

NRD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of Russ Edeal by
Dayle Williamson & John Turnbull

October 7, 2014

1 PROCEEDINGS, October 7, 2014:

2 MR. WILLIAMSON: All right we're on number 17, and
3 we're recording. And this is Dayle Williamson, and I'm
4 accompanied by John Turnbull, the manager of the Upper Blue
5 Natural Resources District. And today we have the pleasure
6 of interviewing Russ Edeal as part of the Natural Resource
7 District's Oral History Project for the Nebraska Historical
8 Society. The interview is being conducted on October the
9 7th, 2014, and we're on a farm just west of Holdrege,
10 Nebraska, in a brand new farm building that's terrific. And
11 Russ has been working hard today. He works hard every day,
12 but he's -- they're harvesting corn and he's running one of
13 the auger wagons and so we're not going to take too long.

14 But, Russ, we're really pleased to interview you
15 and -- because you were at the very start of the NRDs. But
16 before we go into the NRDs, tell us a little about where you
17 went to school, where you grew up, your farm experience, and
18 a few things like that. That'd be good for history.

19 MR. EDEAL: Okay. I grew up north of Overton.
20 Went to a rural school, District 21. My interest in
21 conservation and water probably starts even in the
22 elementary school, because I was involved -- my grandfather
23 was involved with soil conservation. He was one of those
24 early ones that went with the trips to conservation meetings
25 national, Atlanta, Georgia.

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

2 MR. EDEAL: I can remember him coming home with
3 souvenirs from all their different -- I think we he went
4 south, they brought home some cotton bolls. And when they
5 went to Atlanta, you know, there were some things from --
6 peanuts and some things like that from down in that area.

7 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

8 MR. EDEAL: And my mother and dad made me,
9 shouldn't make, showed a great interest in having all of us
10 children do speeches. And at that time, the conservation
11 districts had a speech contest, and KFAB had sponsored it.
12 And I can't tell you an exact year, but I did win that KFAB
13 contest as a -- I was in elementary school then.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Wow.

15 MR. EDEAL: But my grandfather and my dad were
16 both involved with conservation, and so I kind of grew up
17 with it a little bit. Went to Lexington then to high
18 school. Went to UNL. After I graduated from college, came
19 back to this area, and ended up north of Loomis because
20 that's where my grandmother was born and raised. And her
21 grandfather had -- well, father had homesteaded the farm
22 that they had at that time, and they were renting it out, my
23 grandmother and her sisters, two sisters and an uncle, and I
24 asked if I could farm it, and they said yes. So that got me
25 to north of Loomis.

1 Wasn't here -- didn't hardly get inside the door
2 than the director from the soil conservation district over
3 here came to my door, and said, "Do you want to be a
4 director on the soil conservation?" And I said yes, that
5 was an interest to me.

6 MR. TURNBULL: Was that Phelps County?

7 MR. EDEAL: Phelps County.

8 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

9 MR. EDEAL: And the place that I moved onto there
10 was a -- Frank Cole had lived there, that was my uncle. He
11 had a great interest in water. Cole Carlson Well Drilling
12 Company that was headquartered on the farm as I grew up.
13 Then later on they moved to Loomis, and they had their
14 business -- he and Gus Carlson had a well business there on
15 the farm, and then in Loomis later. And my Uncle Frank, was
16 one of the first directors on Central irrigation board. And
17 so he had a great interest.

18 Grandpa Edeal grew up over here in Phelps County
19 also. But then he moved over into Phelps County, I mean,
20 excuse me, Dawson County because, well, he just saw that
21 they were able to -- they had a little water, and they had a
22 lot of livestock. My grandfather loved animals and the
23 cattle. And so he plowed this farm on the north edge of the
24 Platte Valley north of Overton, and a little -- couple of
25 three miles west. His irrigated flat ground was in the

1 valley. And then, as you know, that north hills they jump
2 up -- it just goes from valley to hills just pretty fast.
3 And then, he'd had his pasture ground up there in the hills
4 for his cattle. And he didn't have cows, he just bought
5 calves and then put them in the pasture as yearlings. And
6 that's when we used to -- they used to feed the
7 two-year-olds and had big, big, big cattle. And, I guess,
8 probably not any bigger than what they are now, but they
9 just come on a year quicker than they used to.

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Talking about that ground jumping
11 up pretty fast, I used to go visit Harold Kopf, and he lived
12 right --

13 MR. EDEAL: Right there.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: - right there, and it was a very
15 interesting thing. And he was a --

16 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

17 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- great conservationist and, I
18 know, a friend of yours.

19 MR. EDEAL. Yeah. He -- they just lived about 15
20 miles northwest of us --

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

22 MR. EDEAL: -- on the same -- the storms come down
23 along the hills, they got both of us.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. And what was your
25 grandfather's first name?

1 MR. EDEAL: Alvin.

2 MR. WILLIAMSON: Alvin.

3 MR. EDEAL: Alvin, yeah.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: And your dad's name was Dean?

5 MR. EDEAL: Dean.

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. I knew -- I can't ever
7 remember meeting your grandfather, but I knew your father.

8 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, my grandfather passed away a
9 little younger than what we'd like to today, but --

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.

11 MR. EDEAL: -- so you may not have, but he was
12 very active in --

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: But your father followed up
14 pretty active in that too.

15 MR. EDEAL: Yeah. And they were involved
16 with -- and I suppose part of my involvement with boards
17 and --

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

19 MR. EDEAL: -- community activities were because
20 both my dad and grandfather -- I think between my
21 grandfather and grandmother and my dad, they were on the
22 school board for, I don't know, 27, 30 years, something like
23 that.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

25 MR. EDEAL: So they were involved in --

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

2 MR. EDEAL: -- a lot of things.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: You talked about conventions in
4 Atlanta, Georgia, and so on. Our conservationists were
5 quite a group back then, because they would think nothing of
6 joining a bus tour to head for Atlanta, Georgia. I handled
7 a few of those over the years, and we'd go to New Orleans
8 and every place by bus, two or three buses.

9 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, I was going to say, it wasn't
10 just one, I mean, as I remember it --

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

12 MR. EDEAL: -- you had --

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: Two or three.

14 MR. EDEAL: -- a number of them that you loaded up
15 and --

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, yeah. And finally we went
17 by airplane when we went to Washington, D.C. We thought it
18 was time. Chartered a whole airplane so.

19 MR. EDEAL: Oh. John, you had a question.

20 MR. TURNBULL: What year did you start with the
21 soil and water conservation district? Do you remember?

22 MR. EDEAL: No, I can't tell you the exact time.
23 Between the conservation and the NRD, I had -- I put in 33
24 years.

25 MR. TURNBULL: Okay.

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

2 MR. EDEAL: I can't even tell you exactly how many
3 years I've been off now, but --

4 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

5 MR. EDEAL: -- it's -- you know, time flies. And
6 I'd tell you 10 and it was probably 15 or 20.

7 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, you were very active in the
8 state association too, so.

9 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Well, tell us about, you
11 know, your -- it's sort of at the end of your soil and water
12 district work, the NRDs, the discussion with the NRDs. I'll
13 remind you of a little background here. The Nebraska
14 Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts called
15 for a study of reorganization at the convention in '66 and
16 '67. And '68 was termed as a real fiery one, because they
17 passed a resolution, Number 25, calling for the
18 reorganization. And were you at that meeting? Do you
19 remember in '68?

20 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, I would've been there.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: I figured you were there. I
22 recall --

23 MR. EDEAL: Because --

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- talking to you. No I don't.

25 MR. EDEAL: No, I was involved in when, John,

1 during you asked the years -- I'd been on the soil
2 conservation for three or four years --

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

4 MR. EDEAL: -- before this started. So, it must
5 not have been in '63 or four.

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

7 MR. EDEAL: I moved back here in '62.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

9 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

10 MR. EDEAL: And, so, it would've been around that
11 time.

12 MR. TURNBULL: Okay.

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, I was sure that you were
14 there at that fiery session where they finally passed
15 Resolution 25. And that says, "Hey, we're going to
16 reorganize."

17 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, and you know, the research and
18 the background of it. I just -- I really can't tell you who
19 was the prime, but there was just a number of forward-
20 thinking people that was involved in that time.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

22 MR. EDEAL: I think Warren Fairchild is a -- I
23 remember him being one of them.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

25 MR. EDEAL: And, of course, Maurice Kremer was

1 around and --

2 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Well, and we had a lot of
3 local people, too, that really supported it, and some that
4 didn't.

5 MR. EDEAL: Well, and then, I -- not in this area,
6 we didn't have a lot of watersheds, and had a --

7 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

8 MR. EDEAL: -- lot of those kinds of districts --

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

10 MR. EDEAL: -- were the eastern part of the state
11 had, you know, there was, what, as high as 25, 30 different
12 organizations dealing with the same subject --

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right, right.

14 MR. EDEAL: -- in some of those areas --

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.

16 MR. EDEAL: -- and I think those people that were
17 working with that realized that, you know, this is not
18 really working because we're spending all our money --

19 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

21 MR. EDEAL: -- dividing up the spoils and not
22 having anything to do anything.

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, and in that early
24 discussions, you know, it was more focused on soil
25 conservationists and flood control and things like that, and

1 not looking so much at irrigation water --

2 MR. EDEAL: No, no.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- but, as we talked with Doyle
4 Lavene today, you know, soon after the irrigation thing came
5 in, and he was very complimentary of how the NRDs started to
6 take over some of that -- or start doing it and not take
7 over.

8 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, yeah.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: It wasn't being done.

10 MR. EDEAL: And I think the big discussion, as I
11 remember it, was if you had a nice big watershed and you had
12 all the governance and you had the financial way of putting
13 up the watershed -- saving -- working this watershed, I
14 don't know if I'd have been one of those that I'd been
15 willing to just sign off right immediately either, because,
16 you know, not knowing here we've done this good job then,
17 you know, that's -- turning it over to somebody else. Some
18 of those districts back east that had that many governing
19 bodies, I don't remember, there was a hundred some board
20 directors in that first board meeting.

21 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: In the Nemaha that's right.
23 You're right.

24 MR. TURNBULL: Well, in York, I think the first
25 board was like 72 people.

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, yeah.

2 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, and, you know, that -- if you
3 think about governance, that seems an unwieldy
4 (indiscernible) --

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, and they had to have
6 executive committees. And then the first board members were
7 elected in 1974.

8 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: So, but -- so, you were on the
10 very first board --

11 MR. EDEAL: Correct.

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- with -- I don't remember how
13 many you had on your group here, but not nearly as many as
14 you pointed out.

15 MR. EDEAL: No, I think we started with, what was
16 it, 16. Did we have about 16 or --

17 MR. TURNBULL: When I came here in '75 there were
18 13 board members.

19 MR. EDEAL: Thirteen.

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. But that was the official
21 board then --

22 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

23 MR. EDEAL: Right.

24 MR. TURNBULL: That was the elected board.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: The elected board, yeah.

1 MR. TURNBULL: I don't recall in the history --

2 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, yeah.

3 MR. TURNBULL: -- about the first board here.

4 MR. EDEAL: No, I don't -- I don't know as it was
5 much bigger than that, because --

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

7 MR. EDEAL: -- all we had involved was just the
8 soil conservation --

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, the --

10 MR. EDEAL: -- and then the --

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- five members on each of those
12 boards that you -- well --

13 MR. EDEAL: Yeah. So, there would've been 15
14 there.

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

16 MR. EDEAL: And I don't remember --

17 MR. WILLIAMSON: That was probably it.

18 MR. EDEAL: -- if Central had a position --

19 MR. WILLIAMSON: I don't think Central --

20 MR. EDEAL: I don't think they did.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- had a position. I don't know.

22 MR. EDEAL: I think it was just the first 15.

23 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

24 MR. EDEAL: I think that's --

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. That's probably right,

1 you're --

2 MR. EDEAL: That's about it.

3 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

4 MR. EDEAL: And --

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: So, you cut down to 13. Yeah,
6 the law -- the law required -- you could make a choice, a
7 maximum of 21. And the reason there was 21, the Salt Valley
8 Watershed had 21 members. And they were very strong to get
9 this started, but they said, "We won't go with you unless we
10 have 21 members." So --

11 MR. TURNBULL: Well, that's interesting because
12 the Lower Platte South, which came from the Salt Valley --

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yes.

14 MR. TURNBULL: -- is still a 21 member --

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, and that was one of their
16 restrictions. And they were strong supporters, but that was
17 one of the things they laid on the table, you know. And we
18 thought, "Boy that's a lot of members." But it works, you
19 know. And from nine to 21.

20 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: And you made your own choice.

22 MR. EDEAL: Right, and, you know, demographics and
23 the population in Gosper County was lower population, and
24 ended up with Holdrege, you know, had a lot of the
25 population and Minden. And, so, you know, I think we -- if

1 13 was that number, we had the six districts, and then one
2 at large.

3 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh. Yeah.

5 MR. EDEAL: And --

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

7 MR. EDEAL: It's been moved around as population
8 has moved through the years.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: What do you recall some of the
10 early things that the NRD you were in here started doing?

11 MR. EDEAL: Well, I guess, I'd go back a little
12 bit on your formation --

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Well, that'd be good,
14 sure.

15 MR. EDEAL: You know, the concept of the NRDs was
16 started with watersheds.

17 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

18 MR. EDEAL: And through the effort of, I'd say,
19 Central, because they were - and probably Doyle talked to
20 you about this, because of their governance makeup of the
21 three counties -- I think there was enough people in this
22 area felt that because of our rising water table, the
23 watershed -- basically, the Central district and the
24 irrigation that we had here covered a nice portion of this
25 area. They just felt that we were unique enough, that we

1 had enough other interests other than just watershed and
2 conservationist issues. And we thought that it'd be good
3 for us to have a -- maybe a handle of this problem right
4 here of the watershed and everything of the Central water
5 and everything. And I think, you know, we were in a unique
6 position there, because we were kind of tooting our own
7 horn.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

9 MR. EDEAL: There's not too many people who were
10 going to be supportive of the issue.

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

12 MR. EDEAL: And, but I think with the work of
13 lobbying efforts of Central and the people that were
14 interested in it, that's why it ended up - the Tri-Basin
15 ended up to being the different one.

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, a little bit off the
17 hydrologic lines. That was about the --

18 MR. EDEAL: Right.

19 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- only one, but --

20 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

22 MR. EDEAL: We're in three basins so --

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

24 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

1 MR. EDEAL: -- we're not very hydrological --

2 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, Doyle didn't really talk
3 about that today, because he came on, you know, he came on -
4 - kind of uninformed about that part.

5 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: He came on --

7 MR. EDEAL: After that.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- on the first board.

9 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: So, I said, "Well, Russ is going
11 to tell us that." So, thanks for bringing that up.

12 MR. TURNBULL: So, those three basins are the
13 Platte basins on the north part of this district.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

15 MR. EDEAL: Right.

16 MR. TURNBULL: The Republican in the south --

17 MR. EDEAL: Uh-huh.

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

19 MR. TURNBULL: -- and the southwest part, and then
20 the Little Blue in, on the east part in the Kearney County
21 area.

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, right.

23 MR. EDEAL: And, you know, at that time, there was
24 a lot of things going on, and I'm not sure that we
25 understood all of those things that were going on. I think

1 we were learning everyday as far as what are some of the
2 things -- what were some of the benefits and what were some
3 of the issues. That was kind of an unknown. I wasn't over
4 in this part of the country when they dug it, but when they
5 first dug the canal, to think they could bring the water
6 from the river southeast of Lexington and have it just north
7 of Holdrege in that time and people would drive up 183 and
8 come jump up on the plateau out of the valley, they'd say
9 you're crazy. They didn't realize, you know, how much the
10 profile fell --

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

12 MR. EDEAL: -- from west to east and --

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: And gone to Adams County.

14 MR. EDEAL: Right.

15 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

16 MR. EDEAL: And, so, you know -- and they said
17 they started a crane digging here and one over here and one
18 there, and said they were going to meet and everybody looked
19 at each other and said, "I don't think so." But it worked
20 out. But that kind of brings me to one of my pet peeves is
21 that if you go to some of these meetings and they say,
22 "Well, I don't know if we have enough information yet."
23 They don't know enough information. Well, I feel that we're
24 going to gain new information everyday, but some place we
25 got to draw a line and say we're going to do the best we can

1 with the information we got today --

2 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

4 MR. EDEAL: -- and let's go. And then if that
5 was -- something needs to be tweaked, lets tweak it. But
6 sometimes we have trouble letting go, and then we have
7 trouble getting it tweaked --

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

9 MR. EDEAL: -- as soon as we should.

10 MR. TURNBULL: Yes, yeah.

11 MR. EDEAL: We don't put a guideline and --

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

13 MR. EDEAL: -- look at it. You asked about the
14 NRD, well when this NRD was formed, I guess my answers to
15 the previous question about information is that we felt that
16 we needed to have a lot of baseline. Frank Dragoun was on
17 the board. I guess he and I probably, as I don't want to
18 pat myself on the back or anything like that, but we spent
19 quite a few hours together thinking about, you know, what
20 information do we need, what kind of -- will be reported in
21 the future. And, so, what were some of the baselines? And
22 he, being involved with the water and energetic with
23 Central, had a good idea of where maybe some of their voids
24 were --

25 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

be

1 MR. EDEAL: -- and some of their studies. And so,
2 we spent most of our money, which wasn't a lot, but it was
3 quite a bit, about all we had in those days, not in
4 producing any projects, but it was all in information
5 gathering: well monitoring; water levels; some of the, you
6 know, research on -- one of them as I remember was the
7 culverts in the county, investigating them -- I don't know,
8 John, were you there when that happened?

9 MR. TURNBULL: Yes. Yeah, well that was -- I
10 think that was underway when I came in June of '75.

11 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

12 MR. TURNBULL: What'd we call that? Master
13 drainage plan --

14 MR. EDEAL: Yes --

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

16 MR. TURNBULL: -- I think for the Tri-Basin,
17 yes --

18 MR. EDEAL: But --

19 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

20 MR. TURNBULL: -- and it was going through all
21 three counties, and helping the county road department folks
22 figuring out how to size the culverts from the upstream into
23 the downstream in these watersheds.

24 MR. EDEAL: And John can probably tell you how
25 many small culverts we found below large culverts.

1 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah, lots. Well, unfortunately,
2 we still find that in many areas of the state. It wasn't
3 just a problem here.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

5 MR. EDEAL: But -- and now that, you know, where
6 we are today, I think we're able to go back and find some
7 records probably as far back as any NRD in the state --

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

9 MR. EDEAL: -- because of some of that early --

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

11 MR. EDEAL: -- work that we did. You know, but
12 there weren't really too many projects out here to do other
13 than -- as long as we kept doing the soil conservation --

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

15 MR. EDEAL: -- and like that -- and most of that
16 was -- had federal funds and local -- we had a little
17 (indiscernible) local support, but there was just all this
18 other research that we just felt that was, would be
19 beneficial.

20 MR. TURNBULL: Well and Frank Dragoun's
21 background, as I remember it, I think he worked for the USDA
22 for the ag research service.

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

24 MR. EDEAL: Uh-huh.

25 MR. TURNBULL: Rosalyn Stace (phonetic) or

1 something like that comes to mind here in Nebraska around
2 Hastings, I think --

3 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

4 MR. TURNBULL: -- before he came to work for
5 Central. And he was the assistant general manager at
6 Central while he was on the Tri-Basin board.

7 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

8 MR. TURNBULL: And then, later on, he was promoted
9 to the general manager at Central.

10 MR. EDEAL: Uh-huh, right.

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right. Yeah, that was good.

12 MR. EDEAL: And some of our, you know, our
13 original board were people that were interested in
14 conservation and were active in the -- probably some that
15 went on some of your tours that you had --

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right. Uh-huh.

17 MR. EDEAL: -- because they were there a long time
18 even before I joined, and so -- and they were involved -- of
19 course they really liked the conservation issues, but I
20 think most of them were involved with irrigating and could
21 see what the water had meant to them. And so if there were
22 some problems, they would figure, well, we need to figure
23 that out.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right. And it was kind of in an
25 era when people were becoming more aware of, maybe, a little

1 overuse of water or needs to conserve water or sometimes
2 we --

3 MR. EDEAL: Well, I don't -- it took a while to
4 get that, but --

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

6 MR. EDEAL: -- there were some other issues there
7 that probably -- the nitrates in the water --

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

9 MR. EDEAL: -- cost of fertilizer, cost of energy,
10 and all that have had a big effect on that. And now, you
11 know, the recent years, of course, now the most use we can
12 get for every inch is the best thing --

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

14 MR. EDEAL: -- and no-tills and all that.

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, with the mix of surface
16 water and then groundwater coming into use in the area, why
17 it was an important time to start looking at all those
18 things, but you had to have the back up data to do that.
19 And so, that was great.

20 MR. EDEAL: If you look at history, I mean, before
21 they were terracing and all these and dams and all that kind
22 of thing, we had all that run off. It got to the rivers.
23 Well then we said, well let's conserve. Well then a lot of
24 times we don't know what the end effect is going to be,
25 because as we held that water up in the land, we didn't get

be

1 the run off so then that really didn't have the flows in the
2 river. If you took a yearly flow of a river and it's got a
3 couple floods in there, that increases the flow quite a bit.

4 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: Sure.

6 MR. EDEAL: But it doesn't tell you how useful it
7 was --

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

9 MR. EDEAL: -- and like that. But as we -- I
10 think if you go in southern Gosper County and southern
11 Phelps were they had all the terraces and the dams and now
12 have the no-tillers, hardly any water gets away. It has to
13 rain an awful lot for it to --

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: That's right.

15 MR. EDEAL: -- to get away. And so --

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, yeah.

17 MR. EDEAL: -- that changes the formulas --

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

19 MR. EDEAL: -- a lot, but a --

20 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

22 MR. EDEAL: -- I think we understand it better now.

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Well, Russ, tell us some
24 of the things you did on a statewide basis, cause you were
25 quite involved in that too.

be

1 MR. EDEAL: Well, I was interested, again, being a
2 part of the water issues and land issues. So then, I became
3 the representative from Tri-Basin to the state association.
4 And as I become involved, I'm not one to sit and not to
5 voice or be active or say, "Hey, I'll help you," or, you
6 know, if something needs to be done, I don't mind pitching
7 in. So I suppose that -- by doing that, the people said,
8 "Well, he must be interested in what's going on," and I
9 moved up the ranks in the state association and then became
10 president of the state association. I don't know as we had
11 any major issues then. Don't anything that sticks in my
12 mind, other than always had funding and always had
13 relationships and working with the legislature and whatever
14 legislative issues were and trying to educate. But I think,
15 you know, as I look back, but all of us probably in the
16 positions we've held, we've had a reason to be there. We've
17 maybe not -- didn't know at the time, but maybe have to look
18 back and say, "Well, what happened then." And you have to
19 go back in the history book which --

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

21 MR. EDEAL: -- you're doing and say, "Well that
22 happened during this time. Oh, it did." But, so --

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, yeah. Well it's great
24 pride to interview a third generation conservationist. I'd
25 kind of forgotten about your grandfather, and all that. But

1 I remember that. That was always on the Dawson County
2 Board, wasn't it? He was on that?

3 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, right.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. I knew your dad, and doing
5 all that good things and so. It's just really good here to
6 sit here in a very beautiful -- we call this a farm storage
7 area, but we're in a terrific conference room: three
8 offices, lunch room. And you know, a lot of this has been
9 brought about by irrigation --

10 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- and so, we know how important
12 water is and how important the soil is and how important the
13 people that helped manage this all these years are, because,
14 you know, if this weren't managed right, we wouldn't be
15 sitting in such a nice structure today to do this interview.

16 MR. TURNBULL: Well, Dayle and I were talking
17 today as we were driving out here from Lincoln and York
18 about that he grew up in the Ohio area and I grew up around
19 Fairbury, which is both dry land. And --

20 MR. EDEAL: Right.

21 MR. TURNBULL: -- we were contrasting the farm
22 economies from York to Holdrege as compared to Superior back
23 to Fairbury. It's just absolute black and white difference.

24 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

25 MR. TURNBULL: Where I grew up, we'd have been

be

1 sitting in the side of a little calf stall in the cow barn
2 on a one-legged milk stool.

3 MR. EDEAL: Yeah. Well, the family that's put
4 this together, they're the conservation winners from Phelps
5 County --

6 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

7 MR. EDEAL: -- and the state also so --

8 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

10 MR. EDEAL: -- so they're very interested in --

11 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

13 MR. EDEAL: -- the soil and that --

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. They have to manage things
15 right, yeah.

16 MR. TURNBULL: Well, I remember, Russ, when I
17 first came to work for you folks, you were the board
18 chairman at the time. And I came from a job in Colorado,
19 and really had -- I didn't have any knowledge of NRDs except
20 I just knew what the name was. And you're the one that
21 broke me into the system. And I remember I started in June
22 and it was probably, I don't know, two or three months after
23 that, and you came into my office in Holdrege and you handed
24 me the green final reading copy of LB 577, which was the
25 first groundwater management act that the state had.

1 MR. EDEAL: Uh-huh.

2 MR. TURNBULL: And I remember what you told me.
3 You handed me that document and you said, "John, I think you
4 might want to read this. You're probably going to be
5 working with it a few years." Well, I still am. And it was
6 almost 40 years ago.

7 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Good advice.

9 MR. TURNBULL: Yes, good advice. It's a lot
10 thicker now than it was then.

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: And that's a good thing for
12 history, because, you know, when you pass a law -- the NRD
13 law wasn't complete and it's been amended, but that -- we
14 knew that it was short on that part and so that part came
15 along later and other things came along later.

16 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

17 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

18 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, we, early on I think, we as an
19 NRD, it kind of felt like we were going to be the training
20 tool for -- and so we did have John here early and then we
21 had Gene Stoklasa --

22 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

23 MR. EDEAL: -- here early that moved on to Central
24 Platte.

25 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

2 MR. EDEAL: We had a couple of others that were
3 involved that moved on. Bill, when you interviewed him, you
4 know, he was on the board of directors.

5 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah, Bill Umberger.

6 MR. EDEAL: He was on the first board.

7 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

9 MR. EDEAL: He was one of the first board members,
10 and then he just filled in.

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

12 MR. TURNBULL: Now he was on the Gosper County
13 soil and water conservation.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: The Gosper guys.

15 MR. EDEAL: Yeah, yeah.

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, Bill and I were in college
17 together so I've know him in the Army and everything, and it
18 was a pleasure to interview him.

19 MR. TURNBULL: I remember --

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: We probably got off topic. We
21 talked about artillery and stuff.

22 MR. TURNBULL: I remember having a conversation
23 with Bill when I was here that we were in tree planing in
24 the spring, planting the wind breaks, the little -- the
25 seedling trees that go out every spring. And I was having

1 some kind of coordination difficulty with that which is
2 always working with a number of land owners and tree orders
3 and how do you get them in, how do you get them out, how do
4 you get them planted on time with a full-time helper and a
5 part-time seasonal guy. And Bill complained to me and says,
6 "How can that be so hard, John? That's got to be just a
7 simple thing to do." And I said, "Well, yeah." And after I
8 left here, and Bill became the manager, we were at a state
9 manager's meeting one day and he looked at me and he says,
10 "John," he says, "that tree planting is a real pain in the
11 neck." I said, "That's what I tried to tell you, Bill."

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, it looks a little different
13 when you got to do it. Being on the board. That's good. I
14 love it.

15 MR. TURNBULL: But this was a good board to work
16 for.

17 MR. WILLIAMSON: Oh, yeah, yeah.

18 MR. TURNBULL: A lot of varied backgrounds and --

19 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

20 MR. TURNBULL: -- and good policymakers.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: Like Russ' attitude, let's get
22 this done.

23 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: You know, let's move ahead.

25 Let's keep doing things. So, that's great.

1 MR. EDEAL: Well, I guess, like I said, we were
2 pretty grounded in data --

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

4 MR. EDEAL: -- and proof. If we were in a
5 decision, we wanted to have the proof to make it. And if it
6 was there, then we'd say, "Well let's go. Let's do
7 something here."

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

9 MR. EDEAL: "Let's move forward." And I think
10 we've -- I think that's been the board's attitude, now even
11 that I'm not on the board, but --

12 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, we thank you so much for
14 your many years of service, a third generation. Anything
15 else you'd like to add? We ought to wrap up pretty soon.
16 You got to get back to work.

17 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: Boy, we're proud of you hauling
19 all this corn.

20 MR. EDEAL: Well, it looks pretty good out there
21 this year.

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, it's a great year in
23 Nebraska. Great year because we have water. We had
24 rain-fed corn growing good this year in 2014, so.

25 MR. EDEAL: Right.

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

2 MR. EDEAL: Well, I think, you know, looking at
3 how I view the future, it'd be nice if we had a state --
4 what do I want to say -- opinion of how we want to treat our
5 resources of total package of an overall control or picture,
6 but I don't think we can develop laws that's going to be --
7 everyone can meet, because of our variance. And I hope in
8 this history book you do show all the difference from the
9 west to the east in, not only rainfall, but elevations and
10 climates and all these kinds of things, because there's
11 just, you know, there's no bill that I know of that can make
12 a uniform decision of all these issues and on all these
13 different situations. If they, you know, they say the
14 distance -- whatever the changes from the west side of
15 Nebraska to the east side of Nebraska is the most of
16 anywhere in the world, you know, that puts a lot of pressure
17 on --

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

19 MR. EDEAL: -- thinking about some of the
20 decisions --

21 MR. TURNBULL: Right.

22 MR. EDEAL: -- and then, I think, we got to
23 remember that mother nature probably plays a pretty big
24 role. I think we need to, as groups, meet together. They
25 got to, you know -- we meet together when we have too much

1 or too little, but why can't we meet and make decisions on
2 how we're going to treat both. John has been at enough
3 meetings with me to know that --

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

5 MR. EDEAL: -- that I get a little angry, and
6 that's good for this situation, but while we're here why
7 don't we talk about the other side. And let's make that
8 decision before it happens.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

10 MR. TURNBULL: Right.

11 MR. EDEAL: And that's tough to do.

12 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, it is.

14 MR. TURNBULL: People don't like to make decisions
15 until there's a crisis.

16 MR. EDEAL: Right. So, you know, as we can move,
17 if we can move people to do those kind of things I think
18 we'll be --

19 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

20 MR. EDEAL: -- really ahead.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Well, John, we're very
22 glad you're part of this interview, because you got your
23 start in the NRDs right here --

24 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- in this district. And had

1 good leadership and good friends, like Russ Edeal here, and
2 other board members that helped you get going.

3 And, Russ, we thank you so much for your -- all
4 your dedicated service. And we'll wrap up here, unless
5 there's any last final words. We really appreciate you
6 taking the time. We hit you in a real busy day --

7 MR. EDEAL: Yeah.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- but you arranged a wonderful
9 meeting room here and we'd like to stay longer.

10 MR. EDEAL: Well, thank you for coming out and
11 driving those extra miles. Sorry I couldn't meet with you
12 there in Kearney, but --

13 MR. TURNBULL: That's all right. He's my
14 chauffeur today. It's worked out fine.

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: Thank you very much.

16 MR. EDEAL: Thank you.

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