. We fill up our pickup truck and it's great. Well, is there anything you feel should go on the record or anything you think should be included in the story that I haven't asked about?

Jelks: I don't know of anything. We've pretty much covered everything.

Anderson: We've been through it all.

Jelks: You want to see some of my grasses?

Anderson: Yes.

Jelks: Okay.

Interview with: Dr. Mary Jelks
Date of Interview: March 29, 2010
Interviewer: David Anderson
Subject of Interview: Myakka River
Transcriber: David Anderson

**Note: The following transcription is taken from thirteen different segments of a four-hour long meeting with Dr. Jelks. During this time, the recorder was turned on and off as the various activities transpired. All activities, including the drive in Dr. Jelk's truck, weeding and plant identification, flower planting, time in the visitor's center, drive on All Weather Road with staff naturalist Paula Benschhoff, lunch, and departure occurred at Myakka River State Park.*

(Drive to the park)

Jelks: The manager of the city had property out there, but he used a bunch of river tires to hold his soil. You're not supposed to do that. You know rubber tires came down the river and every year we'd pick about ten or twenty of them in our work on clean up. They would have all these things that hook on to rocks and you'd scratch up your vehicle when you picked them up

Anderson: What a pain. Did you hear about that project where they were trying to rebuild some coral reefs and they dumped thousand of tires into the water?

Jelks: Mm hmm. And they'd come back to life and float to the top.

Anderson: So they had to pay a million dollars or so to pull them out.

Jelks: Yup, it's a mess.

Anderson: I bet this area's been built up a lot.

Jelks: Oh yes.

Anderson: What were these roads like when you first started coming out?

Jelks: Two-lane. Everything was two-lane. A lot of the churches are built out where the property isn't so valuable. They aren't taxed so much in these areas, but I wonder why the people have to go so far to church?

Anderson: Are you a churchgoer?

Jelks: Yes, for years, I taught two-year-old Sunday school class. And I would bring bouquets of flowers and then they could give them to their mothers for having brought them to Sunday school.

Anderson: That's nice.

Jelks: And I got sort of tired of doing that when the little kids were all bringing play weapons to Sunday school. And I said this is a different time. I don't fit in here anymore. I keep taking their guns away from them and the kids carry on about it. I didn't think I needed guns in Sunday school.

Anderson: Well that's certainly not a place for them. This year I've been teaching the Sunday school at the Quaker Meeting House in Sarasota.

Jelks: I bet they don't take guns there.

Anderson: Nope.

Jelks: Lots of people don't really slow down on this curve like they should. This is supposed to be too curvy for them to go fast, but you can't rely on that.

Anderson: I wonder if anyone's careened into that little pond.

Jelks: People do. In fact any road if you get off the pavement, you're apt to get stuck.

Anderson: Out here?

Jelks: Mm hmm.

Anderson: Is the ground real soft?

Jelks: It's really wet.

Anderson: I love this part, where it becomes fields.

Jelks: Yes. There are a lot of birds along the way.

Anderson: A lot of cows. Have you ever had any run-ins with alligators?

Jelks: No, I don't bother them. They can move mighty fast when they want to.

Anderson: Yes. One of the coolest things I've ever done was go canoeing through Deep Hole.

Jelks: Mm hmm. Yeah. I've been there. We had purchased a little old boat. It was made of leather or something and it was sort of like a kayak, but it had a darker color to it. And the alligators wanted to mate with it when they encountered it. So I didn't enjoy being in that very long. Said let's get out of here.

Anderson: Oh wow, that can get you in trouble.

Jelks: Yeah.

Anderson: They must not have the best eyesight.

Jelks: No!... Now they're burying all the military in a wetland the way I see it. See how high that water level is?

Anderson: They can't be buried more than two feet.

Jelks: Yeah. The guy who sold that to the military made a killing. It's wetlands and nothing but a wetland.

Anderson: Is that the only National Cemetery we have here?

Jelks: Yeah, evidently there are a lot of military who, as they get older and die, are from this area. So they run out of burial places. They have some up in middle Florida, but they had none in this area.

Anderson: Do you want to explain to the recorder what we're about to go do?

Jelks: Yeah, we're going out to the park and plant a few little plants that need to be put in their situation. It's too wet today to be trying to go out to get the prairie-type plants... I don't know what they're doing here...

Anderson: Is that construction going on?

Jelks: They're probably still surveying. I don't know why they would still be surveying.

Anderson: What are they surveying for?

Jelks: Uh... I don't know. They've spent three years on this road.

Anderson: Where did you get the plants we're about to plant?

Jelks: Where do I get the plants? I grow them from seed. There are some that can tolerate the colder weather. I think we're over the cold now, but I planted a number of plants that can withstand colder weather. We have a butterfly garden there, which you like to have plants that attract butterflies.

Anderson: There's a butterfly garden at Myakka Park?

Jelks: Mm hmm.

Anderson: Did they do some burning out here recently?

Jelks: Not very recently. They did it for a while, then I don't think they've done it in the past couple of months. It's probably been too wet. They can't get the matches to start the fire. They're

trying to dry out their wings.

Anderson: Oh, buzzards. How many times have you taken this turn?

Jelks: Many times. *(Truck drives by with pallets of grass)* Grass! *(With disgust)*.

Anderson: Oh, you hate to see that, huh.

Jelks: Oh yeah, it means those people are going to use the water. So, we might just want to see what we have here now.

(Dr. Jelks turns off the truck. End of recording.)

(At the front entrance to the park.)

Jelks: So here we have some of the wiregrass.

Anderson: Did you plant that?

Jelks: Yes. And this we don't want [unintelligible plant name]. It takes over the place.

Anderson: Boy, this is a constant battle.

Jelks: Yeah, there's always plenty of weeds you don't need here. And it'll become all weeds if you let it. So here we have a little gulf muhly [[Muhlenbergia capillaris](#)]. You can see it's different than the wiregrass.

Anderson: Are these its little seeds up there?

Jelks: The wiregrass has these prickly little seeds and this is gulf muhly. Entirely different plants. But the grass blades look very similar.

Anderson: Yeah from afar, you really couldn't tell.

Jelks: Yeah. Now, if you look close, you can tell these are just rounded grass blades. The wiregrass, they have a kind of a wooly thing down near the bottom. Kind of a wooly-appearing grass. It looks like it has winter underwear on the—the gulf muhly just...

Anderson: Ooh, I see.

Jelks: And this one has some kind of wooly look at the bottom of the blades. So they're different. They're definitely different things, but they all grow into clumps of grass.

Anderson: It's neat that they do the clumps like that. What's this here?

Jelks: That's some grass that when we burned it, it kept its bottom parts of the roots, and I don't know why it survives that sort of treatment, but it did.

Anderson: It's a very dense package.

Jelks: Mm hmm. It is. And why the burn didn't do it in, I don't know. There's some more wiregrass. But wiregrass is one of the important grasses in the dry prairie.

Anderson: How come?

Jelks: It's a tough grass. It's a good grass. It isn't overcome by other grasses. Even a little tiny bunch of them holds its place.

Anderson: You want us to pull these? There's a lot of it.

Jelks: Yes. And it gets ahead of you and I haven't been coming to this area very much because you couldn't bring in plants to put in, so I wasn't pulling out the others.

Anderson: When was the last time you were here?

Jelks: Well now and then I come and go through and get some of this stuff out. Now there used to be a lot of lara³ here, but I don't think it's come back.

Anderson: What's lara?

Jelks: It's a plant that's very good—it serves some insects that are wasp-like that get rid of certain plants that bother baseball fields and that sort of thing. And it's a very important plant. We try to use it in the city for preserving the ballpark from problems they get.

Anderson: Is this a big clump of something we don't want? (*Fire ants problem*)

Jelks: Fire ants are not good.

Anderson: Speaking of invasive.

Jelks: If you had weeds all over it, they wouldn't like it... There's some more beautyberry [[Calliocalpa americana](#)]. There's blackberry [[Rubus cuneifolius](#)] in this area.

Anderson: Is that natural?

³ The spelling of this word could not be determined. Pronounced \ˈle-rə\.

Jelks: Yes.

Anderson: Do these little guys make berries?

Jelks: Oh, they do. Here's shiny blueberry [*Vaccinium myrsinites*].

Anderson: When does that fruit?

Jelks: It will fruit fairly soon. May. About May. And they're tiny, tiny little things.

Anderson: Uh oh, it looks like someone left their chewing gum in here.

Jelks: Oh yeah, we get whiskey bottles, and all sorts of things in here. This is where they like to dispose of things.

Anderson: Right before they enter the park.

Jelks: Maybe that's what they're doing, I don't know.

Anderson: So what are we pulling up here?

Jelks: Oh, we still got a lot of... that's pepper grass [*Lepidium virginicum*]... So I think I lost my gopher apple [*Licania michauxii*]. I had gopher apple.

Anderson: Oh, the one you showed me the other day?

Jelks: Yeah. I had some here, but I think it was overwhelmed by the other plants. I don't think it's cold intolerant. Too many of the others got in.

Anderson: Survival of the fittest out here.

Jelks: Something you learn very quickly about here. Now somebody dug a little hole down in there. Who lives in there?

Anderson: What makes a hole like that?

Jelks: Well, turtles. But the armadillos tend to dig things up too, so you can't be sure what it is... A lot of bully noises from out there.

Anderson: Bully noises? What are those?

Jelks: People making "boo" sounds... I think this is part of the fakahatchee. This is giant fakahatchee grass [*Tripsacum dactyloides*]. And I like it very much because it's a place where the little tree frogs can hide. And all the predators can't eat up all the little tree frogs.

Anderson: Who are these little runts?

Jelks: They may be from the New Gate School which is down the ways.

Anderson: Do they come here a lot?

Jelks: I don't know. It's a wild bunch of kids...Here we have a real good spring flower. Piriqueta [[Piriqueta cistoides subsp. caroliniana](#)].

Anderson: It's pretty.

Jelks: Yes. Very delicate. That's the surprise of the prairie. Every now and then you'll see something that's a very fragile type of plant.

Anderson: That's always exciting. Are these endangered?

Jelks: Not entirely, no. But they're not common where people would be to see them. Well that was a nice surprise.

Anderson: This is all that pepper grass?

Jelks: A lot of pepper grass. Oh we can't take the time to pull all that out...This is Rhus copallina. It's not like poison ivy, but it's in the same family.

Anderson: Does it make you itchy?

Jelks: No. Common plantain [[Plantago major](#)]. This is a common weed. Not a nice weed.

Anderson: How much of the time you spend here is weeding?

Jelks: Quite a bit. Let's get along in here and see what else we have that's interesting.

Anderson: You know, it doesn't look like a big area, but as soon as you start picking up weeds...

Jelks: Oh yeah, it takes time. Here's a wiregrass that's gotten too dry. It didn't like it that dry. This is rabbit tobacco [[Pseudognaphalium](#) sp].

Anderson: Rabbit tobacco. Do they eat it?

Jelks: I don't think the rabbits care for it, but they call it rabbit tobacco I don't know why.

Anderson: That's kind of a cute name.

Jelks: Maybe the little kids are trying to smoke it at one time. I don't know.

Anderson: It looks like we got a little fungus among us.

Jelks: Oh yes, not unusual. Geaster. Here's a little tiny shiny blueberry. It's one of my favorite plants.

Anderson: What are these things?

Jelks: Oh that's the flattop goldenrod. And earlier it was about so high and was blunted off at the top. That's what those are. Flattop goldenrod [[Euthamia graminifolia](#)].

Anderson: Hmm.

Jelks: And these are the seeds of one of the larger plants that we all can see. Uh, we had in the past two years more of the flattop goldenrod that we had in the ten years before then. It's gotten very predominant.

Anderson: Starting to spread.

Jelks: Yeah. There's one we don't like to tangle with. It has thorns on it.

Anderson: Ooh, be careful pulling that one.

Jelks: And it has big tubers down there so you want to have a spade when you dig the big tubers out. There it is again. Shoot, the name! I can't pull it out of my stupid brain right now. I don't like it. I don't like that plant very much. But it's very prevalent... A lot of partridge pea [[Chamaecrista fasciculata](#)]. And its main stem is dead so we might as well break it off. Now this is *Pityopsis*. It's an aster. [Pityopsis graminifolia](#). And if you use your clippers to cut it off, they'll get pretty dull after a while because these fibers are rough on clippers.

Anderson: That's a tall thing.

Jelks: Yeah, it may be like a Johnsongrass [[Sorghum halepense](#)] relative.

Anderson: What's that rare species?

Jelks: That belongs to the wall. It was poorly done.

Anderson: You were right about all these big trucks.

Jelks: Yeah. Here's a little daisy. It's all wet. It's a wet little daisy.

Anderson: Do you think it likes that wet?

Jelks: No. No, it doesn't like that wet... Oh, there's the [Tradescantia \[fluminensis\]](#). I fought that for years and it still pops up now and then. I didn't get it. But I won't get that either.

Anderson: How do you fight those?

Jelks: You can't. You just keep working it, removing them. And here's old stalks of goldenrod [*Solidago sp.*]. This is regular goldenrod. And this is flattop goldenrod.

Anderson: Oh, all in the same place.

Jelks: I think that's a little tiny shiny *Vaccinium* [blueberry]. Little tiny leaves... That's Paula [Benshoff]. Paula is part of the structure here. She's most important. She writes grants and that sort of thing for the park. And she pretty much has her hands in everything in the park. She's a very fine park ranger.

Anderson: Did I see her in that video of you?

Jelks: Yeah, probably.

Anderson: She said Myakka and Mary have been synonymous or something?

Jelks: Yeah. She understands what it's all about.

Anderson: What is it all about?

Jelks: (*Chuckles*) Well, enjoying nature. Discovering all the wonders of nature. It's kind of a fun thing. To see the plants that predominate year after year. They keep coming back. See you can't help but have respect for the wiregrass. It's a tiny little grass that holds its place.

Anderson: It's very independent.

Jelks: Now we had an area here where the deer would come in and lay on it and they flattened that whole bunch of grass here for a large area. And every night they would come here and sleep on my grass. It's all wiregrass. You'd think wiregrass would be a little bit scratchy to lay on. These little things are probably scratchy feeling, but they laid on these and I don't know what they'll amount to now.

Anderson: That's pretty flat there, do you think—

Jelks: Yeah! They've been laying on that grass night after night and flattening it all down. And I would come and try to plant something near and they would paw and try to pull it out of that area. They did not want me to plant something else there. That was their grass patch and they didn't want to have other stuff come in.

Anderson: Little clover here?

Jelks: Uh, that's uh, it gets a pretty blue flower if you get a clump of it, it's a fairly common

weed that we get, but uh, there's the blue variety and the yellow variety.

Anderson: And these are the yellow?

Jelks: Uh, these would probably be the blue type if they get around to blooming. And this is [*Bidens*](#), which will take over if you let it.

Anderson: That's all this stuff here?

Jelks: Yeah, that's all *Bidens*. It takes over every place it gets in, but it's hard to get the root with it.

Anderson: It really integrates with the other stuff.

Jelks: Yeah, yeah. It thinks it has every right to be here.

Anderson: But it doesn't!

Jelks: Well, you see the deer came in here and laid on this, and the grass doesn't have a chance.

Anderson: Is it dead?

Jelks: Yeah, pretty much mashed down.

Anderson: That's sad.

Jelks: Oh well, as soon as we get a little more tolerable roads to get out in the prairie and get plants, I can remove all this flattened stuff. These are all palm trees, which come from the palm trees above there. Now I thought this was a turtle hole. And snakes like it. You know the gopher tortoise creates a home for about 200 other species and they all live in the place.

Anderson: So you think that was a gopher tortoise hole first?

Jelks: It doesn't look big enough to be a gopher tortoise, but...it isn't dug deep enough to be a gopher tortoise. Now I don't know what did this. Those damn deer probably came and pawed something I put in there and tried to get rid of it. The deer are not friendly neighbors to people who garden.

Anderson: But they're so pretty.

Jelks: The [*Liatris*](#) for instance. They'll bite it off and it will become like an octopus, have many legs on it.

Anderson: What is that?

Jelks: *Liatris*. It is one of my favorite plants... Well this is a preview of realizing I've got a lot of work to do to get this back to being something pretty in the fall.

Anderson: So that's when it really shines?

Jelks: Yeah, that's when you get a lot of plants bloom at that time. The fall garden is one of the better times. Well, we might go on up to see the other gardens. You see from '93 'til just recently, this was the main area I worked on. And then I noticed the butterfly garden and the garden in front there weren't shining too pretty like we'd planned them. This is sweet innocence [*Houstonia procumbens*]. Sweet innocence. All little four-petaled white flowers. It's aptly named. Sweet innocence.

Anderson: That looks spiky.

Jelks: Yeah, it's spiky. We don't need it. It won't do too well now.

Anderson: You gave it the Mary treatment?

Jelks: Yeah. In my yard I have a lot of dandelions [*Taraxacum officinale*] right now that have come forth.

Anderson: It's the time for dandelions?

Jelks: Well, if you try to mow the lawn, they just bend over. You can't cut them off with mowing, you just bend them over, which is kind of discouraging.

(Truck starts)

Anderson: You don't want the dandelion?

Jelks: Well, I'd rather have other things. I don't want wall-to-wall grass, but I'd like to have flowers.

(At the Butterfly Garden)

Anderson: Here, I can hold a thing or two...

Jelks: You want to...

Anderson: Yeah, got one hand here.

Jelks: Well— *(Flower pot slips from Anderson's hand)*

Anderson: Oh my gosh! I'm so sorry.

Jelks: It's alright. That will loosen it up, easier to plant.

Anderson: You're optimistic.

Jelks: Yes. Always be optimistic.

Anderson: Those are looking droopy.

Jelks: Yes, but I cut out a lot of the dead stuff from it, so that's mainly alive.

Anderson: So what is this?

Jelks: Firecracker plant [[Russelia equisetiformis](#)]. We call it firecracker plant because it looks like a whole bunch of firecrackers.

Anderson: I can see that. So what garden is this?

Jelks: Well this is the butterfly garden. And here's a forget-me-not [[Myosotis sp.](#)]. Right there. That blue thing

Anderson: That little guy? It's kind of asking a lot. It's so small.

Jelks: Been done in by the rain. Here's a bigger one. So these are the kind of little plants that I plant and get for the butterflies. A sweet alyssum [[Lobularia maritima](#)]. I get seeds from the seed store to grow some of these.

Anderson: Works just as well, I'm sure

Jelks: Yeah, it does.

Anderson: Is this the new location?

Jelks: Yeah, well I'm not sure where we'll put these. They're not going to freeze this time of year, so they can be put... I'll put one of these here, get a little more color for it. These are partridge pea plants. That's a native that's very nice... Firespike [[Odontonema cuspidatum](#)]. This thing here. It attracts the butterflies and the little birds.

Anderson: And it all died?

Jelks: It froze. But it's not dead. It will come back.

Anderson: That's good.

Jelks: And it also volunteers new plants that it'll put all over. (*Digs up soil*) You see how dry it is down in here?

Anderson: Yeah

Jelks: Where did all that rain go?

Anderson: I don't know.

Jelks: It's not where you want it, that's for sure.

Anderson: Did it wash into the river?

Jelks: I don't know. It's a sandy soil. It's Myakka fine sand. They have a display of that inside. And it does support all the plants very well, but you know, it dries out if you go too long without a rain. So I'll probably have to go get my water can. Now here again is *Bidens*. It has very attractive flowers for butterflies and it's a common weed in the yards. Most people stick their nose up in the air about it, they don't like it. But some of the better butterflies are attracted to it. And so I let some of them grow. Not all of them. That's all you'd have is *Bidens*. Everywhere.

Anderson: They grow pretty quickly. What kinds of butterflies are the better butterflies.

Jelks: Well I like fritillary. The [Gulf] fritillary butterfly does well where you have this little vine that crawls all over everywhere... There's a coontie [[Zamia pumila](#)]. That's supposed to be a butterfly plant. Certain butterflies from south Florida like coontie. I'll have to put a little more soil in that area. When it rains it rains very hard when you have an open area like this.

Well I better go get my watering can.

Anderson: So how did you get to be such a green thumb?

Jelks: I just like plants, (*Laughs*).

Anderson: You get good at what you like I guess.

Jelks: Yeah. (*Reaches for water can, just out of reach*) That's my problem. I always have to go hunt an instrument to do the job. I'm a tool person.

Anderson: It seems a little strange pouring a bunch of water after last night's rain.

Jelks: Yes, but you realize why we have to do it.

Anderson: I do, I saw that soil.

Jelks: Yeah, it's not very wet...Red Salvia [[Salvia coccinea](#)]. It does a good job of propagating itself, so it's a good plant. And it's a native. These things should start having some sprouts on them. That one was hurt badly. On the other side is a garden that was supposed to be more

formal. We're going to go see what it's doing. They had a problem when the plants got sort of tall. And some people came in and stole all the copper wiring for the new campground several months ago. And now they try to keep the plants – try to cut them all down. And it had a sprinkle system when they first put it in. So in their ravaging the area to get the plants shorter, they knocked everything. So it didn't make much sense. And you'll notice as the cars come in, these newer cars are tall. And they can look down and see all these defects. So I try to restore it so it looks more normal. These are all gulf muhlys. They were started in little pots. And I'm hoping they'll gradually take over the large area. They have a good ability to do that.

Anderson: Those will be good for tall cars.

Jelks: Yeah, and it won't get too tall so they can see the crooks come in. The idea is that they want to have it visible so they can see the people coming in so someone can chase them.

Anderson: Do they have cameras?

Jelks: I don't think so. No, we're not that high-tech. The coffee plants [[Psychotria nervosa](#)]. They get quite tall, but I'll have to keep them lower in the future. Now this is a nice butterfly plant, but when it freezes, it looks like dead. A dead thing. It's terrible. So I'm going to keep that cut back. We won't let it get so big. But I don't like things that look dead. But it was a problem because they held the place, they did fine in the regular weather, but when it turned cold, they looked miserable. But here's fire spike and it's probably going to come back. But we don't want it too short, but I may have to cut it back further. It still makes it harder for them to see. These are seeds and it self-propagates with these little seeds. Those little seeds can start a whole new plant. You can see down here it's coming along real good.

So I'm trying to get plants that are shorter. I've dug up a lot of little blueberries, put those in, and rosemary, I put some rosemary in and various smaller plants is what we have to work towards. And there are plenty of them out there that we can dig up and get them in here and cut off these things that grow so terribly tall. These little red salvias are nice. They get that red flower that the butterflies like. I'm real proud that these things have done so well. The cold weather doesn't bother that kind of grass. Gulf muhly doesn't mind it getting cold. Doesn't freeze bad.

Anderson: You love the gulf muhly.

Jelks: Yeah, it's one of my favorites.

Anderson: I can see why.

Jelks: Yeah, it holds its space... I have a lot of pictures of various plants we have and I feel frustrated that so few of them are in bloom I can't really demonstrate the beauty of so many of them. So that's why I gave you the pictures of the lopsided Indian grass so you can get some idea of what I'm talking about.

Anderson: Is that your favorite grass?

Jelks: It's one of my favorites. Gulf muhly is really a better grass. It's easier to work with.

(Later, inside the Visitors Center)

Jelks: This is sand that doesn't hold much nutrition in it, and then you get the clay area that stops the water from going to china. So that's the set up.

Anderson: You can see roots growing all the way down.

Jelks: Now I want you to appreciate the importance of fungi. If we didn't have the fungi that wrapped their roots around trees, the trees wouldn't have a chance in Florida where we have no more nutrition that you get from sand. Therefore they get the important minerals that they need for the trees to grow from the fungi. And it's this relationship between the roots of the trees and the fungi that feed them.

Anderson: Wow, what's the fungi called?

Jelks: There are many fungi. Each plant has a different set. But if you didn't have those the trees couldn't possibly grow in this environment. They need ATP and all that kind of stuff.

Anderson: Oh, adenosine triphosphate

Jelks: Yeah, and all that stuff. It's so important for proper growth of the large trees. So when you look around, go up the tree canopy walk, and see how many, many, many big trees are growing there. And they're all growing in this deficient soil.

Anderson: Incredible. Those little mushrooms are -

Jelks: Very important, very important. *(Pushes button on display to play frog sounds)* These are probably the ones that hide in fakahatchee grass. And I've pleaded with the rangers not to cut that all down at one time. We have a lot of it between here and the main building and I want to leave some of it up most of the time. Don't cut it all down to the ground at one time. Because that's where the little tree frogs hide out from their predators. So here's the pine lily. It is a very important plant and it's very apt to be lost. Because all the hogs root it up and eat the bulb.

Anderson: Those dang hogs.

Jelks: Now actually there are a lot of large bushes that all grow about five foot tall. And these bushes will take over the area. And then your little forbs and grasses are shaded out and you wind up with some property that isn't good for anything but feral hogs. Because you've shaded out the essential things for diversity. That's why you have to do prescribed burns and they have to do removal of some of these plants. Back in the nineties, some of the farm and agricultural

land where they had cattle had not had burns regularly and they had just a monoculture of five foot tall shrubs. And it was just a place where the hogs can hide out. And it wasn't good. It took quite a while to get that land back to where it's productive.

Anderson: So you really do have to burn things every now and then.

Jelks: Yes, you do. I'm always happy when I see people bring children and they're learning about nature. If they understand what it's all about, then they'll help preserve the whole thing... Cold, it's too cold! It's really been a disastrous winter. I can't collect plants. You get stuck, can't do anything.

Anderson: Just sit there twiddling your thumbs.

Jelks: Oh, it's dreadful. You see how many of the bad plants move in unless you go out and collect plants to put in there when you pull them out, you accomplish nothing.

Anderson: They just grow right back.

Jelks: Yup.

Anderson: You got to crowd them out.

Jelks: Australian pine [[Casuarina equisetifolia](#)] does that. They take over, you can't grow anything else.

Anderson: The problem is Florida is so good at growing things. Hopefully the freeze helped a little bit.

Jelks: It got rid of some of the exotic fish.

Anderson: Is there a lot of tilapia in the water?

Jelks: Yes. And we feel they have displaced some of the normal fish and made it difficult for some of the wading birds, the ducks. The tilapia has pushed them out.

(Later, driving in the dry prairie with staff naturalist Paula Benshoff)

Jelks: Without recent burning, you have everything growing up so high, and all these lovely shrubs that we like so much really overpower the grasses and the things underneath. It doesn't take much time for these other plants to take over. And then your little blueberries and there's a [Hypericum](#), that yellow plant. Those aren't going to thrive very well. They don't do as well as if you had it opened up. So it gives you an example. And back in the '90s, some of the land that they added on recently had this sort of growth everywhere. And it was just a hideout for the

hogs. And if you don't keep doing the burns and cutting back, that's the way it gets. It'll get about that high everywhere.

Anderson: So how often do you try to burn?

Jelks: Most of the park is prairie. We try to burn on a two-year rotation. But I think this gives a good example of why it has to be managed. You can't just let it be. Say, "Here's public land. There it is. Leave it alone." And it could become a useless piece of property.

Anderson: And is that just because of various invasives that have come in? Would this have been an issue 400 years ago or so?

Jelks: Not entirely. The regular native plants don't behave. The land is dependent upon the fire. It's a very important principle. But a lot of people will balk at these management procedures.

Anderson: I guess to an uninformed viewer, they would be like "Why are they burning this public land?"

Jelks: Let's go south. I've gathered quite a few plants here recently.

Anderson: So you just come in here and pick and choose what you want?

Jelks: Not really. I'm supposed to gather all the plants for my procedure along Power Line Road. Well, the power line people came out and wrecked the road. So it's impassible. My little runty truck isn't going to go on it.

Anderson: You should ask the power line people to let you borrow a truck,

Jelks: Well they had huge equipment. And they moved all the lines to one side. Instead of having it on both sides, now they have it on this one side. And that's true all the way down back there. It doesn't make much sense to me.

Anderson: There's a hog.

Jelks: My third-born shot one with a bow and arrow. And we butchered it. And we had a lot of good hog meat.

Anderson: Recently or a while back?

Jelks: Uh, it was a year ago.

Anderson: He must be a good shot, with a bow and arrow.

Jelks: It was down at the Myakka State Forest.

Anderson: Yeah, Bob was telling me in Florida, if a hog's on your property you can shoot it.

Jelks: You know the strange thing though, I notice: the laurel oaks [[Quercus laurifolia](#)] out here bloom about 3-4 weeks before they do in town. And the laurel oak is just blooming there in town now. It's very heavy. And the counts have been tremendously high because now were getting some of the live oak along with the laurel oak. I'm trying to renovate the south side of the entry station and I've been putting smaller plants like shiny blueberry and pennyroyal [[Piloblephis rigida](#)] and things like that. You know things that will stay very short.

(Later, during lunch)

Anderson: That was nice of Paula to take us on that tour.

Jelks: So much of the public doesn't really understand why we have to burn and do that sort of thing.

Anderson: That really made it clear to me though, why it's important.

Jelks: Diversity is so important. You read much of E. O. Wilson's material⁴?

Anderson: No, what's that?

Jelks: He's a good person on the environment.

Anderson: Does he talk about diversity?

Jelks: Mm hmm.

Anderson: What does he say?

Jelks: Well, if you don't make it possible to have diversity, you get a system that doesn't function.

Anderson: It's getting windy. It's blowing all kinds of pollen in my food.

Jelks: They tell you you're supposed to eat bee pollen for your immune system. I think it's a bunch of bunk, but that's alright.

Anderson: They say that because the bees eat the pollen and then...

Jelks: Well the bees are going to eat the pollen mainly of flowers and plants... not allergy plants.

⁴ American entomologist and naturalist Edward Osborne Wilson

Anderson: That's a good argument.

Jelks: So that's pretty much a foolish idea.

Anderson: Maybe it's a good way to sell honey though.

Jelks: Mm hmm. Yeah, they do that.

Anderson: Well thank you for packing me a lunch.

Jelks: Oh, that's alright.

Anderson: So the Coordinating Council had 29 members?

Jelks: Mm hmm.

Anderson: How many do they have now?

Jelks: It's about the same. We tried very hard to expand the Wild and Scenic to Manatee and Charlotte County, and that didn't fly with the people in those areas.

Anderson: So the Coordinating Council is made up of more than just Sarasota people?

Jelks: Oh the Coordinating Council is made up of DEP [Florida Department of Environmental Protection], SWFWMD, all these people who manage.

Anderson: So do you still run the Friends of the Myakka?

Jelks: I started it and I was the president for quite a few years, and I thought it would be better to get people who would get the citizens and public more involved.

Anderson: And you didn't feel like you could do that?

Jelks: Oh, I'm not into having parties and things like that.

Anderson: Yeah, I guess with fundraising, you've got to be able to...

Jelks: Be a people person. A lot of these black tie business and that sort of thing. Now I enjoy attending the symphony. I like that sort of thing. And we go to a lot of theatre things. But I'm not into country club sort of stuff... That is a vicious wind! Want a little desert?

Anderson: Hey look at that! Snickers! Thank you.

Jelks: You've got to have faith that all these trees will stand up in the wind.

Anderson: Yeah, each leaf catches a lot of wind.

Jelks: Mm hmm.

Anderson: What do you have going all the rest of the day?

Jelks: Well, I have to... I'll probably get back and I'll probably get a slide from Tampa. And I have to get my... See, I reuse slides. And I have quite a collection of historical slides. But now I'm using some of these slides again. And you have to take your slides and you mount a piece of Melinex tape on it. And you put a very fine little layer of grease on it. And then you put it up there and expose it for a 24-hour period. And then you stain it. So you have to keep replenishing your stains, and there's a lot of extra work that one doesn't appreciate in this business.

Anderson: But you do that so you can save the slides?

Jelks: Yeah, I save most of them, but I've got so many of them over the years that now if it isn't a particularly interesting part of the season, I don't save them. I just clean them off. And you clean them with an ammonium solution and soap and then you rinse them with vinegar, a weak solution of vinegar. And that makes the slides work a little better.

Anderson: Well it's been a nice day.

Jelks: Very nice.

Anderson: I've really enjoyed you showing me all the plants.

Jelks: Yeah. It's a great diversity of plants really. I mean you think of the dry prairie as having so many different species in that one area. It's quite important to appreciate managing the land so they can do that.

Anderson: Yeah. I'm glad you're doing it.

Jelks: It's worth the effort. I just wish the power line road would be easier to travel on.

Anderson: Talk about an inconvenience.

Jelks: It is. And that used to be a train—they used to have a train line on that. It was mainly for getting trees and forestry things.

Anderson: Does that road run east to west?

Jelks: Sort of east, and then it turns south a little bit. But that's why the road is elevated enough that normally we could use it as a travel means. But now recently they've messed it up with all this heavy equipment. Well they say they're going to repair it at some point, but I don't know

how well they'll do that. It's no advantage to them to repair it because they have this heavy equipment. They can go out there and water around in the wet place and never get stuck.

Anderson: It would be a courtesy thing on their part.

Jelks: Yeah but they realigned the whole thing. It doesn't make much sense to me what they're doing. Hello squirrel! Did you want to join us for lunch? Come over and beg close. (*Laughs*)

Anderson: Do you think he'll eat out of your hand?

Jelks: Probably would.

Anderson: Want to try?

Jelks: (*Makes squirrel noises*) He's a beggar. Are you a little beggar? One of my children had a little tiny boat that he would put peanuts in it to feed the squirrels. And the squirrels took the boat, peanuts and oh, took it all up the tree. He got so mad... You too afraid to beg? I have a bird feeder that the squirrels can't get into. That makes them so mad. They'll get up and look down from the roof at it, and they can't figure out how to get in it.

Anderson: Can I get a picture of you holding this picture?

Jelks: Okay. Now that probably isn't the best picture. I have a lot of slides of my plants out here that I've made through the years. But that was one I could find readily.

Anderson: Yeah it's too bad we couldn't do this in the fall.

Jelks: Yeah, then you would see the plants in all their glory. So what is the deadline on this material?

Anderson: Probably the beginning of May. I got about a month.

Jelks: It doesn't take very long for the time to pass on. Well, I think I'll wander on back now. Get caught up on my slides.

Anderson: Well thank you for lunch.

Jelks: Oh, you're welcome.

Interview with: Dr. Mary Jelks
Date of Interview: April 26th, 2010
Interviewer: David Anderson
Transcriber: David Anderson

Anderson: A little bit more about the native grasses would be nice. What's threatening the "native-ness" of Myakka?

Jelks: Well, you get exotic plants come in and take up that space and then you don't have the native grass, you have some exotic that has no enemies, so it can spread and get more of them all around the place. And if you don't have your native plants there, then you have this other grass with no use to the wildlife out there.

Anderson: Some grasses you love, and some grasses you don't. It's kind of interesting to...

Jelks: Yeah, some of the grasses you feel aren't going to take over like some of the exotics do. You put it there, and it's there. It doesn't make about 50 more of them in that area. They'll just stay in one spot.

Anderson: Are the more invasive grasses the ones people are planting in their...

Jelks: Yes, for some reason people will plant something that's not like the regular plants because it's different. And then they have something that can go on and take up much of the land instead of having the native plants growing.

Anderson: Why do they do that?

Jelks: To try to see if this plant will be of more use than the regular native plants. It's always an experiment.

Anderson: Is it for landscaping?

Jelks: Not always. Sometimes it's just to see if it will grow in the harsh conditions easier than the regular plants. They've imported a lot of different grass stalks from other parts of the world. Bahiagrass [[Paspalum notatum](#)] is one of them. I remember when they first introduced that into the lawns here. People said, "Here's a wonderful grass. It doesn't get chinch bugs and all the problems that the grasses they had been using. So they starting planting. Well, bahiagrass blooms just all the time. Puts up these big seed heads. And it turned out that more of the people allergic to grasses were more allergic to bahiagrass than some of the things like timothy [[Phleum sp.](#)] and so I think it becomes then a real problem for health to have all this bahiagrass growing and blooming. The first species that they introduced did just bloom from April 1 to November. It was in constant bloom spreading all over the place. Then they changed and they got another cultivar that didn't bloom quite as readily. But it's still not a native plant. And you go back.... There's

been a lot of plants introduced. Bermudagrass [[Cynodon sp.](#)] again it didn't belong here when they got it. They found it grew in very dry conditions and it didn't need to be watered or fertilized all the time. So it became a winner for some people but not for everyone.

Anderson: Do those grasses get into Myakka?

Jelks: Myakka—you have all kinds of grasses that get there simply because it's an open space and if the wind blows it in, then you've got it. But it won't predominate as well as plants that are used to that climate.

Anderson: Well another question: what is that area in the front there?

Jelks: In the front, it was initially, they didn't charge admission to get in the park. And then as they started to have to charge admission to be able to finance the upkeep of the park, then people would try to get in without paying admission. So that's why they had to make the entry and exit lanes. And in the middle was this space, that in 1993 when I came on board with the park, they decided to call that a plot to explain dry prairie. And so I tried to plant dry prairie plants there so that people could see how it looks around the season. It isn't an ideal place for dry prairie plants because it has all these big palm trees around it. So you're constantly weeding out palm trees that want to propagate their kind. But you keep working at it trying to keep it in the right balance of plants.

Anderson: Was it your idea to make that the dry prairie?

Jelks: I think a number of us thought together that it would be nice to explain to people about dry prairie and the great diversity of plants that occur in the dry prairie.

Anderson: Is that the most diverse ecosystem we have?

Jelks: It's probably more diverse than any other things. You take the oaks, pines, they have to take too big a space for each individual. In the dry prairie, if you keep it burned and keep the other plants from taking over, then you have a very diverse group of plants.

Anderson: Diversity is good. This project has made me really appreciate the dry prairie. It's kind of an area that a lot of people would look at and...

Jelks: Oh they just go by it and don't even think of it.

Anderson: Why?

Jelks: It's just... It's there. So what? That's the attitude most people have of it. But then if you work with it and understand the importance of it, then it becomes almost a religious thing to you.

Anderson: Is that what it is for you?

Jelks: Sort of.

Anderson: Yeah, it sort of does have that religious aspect. Once a week you go and pay homage to it and there's good and there's evil.

Jelks: Right.

Anderson: It's interesting to me because you've done so many sweeping changes for Myakka and Sarasota in general. I mean the media certainly likes to focus on these things and it's been a huge civil service.

Jelks: Mm hmm. Well the cleanup of the river has always been a very important thing to me. And as I get older I'm less effective in doing the areas I do, but it has opened up the spirit of other people wanting to do likewise. So I have groups who volunteer to clean up around the [interstate] 75 area. I still work on the US [Highway] 41 bridges because it seems like a long ways for most people to go. But it's a service that you need to get other people interested in.

Anderson: So now you focus on the entryway. That's where you spend most of your volunteer time?

Jelks: I spend more effort on that than any others. In the cleanups we always try to pick a time when the river is skinny so it isn't so full of water. You can't see the trash underneath the water when it's too flooded. And so we have to wait until a time when there's low flow. Then you can go out there and be more effective in pulling out the things that get in.

Anderson: That's smart.

Jelks: And I always have recorded what we clean up, who does it. That takes quite a bit of time. Too much time I think.

Anderson: To log everything?

Jelks: To log it, and say that year we got a lot. And as the years go by, the amount of stuff that gets in the river is different. For the longest time it was just: we get tires and things that people had tried to use to keep the erosion from their property along the river from eating away their property. And as time passed, it's been more the trash that people carry on the river when they're recreating. Oh oops, it flies out of the boat and there it is. Then the fisherman when they hook into the bushes along the way, they leave a whole bunch of fishing line that will entrap birds and other wildlife. So it's important to get that stuff out of there. And so as time goes on, you have a different focus on these things. Initially it was mainly the tires and fishing line and that sort of thing. As time goes on, you still get an awful lot of the beer bottles. Many more than I think we should. If they can carry them in, they can carry them out. But they don't. But these are things that keep changing. And now my focus has been a lot on the exotics, getting rid of Brazilian

pepper [[Schinus terebinthifolia](#)]. This plant is another one of these exotics that got here and it takes over. And the disturbing thing I had there at the US 41 area, it's warm enough that many of the plants that should be growing there, can't. It's got Brazilian pepper, Australian pine, and now I'm seeing a lot of carrotwood [[Cupaniopsis anacardioides](#)] coming into play. It's another exotic. So the battle goes on.

Anderson: It's just a constant battle. But that's where Don Quixote...

Jelks: Yes.

Anderson: Can you talk a little about Don Quixote?

Jelks: Well, I've always been fascinated with Don Quixote because he's an individual who wanted to get rid of the bad, and he's often fighting things that normal people wouldn't worry about.

Anderson: Like what?

Jelks: Windmills.

Anderson: Hahaha,

Jelks: Why is he always trying to tear down the windmills?

Anderson: I have no idea.

Jelks: But he's getting old and not as effective, and I can share his problem.

Anderson: I think you're still very effective. I mean you certainly do a lot more than anyone else I know.

Jelks: Well, if you could just do more.

Anderson: Always.

Jelks: Yeah.

Anderson: One person can only do so much I suppose.

Jelks: Mm hmm. But if I were more of a people person, just think of the number of people you could influence to follow suit. That's why I felt it was important to get other leadership into the Friends of the Myakka.

Anderson: Oh yeah. Because they throw those black tie events and stuff?

Jelks: Mm hmm. Yeah. If you were a real fundraiser, you would have black tie things and get the truly wealthy people to come out there and promote it.

Anderson: Yeah, it's important to get those wealthy people involved. Get them to care.

Jelks: Mm hmm.

Anderson: Your family made a huge contribution to the Jelks Preserve.

Jelks: Well yes, that property. It's a smaller one. We've had other smaller things. Just got a letter from some friends who live up around the Appalachian area. They had some property at Wolf Creek in Georgia and there were some unusual plants there and they wanted to get it into public domain. And we helped them do that. And the flowers are there each year. In February or early March, these flowers bloom., and there they are. They're available to the public and are protected from—they were going to be taken over by a bunch of hunter groups who didn't worry about whether they destroyed these pretty plants or not. They were more interesting in hunting. So that has been set aside and some of the people sent me an email in the past week telling the GPS location of this plant.

Anderson: Cool.

Jelks: So if you want to go visit next February, look up the GPS and find it.

Anderson: When February rolls around, I'll come find you. So is that where most of your family's money goes into?

Jelks: Not there. No, we've spent quite a bit with different groups. Like the Nature Conservancy and trying to help them put aside... Right now their emphasis is on preserving lands where they have all those big springs up in north Florida. They also are trying to promote saving lands that have the taller pine. That seems to be a better pine to have on conservation land. So instead of just buying any old land, they're trying to specialize and get the ones where the springs are and those tall pines.

Anderson: That sounds like a good strategy. Well I've asked my questions. I thank you for meeting with me this last time.

Jelks: Well that's alright.

Anderson: I've really enjoyed hearing about all this stuff.

Jelks: Well it's kind of fascinating. Once people know you're interested in trying to get public domain for good lands, they want to help you do that. Well, it's worth the effort I think to encourage people to take a more responsible attitude towards our lands.

Anderson: What can the average person do?

Jelks: Well, at least support groups like Florida Native Plants, Sierra Club. These groups, organized groups. Audubon. Audubon is a good group. They make it easier to be politically active for the environment than some of the others. You can go online and if they have a little blip about what needs to be done, then you can go talk to the legislators or whoever you need to talk to to influence them the right way.

Anderson: I have one last question. What do you think of lawns?

Jelks: Again, I think lawns and properties should respect the necessity of having diversity. A monoculture of a grass of any sort isn't wise. I think it's nice to have grassy lawn if you wanted to play croquet or whatever, it's good for that use. But becoming extreme in requiring every landowner to have a grassy lawn of a certain type is too restrictive. I think individual taste should be respected on some of these things.

Anderson: You're referring to neighborhood associations?

Jelks: Neighborhood associations indeed have been too dominant in the picture of landscaping.

Anderson: Where did this notion of the lawn come from?

Jelks: The British people have this idea of private ownership and wall-to-wall grass. The expense of it is too much. If you spend all your effort on that, then you wind up not doing some of the other things.