



**Transcript of Video Interview with Sara Wan,
recorded May 2015.**

This interview is part of Earth Alert's Heroes of the Coast video archive, featuring interviews with leading California coastal activists, past and present California Coastal Commissioners and Coastal Commission staff. For more information, visit www.earthalert.org.

Janet Bridgers (JB): For the top of the tape, would you give your name, Sara, and where you live.

SW: Sara Wan. I live here in Malibu, California, with my husband Larry, of 53 years and we're still actively involved in the environmental movement.

JB: Could you tell us where you're from originally and about some of your educational background?

SW: Yes, I was born in Brooklyn. I went to Vassar College in New York, and then from there to Yale University. I got my master's degree in zoology from Yale University, and then Larry and I were married and we moved out here to California on our honeymoon as he helped...he came to California to help establish the school of engineering at UC Santa Barbara.

Then I went back to school and got my Master's degree in electrical engineering at UC Irvine.

JB: How did you become involved in coastal activism, how and when?

SW: As far as getting involved in coastal activism, it actually developed because it grew out of my concern and my involvement in the environment in general. And I got involved in the environment in general actually on that honeymoon move from Connecticut to California. Larry, my husband, was always an enviro and I wasn't. I was a biologist, a scientist, but I wasn't particularly an enviro. But we made our way across the United States by camping at all the national monuments and parks. And by the time I got to the Grand Canyon, died in the wool enviro, decided never was I going to let anything happen to these wonderful places.

We lived in Orange County for a long time and then when we moved to Malibu, I got involved in a lot of local issues in Malibu that were going to the California Coastal Commission...became very much aware of the commission. It wasn't that I didn't know about it before and that I wasn't concerned about the environment, but I got actively involved in working for this community at the commission and that's basically how I became a coastal activist, here in Malibu. That was about 30 years ago, 35 years ago.

JB: I've been told you did seminars up and down the coast on the Coastal Act. Could you tell us more about that?

SW: Yes, as a member of the commission I became quite concerned that unfortunately the members of the environmental community were very poorly represented at the Coastal Commission. The applicants all have paid lobbyists who spend their time working with commissioners, and socializing with them and had a lot of input to them. And the environmental community basically had nobody, which was something that I discovered actually initially when

I was acting as an environmental activist at the commission before I became a member of the commission.

And so it disturbed me so much when I was a member of the Commission, that I formed ORCA, that's the Organization of Regional Coastal Activists. And what I did was try to put together a group in every county—coastal county in California, that would have members that would work with members in the other counties to help get them representation at the Coastal Commission with commissioners and at hearings. And my belief was that in order for them to be effective, they had to be fully versed in the Coastal Act and the Coastal Commission.

So in order to be a member of ORCA, you had to take two eight-day training sessions, which I conducted, which was to teach people about the Coastal Act, about the issues, just what was the jurisdiction of the commission, what were the things they should be dealing with and then how to understand the commission's procedures.

JB: It's a very important kind of training, that I know from my own experience has just come really piecemeal from being involved in one little issue, then another little issue. So you get a little piece of it here, a little piece of it there, but not the whole thing.

SW: And that's precisely why I put that together, because people would come very passionate about their issue, but they had no experience with the Coastal Commission and they would, lots of time, get off track because they didn't understand that, for example, let's take "views." They would come and talk about views that impacted them. But that's not of concern to the commission. What's of concern to the commission is public views. And so they needed to know how to frame their issues in a way that the commission could listen to them.

JB: And when were you appointed to the commission?

SW: I was appointed in January of 1996. It was kind of an interesting way to be appointed, actually. I kind of knew that I was getting appointed. I had gone to the Coastal Commission to speak in opposition to the proposed development at Bolsa Chica and was there at a hearing, and about two hours into the hearing, I was appointed, and then turned around and went up, took my speaker's slip out of the pile, sat down and that was my first meeting.

JB: There were, I know, some pretty amazing hearings about Bolsa Chica and the next question was to ask you some of the highlights of your experience on the commission, and maybe that was one?

SW: Well, certainly the first one clearly was one particularly, because as I said...I didn't get into all the particulars...but it was pretty exciting as I stood in the back of the room and all of this stuff going on about trying to get me on the commission that day. And that and the subsequent hearings that took place at the commission on a very very important issue certainly was one of the highlights. In fact, the next time the Bolsa Chica came to the commission, I was on the commission and then the following time, when we actually finally had a good decision, I was chair of the commission...big difference in the way the commission behaved. But it's really hard with 15 years on the commission to pick out...there's just so many things but if I had to talk

about a couple that were outstanding I would say the hearing on the Hearst project, up in San Luis Obispo, where we had, at least at that point, one of the largest attendances. I think it was about a thousand and I was vice chair of the commission at the time. And there was a lot of pushing and shoving by the Hearst Corporation. And of course, we had a great victory on that one.

And the next one would probably be the toll road, which was, to my experience, and I think certainly in the history of the commission had the greatest number of people who attended. And I think the official count was well over 3000 people at that hearing, and it was quite an amazing hearing, particularly given all the politics that were involved, which frequently are involved, frankly, in big decisions at the commission. And all the machinations in what was going on, and I walked into the hearing room knowing that we were going to lose and the toll road was going to be passed because they had the votes. And then we won, I think it was 10-1. So it was a huge victory and very very exciting.

Of course, there are a couple of things that stand out where we had huge defeats as well, but I won't go into those.

JB: There is a hearing that Peter Douglas talked about when, one of the times, when they tried to get rid of him. Does that ring a bell to you?

SW: Oh, yes, I remember both times there were public hearings. The first time there was a public hearing trying to get rid of him, I was not on the commission. It was in Huntington Beach. And I remember that very well, but of course, the one I remember best was the one in... I don't know what the year was anymore, I lose track of time, but I was on the commission, but there a huge attempt to get rid of him and it was quite an exciting hearing. And it was kind of fun because they were sure they had the votes, all of the governor, and the... at least one of the elected... I think it was the speaker, the head of Assembly were insistent on trying to get rid of him, because the Republicans had eight of the members. There are 12 members. Let me back up.

Kate Johnson: (in background saying something)

SW: So you asked me about the times that they attempted to fire Peter Douglas. I was around for both of them. For the first one, I was in the audience as a member of the environmental community who had come to support him and the second time, I was on the commission itself when that happened. I'm trying remember exactly who the governor was. It must have been Pete Wilson, because there were eight Republicans and four Democrats on the commission. For everybody to know, there are 12 appointed members of the commission—four from the governor, four from the Speaker of the Assembly and four the President Pro Tem of the Senate. I was a Senate Pro Tem appointment, so I was a Democratic appointment.

And the Republicans were in control and now they thought they had the votes to be able to get rid of Peter. It must have been Kurt Pringle... as I'm thinking about it now, Kurt Pringle was Speaker and so the two of them, the governor and the Speaker of the Assembly decided this was the time that they had the votes to get rid of Peter. And in fact they did, until basically just before the end. And then, when they had called a special session of the commission to do this at the end

of the regular hearing on a Friday. And that morning, the Republicans realized they probably didn't have the votes any longer to do this and they asked... I remember them asking the attorney, the commission's attorney, if they could cancel the hearing, the special hearing. And they were told "no, they couldn't because it had been announced publicly."

And they asked, "well, what would happen if they didn't show up?" And the four of us went, "well that would be pretty good. We'll have the press all to ourselves." So they showed up and it was quite a day and it was a very victorious day. And it never got to a vote. They tried to table it and successfully tabled it and at one point, wouldn't let us speak. But we did.

And the public... I think they had a grand time, because by the time it came to hearing, it was pretty clear what was going to happen.

JB: Wish I could have been there. The population has doubled since 1972 when Prop. 20 was passed and I'd like you to rate the effectiveness of the Coastal Commission and Coastal Act on several areas, starting with securing public access.

SW: Well, let me first start in terms of what's happened and the effectiveness of the California Coastal Commission over the period from 1972 to now. I'll go into the specific areas that you'd questioned, but I'd kind of like to make a general statement because while in any given category, they may not have reached an A+ level, because you have had various times, depending on who was on the commission, you've had good commissions and then commissions that weren't good. I think overall the statement has to be that the coast of California would look very different if it were not for the Coastal Commission. Overall, we have a coast that still belongs to the people of the state, that in most instances can be accessed by the public and much of which has been prevented from overdevelopment. That isn't to say there hasn't been a great deal of development, some of it inappropriate. But if you want to see the difference between what this coast would look like with or without a commission, take a drive down from Los Angeles to San Diego, look on your left and see, which is outside of the coastal zone, what it looks like and look on your right as you go down, there's development, but it's low, it's less intense. Where it's possible, you can still see the coast. Huge difference. This state owes an enormous amount of gratitude to the Coastal Commission because it has kept this coast basically not pure, not maybe as good as it could have been, but certainly it would have been totally different without the commission.

Now I'll answer the questions about the specifics.

On public access, I think the commission has done the best job that it possibly could do. I'll give it an A for that. I would give it a higher rating if I could, but the only reason I wouldn't give it an A+ is because where it has failed, it's been because its hands have been tied, not for lack of trying on the part of the commission. You have to remember that a lot of these things go to the courts. There's a lot of limitation to what the law will or will not allow. And over the years, one of the things that has held back the commission from doing the things that it should be able to do is its lack of funding. So it can't always take actions, for example, about violators and people who are blocking public access, it can't always take the action that it should because it doesn't have the funds to. It's got another tool in its toolbox right now in which can fine people finally for doing, for violating and blocking public access and I think you will see a huge improvement

on public access and the commission's ability to deal with public access. And I suspect that it will go up to an A+, because other than the Pringle commission, I haven't seen a commission Republican or Democrat that wasn't pro-public access.

JB: Something that I think is interesting...many, many people are not aware that other states do not have these same provisions. I was surprised to learn that in Massachusetts a property owner can build a fence right into the water. From your experience in other places in the country, if you could comment about that.

SW: It depends on where you are. For example, in the Northeast, it's particularly bad. They consider the beaches can be privatized. There are attempts to make them public, but it's very difficult. I was in Florida once and we were on the west coast someplace and I asked at the desk, "there's a place I want to go. It's a public beach and how do I get there." And she said, "oh well, it's a good thing you asked, because there's a security guard and unless you the rights to go there, you can't go there."

I said, "excuse me, it's a public beach."

"Well, but you can't get there."

And I immediately said, "boy, it wouldn't be that way if this was California."

And Hawaii is a state that is pretty good, for example, about allowing the public. So it depends on the state. It's state by state.

JB: The preservation of wetlands and environmentally sensitive habitat areas.

SW: Okay, the commission hasn't been as good on this area as it could have been. It's been reasonably good on the preservation and protection of wetlands, probably because in the Coastal Act, the definition of wetlands are very specific. It's very well defined. It says...basically, the Coastal Act says "except for seven reasons, thou shalt not fill a wetland." So it's very, very specific and it gives the commission a lot of power.

Unfortunately, in the case of environmentally sensitive habitat, while the definition in the Coastal Act, it's a wonderful definition, it's probably the most protective of any law regarding sensitive habitat, it still leaves a lot to be desired in terms of the specifics and it gives the commission enough discretion so that where there's political pressure, it can wiggle out of it. So I would give it probably an A on wetlands, or maybe an A- on wetlands and probably no more than a B on ESHA.

JB: Preservation of views and scenic beauty?

SW: On the question of preservation of views and scenic beauty, I think the commission has done, generally speaking, a pretty good job, although, again, a lot of it is subjective. And wherever it's subjective, then the kind of job it does depends completely on whether or not the commissioners are subject to political pressure, what their particular views are, just as, for

example, I'll go back a minute on wetlands, because the Coastal Act is so specific, if the commission does the wrong thing, it's easy to take them to court and win. In scenic views, it's very difficult and to some extent, the courts themselves have limited the commission's ability to be as effective as it should be, because even when the commission may want to, if there's a court action on the part of the applicant, lots of time they win, because the court doesn't necessarily agree with the commission's discretion.

And a big area of failing is that the commission doesn't have the right, and this was determined by a court, to deal with the views of the coast from the ocean. So if you're in a boat, and you're looking at the view, the court says, "that doesn't count." Okay, and of course, that's still a public view, and it should count, but that's not the commission's fault. That's the fault...it's one of the weaknesses of the Coastal Act. There are a couple of weaknesses of the Coastal Act. So overall, view protection is probably in the B range as well.

JB: Preservation of coastal agriculture?

SW: I think on the preservation of coastal agriculture, the commission has really made an effort to maintain coastal agriculture. Again, wherever you're dealing with things that are subjective, it's not all that easy. But the commission has made an effort to deal with this. It's gone so far, at least when I was there, it was making attempts, for example, there are a lot of large parcels in Northern California, North Central California, that are agricultural that have been purchased by very wealthy people who want to take them out of agriculture, put them into mega-mansions kind of thing. And the commission, at least...I don't know if they've continued this policy, but they developed a policy that when you did that, you had to be willing if you bought the parcel and you were using it primarily to build a home, you had to accept a deed restricted easement that would require the rest of the parcel to be put into agricultural use. So I think the commission has made a real effort in this category. It's hard to say that it's been super effective, but I firmly believe that if it weren't for the commission, you'd have a lot less agricultural land than you do, because the coastal land in California is so valuable, that turning it from agriculture to residential would be a desirable thing from the developer's perspective.

JB: And I think that anyone who drives up Highway 1...

SW: And you still see...

JB: and you see how pristine it appears to be.

SW: Yes, I think if you go north of the L.A./Ventura area, and you start to drive north, you see what a good job overall the state has done in protecting that. A little hard to do it south from Ventura, because much of that was developed before the Coastal Act, so there's not much they could do about protecting it.

JB: Coastal water quality and marine biota?

SW: Oh, the commission has been very good on water quality. It has made every effort where it can. Sometimes it's had conflicts with the Water Quality Control Board over whether it should to

do what it wanted to do, but frankly, it's put in a lot of things that protect water quality that eventually the Water Quality Act Board started to do. It hasn't been as good on marine biota, but I think it's...in some of the bigger fauna in the marine life, like whales and marine mammals, it's been excellent. It's done everything it can to try to protect these animals as much as it can. And it went to court, unfortunately lost in the Supreme Court, in its effort to protect whales and other marine creatures from sonar. So it's done everything it can. It's been super, so it depends on the area that you're talking about. But it does put in very good conditions on all of the projects dealing with runoff and it's done a very good job with it.

JB: With regard to Water Quality Control Boards withdrawing permits for one-pass cooling of coastal power plants, are they in effect enforcing section 30231 of the Coastal Act, or do they have their own law? How do the mandates of the two agencies overlap and differ?

SW: Your question deals with how does the Water Quality's jurisdiction and mandates comply with or work with the Coastal Commission's mandates and requirements to protect marine life.

Basically, the commission's mandate is to protect marine life. It doesn't not specifically say water quality, but indirectly, it's water quality, because that's one of the major things that affect marine life.

Most of the time, they work quite well together. The Water Quality Control Board sets the standards for toxicity. The commission doesn't do that. So there's no conflict in that. Whatever their standards are, that's what the commission uses.

Sometimes there have been conflicts. As far as the once-through cooling issue, I think that's a Water Quality Control Board mandate and I can't tell you how the Water Quality Control Board people are handling that. In most instances, the commission is pretty good about seeing to it...they've made every effort when it's come to dealing with most of the "desal" plants where that's also a very difficult problem. But they did approve, and that was one of the things that I would have said was our big loss, they did approve the Carlsbad Poseidon desal plant. Not that I'm opposed to desal, but in this particular case, they are using the once-through cooling power...they're using a power plant that has once-through cooling to provide their power, and they failed to put a subsurface intake in, so they are drawing, they themselves are drawing in water that is destroying sea life. There was a lot of political pressure and I'll be honest, a lot of major decisions that come down from the commission are sometimes tainted by political pressure. There was a lot of political pressure to approve that. But by and large, the commission has been trying to, and the staff reports have tried to if you're going to do something like a desal plant, you're supposed to use a subsurface intake so that you don't draw in the water.

As far as power plants, power plants are actually not in the commission's jurisdiction. The right to site power plants, the right to deal with power plants, was actually removed from the Coastal Act. So the commission does not have any authority in that realm.

JB: The governor's office has obviously been dealing with the drought situation. I'm talking about the effects of climate change so far on California. But the predictions on sea level rise vary from one foot to 20 feet before the end of century, and promise to affect the coast in ways we've

never seen before. Section 30235 of the Coastal Act provides for protection of existing development when it's threatened by shoreline erosion. And from your experience, if you can tell us how you've seen it implemented in armoring in the past, how it might be used in the future and also, how is armoring financed?

SW: So your question has got multi-prongs about armoring of the coast, the effects of global warming and financing, so I'll try to just talk about armoring as best I can.

Unfortunately, I believe that the Coastal Commission when it first came into existence did not properly interpret the provisions of the Coastal Act when it comes to armoring. You cite Section 30235 of the Coastal Act as permitting the installation of armoring, armoring being to protect property that's in danger from erosion.

Unfortunately the wording of that says that the commission "shall" approve. It doesn't give the commission a lot of leeway and to back up, armoring is very disastrous when it comes to its impact on the beach, because the normal beach, and if you have beaches and bluffs and land that's not developed, the normal process is for, as the waves come in, it erodes the bluffs. The bluffs move back. The beach builds up from the bluffs that have been eroded and the beach itself maintains a width, a certain width, so you have a beach. If you armor the back of the beach, you lose eventually the beach in front of that armoring.

So it's a disastrous impact, particularly on the public's ability to have a beach. So backing up with that, Section 30235 says "the commission shall approve armoring," and I'm paraphrasing it, but "shall approve armoring to protect development that's existing development in danger of erosion. Section 30253 of the same Coastal Act says that the commission may not approve any development that will require armoring. So if you read the two provisions together, the logical conclusion is that "existing" should have been interpreted to be "existing at the time of the Coastal Act."

But I guess it's almost 40 years ago now, when the Coastal Act was put into place, that's not how they interpreted it. They interpreted it that as long as the development wasn't going to require armoring at the time it was put in, it could be allowed to be approved. And of course what would happen would be it would be approved and five years later it would need armoring and then the argument was, well, it's existing development. As soon as it's developed, it becomes existing. And so you had amount of development and therefore armoring of the coast. And I don't remember what the amount of the coast is armored now, but when I was on the commission, it was something like 10 to 15 percent of the coast was already armored. And that's disastrous from the perspective of what our coast is going to look like and whether we're going to have beaches and all the rest of the implications of armoring.

When in the late 1990s, the commission decided to take a slightly different tack, which I hope they're still applying, and we decided because Section 30253 said that the commission should not approve anything that would ever require armoring, we took the position that if you're asking us to build where we believe eventually armoring would be needed, you needed to sign a waiver of your rights under Section 30235, because we saying, "if you're telling us that it won't need armoring, we want you to assure us that it won't need armoring, and if you're wrong, then it's

going to be your problem.” So that’s the position that the commission has taken. That hasn’t sit well with a lot of homeowners.

As far as who pays for the armoring, the armoring is paid for by the property owner, unless we’re talking about state property. And state property generally the commission, again Section 30235 says that if it’s a coastal dependent project, then the armoring is perfectly legal and no one had ever objected to that. If it’s a highway, if it’s a big facility, coastal-dependent facility, putting armoring to protect that. But all of the other armoring is on private property, and the private property owners pay for that. But I’ll add one caveat to that and that is because you lose the sand in front of the armor, there are big programs, expensive programs, paid for by the taxpayers to put sand back on the beaches, and that the public pays for.

JB: With regard to offshore wind power and wave energy power that could have the potential to reduce carbon emissions and help the state meet its 50 percent renewable energy goal by 2050, what problems do you anticipate in the implementation of such technologies vis a vis the Coastal Act?

SW: You’re talking about renewable energy such as wind power and wave power and I’m probably going to say a few things that you may not like on this one because I’m not as much of a fan of some of these “renewable” energies as you might think. That doesn’t mean that I’m in favor of the burning of fossil fuels and global warming...I shouldn’t use global warming. Climate change is a much better phrase is a significant problem that’s going to seriously affect us in many many ways, but the thing that we ignore is that the effects of wind power and wave power, just like any other energy source, do not come without their own environmental effects.

Wind power, some of the effects are obvious. They put these wind turbines up in wind corridors, which is where birds migrate. Wind power machines kill birds and bats. They are what we call Cuisinarts to birds and bats. That, in and off itself, is a disastrous impact that everybody seems quick to overlook. But I think there’s a more serious thing that we’ll find, both with wind power and wave power, and that is, no power is free. Okay, so you’re taking now the wind power is coming in wind currents. Think about what is going to happen as you put a sufficient number of these wind turbines...a few is one thing, but a lot is another, and as you remove the energy from those wind currents and you change the nature of wind currents, you will be changing the nature of the climate. And you eventually are going to have climate change for a different reason. So I am not all that enamored of all of this.

We have yet to do the things that we need to conserve. That’s the first thing that we need to do and we’re simply not doing it. We keep saying, “we need energy. We need to feed our need for energy.” Well, the more you feed your need for energy, the more energy you will need. And there’s lots of things that you can do to reduce the energy consumption and that’s what we need to be doing first. And we’re simply not doing it.

And everything that I’ve said when it comes to wind power applies to wave-generated power, too. You’re going to be affecting the waves as they come in. As you take energy from it, you’re going to change those waves. I don’t know how they deal with the water power that comes in, but I will bet you will also affect the microscopic organisms, and just as once-through cooling

did, you're going to affect the marine biota by wave power. So again, you don't find me to be a huge supporter of all of this.

JB: Well, there's lots of issues to be worked here, with regard to renewable energy, and I'm quite involved in New Mexico in these things, but that's not germane.

The coast draws an incredible number of visitors to California. I couldn't find a figure for just coastal related tourism, but visitors to California spent \$117 billion in 2014, providing \$??? In state and local tax revenues, yet the funding for the Coastal Commission has been at the will of the governor and the legislature since its inception. Would you care to comment on the lack of guaranteed income, such as a bed tax in coastal areas for the commission?

SW: You're talking about the funding of the commission possibly through tourism dollars and I certainly would support that. I don't think you're ever going to see that happen. If it was going to happen, it should have happened at the time of the writing of the Coastal Act.

I don't know what the figure is in terms of coastal tourism, but it's in the billions. Our coast generates huge amounts of money for this state and keeping it protected is part of protecting that in a sustainable way so the tourism will continue. If we didn't protect our water quality and our beaches were polluted, who would want to come to the beach because they wouldn't be able to swim in the water. So that would be one thing.

If our beaches and our bluffs were just crowded with homes, it would tremendously reduce the desire for tourism. We have beautiful beaches here and it generates a lot of income and the commission has been very good about seeing to it that, for example, that tourists have the ability to come to California, to come to the coast, to enjoy the coast. One of the things that the commission is good at approving, and I know some people don't like it, are hotels. And the reason they want to approve hotels is so that it isn't just residents who can stay at the beach, but it can be tourists. Whether they're tourists from California, or the rest of the United States or the rest of the world.

So the commission's been very good at that, and they should have a steady source of income, because if we went back to one of the things I said originally about the things that have tied the commission's hand in their ability to do their job, for example, relative to public access has been a lack of funding. They haven't had the staff to do the kind of work that they need to do and that's because the commission does not have a good, solid source of income. It's at the whim of the legislature and the governor and if you have a governor who's opposed to the Coastal Commission, you're going to have its funding removed. You can hogtie the commission in a number of ways, and one of which by removing its funding, and another, of which, of course, is by who you approve. But if you don't have the funding and you don't have the staff to do the job that they need to do, I don't care who's sitting on the commission, you won't be able to protect the coast.

JB: Both on and off the commission, you've been a crusader for protecting whales from the Navy's sonar and if you could tell us more about that work and where it stands now.

SW: I've spent a lot of time working on the issue. You asked me about the issue of the impacts to marine mammals by sonar. I spent a lot of time, was very early on involved in generating and working on the very early stages as we became aware of the impacts to marine mammals, particularly whales, of sonar and other ocean sounds.

I sat on the first committee that was put together that in those days was called MMS—Minerals Management Service—put together and I sat on the panels and on the committee that dealt with it. And then (I lose track of time, I'm sorry to say, so I can't give you the years), but at one point the Marine Mammal Commission put together a scientific advisory panel to come up with a report to Congress on this issue and I was asked to sit on that commission, that committee...it's a FAC A (sp?) committee, a federal advisory committee, and there were mostly...I think there were 28 members of the committee. There were four or five members representing environmental groups. The rest were basically the producers of the sound—the oil industry, the Navy—and they had a number of marine mammal scientists who worked in this area, but they were all funded by the oil industry and the Navy, so you have to question them. But there were about four or five enviros and then they had one person representing the coastal states of the United States, and that was me. While I was technically representing the states of the United States, I became part of the environmental caucus.

We met for a number of years, flew back and forth to Washington and sometimes it was almost weekly, and then when it came time to put together this report to Congress, it didn't happen. We had to write individual reports, because basically the Navy scuttled it. So we did do individual reports. The commission has one on its website, so you can see, which I wrote, on the basis of that. It's a very serious problem. It does affect whales and other sea life. It does cause their deaths. The Navy has consistently blocked attempts to prove it, withheld information, but it's pretty clear that it does affect them.

As I said, when the commission tried to block the use of Navy sonar and made the decision to prohibit it, the commission was taken to court by the Navy and it went eventually to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court overturned the commission, saying on security basis, national security basis, they have the right to do it.

I haven't been as active in that area since leaving the commission because that was really the forum that gave me the ability to do it. Although I have been working on a lot of other issues. I haven't kept up with it, but it's still an ongoing problem and it's still the Navy and the oil industry still has the right to do it, and you can see what's going on on the East Coast right now with sonic "research."

In order to know where to drill for oil off the coast, they have to use sound to explore it and they're doing that on the East Coast right now and there are big battles to try to prevent it from happening, but I don't see how they're going to overcome the oil industry unfortunately and it's going to have a serious effect on the population of marine mammals in the ocean.

JB: Tell us about your current involvement in coastal issues.

SW: As I told you that I originally was not just a coastal activist, but concerned about the environment. I love the desert just as much as I love the coast.

And since leaving the commission, although I still get involved in coastal issues, primarily, in two ways, one, I've been doing some consulting for people who have issues at the commission that they need help on, and to deal with. Of course, my consulting is very limited because I won't take anybody but people on the pro-environment side, or somebody that I think their project is okay and is consistent with the Coastal Act and won't cause any problems. And that kind of limits me as to what I can do in that arena. And I do a lot of work sort of pro-bono, particularly behind the scenes, dealing with issues and advising. And right now, I don't want to mention the project. It's a big project that I'm helping the Sierra Club and I've been writing their letters for them that they're going to oppose...they're opposing something and I'm writing the letter to the commission for them...sort of thing.

But I've branched out into dealing with a number of other issues that are not necessarily specifically coastal-related. My husband and I, Larry, we formed and founded a land conservancy that we operate here. And we have done a lot of work. You can go to our website. It's called...

My husband, Larry, and I have formed a land conservancy based here in Malibu and we do a lot of work throughout the Western Hemisphere. We've done work in Alaska. We've done work to help protect the wolves in the Greater Yellowstone area. We've done fundraisers for Bolsa Chica. We've done work in Mexico and in Ecuador, we wound up purchasing lots of land in Ecuador. And we have two ongoing projects right now that we're working on. One actually is in Chile, in which we are working on, or funding a project to help determine where two species of storm petrels live—Markhams and for the life of me I can't remember the name of the second storm petrel. Unfortunately, storm petrels, basically, their breeding location is unknown. Most storm petrels, they do not know where they breed.

In the case of the Markhams, they knew there was one small colony in Peru, and they knew they had to nest somewhere in Chile and it turns out...well, it was thought they were nesting in the Atacama Desert, but the people in Chile needed some help to be able to get some funds to go out and possibly find where their nests were. We funded them and it turns out that they are nesting in the Atacama Desert. We did a big fundraiser for it and the day of the fundraiser, the researchers in Chile came back with video...the first video ever of a Markham sitting on an active nest. We know where the nests are. We're in the process of gathering information. We have two species. The second species they know absolutely...this is the first time anybody's found any nests of that species and it's very very exciting. We're hoping to map the area, find out how many birds are in the area, because unfortunately that area is owned privately by mining companies and they're already actively mining the area, and along with finding the active nests, we found lots of dead birds that been killed by the mining operations. So the hope is, and that's what our project is about, is that if we can map and get the scientific information to say, "these are important nesting grounds. Here's the area where they nest. And here's how many birds are affected," that we can then try to work to get the money to buy the land and set it aside and protect it.

Another project that we're working on has to do with a project right here in the Santa Monica Mountains and that has to do with, we've been actively involved and working on trying to get a wildlife crossing over the 101 freeway at Liberty Canyon. Some of you may have heard about it. There's been a lot of hype about P22 who managed to cross the freeways here, came probably from the Santa Monica Mountains and is living in Griffith Park. But most mountain lions that live here don't make it for two reasons. As big as the Santa Monica Mountains are, it will only support four males.

So the young males that come in, are born here, either are killed by the other males, or they die trying to get out and away, because they have to cross the freeways, because the Santa Monica Mountains are ringed by freeways. And the idea is to be able to give them the opportunity to get across the 101 and out into the rest of the state of California to be able to breed there, and to allow other lions to come in, because what's happening is that the males that are here are interbreeding with the existing females. And so you're starting to develop genetic problems.

So it's a serious problem. We believe that the wildlife overcrossing will not only help the mountain lions, but because the mountain lions are the apex predator in the Santa Monica Mountains, it will actually help the entire ecosystem. If you remove the apex predator, like the mountain lion, it changes the dynamics and the entire ecosystem will change and you will lose a lot of other species as well. Of course, any wildlife crossing that's built for the mountain lion will also serve for other animals that need the connectivity to other areas, so over all, we think it's an important project. Those are the two main projects we're working on. We're working on a couple of others, but those are our main ones.

JB: Really impressive. Thank you, Sara. Just two more things. Is there anything I've neglected to ask you about that you'd like to talk about, and then I'd like to ask you a few more questions about Governor Brown, but if you'd like to answer that off camera, that's okay.

SW: Okay anything that you haven't covered? No, I think you've done a pretty good job of covering it and just think that I'd like to say why I think it's so important to be concerned about the environment, whether it's the coastal environment or any of our other natural environments.

When I first started, when I first became involved in becoming an enviro, it was purely philosophical. Nature was beautiful. I loved it. How could we destroy it? And I had empathy for animals and felt that we take them for granted and we think that they don't think and they don't feel and they don't any of the same attributes as humans, but that's simply not true. And so in their own right, they have the same right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, just as people do.

But it's become more than a philosophical battle or issue as the years have gone by. Yes, the philosophical drives me, but if you think about it, life is interwoven with other life. It's a web. And we cannot continue to destroy nature and think that eventually, it's not going to affect human beings. Aside from our philosophical needs to it, you can't destroy the ocean, for example, and ignore the fact that, I believe, 70 percent of the oxygen in the atmosphere comes from the ocean. What do you do if the ocean dies? Where does your oxygen gonna come from? What's going to maintain your forests if you kill off all of the native pollinators? All of these

things affect human beings. And we simply are going down this blind path of destruction of ourselves, of our own species. And I think it's time for people to understand that it isn't just about protecting what humans want, but protecting the web of life includes protecting the web of life with people in it.

[end of interview]

57:49 minutes