

INTERVIEW WITH DAN SMITH
BY ANN BLEED

January 28, 2014

1 MS. BLEED: This is Ann Bleed and I'm here
2 interviewing Dan Smith, who just retired as the manager of
3 the Middle Republican NRD. So, my first question to Dan is,
4 tell me a little bit about your background.

5 MR. SMITH: I grew up in Frontier County,
6 southwest Nebraska. I lived in the little town of Maywood,
7 was born there, still live there, never got more than seven
8 blocks from where I was born. But grew up there, went to
9 school there, went to college at Kearney, Kearney State
10 College then. I had a double major in business and math.
11 And, of course, at that time frame, I graduated in 1970, the
12 Vietnam war was still going strong, and I ended up going
13 into the Air Force, and spent seven years, three months, ten
14 days, and about five hours in the Air Force. I was co-pilot
15 of B-52s for most of that time and had just a little bit of
16 combat experience at the tail end of the Vietnam War.

17 Decided to get out of the service, go back to the
18 small town where I'd grown up, and I'd hoped to buy a
19 business there. That didn't work and a position became
20 available at the Middle Republican NRD in Curtis. I
21 interviewed and was selected as an assistant manager to
22 replace Rod DeBuhr, who was moving to York. Wayne Heathers
23 was the manager. Lucille Towne was our secretary. And it
24 was just the three of us in that office in those days. The
25 Middle Republican was probably a little bit unusual in the

1 NRDs at that time, because we -- for a western NRD, because
2 we had a fairly active watershed program. The '47 flood on
3 the Medicine Creek that did a lot of damage down through
4 Cambridge, Nebraska, had been probably the primary impetus
5 for the watersheds on the Upper and Lower Medicine Creek.
6 Construction was actually started by the Watershed
7 Conservancy District. But we finished up those projects on
8 the Medicine Watershed and probably built about, I think, 11
9 structures in that. It was so big, it had to be split into
10 two watersheds. Federal USDA funding, of course, PL 566.

11 We had another watershed over in Hayes and
12 Hitchcock County, the Blackwood Watershed that we were
13 actively working on and built about 11 or 13 structures over
14 there. We also had two old watersheds, the Dry Creek South
15 in Red Willow County, and then the Dry Creek Pilot that was
16 in southern Frontier and Red Willow County. Now, those
17 watersheds were already built (before the NRDs). We were
18 responsible for the O&M on them. As I recall, the Dry Creek
19 Pilot wasn't the first pilot watershed started in the United
20 States, but I believe it was the first one completed in the
21 United States. And those structures are still all viable,
22 active structures, and we still do O&M on them.

23 So, that, the watershed programs the relationship
24 with SCS at that time, with technical assistance for helping
25 that agency with layout and design of conservation

1 practices, were probably the primary emphasis for the NRD.

2 Now, just before I had started, the Middle
3 Republican and the Twin Platte had got together to do a
4 groundwater model because the water issues were just
5 starting to come to the front.

6 MS. BLEED: These are groundwater issues?

7 MR. SMITH: Groundwater issues, yes. We didn't
8 have a whole lot of development, but there in the middle to
9 late '70s, things were really booming and everybody was
10 concerned that if those types of development rates continued
11 into the future, would there be an issue with groundwater?
12 And fortunately, that trend slowed down considerably, but we
13 contracted with USGS and Conservation and Survey, to put
14 together the Platte-Republican Groundwater Model that
15 basically went from the Platte River to the Republican River
16 and included that portion of the Twin Platte NRD and 80
17 percent of the Middle Republican NRD.

18 On other water issues, the Upper Republican was
19 just getting started on their control area and were
20 developing some of their rules and regulations. And I think
21 one of the first meetings I went to after starting with the
22 NRDs was one of their public hearings over in Imperial, and
23 there was a crowd big enough that they had to use the high
24 school gym to get everybody in and lots of testimony, lots
25 of passion, lots of emotion. But they persevered through

1 that whole process and put together a pretty good program
2 for what we had in those days. And one of the things I've
3 always said with regard to NRDs, I think, is that when
4 somebody wants go get involved in what's going on, which is
5 good, they will grab the statutes for groundwater management
6 now and look at them and say, "My God, look at all of this
7 ability, all this authority. Why hasn't something been
8 done?" And I think you have to understand how those
9 statutes matured over the years to what we've got now. And
10 it was a long, slow process from back in the late '70s. The
11 NRDs' authorities with groundwater management were pretty
12 limited. The old control area concept required approval of
13 the Department of Water Resources or you couldn't do the
14 plan. And the groundwater management areas that we have
15 now, of course, don't require that approval. There's a
16 tremendous amount of coordination, of course, but they don't
17 require that approval. So, the way the statutes have
18 matured over the years, the way NRDs have matured over the
19 years, I think is admirable for the organization. There are
20 lots of good people, lots of ideas all it takes is interest
21 and then you can build that interest into programs and
22 policies that work at the local level. We talk about local
23 control and we have many examples. You've got your county
24 commissioners and you've got your school districts, and
25 they're local control, but they're focused more on a single

1 issue, where NRDs now have so much broader responsibilities,
2 so much broader authorities that there's any number of
3 things that they can be doing. We tend to focus on a few and
4 put our emphasis there. Groundwater management, of course,
5 is one of those now, but, it's local control that addresses
6 local issues with that local perspective of knowing what's
7 going on and knowing what needs to be done that I think
8 makes them so darn effective.

9 MS. BLEED: And I think what I also am hearing you
10 say is that there's more chances for the local folks to get
11 involved in the decision-making.

12 MR. SMITH: Absolutely. We all have an elected
13 board of directors. They're all good people genuinely
14 wanting to get something better for their area, for the
15 district. Hopefully we stay away from too much neighborhood
16 focus and look at the big picture. And I think, in general,
17 that gets done across the state. People may start on a
18 board with a single interest in mind, but I think over time,
19 they learn that the big picture has more importance and
20 that, if you don't get the big picture right, you can't get
21 the local picture right, either. And directors, I think,
22 have done an admirable job over that. I've known any number
23 of directors not only from my district, of course, but
24 across the state and I've had the good fortune of working
25 with some of them on various projects. There were a number

1 of directors on the Water Policy Task Force, as you know.
2 Those were challenging times looking at that integrated
3 management concept. And I'm still kind of amazed and wonder
4 how we got it done in the way we did it, but I think it
5 worked. We've got something out there that's the basis for
6 good, sound management. It will always improve. There will
7 always be changes made. But I think we were able to put
8 together a program that gave us a good enough foundation
9 that you could build on it, could change it, could amend it
10 as time goes on, and get around to the point where we start
11 managing the water in Nebraska instead of just managing
12 groundwater or surface water. I honestly feel that, while
13 we've had lots of comments about what we did or did not do,
14 I think the Republican Basin has led the way in that aspect
15 in a lot of things. We still have our issues. We still
16 have our challenges out there, but we continue to move
17 forward with programs, policies, projects, that I think will
18 make the Republican Basin a strong, viable basin and one
19 that can stay in compliance with the Compact, where Nebraska
20 by itself couldn't stay in compliance. We can make it work,
21 and I think we are doing it. And my involvement in that
22 process is one of those things that, I'm proud to have had
23 the opportunity to work with the other managers, with the
24 other boards on projects in our basin.

25 MS. BLEED: One of the questions that comes up

1 about the NRDs, and I know your NRD was intimately involved
2 at one point, is where you have districts and you have
3 different rules across boundaries. If I'm remembering
4 correctly, there was a lawsuit on the across boundary issues
5 between the Middle and the Upper, was it?

6 MR. SMITH: Ann, I'm not sure. I don't remember
7 anything specific there. Early on, you mean?

8 MS. BLEED: I may be misremembering.

9 MR. SMITH: There was some -- I know one of the
10 irrigation districts early on wanted to take some action
11 against the Upper Republican NRD and decided that they
12 couldn't do it just because of the way the legal -- they
13 would have had to have sued each and every landowner rather
14 than a district. And there have always been, and probably
15 always will be challenges between districts. You can always
16 say, "Well, if they'd do more, we wouldn't have to do as
17 much." But just like water, that all rolls downhill, too.
18 Your neighbor below you could say, "Well, if you'd have done
19 more, we wouldn't have to do as much." But, no, I think we
20 get along.

21 MS. BLEED: How do you deal with those issues?

22 MR. SMITH: Just to a certain extent, try to ride
23 it through. You've got to keep an open dialog with your
24 neighbors. And I feel we have always done that. Years ago
25 in the Republican River Basin, we started an informal group

1 that we later put together under an inter-local agreement,
2 that included the four NRDs in the Republican Basin and the
3 irrigation districts. And that group still meets.
4 Initially, we put it together to share information, to
5 figure out what each of us do, which was really beneficial.
6 We became formal when Kansas sued Nebraska the first time
7 over the Republican, hoping to file an amicus brief with the
8 Court. We weren't allowed to file by the Court, but the
9 group still worked together to just continue to keep an
10 understanding of what each of our issues were and if we
11 weren't addressing your issue, then why? Why couldn't we do
12 what you thought we should have done? And that group still
13 meets. You know, it's effective at times, it struggles at
14 time. But it's still an opportunity to have an open
15 discussion of what's going on. And they are going to
16 continue to be, I don't care whether you're the Republican
17 or any other basin. There will continue to be issues
18 between groundwater and surface water simply because of the
19 way it's administered in Nebraska. It's a relatively
20 complex system. It's relatively unique, I guess, west of
21 the Mississippi, as far as I know. And I think it will
22 probably change over time, whether that's done legislatively
23 or through the courts. Hopefully, it's legislatively with
24 something we can work on, work together on.

25 MS. BLEED: How would you see that changing? What

1 would you change about it?

2 MR. SMITH: I'm not exactly sure. My fear is that
3 you end up with the courts somehow throwing the two systems
4 together, and then, who manages what? Not that they can't
5 be put together, not that they can't work that way, but,
6 Nebraska's (groundwater) correlative rights, surface water
7 with appropriation rights are so different. I don't see how
8 we'd ever blend those together formally. Now, it could be
9 done, I think, through the structure we've got now, through
10 the integrated management plans that we've worked on. I
11 know, in the Republican, we're considering going back to a
12 basin integrated management plan, I guess, like you have to
13 do on an over-appropriated designation under LB962. Similar
14 to what we would have done under LB108, the old process that
15 first recognized those conflicts between ground and surface
16 water. And then, through that basin plan, I think we could
17 better address some of the conflict issues between
18 groundwater and surface water. We're never going to make
19 them go away, I'm firmly convinced of that. Things have
20 changed, and I don't think it's practical to restore the
21 system to what it was, if you will, at whatever point in
22 time you pick. But I think we could work -- with a basin
23 plan, we could work on projects that focus on minimizing
24 those conflicts, which, again, I don't think you can ever
25 make them go away, but I think we can minimize them without

1 having to mitigate them or litigate them either one. But I
2 think that's where things will have to go.

3 I don't think it has to be done legislatively.
4 Once again, I think we can work through the integrated
5 management plan concept on that basin plan. And it takes
6 the commitment and the participation of all the parties
7 involved. The NRDs just can't get together and say, "Here's
8 our integrated management plan for the basin," and expect
9 everybody else to buy off on it. We've got to have their
10 input, their support, their participation of all interests,
11 and primarily those irrigation districts, whether they be
12 big scale or small scale. We've got to have the individual
13 appropriators that are out there involved in the whole
14 process so that everybody understands what the plan could do
15 and where it needs to go.

16 You know, we've sort of been in a -- I don't want
17 to say panic, but because we're relatively poor in the
18 Republican River Basin, a penny of tax in my district
19 doesn't raise quite 300,000, where a penny of tax in the
20 Papio is, what, five million? So, you've got to build your
21 programs within your financial abilities. We do use the
22 occupation tax authority that we've had on our project, but
23 we seem like we -- we, the Republican NRDs, kind of always
24 been behind the power curve just on funding issues. We've
25 been fortunate enough over the years to get some funding

1 through the State DNR, and been able to use that to put
2 together some of our projects. The Upper started their Rock
3 Creek project on their own and got it up and running. We're
4 working on the N-CORPE project now. Hopefully by the end or
5 middle of February, we'll have some water going down the
6 stream in Medicine Creek, once again, pushing that water
7 through the system so that Nebraska can stay in compliance.
8 Were it not for the occupation tax authority that we have,
9 we wouldn't have been able to afford that project.

10 But we've got those two projects out there.
11 They've got the capability of taking the edge off of the
12 panic, if you will. Now we can turn around and focus on
13 programs that can bring about overall stability in the
14 basin. And we can address, some of the issues with the
15 surface water irrigation districts. Once again, I know we
16 can't bring them back to where they were, but we can
17 mitigate some of the issues that they might have. In an
18 orderly program right now, not responding, not reacting to
19 the year, the compact call year or problems with Compact
20 compliance.

21 You know, hopefully, the Supreme Court makes their
22 decision on the Special Master Kayatta's report to them. If
23 they accept it in whole, Nebraska's going to be in
24 reasonably good shape. We've got some things we need to
25 work forward with. Will we end up back in court on the Rock

1 Creek and the N-CORPE and some of the other issues that are
2 out there in arbitration now? Who knows? Those things just
3 have to be worked with.

4 But I think we've got a system in place in the
5 Republican. Once again, the foundation's there that we can
6 build on it and, I think, bring about a fair amount of
7 stability in the basin. We can't make it rain.

8 MS. BLEED: We've tried.

9 MR. SMITH: It'd be nice to make some of the
10 droughts go away, but we can't make it rain. And the dry
11 years complicate the process. Some of the minor issues are
12 magnified so by a drought year that it's too easy to
13 overreact to the problems that you have. They're compounded
14 when they come on top of each other. But, I'm still
15 confident that through the system, we can make things work
16 in the Republican River Basin.

17 Just look at the Platte. Ron Bishop, I truly,
18 truly loved the man. He was, from my early days as a
19 manager, was a mentor to me. If I had some issues that
20 scared me, I called Ron or I called John Turnbull, and I
21 said, "Hey, what should I be doing? What should I be
22 looking at?" And they were always more than willing to give
23 me help. But some of the things that Ron's done, put
24 together for the Central Platte on the Platte River Basin.

25 MS. BLEED: The conjunctive management?

1 MR. SMITH: Yes, conjunctive management. The
2 Central Platte should be extremely proud of what they've put
3 together there.

4 MS. BLEED: So, essentially, that's working with
5 surface water and groundwater together to augment --

6 MR. SMITH: Right. What they've done with the
7 three or four canals that they've worked with in that
8 district. And I know some of the people involved with those
9 projects. I think is great. If you can get enough
10 stability in your system so that you can turn around and
11 then work on the other problems without having to panic,
12 without having to overreact, without having to meet the
13 challenges of the day, you could work on those things that
14 will give you the ability to meet those challenges way into
15 the future and not react at them one at a time.

16 MS. BLEED: So, let me ask you, if -- I mean,
17 obviously, one of the keys to the natural resources
18 districts is local control. Thinking about your NRD and the
19 Republican Basin, do you think a lot of what you've done
20 would have gotten done if this was all under State control
21 and you didn't have local?

22 MR. SMITH: Would it -- yes, it would have been
23 done. I think it would have been much more of a struggle.
24 When we were looking at our first groundwater management
25 area, in five days, we did five meetings in each of the

1 counties in our district, and probably had 100 to 120 people
2 at each one of those meetings, and a lot of comments. The
3 local reaction to any control, whether it be your school
4 board or your county or the ag society wanting to build a
5 new building at the fairgrounds, is going to have some
6 kickback. And we had a fair amount. But the ability, then,
7 of those locally elected directors to visit with their
8 friends and neighbors in the weeks after those meetings,
9 brought about an understanding that you could move forward
10 with a plan that I don't think the state could have done.
11 You could have dropped the same plan in at the State level,
12 but there would have been a lot more resistance to it, a lot
13 more of a battle to get that level of understanding that you
14 could do with people at the local level.

15 And I think that's where local control will always
16 be more effective than State control. Not necessarily
17 better, but more effective, because you've got ability to
18 build the support that you need. There are people that are
19 well-informed, uninformed, and misinformed. Well-informed
20 and uninformed you can work with easy. Misinformed, you
21 have to make an extra effort to take apart what they think
22 they know to try and bring them back into one of those other
23 two categories. And that, I don't think you could do from
24 the State level. I think you've got to have that local
25 contact, that local office that you could call. Whenever

1 we'd have a new issue, regardless of what it might be, the
2 phone's going to ring off the wall for two weeks as soon as
3 it becomes public. And that's been the case over the years,
4 whatever it may be. There's always going to be somebody
5 that wants to know, wants to be able to call, wants to be
6 able to talk to a person and understand. And if you've got
7 that local office out there, you can get that done more
8 effectively than trying to call somebody in Lincoln.

9 MS. BLEED: Getting back to the early days of the
10 NRD, do you remember any stories or discussions about the
11 formation of the NRDs and what was going on?

12 MR. SMITH: Well, of course, that first legal
13 challenge by the League of Women Voters, I believe, created
14 a little bit of confusion from what I understand. There
15 were two or three districts that never hired managers until
16 it was settled. I think Twin Platte didn't hire a manager
17 until January -- December or January. Kent Miller is the
18 only manager they've ever had, but he was hired a little bit
19 later. I think there were a couple other districts that
20 also did that. You had massive boards because all those
21 boards from the merged districts had to continue to meet. I
22 know our secretary talked about having to keep books,
23 accounting, for 12 different groups that went into our NRD
24 between the soil and water conservation districts and the
25 watershed conservancy districts that we had out there. So

1 just doing that, so, it was a struggle until they got
2 through that challenge.

3 Then the individual boards appointed people to an
4 executive committee and then you had to get through the
5 elections. You had two-year and four-year appointments and
6 got through that process. And so, you were essentially two
7 years into the existence of the districts before you had the
8 first board that was elected to fully represent those
9 districts.

10 Then there were the later challenges of the sub-
11 district issue of getting close to one to one.

12 MS. BLEED: The one person, one vote kind of
13 issue?

14 MR. SMITH: One person, one vote, yes, was a
15 challenge. Which, in the Middle Republican, we said, let's
16 just go to at-large. And I think it's worked reasonably
17 well for us. We would have had to have pin-wheeled sub-
18 districts off of McCook. To make things generally easier
19 election-wise, we just said, let's go to directors at large.
20 And we are the only district in the state that doesn't have
21 sub-districts. We elect all of our directors at-large, and
22 it functions reasonably well for us now. We have a
23 concentration of directors from Red Willow County now, which
24 we would have if we'd have had sub-districts. There are
25 areas in our district that don't feel like they're

1 represented. And in working with those folks, you need to
2 make sure they find a director of the existing ones that
3 will listen to them. Doesn't necessarily have to agree with
4 you, but find somebody that'll listen to you. You've got to
5 make your concerns known. You just can't sit back in the
6 woods and holler that I'm not being treated right. You've
7 got to get out and participate in government if you want it
8 to work well for you. You can't just stand back and watch
9 it go by.

10 MS. BLEED: Is there anything else you can think
11 of you'd like to add?

12 MR. SMITH: We're here at the Legislative
13 Conference. We do a fall conference, and I know other
14 groups have conferences, but, the last few years, I think
15 especially since Dean Edson took over as NARD executive
16 director, these conferences are an excellent opportunity to
17 share experiences, share problems, and get a perspective on
18 what -- not just what your issues are, but some of the
19 challenges that other districts deal with. This Legislative
20 Conference, there may be a piece of legislation out there
21 that you think is just marvelous, but until you get the
22 opportunity to sit down here and figure out what the impact
23 of the same thing that's good for you is bad for a District
24 3, you know, 30 miles away, then you go, "Oh, yeah, I never
25 thought about that." And these conferences give us the

1 ability to air out those issues. Figure out if our idea, is
2 fixable? Is it totally broke? Can we change this into
3 something? Can we move with something that can be good for
4 both of us?

5 Another thing that the NRD system does is our
6 Managers' Committee. And I think we meet about five times a
7 year. It gives us an opportunity once again to, kind of, in
8 a smaller environment; to air out our concerns, figure out
9 what's wrong, what needs to be fixed. Will that fix work
10 for everybody? Once again, that blending new concepts into
11 the existing programs of 23 districts and understanding
12 that, yes, if it's good for me, it should be good for you.
13 And if it isn't, we need to figure out how to do that. And
14 I think the NRD system with these conferences, with the
15 managers being able to get together; it's a good opportunity
16 for that. We've just hired, of course, a new manager for
17 the Middle Republican NRD, and one of the things I've done
18 is -- with Jack is encouraged him to, through the Managers'
19 Committee, to listen. And he's met a number of the managers
20 already, but to find out who to talk to, and I said, "I'll
21 work with you. I know who you need to go to if you have an
22 urban program, if you have trails, if you have watershed
23 issues, budgets." There are managers out there that have
24 unique skills within each of those areas and you don't have
25 to learn everything new. You can go draw on some of that

1 information, some of that background that the other parties
2 have. And I think that's one of the things that's maybe
3 unique for the NRD system is that we've got that
4 relationship between the managers that we can have that open
5 and free discussion and sharing. We don't get such an
6 ownership in a program at the local level that we wouldn't
7 tell anybody else what we do. And I think that's one of the
8 good things about NRDs. And I think that works through the
9 directors, too. Once again, a director will be as effective
10 as they choose to be, will know as much, will be aware of as
11 much as they want to get in and get involved. If you just
12 want to go to a meeting once a month or a committee, if
13 you're on one, and not get involved in everybody else's
14 business, if you will, then you'll stay relatively low on
15 the knowledge tree. But if you get out and get involved, I
16 think you've got -- you have that ability to learn from
17 others to figure out what their experiences are, to figure
18 out what their problems are, and hopefully not make those
19 same problems at your local district. And I think that's a
20 good relationship in the NRD system.

21 MS. BLEED: One more question that I've got, and
22 this is really not related to the topic at hand, but just
23 out of curiosity, what do you think should be the role of
24 the State?

25 MR. SMITH: Difficult question. We're dealing

1 with the funding issue now, Senator Carlson's task force.
2 We started that two years ago with whatever the LB was that
3 the Natural Resources Committee put out. That didn't go
4 far. The NRDs put together a tremendous amount of
5 information, which Senator Carlson's task force was able to
6 sweep in and use. But we do need some level of funding at
7 the State level. Once again, some districts can handle
8 startup of a new program just because of their valuation.
9 For some of the districts, and mostly the western districts
10 that are smaller have a little less valuation, it's tough to
11 do something new. Now, we have extended authority for
12 groundwater management, but if you want to just start a
13 watershed program, it would be almost impossible. Of
14 course, there's very little federal funding now, but
15 anything that's not directly groundwater related, there's
16 very little funding available to help you get the start.
17 I've thought and worked a little bit on some legislation on
18 a revolving loan fund I think would work for most of it. We
19 don't need an outright grant from the State. Sure, if we
20 can get it, great. But if you can just have the
21 availability, the opportunity to go out and get money for
22 your startup, get a loan, pay it back over time, most of us,
23 I think, can handle new programs administratively, but that
24 initial startup can stop a good project from happening just
25 because -- and it may not be that it's that expensive. You

1 just can't afford to get it started. You could afford to
2 run it after it's going, but you just can't get it started
3 and that's where we need that State help.

4 Now, once again, it can't be an open checkbook. I
5 think it's got to be a program where there's some review,
6 there's some oversight. I think one of the things that one
7 of the pieces of legislation this year looks at is the \$50
8 million, as being used only for the projects that were
9 identified through that task force process.

10 So the one project that could save the State on
11 everything could come up tomorrow, but it couldn't be funded
12 because it wasn't one of the original ones considered. So,
13 we need some more flexibility there. There has to be the
14 opportunity to put together a program that technology has
15 made possible now that changes -- there are things that
16 change and we've got to be able to adapt with that. So, the
17 State involvement has to be there on a number of other
18 issues. I guess I look at it primarily as funding, but we
19 need help with studies. Every NRD doesn't need a
20 groundwater model or a hydrologist and a geologist. We need
21 the ability to go through either DNR or Conservation and
22 Survey or fund projects, studies through USGS. You know,
23 there are a number of different groups out there that we can
24 do that, but we need that state or federal help, in many
25 cases, involvement just for that study, for that phase.

1 Because, it would be foolish -- not foolish, I guess, but
2 it's not practical for us to, for the Middle to hire a
3 groundwater modeler. We could keep one busy, but we
4 couldn't generate the output that would justify the cost.
5 So, we need that ability, that relationship with the states
6 -- with the State agencies to do that, not only on quantity
7 issues, which I would typically associate with DNR, but the
8 quality issues with DEQ. We need to have that State agency
9 there can help or outright do the study, the modeling if it
10 needs to be for various issues. So, there's a role there,
11 an important role there for the State. And that I don't see
12 ever going away.

13 Could there be a different structure? We've
14 looked at a variety of different things over the years.
15 "We," being the State of Nebraska, not just the NRDs. But
16 do we need one giant agency with divisions? Do we need lots
17 of separate agencies? And that question will always be
18 asked, regardless of the system you have, you have to think
19 that maybe there's something out there that would work
20 better. Not change for change sake, but, regardless of how
21 good you function, you can be better in some respect. It
22 may not be practical, but you could do your job better if
23 you think about it long enough. So, the State agencies are
24 going to have to be involved in the local programs. I guess
25 it's no different than the State Department of Education

1 looking at curriculum for the local school. They could
2 build things, science curriculum, on a scale that could
3 apply to all schools that once again, you couldn't do at the
4 -- you could do at the local level, but you couldn't
5 necessarily afford it.

6 MS. BLEED: Anything else you'd like to add?

7 MR. SMITH: I don't know, Ann. Like I say, the
8 NRDs, I knew very little about natural resources districts
9 when I started with them. I'd been gone, like I said,
10 again, I'd been in the service, so I hadn't been in Nebraska
11 during those formative years. When I started with the
12 district, we used to kind of loaf in the winter. We planted
13 trees in the spring. We did our watershed work, our O&M or
14 dam construction during the summer and a little bit of
15 wildlife work in the fall, and the winter months we just
16 kind of sat around, got ready for the next round. And now
17 we stay busy all year long. The system, if you will, has
18 morphed into where the meetings happen through those winter
19 months, through the idle time that we used to have. The
20 NRDs are unique to Nebraska. And I think they're unique in
21 the role that they play. They can meet those challenges.
22 We've got enough variation in authority that we can do
23 things at the local level that couldn't be put together by
24 the other -- not as effectively put together by the other
25 subdivisions that may be out there. Some folks complain

1 that, your district doesn't do anything with trails, and my
2 district doesn't do anything with water issues. But you
3 focus on those things that are important in the area. We
4 don't have a whole lot of storm water run-off concerns out
5 in Curtis, Nebraska.

6 MS. BLEED: At least not as a city.

7 MR. SMITH: Not at the moment.

8 (Laughter.)

9 We will never have the issues and the emphasis
10 that the Lincoln and Omaha districts have. But we meet our
11 challenges just as effectively. But there are different
12 issues within those schemes. So, I think the NRDs are going
13 to continue to function, are going to continue to be viable.
14 We've got to meet those challenges to our effectiveness when
15 they come up. And once again, I think it's mostly
16 misinformed. People that look at the laws that are on the
17 books now and say, "My God, why haven't you done something
18 about this?" But when the issue may have started, you had
19 very little authority. You may have just got the authority
20 with the last session of the Legislature. But you've got to
21 be able to meet those challenges to your effectiveness.
22 You've got to work towards putting together the programs
23 that you know meet the needs of your local area.

24 MS. BLEED: Thank you very much, Dan. Appreciate
25 your input, and you'll be getting a copy.