

INTERVIEW OF  
MARLIN PETERMANN

July 11, 2013

1           MR. FLEECES: A red light will show up and I can  
2 say that I'm interviewing Marlin Petermann at the Papio NRD  
3 Office on July 11, 2013. Marlin, I'm happy that you could  
4 visit with me this evening about your involvements before  
5 NRDs, if that's possible, and then after NRDs. So why don't  
6 you just go ahead and tell us a little bit about yourself  
7 and your education, and we'll just ramble on -- only 45  
8 minutes. I go about one-fourth, one-fourth, one-fourth.

9           MR. PETERMANN: Well, it's an honor to be asked to  
10 input here to the history of the NRDs. So, yeah, I started  
11 out on this earth back in Gosper County, Nebraska, which is  
12 kind of Southwest Republican River Basin. Arapahoe was  
13 where I went to high school and -- which is in Furnas  
14 County, but -- so I grew up on a farm, just a diversified  
15 cow/calf, crops and so on, and was there until I graduated  
16 from high school. And then when I went to college at the  
17 University of Nebraska in Lincoln. I remember my guidance  
18 counselor saying, "Well, you ought to go to college,  
19 Marlin," and I go, "Really? Why should I do that? What  
20 would I do?" "Well," he says, "you're pretty good in  
21 sciences and math and stuff, I think you ought to be an  
22 engineer." And I go, "Engineer? What do they do? I mean,  
23 I'm a farm boy here, what are you?" -- "Well, they do those  
24 things." "What kind of engineering?" "Well, you're a farm  
25 boy, agricultural engineering," so that's what I did.

1 MR. FLEECS: I'll be darned.

2 MR. PETERMANN: And I had a guidance counselor  
3 that kind of helped me on my way, with the good Lord guiding  
4 I think. But, anyway, so I attended UNL and graduated in  
5 1971, and then I actually went to work for the very first  
6 Department of Environmental Control in Nebraska --

7 MR. FLEECS: Really? DEC?

8 MR. PETERMANN: And I was DEC back then and Gail  
9 Lewis was the director at that time and went to work there  
10 and I went -- and we were just in the beginning steps, at  
11 that time, of establishing a sanitary waste law in Nebraska,  
12 so I went to all the little towns around the state and told  
13 them, "Guess what? We're going to close your little town  
14 dump," and man did I get a great reception. They just --

15 MR. FLEECS: Not a good thing to do.

16 MR. PETERMANN: -- "You're what?" So it  
17 was -- but I traveled the whole state doing that, which was  
18 interesting. And then after we did that I also got involved  
19 with the feedlot runoff and some of the inspection of those  
20 with DEQ. But I was really only there nine months because I  
21 graduated in December and then was in DEQ for nine months  
22 and decided to go back to grad school and I actually took 36  
23 hours of classes in a year-and-a-half and had my master's  
24 all drafted up. For a thesis I did soil erosion research  
25 out on the Rogers farm east of Lincoln, for Neb- -- a

1 University farm, and got my master's -- my thesis drafted  
2 and my sponsor said -- my advisor said, "This isn't going to  
3 do. You've got to start over on this." And I'm going,  
4 "I've got to work for the Papio NRD in a month. What do you  
5 mean?" "Well, you can finish it while you go to work."

6 Well, I had actually gotten married in that period and we  
7 had a son and had another one on the way, and I said, "Okay,  
8 I'll finish it up when we get to work." I came to work for  
9 the Papio NRD and didn't pick it up again. So, I've got all  
10 the classes, which was great, and it was great, and doing  
11 that research was super in soil and water. I used the  
12 rainfall simulator on the fields and we'd catch the silt  
13 coming off and see what cover did to it, you know, and drew  
14 up little equations on how much runoff you get from a  
15 certain rain intensity and all that. It was good stuff.

16 MR. FLEECS: So all that experience you gained in  
17 those few months and stuff really worked in well with  
18 the -- what you were going to be doing with the NRD then.

19 MR. PETERMANN: It really did. It was perfect. I  
20 don't have that little sheet of paper that says I have a  
21 master's degree, but I had all that wealth of experience and  
22 would never give that up, and I've never really needed that  
23 sheet of paper. But I did go on to get my professional  
24 engineer's license as an engineer.

25 MR. FLEECS: There you go. And that's what's

1 important.

2 MR. PETERMANN: That's what's been important, yes,  
3 to me. So, in January of 1974, I came to work for the Papio  
4 NRD.

5 MR. FLEECS: And at that time the manager, was it  
6 England?

7 MR. PETERMANN: Merlin England was the general  
8 manager and Jerry Wehrspann was the assistant general  
9 manager, and he's actually the one that interviewed me and  
10 hired me.

11 MR. FLEECS: Oh, really? Okay.

12 MR. PETERMANN: And I was the construction  
13 engineer at that time and basically duties to design and  
14 construct levees along the Papio Creek, and worked a lot  
15 together with Milton Fricke at the time because he had a lot  
16 of land down along the Papio Creek.

17 MR. FLEECS: Yeah, he was a big landowner.

18 MR. PETERMANN: Of course, he was very  
19 instrumental in the starting of the NRD.

20 MR. FLEECS: Yeah, he was a very important key in  
21 the old district, whatever you want to call it, back in the  
22 late '60s when that legislation was being proposed because  
23 he had, I think, a lot of influence and he -- people really  
24 respected him, which I think helped in legislation when you  
25 talk about the urban senators in Omaha.

1 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah.

2 MR. FLEECS: In Sarpy County, and what Milt Fricke  
3 stood for. And if Milt probably said it was good, they  
4 would probably say, "Yeah, it probably is."

5 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah.

6 MR. FLEECS: So Milt was probably very important.

7 MR. PETERMANN: Milt had a way about him that, you  
8 know, pretty silent -- I mean, soft spoken but yet when he  
9 spoke you listened.

10 MR. FLEECS: Yeah, you'd better listen.

11 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah, because he had something  
12 important to say.

13 MR. FLEECS: Very conservative.

14 MR. PETERMANN: Oh, yeah. His farm, of course, is  
15 down -- his has this land yet -- well, he's not with us any  
16 more, but his sons own ground along the Papio Creek yet  
17 today. But, where his farmstead was at 72<sup>nd</sup> and Cornhusker,  
18 near Papillion, is now a little shopping center.

19 MR. FLEECS: Oh, yeah.

20 MR. PETERMANN: When he passed away a few years  
21 ago, the boys decided to sell out part of the farm and start  
22 reaping some of the benefits of the land values tremendous  
23 increases, but they still own the bottom grounds on the  
24 farm.

25 MR. FLEECS: Who else, at that time, that was kind

1 of influential with the NRDs up in this area?

2 MR. PETERMANN: Oh, well, you know, I've gotten to  
3 know -- John Neuberger had been, you know, a staff member  
4 here, but that was prior to my time.

5 MR. FLEECES: I think he was involved in some way  
6 with the Papio Advisory Board.

7 MR. PETERMANN: He was on the Papio Advisory Board  
8 and I think he was the director of that.

9 MR. FLEECES: Yeah, right.

10 MR. PETERMANN: And I think he actually hired  
11 Steve Oltmans or I think Steve worked for him.

12 MR. FLEECES: Steve or Wehrspann, one or the other.

13 MR. PETERMANN: I don't know, he might have hired  
14 Jerry Wehrspann, too. Yes, he might have, because Jerry was  
15 here before the -- well, I --

16 MR. FLEECES: Wasn't Jerry an engineer?

17 MR. PETERMANN: Yes, Jerry was an engineer from  
18 Iowa State and a good engineer and a very good man. So I  
19 came on -- into the NRD scene a year and a half after it  
20 formed.

21 MR. FLEECES: It became law.

22 MR. PETERMANN: After it became law in '72 -- July  
23 of '72.

24 MR. FLEECES: You worked real closely up here, you  
25 had to, with the SCS at that time. Did you see any

1       resentment with the SCS back in those early days of the NRD  
2       about them being kind of shoved along the sideways and  
3       didn't have the influence on the old SWCDs like they did, or  
4       did you see any of that?

5               MR. PETERMANN:  No.

6               MR. FLEECS:  I would have thought with Fricke,  
7       with Milton, that they probably would have said, "We'd  
8       probably better think this is a good deal."

9               MR. PETERMANN:  Yeah, I really -- I was a little  
10       after -- of course, it was a year and a half old and maybe  
11       some of those things were there earlier on, but -- and, of  
12       course, I didn't work as much with the SCS at that time, I  
13       was kind of on this Papio Creek project.

14              MR. FLEECS:  Okay.

15              MR. PETERMANN:  That was my main responsibility,  
16       it expanded, you know, and we worked with NRCS some there,  
17       but I wasn't in direct contact with them as much as some of  
18       the other staff like Ralph Puls who worked with them on a  
19       daily basis.  But I never really did see or feel any great  
20       animosity here.  I think they're always -- and maybe Milton  
21       had a big role to play there in basically saying, "This is a  
22       good thing."  And I've heard it from other districts and  
23       other managers and so on, but not so much here.  But I can  
24       see where it probably was quite a controversy and I think  
25       Ralph had told me at one time that it was something that was

1 a real rubbing point, and I could see why it was because  
2 here the NRDs are taking over their role, but I think there  
3 was an understanding, enough salesmanship, to say, "This is  
4 going to be better. Yeah, it's a change and maybe you think  
5 you're getting shoved aside a little, but in the long run  
6 it's going to be better," and I think it's really proven out  
7 to be that.

8 MR. FLEECS: I think they finally realized that  
9 with the NRDs and their abilities to get grant money, their  
10 abilities to get tax revenues, and hire people to assist  
11 them on a lot of their projects, that this was going to make  
12 them a lot more successful in what they were planning to  
13 Do.

14 MR. PETERMANN: Oh, yeah.

15 MR. FLEECS: With the NRD and the SCS working  
16 together on these projects.

17 MR. PETERMANN: And I think we saw that just grow  
18 and I could see that -- again, in early years, wasn't  
19 involved as much, but through the years just how the state  
20 conservationist's, I think, attitudes changed and the  
21 employees to the point of saying, "Let's embrace this  
22 because this is better than anything they have in any of the  
23 other states." I've gone to national conferences and they  
24 hear about what we can do in Nebraska and what is going on  
25 with soil conservation and watershed projects, and so on,

1 and they just, "How can we do that?" "Well, you don't have  
2 NRDs." And so it's -- you feel kind of sorry for them, you  
3 really do, but I don't know how you get it done. I've often  
4 wondered about that, just makes you go, "How in the world  
5 did that happen? I mean, that had to be one heck of a  
6 battle in the legislature. That's monumental to see that  
7 turnover and take all those 154 entities and put them into  
8 24 at that time, and the battles" -- but, you know, only two  
9 things -- and why can't any of the other states get that  
10 done? And the two things I think of mostly is the fact that  
11 we have a unicameral and have one unicameral and not two  
12 houses, and that -- I don't know, it seems like maybe that's  
13 because we're the only ones that's got that in Nebraska, and  
14 maybe that helped keep the politics down a little bit and  
15 able to really sell the program.

16 MR. FLEECES: We had some real leaders in the  
17 legislature at that time that worked with people. Harold  
18 Sieck from Seward County, he was involved with the old Salt  
19 Valley watershed project. We had Hal Schroeder there in the  
20 '60s, an engineer there that -- and a lot of these people  
21 were pretty well respected by the senators and this is why I  
22 think it helped for Omaha and Lincoln to have some of these  
23 leaders on the local level like Milton Fricke and Harold  
24 Sieck up there, and some of these people, because you needed  
25 those votes to kind of overstate what a lot of these rural

1 people were thinking, "Boy, we're going to lose our local  
2 control." I heard that when I was with the Commission back  
3 in the '60s. I went to these meetings and I heard all this  
4 stuff, "Yeah, you're going to have all these things you're  
5 going this and this and this," and most of it was southeast  
6 Nebraska and we just -- because a lot of the influence there  
7 was because of the Soil Conservation Service, they were  
8 afraid they were going to lose their control over watersheds  
9 and SWCDs not knowing what the NRDs could do for them.

10 MR. PETERMANN: Exactly.

11 MR. FLEECS: Fiscally and also everything else.  
12 Today, I don't know how easy this would be to do it today  
13 because of two things; the mill levy taxing authority, and  
14 eminent domain.

15 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah.

16 MR. FLEECS: That was kind of a sticker back at  
17 that time.

18 MR. PETERMANN: I'll bet it was, but not like it'd  
19 be today.

20 MR. FLEECS: Oh, not like it would be today.

21 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah.

22 MR. FLEECS: Everybody just would -- they'd come  
23 right off the walls. Couldn't give government like that the  
24 power to -- they'd be condemning everything, just running  
25 over everyone.

1           MR. PETERMANN: We've been -- and they've tried to  
2           overthrow that especially in recreation issues. People seem  
3           to understand some like flood control, but on the trails and  
4           recreation and activities, you know, we don't need to  
5           condemn for that, but -- and that's, of course, the one  
6           thing we have here in the Papio is, we're 600,000 people and  
7           that's the thing that has certainly been the challenge, but  
8           we're serving a bit of a different constituent, but -- and  
9           that's okay, but that's where the NRDs are common, but yet  
10          they're different. We have all similar -- some resource  
11          issues of one sort or another, but we have different factors  
12          and different players and so it is important that we could  
13          be autonomous and adjust. But this watershed concept has  
14          just -- it's, I don't know, so dynamic, so innovative to  
15          say, "Let's deal with things on a watershed basis," and it  
16          makes so much sense today and all our working with people  
17          with going to -- whether you're with the senator or with  
18          congress in Washington and say, "We're addressing things on  
19          a watershed basis rather than political lines like a city,  
20          and that water doesn't care whether it crossed the city  
21          boundary or the county line or whatever it is."

22          MR. FLEECS: It's going to go where it wants to  
23          go.

24          MR. PETERMANN: That's right, and that's in a  
25          watershed. And so it makes so much sense. In fact,

1 we've -- another big partner that we've had here beyond NRCS  
2 is the Corps of Engineers because we have a lot more flood  
3 control issues here in the eastern part of the state and so  
4 they've been a major player. And the thing that the NRDs  
5 can bring to the table that some of the water districts  
6 couldn't and other entities was, you have the taxing  
7 authority so you've got the funds to be a local sponsor and  
8 partner with the federal government, and whether it's the  
9 NRCS or the Corps -- and, you know, it's even astonishing to  
10 the Corps of Engineers about Nebraska and the NRDs, and we  
11 got a letter from headquarters that sent to -- I think it  
12 was to Dean Edson and copied to us saying, "Keep doing what  
13 you're doing, Nebraska, because the NRD system is the  
14 premier in the nation and we really appreciate working with  
15 the NRDs and what you can do and have done because of the  
16 way you're set up." And it really is -- it's from a  
17 national perspective, they just rave over it because -- and  
18 now -- and I know Steve Oltmans and I have talked about  
19 this, you know, some day Washington's going to understand  
20 that working on a watershed basis -- and EPA was one to  
21 start working with us and it's good -- you've got to work  
22 with cities and counties, but really if you're going to  
23 address water quality, you've got to work on a watershed.  
24 And today, that's all you hear EPA talk about is the  
25 watershed. EPA finally got it and that's one place why I

1 think Nebraska's done well working with DEQ, too.

2 MR. FLEECS: Oh, yeah, we had, I thought, a very  
3 good -- and still do, I think, as far as that -- from an  
4 environmental basis with DEQ in Nebraska. They've always  
5 been pretty level-headed and always seems to work real well.  
6 I know there's been some little problems, but --

7 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah, little problems, but I think  
8 our current director and directors before him realized how  
9 much easier their job can be in working with NRDs.

10 MR. FLEECS: That's right.

11 MR. PETERMANN: It makes their job easier.

12 MR. FLEECS: I think they realized if we've got a  
13 problem out there on the local level, that we've got an  
14 agency on the local level that can understand what the  
15 problem is and work with us in getting it solved.

16 MR. PETERMANN: Exactly.

17 MR. FLEECS: I think they finally got to realize  
18 it and I think NRCS has finally realized that after about  
19 four or five years it could work, just like they would have  
20 never got Swan Creek done down there where I was at through  
21 the old Swan Creek watershed district. They wouldn't have  
22 had enough money. We already knew that when I started in  
23 the beginning of some of those projects that what they were  
24 trying to do with recreation and maintenance, they were at  
25 their maximum already and they still weren't going to have

1       enough money to carry out some of those things, and boy they  
2       were an easy sale down there in southeast NRDs. They were  
3       pretty easy sales because they had eight watershed districts  
4       down there and a lot of flood control, a lot of work done,  
5       you know.

6                Have you seen the NRD concept kind of change in  
7       the time you started, a little more emphasis on maybe  
8       different things and what they were thinking about at that  
9       time?

10               MR. PETERMANN: Oh, yeah, I think it's broadened  
11       certainly. When I came, certainly the emphasis was working  
12       in the rural areas and, you know, that was the emphasis.  
13       And then we had -- since there had been the Papio Watershed  
14       Advisory Board and working some on flood control, that was  
15       the other main emphasis, but that was it, those were the  
16       programs. And -- but I think as we -- as time went on, I  
17       think we saw the fact that the urban constituents, and  
18       certainly in our case, said, "What about us? Where are you  
19       getting your money by the way?"

20               MR. FLEECES: Eighty percent of it.

21               MR. PETERMANN: "Eighty percent of it from us and  
22       what are we getting here?" So, you know, you try to sell  
23       them so long on all these dams, "These flood control  
24       projects, these conservation measures on the farm are all  
25       benefiting you because they keep the water clean, they slow

1 down the water, they control flooding, so that's what your  
2 benefit is." And they'd go -- they balked at it for a while  
3 then would say, "Yeah, we agree," but then they said, "We  
4 still -- what about my creek that's eroding here in town and  
5 my streets are falling in? My houses are falling in and my  
6 sewer lines are falling in. What about that? Are you guys"  
7 --

8 MR. FLEECS: Sediment off the neighbor.

9 MR. PETERMANN: Sediment off the neighbors coming  
10 down. And so I think that was the major shift you saw here  
11 is really -- it grew up in a shift to where, "We've got to  
12 do urban work," and that really, I think, was a major, major  
13 shift. Then I think the other thing is, I think,  
14 recreation. We go in here -- if you'd have told me -- and I  
15 said this 15 years ago, but if you'd have told me that we  
16 were going to get involved in building trails at the NRD,  
17 sidewalks, you know, I'd say, "You're nuts, that's not an  
18 NRD thing," but we started saying, "Let's do multipurpose  
19 things. We've got levees along these creeks. Let's put a  
20 trail on them and let people go out and walk on them.  
21 There's something for the urban constituent," and that thing  
22 caught on fire and the city started going, "Whoa," and the  
23 cities go, "Let's do this," and it just caught on fire in  
24 the area into a multipurpose benefit project. And that's  
25 the thing I don't think we sell enough at times is the fact

1 that we don't just build a project like a road or a street  
2 to drive on, we build a project -- you can get flood  
3 control, you get erosion control, you get recreation, you  
4 get wildlife benefits, all those things from the projects we  
5 do.

6 MR. FLEECS: And those trails got urban people out  
7 into the rural area to see, "What are some of the problems  
8 that we have out there?" And then when -- you brought up  
9 something that's happening in that rural area. Those people  
10 said, "Oh, yeah, I remember seeing some of those when I was  
11 on the trail on the Papio, levees and stuff, and I mean  
12 that's great!

13 MR. PETERMANN: It did, and they were good  
14 inspectors for us to look at problems around -- and it's  
15 really, I think, really been a very good thing. And I think  
16 we always need to keep focused on where our main purpose is  
17 and I think the NRDs have said, "Our main purpose is erosion  
18 control, sediment, flood control, that's our main purpose,  
19 but all these other things are also things that our  
20 constituents see a benefit from and do benefit from and so  
21 we need to do that."

22 MR. FLEECS: Yeah, you just need to sit down and  
23 visit with people about the side benefits that any project  
24 has and you just explain that. They might seem small at the  
25 time, but its projects that people understand. When it's

1 closer to them and if it's going to benefit them a little  
2 bit, it may help them a little bit, they may still be more  
3 acceptable. And you usually -- do you have -- does that  
4 help you in getting good representation as far as directors'  
5 interest? Is there a lot of special interest on certain  
6 things or do you get people like in urban areas that are  
7 pretty, you know, tunnel vision type stuff or do they have -  
8 -

9 MR. PETERMANN: I think mostly it's all -- it's  
10 good conservation minded and don't get too many. I think  
11 we've really been fortunate not to get too many that just  
12 have an agenda, you know, like, "Boy, this is what I want to  
13 push." We've gotten those and had those, but not many.

14 MR. FLEECES: Oh, yeah, we've all had those.

15 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah. But, really, I think people  
16 generally have an interest to conserve our natural resources  
17 and work with our water and soils, and that's been good.  
18 We're talking about things that have changed. The one thing  
19 that hasn't changed since I got here is the fight with  
20 Washington County. That has not changed one iota and I  
21 don't know what ever will. But that battle was here when I  
22 came and really escalated in the late '70s and early '80s,  
23 and we had board meetings to go into midnight and just --  
24 and I remember those. And then there was -- the dams were  
25 de-authorized and then things kind of calmed down. And then

1 as we had communities come and say flood control problems  
2 and NRD, you know, looking then what can we do to try to  
3 really address this flood control problem that's still out  
4 there because the Corps only built four of their dams that  
5 they had proposed of the 21, but that riled the Washington  
6 County folks up right away again. They think you're going  
7 to do it up there and it's been -- but that battle, it's the  
8 next generation of -- it's their kids that are out there  
9 battling it now. It's unbelievable. I  
10 just -- it's not the majority, but that battle is  
11 just -- won't go away.

12 MR. FLEECS: It's hard to overcome it and in  
13 my -- down there with the Lower Big Blue I think one of the  
14 things I had going for me was that -- and some people  
15 accused me of this, that if I wanted a flood, I would do my  
16 magic wand and we would get a flood because then we  
17 would -- people would start supporting it. And we got the  
18 mill levy increased in the legislature when they voted on it  
19 that year to go with the four cents and the year we voted we  
20 were getting -- Swan Creek was flooding Dewitt down there.

21 MR. PETERMANN: I think I remember that.

22 MR. FLEECS: We had to have a flood. This is what  
23 the Papio has missed.

24 MR. PETERMANN: Yes, you're right.

25 MR. FLEECS: And since 1964, or '60, whenever.

1 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah.

2 MR. FLEECS: -- they have not had one of those  
3 barn burners come right down that watershed like that one  
4 did and create all of that water and just follow it -- the  
5 storm just follows it right on down. It's going to happen  
6 again some day. I had people in the Swan Creek that had  
7 structures above -- upper part and they was constantly going  
8 out to get easements from them, "Why should I have to give  
9 up my land for those people that live in Dewitt and for  
10 those people that live in Beatrice?" And I said, "Well,  
11 sometimes you've got to do these things so we save bridges  
12 because those people are paying mill levies that keep  
13 bridges from being washed out and that's helped your  
14 situation up here, you know, just different things."

15 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah.

16 MR. FLEECS: But I always had a flood.

17 MR. PETERMANN: That's -- yeah, you had the key  
18 there, that's right, you've got to have a flood or it's just  
19 loses interest.

20 MR. FLEECS: I was talking to Mr. Connelly before  
21 you came and I kind of introduced myself, "Oh, yeah, I  
22 remember you," and we got to talking, and we talked about  
23 the same thing again, you know, about how things haven't  
24 really got that big hit again like we had back in that time  
25 that created all the -- some of the stuff that you were able

1 to sell to get flood control, just like the Papio.

2 MR. PETERMANN: Exactly.

3 MR. FLEECS: I mean Salt Valley. They had the  
4 flood in the '50s. If it wasn't for that they wouldn't have  
5 got the Salt Valley project. So you need those and, God,  
6 you hate to have them but --

7 MR. PETERMANN: We've got a simulated flood on our  
8 website now. What we did was, Ames, Iowa, got flooded two  
9 years ago, 2010, flooded the basketball court. I don't know  
10 if you remember that. And the watershed above Ames isn't  
11 much different than the Papio, it's a similar size almost, a  
12 little bigger. But we took that storm and said, "Engineers,  
13 we want you to just take that storm, all the rainfall, to  
14 various places and sit it over the Papio, over -- and adjust  
15 it in the basin just like it was there, try to just simulate  
16 like as if it rained here," and it just wiped out, you know,  
17 70,000,000 -- \$700,000,000 in damages. We went -- and it  
18 just -- yeah, we haven't had that one happen over the basin  
19 and that makes --

20 MR. FLEECS: And, you know, people from Washington  
21 County, that's what it might take before some people decide  
22 "Yeah, we're going to have to sacrifice something," and that  
23 might be what it'll take, something -- but probably until  
24 then --

25 MR. PETERMANN: Yeah. We've got a -- one of the

1 things that really came about in working in water quality  
2 and DEQ, the cities have to put together a storm water  
3 management plan and get a water quality permit for storm  
4 water runoff, and that was part of the Clean Water Act way  
5 back when, but they never really started enforcing it until  
6 about 2000. Well, when this happened, the communities here  
7 came to the NRD and said, "Man, we need some help here  
8 because we don't know how to do this and what to do, and can  
9 you help us out?" And so that's when we started and said,  
10 "Well, yeah, we think we ought to work together on that and  
11 why don't we form a partnership and all work together  
12 because it's the Papio watershed primarily is the issue for  
13 the metro area.

14 MR. FLEECS: Storm water runoff.

15 MR. PETERMANN: And storm water runoff. And  
16 LaVista is a mile wide and six miles long and, "What can  
17 they do about it?" "Yeah, but working together we can." So  
18 we formed this Papio partnership and that really -- and then  
19 the partnership said, "Well, we want to work on all aspects  
20 of water, not only quality, to meet these NPDS permits," and  
21 do that -- and what we found, we could do it a heck of a lot  
22 cheaper because you didn't have to have eight permits, you  
23 had one permit basically and everybody doing the same thing  
24 and what you do over here helped satisfy a permit over here  
25 and so forth, so it's saving a lot of money. But they also

1       said, "We want to look at the flooding issue and work  
2       together on that," so we also developed kind of a new flood  
3       control plan. Took some of the old Corps reservoirs that  
4       were still feasible, looked good, and added a few to it and  
5       came up with what we now call the Papio Partnership  
6       Watershed Management Plan, and worked with Douglas and Sarpy  
7       County. Now, Washington County wasn't required to do this  
8       storm water permit because they're too rural yet, they're  
9       too rural, so they never wanted to join and we said, "Boy,  
10      you're part of the watershed, how can you not?" "Well, we  
11      tried a number of efforts and it just didn't work." But  
12      they have adopted a flood control plan now but their plan is  
13      that they would -- as they build subdivisions, they'll hold  
14      all the water back on every subdivision.

15               MR. FLEECS: Well, that's a start.

16               MR. PETERMANN: It's a start. And that's what the  
17      partnership said, "Okay, if that -- we don't really agree  
18      with your approach, we don't think it's going to  
19      work -- well, it can work but we don't think it's going to  
20      be economical and it isn't the best way to do it, but if  
21      that's what you want to do it could provide flood control.  
22      The trouble is, you have to wait for the whole watershed up  
23      there to develop to get the control." But it's a start and  
24      that's what the partnership said, "Okay, if that's what you  
25      want to do, you do that. Down here, we want to build some

1 structures so we have some recreation areas and also that we  
2 can -- those flood control maps are reflected then on the  
3 FEMA flood maps. If you do it in every subdivision, they  
4 won't reflect that on the flood maps." So --

5 MR. FLEECS: It's got to be total.

6 MR. PETERMANN: It's got to be a good structure.  
7 So, anyway, there is a plan now. They still don't believe  
8 us that we aren't coming up there to build a big dam, but  
9 there isn't any plan to do that right now. We'll see.  
10 Anyway, it's been good -- I think that's, again, where the  
11 NRD -- working as a watershed.

12 MR. FLEECS: Yeah.

13 MR. PETERMANN: And the watershed approach brought  
14 a solution together and got everybody else working together,  
15 all the cities working together that a lot of times fight  
16 each other on stuff because -- and said, "Let's work  
17 together on this water issue," and I think it's really  
18 developed a relationship here and helped our communities  
19 work together in addressing those water quality and flooding  
20 problems.

21 MR. FLEECS: There was a lot of the cities and the  
22 counties, through the inter-cooperation act - inter-local  
23 agreements --

24 MR. PETERMANN: That's what we have is an inter-  
25 local agreement.

1           MR. FLEECS: That's what really made people start  
2 thinking about, "What can we do jointly on some of these  
3 things?" Lincoln just got done doing their big project  
4 right down through --

5           MR. PETERMANN: Yes.

6           MR. FLEECS: -- and that would have never come  
7 about if it wasn't for the University, the City of Lincoln,  
8 Lower Platte South taking kind of the leadership on that  
9 stuff and get the Corps and everybody involved with that  
10 thing.

11          MR. PETERMANN: Without inter-local agreements,  
12 though, working together, it wouldn't happen.

13          MR. FLEECS: You betcha. And that's what people -  
14 - I think we go back and I think we take NRDs for granted  
15 right now, but just think what would we have had to do if we  
16 didn't have NRDs? I mean, how would you -- you'd still have  
17 the old rural water districts trying to develop water --  
18 rural water projects up in Blair or some place and not  
19 knowing where they're going to get their water --

20          MR. PETERMANN: Exactly.

21          MR. FLEECS: So where do they get it? Get it from  
22 MUD.

23          MR. PETERMANN: Yeah, Fort Calhoun's getting it  
24 from MUD, you bet. We can help make that happen.

25          MR. FLEECS: Outside of their county.

1                   MR. PETERMANN: Exactly, yep. We're trying  
2 to -- and then Blair feeds water from there down toward Fort  
3 Calhoun and serves the rural area there. So we've got MUD  
4 serving north toward Fort Calhoun, Blair serving  
5 south -- and that's two different rural water systems. What  
6 we're in the middle of right now is merging the two and  
7 we're having a big cat fight. "Oh, you know, we're going to  
8 assume some of their debt and, oh, this is" -- so we're  
9 going -- our board meeting tonight's going to go through  
10 that, and it's quite a cat fight, but it really, again, is  
11 the idea, "What did NRDs do?" They merged 154 entities  
12 together. It showed how it can work. And that's how these  
13 two -- I mean, they actually -- we have an interconnection  
14 right now, but we really want to merge it and just operate  
15 it as all one system.

16                   MR. FLEECS: These people, I just think they've  
17 got pride of ownership.

18                   MR. PETERMANN: Yes.

19                   MR. FLEECS: And the trouble is, they're going to  
20 end up not owning nothing --

21                   MR. PETERMANN: Exactly.

22                   MR. FLEECS: -- when it's all said and done  
23 because there won't be -- they'll be bankrupt.

24                   MR. PETERMANN: Yep.

25                   MR. FLEECS: They won't be able to finance it and

1           then what are you going to do? They're going to say, "Oh,  
2           maybe we should have worked something out 10 years ago."

3                   MR. PETERMANN: Yeah.

4                   MR. FLEECS: Well, I think, you know -- I don't  
5           know, running out of time, but --

6                   MR. PETERMANN: Yes. Well, this has --

7                   MR. FLEECS: You've got a meeting to go to.

8                   MR. PETERMANN: Yeah, I do. We have a board  
9           meeting tonight. That was another thing on the Papio that,  
10          you know, we merged with the Middle Missouri Tributaries,

11                   MR. FLEECS: That was good.

12                   MR. PETERMANN: And that was -- it was a very  
13          good.

14                   MR. FLEECS: Especially for them.

15                   MR. PETERMANN: Yes. And now there's talk, "Oh,  
16          the urban people are trying -- not helping us and not doing  
17          what we want to do so maybe we ought" -- there's actually  
18          some talk of a couple of those counties forming their own  
19          NRD again. Just -- do you realize -- and we've done  
20          computations and we've kind of done this every -- because  
21          you hear that come up, "Oh, we're not getting our share up  
22          here." Actually, what was said from early on is Omaha  
23          really should have probably been the ones complaining and I  
24          think some of them did bring this up. In fact, they said,  
25          "Well, we're just going to be shipping our money up there to

1 help them out." "Well, yeah," and that's what's happening.  
2 They're getting probably -- our numbers show two to three  
3 times the taxes we raise in those areas, in those northern  
4 four counties, go up there -- and programs. And we show  
5 that to them and they go, "Well" -- you know, and then it's  
6 kind of like, "Well, we don't care, you aren't doing this  
7 because we want it," so they've definitely benefited. But  
8 the thing it did was got us all together on the Missouri  
9 River and, really, that was another thing we focused on is  
10 habitat on the Missouri and really did a lot of habitat  
11 development there in helping the endangered species and that  
12 stuff, so that's another working relationship with the Game  
13 and Parks and Fish and Wildlife people that we sometimes  
14 have disagreements with, but we can form a working  
15 relationship and help them, too.

16 MR. FLEECS: If you do it with strength, you know,  
17 on those problems, talking to those agencies, when you've  
18 got -- besides you, the NRDs, the cities, the  
19 people -- you've got some strength there when you go to the  
20 Game and Parks Commission or Fish and Wildlife Service. And  
21 I don't know if you do much with the Corps, but that's --

22 MR. PETERMANN: Oh, a lot, yeah, exactly. Yeah,  
23 you do. The other thing, just the association of NRDs, and  
24 I don't know if the Soil and Water Conservation Districts,  
25 did they have a state association? Was there something --

1 MR. FLEECS: Oh, yeah.

2 MR. PETERMANN: So that was probably pretty  
3 active.

4 MR. FLEECS: It was, and very active back in the  
5 '60s when we got to talking about NRDs. We had some good  
6 state association people on that board and from all  
7 the -- what the heck was there? How many -- 50-some -- I  
8 forget now how many SWCDs there were. There was a bunch of  
9 them back at that time and each of them had a member on that  
10 board. To try to convince them back in the '60s that this  
11 was the way to go, it was not easy.

12 MR. PETERMANN: I applaud you guys that did that  
13 and ground through that and hung in there and stayed with  
14 it. I don't know how you did it.

15 MR. FLEECS: It was some challenging times --

16 MR. PETERMANN: Oh, amazing.

17 MR. FLEECS: To do it, but you look back and boy  
18 it was all worth it.

19 MR. PETERMANN: It really was. It really, really  
20 was. And it's -- I've been here now for 38 years --

21 MR. FLEECS: That long?

22 MR. PETERMANN: And I go -- but it's been a great -  
23 - and people say, "Why do you stay that long?" The  
24 challenge always grows and it's there.

25 MR. FLEECS: There's always something new.

1                   MR. PETERMANN: Something new, yeah. And plus, I  
2 enjoy the fact that I can get out of the office and go out  
3 and plow my hands in the dirt.

4                   MR. FLEECS: Just like I told Fred there talking  
5 to him, you know, I said, "One good thing about NRD, being a  
6 manager, or NRD in general, I can look back now at projects  
7 that I was involved with in my 30-some years as the NRD  
8 manager and they're still out there. They're still doing  
9 their job and they'll be doing it for another 35, 40 years,  
10 or maybe greater depending on the maintenance at the NRDs  
11 and they'll do that."

12                  MR. PETERMANN: There's a lot to be proud of.

13                  MR. FLEECS: And I said, "We look at that and  
14 sometimes just put it aside, but we don't need to put it  
15 aside, that's something you've got to be proud of. We spent  
16 money but, by golly, it went for something that's going to  
17 be here for a long time."

18                  MR. PETERMANN: That people are enjoying.

19                  MR. FLEECS: It's an investment.

20                  MR. PETERMANN: It is. And people enjoy it,  
21 people benefit from it, and it's just -- yeah, it has been.

22                  MR. FLEECS: Well, Marlin, it's been a pleasure.

23                  MR. PETERMANN: Oh, very much.

24                  MR. FLEECS: What we're going to do, when we get  
25 these things done, I'm going to take my little tape and hope

1 everything comes out good on it, and we'll get it  
2 transcribed and then I will send you a copy of what we  
3 talked about.

4 MR. PETERMANN: It's going to repeat everything I  
5 said? Oh, my.

6 MR. FLEECS: They have me go through and --

7 MR. PETERMANN: Oh, okay, edit it a little bit.

8 MR. FLEECS: -- edit it to make sure that  
9 everything --

10 MR. PETERMANN: Now, are you going to publish  
11 those all then or --

12 MR. FLEECS: This will be done through the  
13 Nebraska State Historical Society, that when we get all this  
14 stuff done -- we've got somebody working to kind of  
15 coordinate and -- there might be some stuff taken out and  
16 put in, just so we have really a good old biography of NRDs  
17 and who was involved and how they were involved.

18 MR. PETERMANN: Should I sign here? Do I need to  
19 sign?

20 MR. FLEECS: Yeah.

21 MR. PETERMANN: What do I -- okay, put my name  
22 here.

23 MR. FLEECS: Put your name there, sign it there,  
24 and your address and today's date.

25 MR. PETERMANN: That's my home address you want,

1 right?

2 MR. FLEECS: Yeah, even though we're at the Papio.  
3 If I wasn't tired, I'd stick around for your meeting just to  
4 see --

5 MR. PETERMANN: It's going to be a long one today.

6 MR. FLEECS: I got your agenda.

7 MR. PETERMANN: Oh, boy.

8 MR. FLEECS: Yeah, I've got to get out to the  
9 Lower Elkhorn and interview those people.

10 MR. PETERMANN: Stanley and --

11 MR. FLEECS: And Tom Moser up in Hartington. And  
12 I'm going to interview out there in North Platte, the  
13 manager there. Did you have a meeting in Ord today you  
14 said?

15 MR. PETERMANN: We did. It was out of the Lower  
16 Platte so it'd be the Loups and the Elkhorns and then the  
17 Lower Platte South, the Lower Platte North and us.

18 MR. FLEECS: Steve says, "Was it an NARD meeting?"  
19 I said, "No, I don't think it was an NARD meeting."

20 MR. PETERMANN: It was a Lower Platte Basin  
21 meeting.

22 MR. FLEECS: Well, those ought to be interesting.

23 MR. PETERMANN: It is because we're really getting  
24 down to talking how much water is there and who's going to  
25 get it, so it's getting into that kind of talk, kind of like

1 the Republican Basin.

2 MR. FLEECS: Yeah, well --

3 MR. PETERMANN: Voluntarily.

4 MR. FLEECS: -- probably not quite as bad as the  
5 Republican. Well, okay, I'm shutting it off.

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