

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD BERAN,  
RITA GOLDFISH and DEAN RASMUSSEN

June 21, 2013

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1 MR. BARR: This is Jim Barr. It's June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013, and  
2 we're at the Lower Loup NRD Headquarters interviewing Dick  
3 Beran, Rita Goldfish, and Dean Rasmussen. And, Rita, would  
4 you like to give a little about your background?

5 MS. GOLDFISH: My name is Rita Goldfish and I  
6 started with the Lower Loup Natural Resources District in  
7 June of 1972. And I've been with them ever since.

8 MR. BARR: Any more about your background, where  
9 you're from, that sort of thing?

10 MS. GOLDFISH: I am originally from Loup City.  
11 And when I got married in 1972, I moved up here. My husband  
12 worked for Loup Valleys Rural Public Power District and he  
13 has since retired from there. And I have three children.  
14 My eldest son, Randall, is a doctor in Kearney. My second  
15 son, Robert, is part owner of an auto body repair shop. And  
16 my daughter, Rachel, works for The Buckle at their corporate  
17 offices in Kearney, and she is married to Ben Klein and he  
18 is a teacher in Lexington Public Schools, and they have a  
19 little boy who will be three years old. His name is Micah.

20 MR. BARR: Dick, you want to go next?

21 MR. BERAN: Okay. Richard Beran, I started out in  
22 this business with the Sarpy Soil and Water Conservation  
23 District as, I think, the first manager of a district in the  
24 state of Nebraska. I think that's correct. I came to work,  
25 then I went to the Papio Watershed Board where I worked for

1 John Neuberger and Milton Fricke, who was well known in  
2 conservation circles in Nebraska. I progressed, then, to  
3 the Lower Loup Natural Resource District out here in June of  
4 1972.

5 MR. BERAN: Outside of that for background, that's  
6 about it.

7 MR. BARR: When did you retire?

8 MR. BERAN: Oh, when did I retire, Rita?

9 MS. GOLDFISH: Oh, gosh.

10 MR. BERAN: Rita should know.

11 MS. GOLDFISH: I have to stop and think.

12 MR. BERAN: I can't remember.

13 MR. BARR: Well, if you think of it later on, we  
14 can add it.

15 MR. BERAN: We can fill it in.

16 MR. BARR: Dean?

17 MR. RASMUSSEN: I'm Dean Rasmussen. I grew up  
18 down in the Cotesfield area. There's not much there, but  
19 when I grew up, it was a thriving town, even had a high  
20 school, which I went to for a couple of years. And went to  
21 a business college and then came back to farm. And that  
22 lasted a while. And then I had a chance to buy a grocery  
23 store, or we did. And we bought that and pretty much been  
24 in the grocery business ever since. I thoroughly enjoy it.  
25 And I like to tell the story of when we were in the grocery

1 store in North Loup. I had four young boys working for me  
2 and they all went into the grocery business, so I figure I  
3 ruined four lives right there.

4 (Laughter.)

5 MR. BARR: Well, I don't know what to talk  
6 about -- was some of the years before the NRD was formed and  
7 what you might have done in relation to soil and water  
8 conservation or any of the subdistricts that were involved,  
9 or how it come to be that you got involved with the Natural  
10 Resources District.

11 MR. RASMUSSEN: Well, I was on the old Howard  
12 County SWCD Board until the NRDs were formed, and then I  
13 trans- -- didn't transfer, but got elected here and have  
14 been a member ever since, 41 or -2 years, I guess it is.

15 MR. BARR: Do you remember the size of the interim  
16 board, roughly?

17 MR. RASMUSSEN: Here?

18 MR. BARR: Yeah.

19 MR. RASMUSSEN: Oh, my gosh, the first time or two  
20 we met at the Elks Club and it filled the whole dining area.  
21 There was so many from every town, every county, and I don't  
22 know how it happened, but I presume there was probably 200-  
23 225 people that night and they had to elect officers. And  
24 Charlie Zangger, deceased now, he was elected chairman and I  
25 was elected vice-chairman, and I haven't figured that one

1 out yet. But it's been quite a ride. And, you know, if the  
2 NRDs hadn't been formed, it would be a sorry mess, because  
3 every farmer -- okay, "The neighbor drilled a well 150. I'm  
4 going 175." And right up to the fence line, every one of  
5 them had 10 or 12. It's the best thing that ever happened  
6 to the State of Nebraska. I think.

7 MR. BARR: Backing up just a bit from the Howard  
8 County, did you have any projects for that?

9 MR. RASMUSSEN: No, not very many, because we had  
10 to go to the county board for a few dollars. Sometimes that  
11 wasn't easy.

12 MR. BARR: Richard, did you want to talk a little  
13 about the Papio, your experience over there before we get  
14 into this NRD?

15 MR. BERAN: Yeah, I sure do. Richard Beran again,  
16 speaking on history a little bit. I started in the  
17 conservation business with my father, Father and Son  
18 Conservation Contracting. When that business was  
19 liquidated, I went to the Sarpy Soil and Water Conservation  
20 District as the first manager of a district in the State of  
21 Nebraska, largely due to the efforts of Milton Fricke, who  
22 was an old-time conservationist and renovator of the Papio  
23 Creek in the Omaha metropolitan area. So, I worked there.  
24 Initially consisted mainly of putting the levies -- pushing  
25 the levies back, allowing more flood flows down the Papio

1 Creek channel. And of course, we operated heavy equipment  
2 and we done the other conservation work. I can't give you a  
3 year for the district, but I was the first manager for a  
4 soil and water conservation district in the state.

5 When the Papio Watershed Board was formed, I then  
6 changed from the Papio Watershed Board -- excuse me, from  
7 the Sarpy Soil and Water District to the Papio Watershed  
8 Board as Assistant General Manager for John Neuberger. Our  
9 office then was in Ralston, Nebraska. And we then took over  
10 the maintenance of the Papillion Creek and the flood control  
11 projects in the City of Omaha, the ones that were within our  
12 jurisdiction.

13 In '72, then, through the efforts of Rudolf Kokes,  
14 who was a long-time state senator, and one very interested  
15 in agriculture and conservation, Rudolf convinced me I  
16 should come out to central Nebraska and be one of the first  
17 managers of the newly formed natural resources district.  
18 And I think Rudolf basically, as a state senator, was  
19 probably pretty instrumental in getting the whole natural  
20 resources district organizations set up in Nebraska,  
21 because, as a state senator, he carried the ball for the  
22 rest of us. And we could always count on support from Rudy.  
23 Rudy has since passed on, and we owe an awful lot  
24 conservation-wise in this area and the state to Rudolf's  
25 effort.

1                   MR. BARR: While you're at it, would you mind  
2 talking a little about Milt and any other leaders in the  
3 Papio while we're -- I hate to bring it in --

4                   MR. BERAN: No, that's fine.

5                   MR. BARR: -- but we may not have anybody else  
6 able to do that. I know Milt Fricke was -- he was also on  
7 the Soil and Water Conservation Commission as I recall.

8                   MR. BERAN: Yeah, Milt was -- Milt served on the  
9 Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Commission. He was  
10 Chairman of the Papio Watershed Advisory Board. He was a  
11 cow milker, had a big milk business just outside of  
12 Papillion. And milk was renowned nationally in the National  
13 Association of Conservation Districts. So he goes a long  
14 ways for conservation.

15                   I don't want to say too much about the Papio  
16 Watershed Board, but it consisted then of the City of Omaha  
17 and included work on the main channels of the Papio Creek  
18 and, of course, conservation in the agricultural areas.  
19 And, of course, flood control was their main objectives. We  
20 all know what the floods have done in Omaha, so I don't  
21 know -- I can't tell you where John is right now. He's  
22 someplace.

23                   MR. BARR: We'll try to figure it out. If you  
24 think of any other leaders you'd like to mention, either of  
25 you, on the early leadership either here at the Lower Loup

1 or in the Papio, just bring it in whenever it occurs to you.

2 MR. BERAN: Yeah, several people come to mind in  
3 the Sarpy Soil and Water District who I worked for first.  
4 Dale Harder being one of the old board members. I can't  
5 think of any of the others right now.

6 But we then came out here in 1972 at -- I guess  
7 Rudy Kokes was the guy that kind of brought me out here to  
8 central Nebraska. I was born and raised in Beatrice, moved  
9 to Hebron, so my entire history, I'm a Nebraska boy, been  
10 here all my life.

11 Rita, why don't you take over for a while? I'll  
12 think a little bit.

13 MS. GOLDFISH: You're going to think a little bit?

14 Okay, there were 54 members on the full board of  
15 directors when it first started and then 20 members were  
16 elected to the executive board, and they were the ones that  
17 met regularly every month. And every now and then, they  
18 would have the full board. I can remember our first office  
19 was on M Street.

20 MR. RASMUSSEN: Yeah, we moved around a little. I  
21 would like (indiscernible) Richard was saying he got out  
22 here and I sat on the bunch that hired him at that time.  
23 And I never will forget, Bill Schudel, he was on with us,  
24 and he's passed on now, but I think we had three or four  
25 that we narrowed it down to. Then, of course, an old

1 country boy, you know, he always looked at the dollar.  
2 Well, Richard had maybe a few dollars more he wanted. I  
3 never will forget old Bill Schudel, he says, "Boys, we  
4 better throw a few dollars in and hire somebody good," so we  
5 hired Mr. Beran.

6 MR. BERAN: Well, thank you, Dean. I'm going to  
7 tell you a little, just another little story. I'm going to  
8 tell this on Rita. I don't really expect you to put it in a  
9 report, but one day I heard at the office, I heard some  
10 yelling, couldn't figure out what it was. I run up front  
11 and at that time, Rita had, I think, about waist-length  
12 hair. And it got caught in the copy machine.

13 (Laughter.)

14 MS. GOLDFISH: I bent over to pick up a -- change  
15 papers or whatever it was, and the dang thing caught my  
16 hair.

17 MR. BERAN: And there she was trapped in the copy  
18 machine.

19 (Laughter.)

20 That's it for that.

21 MR. BARR: I see she has short hair now.

22 Well, unless, if there's anything else up to the  
23 point you started as the district, kick it in. Otherwise,  
24 we'll just go to the --

25 MR. RASMUSSEN: I would like to say though that,

1 I'm sure every board would or district can say it or would,  
2 but we can really truthfully say it that Mr. Beran started  
3 it and from then until today, we have been blessed with the  
4 most wonderful staff that you could ever ask for, not a  
5 clock-looker in the whole bunch, and they've been very, very  
6 good to work with all the way from the top to the bottom.  
7 We're very -- our board is very, very proud of the people  
8 that has worked for us, very proud.

9 MR. BARR: What were some of the original  
10 challenges you faced as you started the district?

11 MR. RASMUSSEN: I remember me and the late Frank  
12 Bartak and a guy from Ericson figured out the first budget.  
13 We were pretty proud of ourselves. We got it in there, but  
14 we only forgot one thing. We put in enough to pay the  
15 wages, but we never put anything in to start a project. I  
16 never will forget that either. But we got some put in.

17 MR. BARR: What were some of the sorts of projects  
18 you did early on as a district?

19 MS. GOLDFISH: We did -- well, they picked, of  
20 course, the SWCD's tree planting projects and stuff like  
21 that. Then also, they implemented the road structure  
22 projects. And they also -- one of the first foresters that  
23 we had here brought about the plan of living snow fences  
24 that are along some of the highways now, and county roads  
25 now, too. And then it went into water programs, the

1 measuring of the wells, and water samples to see where the  
2 nitrates were concentrated and things like that. And it's  
3 kind of just, you know, gone from that on down the road.  
4 But a lot of water projects.

5 MR. BERAN: I think one of the most early projects  
6 that -- not projects, but programs that the districts had to  
7 confront was public acceptance. We were new. We were a new  
8 organization. It was somebody else that was going to tax,  
9 so we had to pretty much watch out what we were doing. We  
10 weren't spendthrifts. We watched the pennies pretty close,  
11 and we had to, because of public acceptance.

12 The Lower Loup District here, is close to the  
13 largest NRD in the state. And so we had all kinds of folks  
14 that, you know, we had farmers, and we had ranchers, we had  
15 businessmen, we had everybody. And I can think of some of  
16 the businessmen that probably saved the bacon for the  
17 districts, and didn't let us go downhill.

18 Dean, I think you can look back at some of the  
19 people like Rudy Kokes, who was a farmer, but yet, he was a  
20 businessman also.

21 MR. RASMUSSEN: Oh, yes, he was. Intelligent man.

22 MR. BERAN: Some of the men out at Columbus that  
23 were -- we had Luchtel that was a banker?

24 MS. GOLDFISH: Luchteh.

25 MR. BERAN: Lucktel, Luchtel was a banker in

1 Columbus. And we had folks like that on the first board  
2 that really helped us, because the farmers didn't really  
3 know whether they wanted to put out the money for an  
4 organization like this.

5 Now, Bill Bowness from Loup City was another  
6 banker that we had on the board at one time.

7 MS. GOLDFISH: He was my former boss.

8 MR. BERAN: Yeah. Did I take you away from him?

9 MS. GOLDFISH: No, I quit. He's the one who told  
10 me, he says, "Go up there and apply for that job."

11 MR. BERAN: That's right, because you got married  
12 and you moved to Ord, didn't you?

13 MS. GOLDFISH: Yes.

14 MR. BERAN: Rita used to ride sidesaddle on a  
15 motorcycle at lunch, too. I don't think she ever fell off.

16 MS. GOLDFISH: No.

17 MR. BERAN: She had a good hold on her husband.

18 (Laughter.)

19 MR. BARR: Did you guys get involved in Senator  
20 Kokes' plan to bring the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
21 to Ord as the headquarters or --

22 MR. RASMUSSEN: He would have liked to have saw  
23 that done.

24 MR. BERAN: I'm not familiar with that.

25 MR. RASMUSSEN: Well, he kind of used that to get

1 the State to build a new Game Commission headquarters in  
2 Lincoln, as I recall. But I'm sure he would have liked it  
3 in town here.

4 MS. GOLDFISH: But I think he was probably  
5 instrumental in getting the NRD to locate here.

6 MR. RASMUSSEN: Oh, yeah, very.

7 MR. BARR: How many counties, partly or wholly, do  
8 you roughly encompass?

9 MS. GOLDFISH: In the beginning, we had all or  
10 parts of 15 counties, and now we have all or parts of 16  
11 counties with the little piece of Butler County that we got.

12 MR. BERAN: You have a piece of Butler County?

13 MS. GOLDFISH: Yes, we have a piece of Butler  
14 County.

15 MR. BERAN: I'll be darned.

16 MR. RASMUSSEN: Not very much.

17 MS. GOLDFISH: Not very much, but we got a piece.

18 MR. BERAN: Can't be satisfied with being the  
19 biggest.

20 MR. RASMUSSEN: We're spreading out.

21 MR. BARR: Did you ever get involved in the North  
22 Loup Project or any of the relationships about that project?

23 MR. RASMUSSEN: You mean the Calamus or --

24 MR. BARR: Yeah.

25 MR. RASMUSSEN: Well, I tell you, my dad was --

1       been on the board of that from day one, and when he passed  
2       away, why, they appointed me to be on there and I was only  
3       there, I don't know, a few months, and I -- I shouldn't say  
4       it because I'm there now, but most of them gentlemen were --  
5       had a little age on me, and at that time I was a little  
6       younger, and I had to choose one or the other. And I  
7       knew -- I elected to go to the NRD. I thought them people  
8       were going to come to the front, which they have, each and  
9       every one in the State of Nebraska.

10               MR. BERAN: I can't think of the name of the guy  
11       that was ahead of that Loup Irrigation Project.

12               MR. RASMUSSEN: Cyrus Shaugnessy, wasn't he?

13               MR. BERAN: Okay, well, I can't remember. But I  
14       know there was some personal jealousy between the irrigation  
15       district and the natural resources district thinking that we  
16       were trying to steal their thunder, something to that  
17       effect.

18               MR. RASMUSSEN: Henry Lange was another one on  
19       there.

20               MR. BERAN: Yeah, Henry Lange was a -- they all  
21       done a good job.

22               MR. RASMUSSEN: You bet they did.

23               MR. BERAN: We didn't have any -- we had enough to  
24       do without fooling around with an irrigation district.

25               MR. BARR: That was one of the original

1 discussions in the legislation was rather to try to bring  
2 irrigation districts and then decided not to.

3 MR. BERAN: Yeah.

4 MR. RASMUSSEN: I was a delegate to SWCD  
5 convention in South Sioux City when we voted on whether we  
6 should go to the NRDs or not. And that was a very, very  
7 ticklish situation. There were some very, very against it.  
8 Then there was guys like me, very, very for it. And when we  
9 voted, the chairman at that time, I think maybe was Warren  
10 Patefield. And he had everybody for stood, and then those  
11 against stood, and he counted. I remember that.

12 MR. BARR: Quite a day. Well, that -- speaking of  
13 that, in this general area, was there any strong opposition  
14 either from soil and water -- soil and conservation  
15 districts or any other particularly strong opponent,  
16 particularly at the time of the legislation?

17 MR. RASMUSSEN: Not as much here as in a lot of  
18 districts, I don't think.

19 MR. BERAN: I don't think so. There was probably  
20 a little bit of animosity from a -- what do they call it?  
21 Jim Pinkman's organization.

22 MR. RASMUSSEN: Oh, the irrigation districts.

23 MR. BERAN: The local irrigation district that was  
24 headquartered here out of Ord, I think probably was  
25 wondering whether we were trying to steal their thunder. We

1 didn't have any, you know, irrigation districts were not  
2 part of our makeup. We didn't want anything to do with  
3 them, frankly. But we have the two, the Farwell Irrigation  
4 District, the North Loup Public Power and Irrigation  
5 District.

6 MS. GOLDFISH: Middle Loup.

7 MR. BERAN: Middle Loup, yeah. So there was some  
8 jealousy, put it that way.

9 MR. RASMUSSEN: But as of today, every one of them  
10 irrigation districts, if they got problems, they look to us.  
11 I mean, they really do, thanks to our staff. They smooth  
12 things out.

13 MR. BARR: Over the years, what are some of the  
14 projects and programs that you think were most successful or  
15 useful in this district?

16 MR. RASMUSSEN: You'd know more about that.

17 MR. BERAN: Well, I think probably Davis Creek was  
18 one of the biggest ones. Actually, the public acceptance of  
19 soil and water conservation work was probably one of the  
20 biggest also. But Davis Creek, which we now -- which the  
21 District now manages as a recreation area, and it was put in  
22 by the irrigation district for -- to hold irrigation water  
23 in. I'm trying to think.

24 MS. GOLDFISH: Probably water quantity that has  
25 kept us out of being designated fully appropriated, because

1 we put in a lot of studies. Right now we have the ongoing  
2 ELM Project.

3 MR. RASMUSSEN: But, you know, when we went to  
4 moratorium --

5 MS. GOLDFISH: The well moratorium?

6 MR. RASMUSSEN: Yeah. I was scared to death to  
7 have the phone ring. I was scared to go to the mailbox. I  
8 was scared to meet anybody on the street. But they all say  
9 that was the best thing you ever done. But I was scared.  
10 I'll admit it.

11 MS. GOLDFISH: Yes, that kept us out of being  
12 fully appropriated.

13 MR. RASMUSSEN: Yes.

14 MS. GOLDFISH: Which I'm sure we were headed. And  
15 the ELM Study, when they did kind of designate us a little  
16 bit as being fully appropriated, kind of turned them around,  
17 because we had the figures to show that, no, this is  
18 otherwise.

19 MR. BERAN: This was all after my time.

20 MS. GOLDFISH: Yes, the ELM Study was, yes.

21 MR. BARR: Could you describe the ELM Study while  
22 we're -- just for anybody that might not know what it  
23 involved, just roughly?

24 MS. GOLDFISH: It's the Loup-Elkhorn Modeling  
25 Study of river basins to see how, you know, if it's being

1       depleted and things like that.

2               MR. RASMUSSEN: We've spent a lot of time on that.  
3       Some very intelligent people have worked on that as part of  
4       our staff.

5               MR. BERAN: I think one thing could be made.  
6       Flood control isn't a big thing in this district, because  
7       most of our head waters come out of the Sandhills. And, you  
8       know, we don't get anything out of the Sandhills but what  
9       nature gives us a year-round runoff. So, flood control  
10      wasn't too big a project. But we did work that, and  
11      nobody's mentioned, (indiscernible) Soil Conservation  
12      Service, jiminy Christmas. They'll hang us if we don't talk  
13      about them a little bit.

14              MS. GOLDFISH: Yes.

15              MR. BERAN: The Soil Conservation Service, of  
16      course, is an organization that's -- it's a federal  
17      organization through the Department of Agriculture, and they  
18      maintain offices in most all the counties within the  
19      district. Well, some of them have more than one county.

20              MS. GOLDFISH: Yes, and some of them they've  
21      consolidated here recently, because we had, at one time,  
22      nine field office locations and now we only have eight. And  
23      we provide the secretarial staff for them, and we also have  
24      some technical representatives in some of the offices. And,  
25      they do the tree planting or they supervise the tree

1           planting and they do the chemigation permits, the well  
2           monitoring and the water collecting for the nitrate program.

3                   MR. BERAN:   SCS does that?

4                   MS. GOLDFISH:  No, our technical guys.

5                   MR. BERAN:  Yeah, our technical.

6                   MS. GOLDFISH:  Yes.  SCS, they do all the  
7           technical things for on ground projects such as grazing  
8           systems and tree belts and grade stablizations and things  
9           like that.

10                   MR. BERAN:  One other thing, Rita, how many  
11           employees do you have in the Loup?

12                   MS. GOLDFISH:  In the Lower Loup?  Well, our  
13           constant employees, I think, are 26.  I don't do the payroll  
14           anymore, but I think 26.  But during the summer, we hire  
15           college-age students and some high school students to do the  
16           maintenance in our arboretum and down at Davis Creek, and  
17           now that the Game and Parks gave us Pibel Lake, they do that  
18           too.  And also, we have a landmark arboretum on the Aagaard  
19           farm.  The Aagaards gave us their farm.  And just this past  
20           year, we stepped up doing more things out there than what we  
21           have in the past.  And it's kind of an experimental farm  
22           where we do tree plantings to see if they'll grow and if  
23           they won't grow and stuff like that.

24                   MR. BERAN:  Yeah, I forgot all about that.

25                   MS. GOLDFISH:  The Aagaard Farm?

1           MR. RASMUSSEN: I haven't -- I rode with you out  
2 there one time in a pickup.

3           MR. BERAN: I have a lot of bad -- off the record.  
4 Dean and I and probably Rita also have some bad thoughts  
5 about some of the things that happened at the Aagaard time,  
6 but let's just say that the Aagaard family, Jim, Anna, and  
7 Valborg Aagaard, who were a bachelor and two spinster  
8 sisters who lived on the farm that we got acquainted with --  
9 I guess mainly I must have started that.

10          MR. RASMUSSEN: I think you did.

11          MS. GOLDFISH: I think they acquainted themselves  
12 with us, because they had the reputation of giving their  
13 farm to a charitable organization so that they didn't have  
14 to pay taxes.

15          MR. BERAN: Yeah, that was -- it was 440-480  
16 acres?

17          MS. GOLDFISH: Something like that.

18          MR. BERAN: 480 acre farm that the Aagaard family  
19 deeded to the Natural Resources District for experimental  
20 purposes at grass seedings and what have you. And they gave  
21 us the farm, but they didn't want us to have it, kind of.  
22 They were old folks and you had to treat them really with  
23 kid gloves. I spent a lot of time out there just mending  
24 fences, verbal fences. I didn't mend any wire fences, but  
25 anyway, Jim, Anna, and Valborg were old Danish folks that

1 had their own ways and -- but we eventually, I think they  
2 understood that it was probably the thing to do, because  
3 they didn't have anybody to leave the farm to. The NRD now  
4 manages the farm, and I have been out of it for long enough  
5 that I don't know what they're doing, but I'm sure that  
6 they're still doing some things out there on the farm.

7 MS. GOLDFISH: Right now we have put in different  
8 food plots this year for wildlife and they're in the process  
9 of putting in -- they're called guzzlers for wildlife. And  
10 they're basically waterers for wildlife that collect the dew  
11 and rain and store it so that there's a water source for the  
12 wildlife out there. And that's what they're doing out there  
13 now.

14 MR. BERAN: Well, one time we had some  
15 experimental plantings. We done -- along with the  
16 University of Nebraska, we had some experimental sprayings,  
17 things like this that we wanted to -- actually, the  
18 University was looking for a place to do it, and we were, I  
19 guess, a good subject, because we had control of that farm.  
20 We didn't -- I don't think we cropped anything, did we?

21 MR. RASMUSSEN: A little bit.

22 MR. BERAN: It wasn't much.

23 MS. GOLDFISH: I think just some hay, because the  
24 Forest Service or someone says for fire protection, you  
25 better cut some of this because it's getting rather dense

1 out there. And NRCS contributed a lot of different trees  
2 for experimental plantings out there.

3 MR. BERAN: I'm going to go back a little further.  
4 We left out the Forest Service, because the NRD, when I was  
5 still here, employed, through the University of Nebraska, a  
6 forester. John Van Ells was the first forester. Rich  
7 Woollen is the present forester. I think probably -- are we  
8 the only NRD that has a forester?

9 MS. GOLDFISH: There might be -- I think maybe  
10 there's two or three others.

11 MR. BERAN: If there's none other, why they'll  
12 probably tell you so.

13 MS. GOLDFISH: Is Doak Nickerson yet with one of  
14 the NRDs in the western part of the state?

15 MR. RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

16 MR. BERAN: He might have been with  
17 (indiscernible). Anyway, so we've done an awful lot of  
18 experimental forestry stuff at the farm, tree plantings, all  
19 kinds of species of trees. Rich Woollen now manages that  
20 department for the NRD, and he's on call for diseases,  
21 insect problems, what have you. And I'm sure Rich is still  
22 as busy as he always was.

23 MS. GOLDFISH: More so, because they declared him  
24 a district forester or whatever it was, and he has a lot of  
25 area to cover now.

1 MR. BERAN: Oh, does he cover some additional  
2 area?

3 MS. GOLDFISH: Yes.

4 MR. BARR: Did you have any special relationship  
5 with the Upper Loup NRD or connection to them?

6 MR. BERAN: Well, only we were kind of the -- we  
7 took everything out of the river that they'd give us.

8 MR. BARR: And was that all good?

9 MR. BERAN: Well, it was all good, because it was  
10 Sandhills, and you don't get much runoff from the Sandhills.  
11 We always had good relationships with the Upper Loup. Paul  
12 Madron, I think he was the first and only.

13 MR. RASMUSSEN: Yeah, the only until the lady  
14 came.

15 MR. BERAN: Is there a lady up there now?

16 MR. RASMUSSEN: Yeah.

17 MR. BERAN: Oh, Ms. Helen White.

18 MS. GOLDFISH: There's two. She left and now Anna  
19 Baum is the Manager.

20 MR. BERAN: That could be Anna. I'm so out of the  
21 loop. Paul Madron was the manager, and we had good  
22 relationships with Paul. But we only get what the Upper  
23 Loup gives us as far as constant river flows. We get -- of  
24 course, they have some flood flows.

25 MR. BARR: One question that's come up in this

1 discussion is, Nebraska is the only state to have natural  
2 resources districts, and several have thought that it might  
3 be a good idea. Do you have any thoughts on why it happened  
4 in Nebraska and may not have happened in other states?

5 MR. BERAN: Warren Fairchild and Milt Fricke were  
6 the two that really got the natural resources district  
7 movement going in the State of Nebraska. That was, of  
8 course, the contribution that I forgot to mention as far as  
9 Milt was concerned, but yeah.

10 Warren Fairchild, who was with the Nebraska  
11 Natural Resources Commission at the time, has -- he was a  
12 State employee, a State department head. I'm trying to  
13 think. I'm sure there were several others, but they fail me  
14 right now.

15 MR. BARR: That's fine. You've observed this now  
16 for 40-some years, both as pre-NRD and NRD. What are some  
17 thoughts you might have on how it's worked out, particularly  
18 in relation to how you might have thought it would have  
19 worked out in the beginning?

20 MR. RASMUSSEN: Well, my personal opinion is, and  
21 I think Mr. Beran was in on that, when the districts were  
22 formed, and I'm sure you spent a night or two, you know, the  
23 Loup here, and then Elkhorn here, whoever done it did a  
24 mighty fine job of putting it in districts by themselves,  
25 pretty much.

1           MR. BERAN: I think there was a lot of -- a lot of  
2 states were looking at Nebraska when the districts were  
3 formed, because most of the states, I think, still operate  
4 under the old soil and water conservation district setup,  
5 which they're much -- they're on a countywide boundary. And  
6 you can't do much countywide as far as putting staff in who  
7 really get the job done. Directors, fine, they do a good  
8 job as far as directors, but they're -- they have their own  
9 businesses to run. They can't run a district and do their  
10 farming or whatever they do. So we think that natural  
11 resources district or a like organization could be used in  
12 any state and should be.

13           MR. BARR: How are the counties' districts funded  
14 as compared to the natural resources districts?

15           MR. BERAN: Well, Dean was a member. I'll let him  
16 talk first.

17           MR. RASMUSSEN: What, SWCD?

18           MR. BERAN: Yeah.

19           MR. RASMUSSEN: Well, we had to go to the county  
20 board to get money, and if you had a project you'd like to  
21 see and it was several -- at that time, several thousand  
22 dollars, good luck, fella. You just didn't get it. We were  
23 lucky to get enough money to run a little office and like  
24 that. Oh, sure, we done a few things, but not what  
25 should -- like Beran says, I mean, you cannot do it on one

1 little square county. You cannot do it anymore, or couldn't  
2 even do it then.

3 MR. BARR: Would that be part of the opposition,  
4 the counties didn't want to let loose of --

5 MR. RASMUSSEN: Oh, sure, I'm sure.

6 MR. BARR: -- their control?

7 MR. BERAN: Oh, yeah. There was some opposition,  
8 but I'll say that Milt Fricke probably was one of the  
9 instigators. When I was with the Sarpy Soil and Water  
10 Conservation District, we had D8 CATs, we had motor graders,  
11 we had scrapers. We worked for Douglas County, we worked  
12 for Sarpy County, as far as setting the levies pact on the  
13 Papillion Creek. And that's where our money came from.  
14 That's what financed my office and allowed us to function  
15 the way we did. So a small SWCD, outside of begging the  
16 county commissioners, has no way of supporting it. Tree  
17 planting, that's some of the counties, sure, they made a  
18 little money tree planting, but it doesn't go very far. So,  
19 that's why it was the thing to do was to get an organization  
20 that was funded, that could do the job.

21 MR. BARR: At this point, if any of you would like  
22 to offer any observations on anything related to  
23 conservation or natural resource districts or government in  
24 general.

25 MR. RASMUSSEN: Well, and maybe this isn't what

1       you want, but I've had privilege of sitting on the NARD  
2       Board for several years and I'd like to continue until I,  
3       not expire, but retire. And we go to them meetings, and I  
4       don't think -- well, I call them the cream of Nebraska, the  
5       people that go to them. I mean, they're interested in  
6       saving our state, saving our water, and I'm kind of proud to  
7       have been on that organization.

8               MR. BERAN: Well, yeah, I think you can take a  
9       look at the makeup of the boards statewide. You have  
10      lawyers, you have local businessmen, you have farmers, you  
11      have ranchers. Rita, help me with somebody else.

12             MS. GOLDFISH: Oh, we have lawyers. We even had a  
13      judge at one time.

14             MR. RASMUSSEN: Yeah, veterinarians.

15             MS. GOLDFISH: Veterinarians, bankers, we have a  
16      preacher on the board now.

17             MR. BERAN: Really?

18             MS. GOLDFISH: Uh-huh.

19             MR. BERAN: That's what you needed.

20             MR. BARR: Should have had that to begin with.

21             (Laughter.)

22             MR. BERAN: Should have had that a long time ago.

23             MS. GOLDFISH: We've had old SW- -- well, old  
24      NRCS, people who are retired from the NRCS, and they have  
25      been on our board. And NRD employees who have quit the NRD

1 and started their own businesses now have ran and have been  
2 on our board or are on our board right now. And the board  
3 has changed through the years from being ultra-conservative  
4 to being more liberal.

5 MR. RASMUSSEN: Yeah, but we had to. We had to be  
6 conservative when we started. We had to be.

7 MS. GOLDFISH: You had to be conservative when you  
8 begin, because I remember going to some of these -- to visit  
9 the field offices to see who the secretaries were that were  
10 supposedly supposed to be under my direction. And they were  
11 all older ladies and they looked at me, like, "Humph. What  
12 do you think you know?" And, you know, and they were -- in  
13 the beginning, it was all very -- kind of hard for them to  
14 leave go of their county lines, because this was, you know,  
15 what they operated under. And that's basically what they  
16 do, even some of the directors had a little bit of a tough  
17 time, I kind of noticed them, leaving go of their county  
18 lines.

19 MR. BERAN: Yeah. County lines were sacred when  
20 we first started, and that was probably one of the big  
21 things that people looked at -- looked down their nose at,  
22 was the fact that, gee, we're -- we got a little county here  
23 and we want to keep what we've got. Well, they didn't have  
24 the financing. They couldn't employ the people that was  
25 necessary. You can't build county highways without people.

1           You can't operate a natural resources district efficiently  
2           without people to do it. And you've got to have salaries.

3                   MR. BARR: Have you noticed any major changes in  
4           the whole conservation agenda or outlook over the 50 or so  
5           years you folks have been involved in this?

6                   MR. RASMUSSEN: Well, it's a lot easier for people  
7           to come and ask us if they can -- or if we can help them or  
8           what would you do, and this and that. I think they come in  
9           here a lot more than they ever used to.

10                   MS. GOLDFISH: Uh-huh.

11                   MR. RASMUSSEN: They think, by golly, you guys are  
12           all right. We have our problems, too, but a lot more  
13           traffic in.

14                   MR. BERAN: I think that's right, because the  
15           district here has a sizable budget. You don't maintain a  
16           sizable budget without people yipping at you unless you're  
17           doing a good job. Part of the good job comes from changes  
18           in state law, which required it, but still you'd have a lot  
19           of opposition if you were throwing money down the rat hole.  
20           And they don't.

21                   MR. BARR: What were some of the good changes that  
22           have been made statewide since the original legislation?

23                   MR. BERAN: Statewide?

24                   MR. BARR: Well, I mean, beyond just the specific  
25           NRD. How you voted, was that a difference? Some districts

1           went to one man, one vote. The Groundwater Conservation Act  
2           was -- gave additional responsibilities to NRDs.

3                     MR. BARR: Any other things that --

4                     MR. RASMUSSEN: We're one man, one vote right now,  
5           aren't we?

6                     MS. GOLDFISH: Very close to it. We have ten  
7           election districts and one at large, and every -- whenever  
8           they do the -- I want to say, the population count, we  
9           always have to go through and readjust, especially in the  
10          eastern part of the state more so than in the western part  
11          of the state. I mean, in the eastern part of our district  
12          more so than in the western part of our district. So  
13          population has kind of migrated, I guess, as you want to  
14          call it.

15                    MR. BERAN: Looking at it historically, I would  
16          say, Rita, and you correct me if I'm wrong, a lot of people  
17          thought this was going to fail because we were bringing  
18          people in from all over to manage the soil and water  
19          resources of this particular area. "It's never going to  
20          work, it's never going to work. We want out little county  
21          organizations." Well, you know, they were forced into it,  
22          and I think everybody accepts it now.

23                    MR. RASMUSSEN: Oh, yeah.

24                    MR. BERAN: Without a problem. I don't know  
25          whether, in the Big Blue, whether you had those problems or

1 not.

2 MR. RASMUSSEN: There's been some problems.

3 MR. BERAN: You had those problems, yeah. But  
4 you've had a good manager that started you out and he made  
5 it work.

6 MR. BARR: At this point, anything you'd like to  
7 add is open --

8 MR. RASMUSSEN: I always looked at our district  
9 that somewhere we've done something right, because our  
10 personnel turnover is nil or near it, and that's a blessed  
11 deal to have on any organization if you got some good people  
12 and they stay with you. But we have tried to treat them  
13 decent, too. All except that time we -- (indiscernible)  
14 then got a little lengthy and 2:30 in the morning, why the  
15 wives started to call. "Where are they at? Where are they  
16 at?" I think we put one lady out to the phone. I never  
17 will forget that.

18 MR. BERAN: Well, there were some late meetings,  
19 which they weren't used to. Usually -- I was an SWCD  
20 district manager before I was a manager for this district.  
21 And there was an awful lot of nonsensical chit-chat that  
22 went on among board -- you know, "How's the cabin going?"  
23 "How's the crops?" You know, "What'd that guy do down the  
24 hill?" You know, things like that, but were not district  
25 business. And I suppose, you can go to some county boards

1 right now and get the same thing in Nebraska.

2 MS. GOLDFISH: And we've also helped the  
3 communities. The walking trails and things like that are a  
4 fantastic hit and benefit to the communities.

5 MR. RASMUSSEN: I think we've done a good job  
6 letting them know that we are here and we will help you if  
7 we can.

8 MS. GOLDFISH: Help them get grants and right now,  
9 we've got the RC&D's tire grants --

10 MR. RASMUSSEN: Yeah, that's tomorrow.

11 MS. GOLDFISH: -- to pick up used tires.

12 MR. RASMUSSEN: Four hundred ton is what we're  
13 looking at.

14 MR. BERAN: Boy.

15 MS. GOLDFISH: So we help with that. And then  
16 also programs for the kids at school. I know Larry, he does  
17 a lot of -- he just came back from ACE Camp in Halsey this  
18 week. And Rich, I know, goes during the school when  
19 school's on and gives different talks to the FFA students or  
20 whichever -- natural resources students they call them, too,  
21 on different tree aspects and things. And we sponsor the  
22 range and soil judging events, and different things like  
23 that.

24 MR. BARR: Anything else? I really appreciate  
25 your time and --

1           MR. RASMUSSEN: I really enjoy sitting down and  
2 starting from here and going to here.

3           (Laughter.)

4           Me and Richard do that every now and then.

5           MR. BERAN: Wish I hadn't lost -- kind of halfway  
6 lost my voice. But, no, I don't know. You're not going to  
7 be able to use it all, I'm sure, but things -- since I have  
8 retired, things have changed considerably. And I don't know  
9 what all those changes are. I may look at some of them  
10 unsupportively, but I don't say anything about it, because  
11 I'm not here and I don't know. So, so what? The present  
12 manager here is a damn good friend of mine. And I hired him  
13 as my first assistant -- no, second.

14          MR. RASMUSSEN: First, wasn't it?

15          MS. GOLDFISH: No.

16          MR. BERAN: No, Jerry Murray was the first. But  
17 he's a good man and he does a good job.

18          MR. RASMUSSEN: When you hired him, you brought  
19 him around to the officers at that time. And I remember we  
20 told you, "Beran, you have to work with him. You pick out  
21 whoever you want."

22          MR. BERAN: Well, yeah.

23          MR. RASMUSSEN: So he done a good job.

24          MR. BERAN: Which goes to the fact that the boards  
25 let us have the district as long as we didn't get plum wild.

1           They let us do about, you know, whatever we thought was  
2           necessary.

3                       I'll tell you, in the early days, not many boards  
4           spent much money. They were farmers and they were close to  
5           the vest. This district was no exception. They were the  
6           same way.

7                       MS. GOLDFISH: Of course, with the mandates that  
8           the Legislature put on came new projects and more people  
9           and --

10                      MR. BERAN: Well, and the breaking up of the  
11           Sandhills was one thing that we had to contend with that the  
12           district didn't like, but, you know, when a person buys a  
13           quarter of land, it's his land. He can do what the hell  
14           ever he wants to do with it, and we didn't like it and we  
15           didn't mince any words that we didn't like it. But we  
16           couldn't do anything about it.

17                      MR. RASMUSSEN: We tried.

18                      MR. BERAN: Yeah, you couldn't legislate it.

19                      MS. GOLDFISH: But now they have it where they  
20           have to have certified irrigated acres, so they just can't  
21           go in and break it up like they did back then. They'd break  
22           it up and then go away, and then we'd have to pay for them  
23           to reseed it.

24                      MR. BERAN: I suppose a lot of people -- I don't  
25           know what -- you're in York County, right?

1 MR. BARR: Right.

2 MR. BERAN: I don't know whether you know how some  
3 of that land is. There's a lot of quarters growing up to  
4 weeds, absolutely growing up to weeds, because speculators  
5 bought the land, put a pivot on it, took the goody out of  
6 the land for two, maybe three years, whatever they could,  
7 then they let it go. And it's setting up there growing  
8 tumbleweeds now. And we knew it was going to happen, but  
9 that's something you can't legislate.

10 I'm about run down.

11 MR. RASMUSSEN: I enjoyed it.

12 MR. BARR: Thank you all very much for doing this.

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