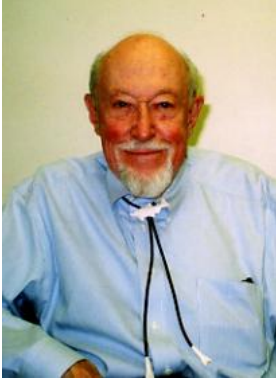




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This interview was conducted with Marty Seldon on July 2nd 2007, in Sunnyvale, California. The interviewer is Tamara Belts.

TB: I, Tamara Belts, am down here with Mr. Marty Seldon, who is a long time fly-fisherman and in particular was very, very active, and involved in a lot of the conservation efforts of fly fishing. We are about to do an oral history. He did just sign the Informed Consent Agreement. He does know he's being recorded. Our first question is how did you get started fly fishing?

MS: Well, my experience started out on the east coast and we moved to California in 1955. One of my neighbors got me into a rented rowboat at the Santa Monica and Zuma Beach piers and we'd go out and fish with conventional gear. That went on for some time and then I got interested in conservation—moved to northern California, 1960, and then got active in fishing with conventional tackle. We fished in the Bay, we fished all over the state. I fished for shad, fished for striped bass, salmon . . . And as a result of that I got started writing fishing columns for a couple of local newspapers, *Pacific Out of Doors* and *The Valley Journal*. While writing those columns I got interested in conservation, became a member of Trout Unlimited and wound up as the president of the local chapter, the Santa Clara Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

At the same time, about the early 1960's, I was working at Varian Associates, Palo Alto, California, [as] a microwave tube engineer. A lot of the people that worked for me and with me were fly fishers. And they were merciless! Finally one of the men that worked there and I went to Santa Clara Parks and Recreation and took a course—guy by the name of Cal Doty, an elderly gentleman, he gave us a course on fly casting and then fly tying. Then we joined the local club in 1971—that's when it all started!

TB: Well, how did fly fishing attract you versus the conventional?

MS: Well, there are just so many more aspects to fly fishing than there are to conventional tackle. Just sitting there with a worm on the hook, bait on the hook waiting for something to happen . . . but in fly fishing you have so many more dynamics. You have the flies: the selection of the flies, tying the flies, the art of tying flies. Then you have the casting: I mean, you could cast all day and enjoy it without a fly on the end of your line—just the art of casting and the rhythm and the pleasure of throwing a tight loop and having it go out and lay out is great. There is the primordial instinct of the hunt – man integral with nature. You also have the literature [which] is just fantastic; there's a great body of literature on fly fishing and great writers. You can get interested in the art! There are great fly fishing artists. There are so many more dimensions to fly fishing than there is with conventional tackle—just sitting there in a row boat—that it just caught my attention. I love it!

TB: Excellent! Well, how long did it take you to get to feel like you were really adept at it?

MS: Well I'm not really adept at it yet!

TB: So, it's a life long pursuit.

MS: A life long pursuit, yes. In fact, I was just thinking of taking some tune up [lessons] on my casting from some of the pros that I know. So it's a life long pursuit—I don't consider myself to be a professional level fisherman or caster, but I enjoy it a lot and *I think* that's really what counts.

I've been very lucky that as a volunteer for the Federation of Fly Fishers (which started about that same time); the conservation chairman who lived up in Davis drafted me to testify before the Senate Finance Committee against another dam on the Kings River, near Fresno, California. Another gentleman, Stewart Chesney, came up and we both went to the Senate Finance Committee hearing in Sacramento. We made our little speech and then the chairman of the committee, a Senator Zenovich from Fresno gave up his gavel, came down, and spoke against us!

It was a sort of enlightening way to get involved in the legislature, the way things don't always work in your favor—which is important if you're in fisheries conservation, because the people on the other side have a lot more power and a lot more staying power. They think in 50 year terms, we think in what's going to happen tomorrow. That got me launched, and it went on from there. But basically, as far as fishing goes, through my involvement in the Federation, and then I was on the FFF Executive Committee for ten years, and that introduced me to people all over the country—and a lot of our professionals.

I've fished for trout in, let's see, aside from California, I fished in England and Austria and France. I've gone Atlantic salmon fishing in Iceland. I fished the holy waters of the Au Sable in Michigan. I fished for tarpon in Costa Rica. This has given me a very broad scope and enjoyment—meeting and making friends with people all over the world has just been magnificent. In California I like to fish Fall River, then the upper and lower Sacramento, those would be the two, and then of course I enjoy the San Francisco Bay Delta, fishing for striped bass. In those same waters in the spring time we have a tremendous run of American shad that I enjoy. So, I love to fish!

TB: What else can you tell me about your efforts in the northwest California area for conservation?

MS: A few years after I testified, I became the vice-president of conservation for the Northern California Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers. I got involved in all our Northern California, Northern Nevada fisheries conservation issues—and there were many! I mean, we went through the whole wild rivers battle. We went through individual problems. We started a number of restoration projects that are still on-going all the time. It's a never-ending battle, and I enjoy the quest.

TB: So tell me a little bit more about what is involved in, like, you were talking about wild waters initiative, what really is that? To a person who doesn't know what that means—what is that?

MS: Well, California has always been sort of a commercial salmon and timber state, as far as historical political power is concerned. Those people with money have had the most influence on how resources are run. Unfortunately the heads of the fish and game department, and the fish and game commission are political appointees. Regardless of party, there's a requirement that you be a major contributor, normally, to get on these commissions. This means that if you're a major contributor and function at those levels then you're not really interested in fisheries conservation, you're more apt to be associated with big water. Unless they're properly managed, our resources could be destroyed. So it's a continual battle.

I think I was one of the first ones in the state of California to submit a protest at a water rights hearing. Now there are formal processes for water rights applications and protests. I showed up at a meeting in Santa Cruz, there was this dam going up on the San Lorenzo River and it was being held in, I think, the water district's office. There was one person from the water district and one person from fish and game, and they were just going to write this thing off and make a few decisions. They said, "Why are you here?" And I said, "Well, I've filed this formal protest, I want to protest the way you're going about this. Number

one, if it's going to be approved, it has to be approved with the right kind of regulations. We want fish ladders. We want good minimum flows below the dam, [and all of these other things.]" They were just astounded! So we've had a number of firsts going through the Seventies to today.

TB: So were you successful?

MS: We did get it fish laddered; we did get some mitigation in the flows. One of the problems when you have political control of resources is that the public trust, particularly in the water and the fisheries doesn't necessarily get represented. It's more political influence, and that's really the dilemma we all face, I think in all states.

TB: Now, do you have any fly-fishing only waters down here?

MS: There are some. In general, fish and game agencies today are loathe to put special regulations . . . California has—well, if you took about seven of the major eastern states, we have about a 1200 mile coastline and about the same area except more variation in topography than those states. So we really have more to worry about. It's very difficult, it's a continual battle.

TB: How about your involvement in the Federation of Fly Fishers? Have you been involved nationally then, beyond Northern California in conservation?

MS: Nationally and internationally, yes.

TB: So can you tell me more about that?

MS: Well, I started out as a member of the executive committee then became conservation vice-president of the Federation (and being a member of a small executive committee you're active in the management of the whole organization). The thing that attracted me most about the Federation of Fly Fishers is its all-species, all-waters scope. The Federation is not just another trout organization, but we are people that are just as concerned about bass or salt-water fish as about trout; it's more than a trout organization. Then the other thing is trying to figure out ways to protect what we have so we can pass it on to future generations. We live in a society today where young children are just not exposed to our outdoor heritage. Too many single parent homes, and the parents are working, they just don't get this exposure. I think educating our youth and getting to these kids and passing what we have down to them is very important. That's another reason why I like the FFF. The Federation has done things like help develop the Boy Scout merit badge for fly-fishing and a lot more.

TB: Oh nice.

MS: And clubs go out and actually help troops that want to do this and train them, teach the kids.

TB: What have been some of your involvements internationally?

MS: Well, for a number of years after I retired [from] the executive committee, I was chairman of the FFF international relations committee. One of the difficulties we have is that we have a relatively low membership, primarily US-based. Without the kind of funds that allow you to travel and visit people, it's very difficult to get people involved internationally. But we have affiliates in Germany, in England, in Australia—all over the world. But you know clubs sort of go up and down in their effectivity and their membership, so it's a constant battle. Particularly now in the present international environment where some people are not very friendly to the United States, it even makes it more difficult. But I was international relations chairman and got more people involved in the Federation, so I'm proud of that work.

TB: What kinds of things did you do to get more people interested?

MS: Well, number one, because of my bent [toward] conservation, I helped people with conservation problems. For example, there was an affiliate in the Netherlands that was trying to fight a large, hydropower dam. Well, I was able to put the gentlemen that were working on that in contact with the hydropower experts in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They helped them and got them all the information they needed to get proper restrictions on the project, or try to fight it. That's the kind of thing -- mostly as a facilitator.

I have been the FFF representative to the international Wild Trout Symposium since 1979 and this is my last year as Symposium Awards Chairman, having held that position for the past seven years. The Wild Trout Symposium is managed by an ad hoc committee from the FFF, TU, and concerned federal and state agencies. This event is held every three years and provides an outstanding forum for working fisheries biologists and fishery conservationists to not only learn the state of the art of the resources but to meet their peers in an informal setting that would otherwise not be possible (www.wildtroutsymposium.com). I am very proud of my participation with this group and its accomplishments.

TB: So internationally, are a lot of the problems the same? Is it the same kind of power struggle?

MS: Oh, absolutely! Absolutely! In fact in some countries, like Canada, there's very little mandatory environmental oversight. Companies control these projects and put them in—there's just no stopping them. It's very difficult.

TB: Well, I really want you to brag about yourself. You have a lot of awards, [like] the FFF Lapis Lazuli (1992).

MS: That's the highest award that the Federation has and it's given out on occasion. I was honored for my years of service to be given the Lapis ring. In 1971 *Field and Stream* gave me their Environmental Action Conservation Award. I have a nice duck pin I can wear on my lapel.

TB: So tell me a little bit more about what was behind [that and] elaborate on some of your work.

MS: Well, one of the early things we did was that we participated with the natural resources defense council in a suit against the state of California and the timber companies who just logged Redwood Creek. Redwood Creek is a northern California stream, a salmon and steelhead stream, and they just had degraded it horribly by improper logging. And they weren't really enforcing the state regulations on rollbacks, buffer zones, etc. We went in and won a case against them and at least temporarily forced them to upgrade and enforce the environmental regulations on logging.

TB: So is that one of the problems: it's not that the regulations aren't there, it's just that people tend to [ignore] them, or circle them.

MS: Generally, yes, but not always. There are water agencies that want to eliminate the environmental species act for steelhead. They claim, "Well, there are all these hatchery fish, and hatchery fish are as good as wild fish—they're not really endangered anymore." Well that's really obscene! We've been fighting that in court. We're still in court today over issues like this. What's happened in the last 20 years is that the Sierra Club and others have legal staffs, because of their millions of members, and they're willing to work on issues like this with us. Where we couldn't afford to do the litigation ourselves, we can go to others for a just cause.

TB: That's kind of cool. So they're issues which are at the heart of fly-fishing and [protecting] the waters for that and you (FFF) don't have the funds [to litigate] so you go to the Sierra Club?

MS: Oh, absolutely! Yes, that doesn't necessarily mean we endorse everything that they do, but in those cases if we can agree then they will help us. The other thing that's developed in California, and again, throughout the nation is that, for example, there's a national hydropower coalition. In California there are

water caucuses and other groups like this that bring in all the constituents and attempt to get compromises on issues. So, I think today we're a lot better informed on what's really happening than we ever were.

TB: Water must be a super huge issue in California with all the irrigation needs of all the farmers and . . .

MS: Well, the problem is, you know, I think it's fine—if they want to grow cotton in the deserts of central California, in the Mojave Desert that's fine. What isn't fine is if I have to pay for them with my taxes. And what's happened is that these projects were never economical. One study I saw—they could take the total investment of the federal government, put it in the bank and just give the farmer's the interest and you'd have more net economic gain than giving them very, very low cost water and destroying our rivers and streams. I think that there's been no balance in the past. This is the kind of thing we're trying to correct. Through all our trembling and tumbling we're fighting these problems. They've destroyed small streams, they've destroyed large rivers. A typical example in California, one that's going on right now, is that the Carmel River in Monterey and Carmel there's a very limited amount of water coming out of the Carmel River, and it's over-harvested. There are two dams, below the upper one, they have to release water, below the other they don't have to release any water. These are the kinds of issues we get involved with, particularly when they've got continual applications to take out more water and it is just not available. We're trying to protect the fish.

TB: Have you ever had any dams removed?

MS: This is really just starting. Yes, we're looking at the Klamath; we're looking at a number of rivers where that's now possible, and again, the ones in the northwest. Of course, the Columbia's a classic example of that.

TB: If they took out a dam, would it really be possible to restore it?

MS: It depends on the flow and the habitat. As W.C. Fields said, "You are what you drink." Of course, he had a different attitude towards what you drink. But yes, it's water: good, clean, cold water. And if you can free up so many miles of it—I mean, it's a basic, simple, biologic calculation: if you can free up so many miles and you can restore the gravel, and it doesn't get silted in, you can get spawning fish.

TB: Do you feel like you're successful overall in your conservation efforts and are you hopeful that the future will be [brighter] that, you'll, somehow be making enough headway that it'll be like the first thing that's being considered when people are [planning for water rights and stream management]?

MS: I doubt if it'll ever be the first thing, but I think the young people that are getting involved now are really excellent. They're smarter, they're sharper, and they're really motivated. We have people now that are taking my place, that are continuing on—that are really doing a great job. So, I think things are improving, and hopefully they will in the future.

TB: Anything else that you want to kind of brag about or talk about?

MS: Well, one of the other things that I've always been interested in is the subject of catch and release fishing. Unfortunately it's sort of become a buzz word for some people where that's terrible, and it isn't! But what you have to do is use catch and release fishing appropriately. If you have a pond that's full of little blue-gills that are stunted because there are too many, it makes no sense to catch and release. You want to harvest most of them so that the ones you have can live better and grow bigger. But on the other hand, there are so many premium fisheries, large, wonderful fish where the waters are highly productive and capable of growing, you know, instead of a six inch trout, a twenty inch trout.

It's those fisheries that are over-impacted by harvest, that really need special regulations. This is where we want to see catch and release. This is the other thing, of course, that once you release the fish, you just don't throw them back! We try to encourage this with conventional fishers as well. If you have a bronze

hook that will rust out, instead of pulling it out of the fishes' guts, you just cut it off and it will dissolve eventually; so proper handling and proper release of fish is very important. And again, our other rule is that when you take a fish out of water hold your breath. When you can't hold your breath anymore put the fish back -- which is another aspect of handling fish properly.

TB: So have you found some changes in the etiquette of fly fishing since you've been involved with it?

MS: Yes, but I don't know whether it's all good. Part of the problem, of course, is that pretty rivers or famous rivers or rivers that are written about get an awful lot of use, engender an awful lot of people; and some of these people are not always gentlemen. The classic angler's etiquette, respecting your neighbor, and not walking in front of them, or not running a boat over his line, often gets ignored. In fact, the Federation wrote on the ethics of fly-fishing, but we need a lot more people involved. It's something you have to preach continually and educate the public.

TB: So is the best place to do that at the Federation level or at the local club level or both places?

MS: Well you can start, because you have access to . . . I don't know how many fly fishing clubs there are—perhaps four or five hundred in the United States. So the place to start is with those, but then, through articles—there are writers that have emphasized this, *Field and Stream's* George Reiger, and of course Ted Williams in *Fly, Rod and Reel*. We must reach out more to the conventional anglers. I think that's important.

TB: Have you, yourself, designed any flies?

MS: No, no, I'm not really a fly-tier. I enjoy the art. Some of these people are just fantastic, and I have a great collection of flies from friends that I framed. I don't do it anymore—but about every ten years I took the beginner's class and then gave it up. I can admire other peoples a lot better than I can do it myself.

TB: What about, you were talking about the literature of fly fishing. Do you have some favorite authors or some [favorite books]?

MS: Yes, I've been collecting books fly fishing books, many by people I know. My theory was after working in industry for 30-40 years that, well, when I retire, I'm really going to read all those. Well, I'm busier now than when I worked—I don't know how I *ever* had time to work and I may never get to read them, but I have a great book collection. So, favorite authors: Thomas McGuane, Ernie Schwiebert, Dave Whitlock, Lefty Kreh . . . many, many, many people.

TB: Anything else then, I guess, about the organizational structure of fly fishing?

MS: Well, again, the fact that the Federation of Fly Fishers is all-species, all-waters, and international in scope. We have to preach the message and get it out to more people.

TB: Any other things . . . I really do want you to brag now, about some of the things that you're the most proud of in regards to your [contributions to fly fishing].

MS: Well, it's one thing to get awards. I think I've always suspected the Federation has given me an award every five years just to keep me working. But what's important to me really, more than awards, are the people I've met. Through my involvement at the international level I know people all over the world, all walks of life—from shoemakers, to carpenters, to corporate executives. It's knowing these people—and of course, many of the personalities that come to our conventions and meetings—so I know a broad aspect of people at all levels. Making friends with all these people has just been a great benefit to me, what really drives me.

TB: Do you think with the growth of the Federation, is it still as agile? [You've grown and now have] an executive director that's paid . . . does that get them farther away from [the heart of the organization]?

MS: I think things are better now than ever. Historically, the Federation was always controlled by the local clubs, and the local clubs are organized in councils, and then these people had the direct vote. Well, instead of that, it's one member, one vote now—it's much more democratic. But I think it's much more universal. In other words, local clubs, or even regional councils, their primary motives usually are enjoying yourself, enjoying fishing, promoting the sport, but they're not really that interested in an international organization. I think what the Federation has done—this is very positive—is to go to one man, one vote; hire a professional executive director; and develop a more professional board of directors of people from corporate and other interests that are really much [more] capable of building an international organization and running a business. I think in that aspect the growth of the Federation has been very positive. I haven't seen the numbers, [but] even Jack Nicholas is now one of our spokesmen, so that's very positive.

TB: Excellent. So were you in the first conclave when they first started?

MS: No. No, I came a few years later.

TB: Anything else that you think is important about your experience and contribution to fly fishing that we haven't talked about?

MS: Well, primarily conservation, and again, trying to emphasize delegation: not trying to do it all yourself, but getting other people involved so they can carry on. I think that's been another one of my things I've tried to do.

TB: Any thought about the future of fly fishing?

MS: Well, again, I think it's very positive. Even in this world of global warming and restricted resources, and all sorts of other problems, I think the future looks good.

TB: Any thoughts about the evolution of equipment?

MS: Well, I don't know. I've gone through it all—I started out with a Payless Drugstore kind of fly rod. My first one was actually to go worming, I actually used it to fish with worms before I got into fly fishing and I think the growth has been tremendous. Part of the problem is that a lot of the high end rods have really gotten, out of hand, expense wise, and it just hurts the market. But I think it's starting to balance, with China and other people now getting involved. There are many more companies that are offering beginner outfits that are very inexpensive. I think you can do better with better equipment and I'm starting to get interested in bamboo rods again. I think we all come full circle.

End of Side One, Tape One

TB: Anything else?

MS: [Not], unless you have any other questions.

TB: No. That's great! Well, thank you very much.

MS: Well, pleasure talking to you.

The End

