

INTERVIEW OF
VINCE KRAMPER
September 27, 2013

1 MR. STARR: I'm doing an interview with Vince
2 Kramper, who was a director of the Middle Missouri Natural
3 Resource District and then the Papio Natural --
4 Papio/Missouri River Natural Resource District, a member of
5 the Natural Resources Commission and a member of the State
6 Environmental Trust, all for a number of years. And I'm
7 doing this interview at his home in -- near Dakota City,
8 Nebraska, and this interview is being conducted for the
9 Natural Resources Districts' oral history interview project.
10 I'm doing the interview and my name is Gayle Starr. The
11 interview is being conducted on September 27, 2013.

12 And with that, Vince, could you give me just a
13 summary of what you've been up to?

14 MR. KRAMPER: Well, how many years
15 (indiscernible), 40 years?

16 MR. STARR: However many years -- you want to
17 start at the beginning, or wherever.

18 MR. KRAMPER: Well, when I was younger I was on
19 the SWCD board, which all the counties in the state were
20 that, and perhaps the commissioners would give us a little
21 money to do some project, but we really couldn't do
22 anything. Then, all of a sudden, when the NRD started
23 out -- and I just feel like Nebraska is the luckiest state
24 in the whole union. It was the best thing. Every time
25 you'd go to a meeting, everybody would say, "Oh, I wish we

1 could have the NRDs, but we can't convince our legislature
2 to do it." And I kind of felt sorry for them. It's been
3 the greatest thing that ever happened to the state of
4 Nebraska. We got tax money to do projects, do the
5 conservation, which were made -- that was our purpose and so
6 forth. So, like Gayle says, I've been on that for many,
7 many years. And then we had 24 NRDs in the state and I was
8 the chairman of the Middle Missouri Tribes NRD and here again
9 we had a low count of people in our district, the northeast
10 corner here, and so we really didn't get enough money to do
11 the projects. We got some nice small projects done, but we
12 really weren't getting anywhere. And then the Papio NRD
13 says, "You know, if you want to merge with us, we'd welcome
14 you in." And I had very -- I had a problem with that
15 because I thought, "Well, how are we going to have any
16 representation?" However, it was the best thing that ever
17 happened. They're taking good care of us up here in this
18 corner. It's just working great. I couldn't -- I don't
19 know how you could improve it any better. Projects are
20 getting done. People are happy. I'm just thrilled to be a
21 part of that -- or been a part of that, I'm retired now of
22 course, but --

23 MR. STARR: When the NRD laws were initially
24 passed in 1969 and then there were amendments for a few
25 years and it was actually implemented in 1972, at that point

1 how much did you know about what the NRD law really was,
2 what was going to happen?

3 MR. KRAMPER: We really didn't know too much. I
4 guess I had the attitude we had nothing, practically
5 nothing, and I'm sure a lot of people worked on the rules
6 and regulations and I felt -- I had enough faith in them
7 that they probably were pretty good, maybe needed some
8 refining, but I just felt, "Wow, maybe we're going to get
9 something done now," and it certainly turned out to be true.

10 MR. STARR: Were you involved in any of the state
11 association activities at that time and the -- contacting
12 senators saying what your opinion was and so forth?

13 MR. KRAMPER: Well, yeah, we were always
14 encouraged to be in touch with the senators and to let them
15 know what's going on. If we had a certain view on things,
16 we wanted to let them know. And what better way for them to
17 know than finding from the grass -- finding out from the
18 grass roots, which we were. So, yeah, we did that.

19 MR. STARR: When it went into effect, July 1,
20 1972, and you had your first board meeting -- and however
21 many directors there were on the Middle Missouri Tribs, what
22 was the reaction of everybody? What were the board members
23 saying?

24 MR. KRAMPER: Well, we had a lot of, "I don't know
25 what's going to happen or what we're supposed to do," but we

1 had a manager -- I can't think of --

2 MR. STARR: Rod Storm (phonetic).

3 MR. KRAMPER: Rod Storm. I was chairman of the
4 board at the time we were looking for one and he came to me,
5 just a young guy, and he was interested in the job. And I
6 said, "Well, by golly, let's get him started, the young
7 man," and he just turned out to be terrific. He was really
8 a good person for that job. And he helped educate the board
9 members so we knew more what we were going to do and he ran
10 a good ship. He did a good job.

11 MR. STARR: But did you hire Rod right away or was
12 it --

13 MR. KRAMPER: No. If I remember right, we didn't
14 have anybody there as chairman -- I guess I was kind of
15 leading what was going on and, like I say, we really weren't
16 positive what we were supposed to do and so forth. We were
17 getting a few things done and everything, but we could see
18 we needed some -- people working every day on it.

19 MR. STARR: One of the -- if I remember right, one
20 of the projects you had was that Tekamah mud watershed.

21 MR. KRAMPER: Yes.

22 MR. STARR: That was probably one of the few
23 things that this NRD really had going at that time.

24 MR. KRAMPER: That is so right. We had a lot of
25 people being flooded in that area and when we started on

1 that project, we had so many nay-sayers on there that said,
2 "Oh, it's never going to work. We don't need that."
3 Ironically, as soon as it was built, within a year they had
4 a terrible storm there and it would have flooded terrible,
5 so that stopped any nay-say after that. But that was a good
6 project. Worked hard on that. I felt it was a good
7 accomplishment.

8 MR. STARR: Yeah. When that merger came along,
9 about when was that? Was that after about five years, or
10 10?

11 MR. KRAMPER: Well, it must -- I had those
12 figures. We were like 17 years, I think we went without the
13 merger, and then we -- over 20 years we've been in the
14 merger. And people talk about changing representation and
15 so forth, but everything is working so smooth I personally
16 don't see any reason to change anything.

17 MR. STARR: Yeah. When that happened, what kind
18 of process did your board go through? Was it -- I assume
19 there was a lot of questions and a lot of --

20 MR. KRAMPER: A lot of questions.

21 MR. STARR: -- maybe controversy?

22 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah. Like I say, we weren't sure
23 we were going to represent it from up here, but I forget we
24 had something like 11 on our board and there was like 11 on
25 their board, so we merged both boards and we had 22 or 20, I

1 forget the exact figure. It's very hard to get anything
2 done with that many people. Of course, we slowly put that
3 down and now they have, I believe, just 10 or 11 on their
4 board and that's working. It was too big a board before.

5 MR. STARR: Yeah. So what were the -- what do you
6 think were the benefits that you got out of the merger or
7 what were the -- well, first of all, what were the arguments
8 that people made against the merger?

9 MR. KRAMPER: I think they thought that they
10 wouldn't -- nobody would even see or know who they are, just
11 no representation. That's what I think scared everybody,
12 including myself, I had no idea. They were all mostly city
13 people down there, what are they going to know about farms?
14 But that turned out not to be true, they were very
15 conscientious, good people.

16 MR. STARR: What were the arguments for the
17 merger?

18 MR. KRAMPER: Well, we could see there could be
19 more money available to do these projects. We were letting
20 a lot of things go because we just had no way we could
21 finance them and yet the conservation projects needed to be
22 done. So we thought, "Well, maybe this is a chance to get
23 something like that done" and that turned out to be true
24 also.

25 MR. STARR: When were you -- if you recall, I

1 don't. When were you first on the Natural Resources
2 Commission? Was it about 1980 or --

3 MR. KRAMPER: Well, let's see, I think my plaque
4 is 30 years or something.

5 MR. STARR: So somewhere around 1980 then?

6 MR. KRAMPER: I think it must be.

7 MR. STARR: So when you first got on the
8 Commission, what was your initial reaction of what the
9 responsibilities were and what your fellow commissioners
10 were?

11 MR. KRAMPER: Overwhelming. It was -- they're
12 involved with so many things that I didn't know too much
13 about. I had so much learning and even after those 30
14 years, I'm still sure I didn't know all about it. They did
15 wonderful things but it was very deep and
16 well-thought-through things, and a lot of special people
17 worked on projects to help us get along and find out how to
18 do it. It was good.

19 MR. STARR: One of the concerns I mentioned
20 earlier before we started recording was that a group of us a
21 year or so ago had gotten together to talk about funding,
22 and a number of people in that group were concerned about
23 the relationship of the Natural Resources Commission and the
24 Natural Resources District. They said, "Well, you know, the
25 districts control the Commission. It's not a fair playing

1 field for those of us that are not involved." What's your
2 reaction to those comments?

3 MR. KRAMPER: Well, I always felt that the
4 Commission was kind of overseeing. Then, when state money
5 came, the NRDs would ask us what they could get, how much,
6 and so forth. And I thought it was, we're the ones that
7 kind of doled it out on the need, and so forth, in each
8 district and I hope that's what we got accomplished.

9 MR. STARR: What was your view of the relationship
10 and your trust and so forth with the fellow Commission
11 members that you worked with over the 30 years or however
12 long it was?

13 MR. KRAMPER: I had a lot of respect for everyone
14 who was on the board. (Indiscernible) get elected onto it
15 by their area told me that their people -- that they had
16 faith in their -- and I had no problems having faith in
17 them. You could just see them interacting in how -- that
18 they knew what they were doing going on.

19 MR. STARR: Yeah. How about working with the
20 various managers, and a number of them came to the
21 Commission looking for funds, looking for help on various
22 things, legislation and what have you? How was that
23 relationship over the years?

24 MR. KRAMPER: Well, I've got to tell you that the
25 managers were out to get something for their districts and

1 they just --

2 MR. STARR: Surprise, surprise.

3 MR. KRAMPER: But this was their job and there
4 were certain ones who were more aggressive than others, but
5 they all did -- had a good presentation and they really had
6 a need. Our problem was, we didn't have enough money to
7 satisfy everybody so we had to make some hard decisions
8 which way to go. But the managers were great people, I
9 can't think of a bad manager we ever had.

10 MR. STARR: One of the things that we were talking
11 about in the process of doing this project -- and that John
12 Miyoshi and I talked about this morning, was that a number
13 of the managers, particularly the original managers, are
14 either retired or about to retire and there's going to be a
15 lot of talent that's going to be retiring before long or
16 already has retired in a few cases. It's a difficult thing
17 but life goes on.

18 MR. KRAMPER: That's right. Well, like, when I
19 retired, I'd been on there a long time and, of course, you
20 get that attitude, "How is it going to go without me?"
21 Well, they can. And it's time there's -- when new, younger
22 people should step in -- and maybe they don't have the
23 experience, but they might have an idea that we never even
24 thought about, and a good idea. I never had a problem with
25 new ones -- younger ones coming in.

1 MR. STARR: Talking about what was happening
2 before your area, this merged NRD, two years ago we had a
3 monumental flood on the Missouri River and of course, the
4 Papio/Missouri NRD has a big chunk of the Missouri River.
5 What happened in this area from the NRD's standpoint or from
6 the citizen's standpoint?

7 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah. I wasn't on the board at the
8 time this was going on, but I know they did a lot of stuff
9 in the area and I'm sure they did everything they could. It
10 was a big, big project like you're talking about. It
11 covered a big area and a lot of water. Sand was the biggest
12 problem. But I've heard stories and stuff that they did a
13 good job with what they could do.

14 MR. STARR: The landowners, farmers, et
15 cetera -- and I think this is more true on the Iowa side
16 than it is on the Nebraska side, really suffered some
17 tremendous losses as a result of that from what I've seen.

18 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah.

19 MR. STARR: It's been a tremendous thing. One of
20 the things that you did -- the shirt you've got on,
21 Environmental Trust --

22 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah.

23 MR. STARR: Are you still on the board?

24 MR. KRAMPER: No, I retired from that also. Been
25 on it since it was first started. Governor Bill -- Ben

1 Nelson started it and I really enjoyed being on there. It
2 kind of worked with the Commission on things we got done.
3 It was all conservation work. It's lottery money. People
4 are against the lottery but, by golly, I call it a free tax.

5 MR. STARR: Voluntary tax.

6 MR. KRAMPER: A voluntary tax, that's what it is.
7 It got so many good projects going, or helped the NRDS on
8 some of their projects (indiscernible) that we were eligible
9 to help them with, that was good times.

10 MR. STARR: How did you feel you worked with your
11 fellow board members there because that was a mix of people,
12 state agency heads, and -- Governors appoint you basically,
13 the various governors along the line.

14 MR. KRAMPER: Well, again, there they were, either
15 appointed or elected, they came from good backgrounds. I
16 don't -- I can't think of a member that I didn't like or
17 anything like that. We got some that maybe talked more than
18 others, but we (indiscernible).

19 MR. STARR: That's true in any group.

20 MR. KRAMPER: That's true. But they were just
21 good representatives for their areas.

22 MR. STARR: Yeah. And you had that change where,
23 when the governors changed, they appointed different people
24 and -- as well as the agency heads. Some of the directors,
25 they had friends or whatever that they appointed and that

1 made a difference in there. When the merger -- getting back
2 to the NRD, when the merger happened I think at that time
3 Jim Besik (phonetic) was the manager.

4 MR. KRAMPER: That's right.

5 MR. STARR: And was there much concern on the part
6 of the staff on that happening? Not just Jim, but whoever
7 else you've had.

8 MR. KRAMPER: No, not -- there wasn't any
9 controversy or anything. Things worked out good. Jim was
10 new, too. He didn't know a lot of the stuff, but he learned
11 real fast and did a good job.

12 MR. STARR: As far as I know, he's still working
13 for the NRD, as far as I know.

14 MR. KRAMPER: Yes, there on the Papio.

15 MR. STARR: Have you had much contact with the
16 current NRD manager down there?

17 MR. KRAMPER: Oh, yes, John -- yes.

18 MR. STARR: Winkler or something like that.

19

20 MR. KRAMPER: Winkler, right. In fact, the whole
21 board was up here just last week. Once a year I talked him
22 in to coming up here to Dakota County to have their meeting
23 up here, and in the process we have a picnic out in my big
24 shed out here and we have it catered and everything, and
25 then we invite the City administrators, the boards, the

1 county boards, the leaders of the county and so forth so
2 they can meet the NRD board members and the board members
3 can meet them. It's worked very good. We had a hundred
4 people here just last week.

5 MR. STARR: Am I remembering right, the City
6 manager is Lance Headquist (phonetic), is that right?

7 MR. KRAMPER: Right, from South Sioux City.

8 MR. STARR: He's still --

9 MR. KRAMPER: Yes, still there. One of the best
10 in the state, they tell me, and I think he is.

11 MR. STARR: He's been there quite a while --

12 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah.

13 MR. STARR: -- (indiscernible). I don't know
14 (indiscernible), but he's good.

15 MR. KRAMPER: Yes, he is.

16 MR. STARR: Is -- and I can't remember his name
17 now, but the guy that was the -- he was kind of in the
18 Tri-State Planning Commission head.

19 MR. KRAMPER: Oh, I know who you're talking about.
20 I can see his face.

21 MR. STARR: Yeah, I can't remember his name, but
22 he was really --

23 MR. KRAMPER: Skip Eisner (phonetic).

24 MR. STARR: Yeah. He was really a top guy, too, I
25 thought.

1 MR. KRAMPER: Yes, he was, very knowledgeable.

2 MR. STARR: Yeah. I would guess he's probably
3 retired by now.

4 MR. KRAMPER: I would think so. I haven't seen
5 Skip for years now.

6 MR. STARR: Yeah, I know he was -- but he was a
7 top individual, too.

8 MR. KRAMPER: Yes, he was.

9 MR. STARR: You went to a number of national
10 conventions, state conventions.

11 MR. KRAMPER: Right.

12 MR. STARR: And particularly at the national
13 convention, you mentioned earlier talking to people from
14 other states and what their view was of NRDs. How would you
15 characterize that -- those conversations?

16 MR. KRAMPER: Well, I felt so fortunate and so
17 lucky to have the NRDs that when I talked to these people
18 and the problems they were having, they were having
19 financial problems. Very, very few districts across
20 the United States have any money other than -- they
21 can't -- they don't have tax money, for instance, so it was
22 very hard for them to get good projects going and so forth.
23 I just really felt very fortunate. One convention we went
24 to -- and I thought that the convention -- a lot of people
25 think they're a waste of time, but that's where I learned

1 about rural waters was at a convention. And when we came
2 back I said, "Can't we do something like that?" because
3 we've got a lot of water here in Dakota County, but it's
4 very irony water. And from there it mushroomed and we got
5 the job done. The Papio is running it now and it's just a
6 great, great thing for the people.

7 MR. STARR: Has that expanded very much or is
8 that --

9 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah, it keeps expanding. We're
10 limited because where we borrowed the money -- I think it
11 was FHA or something, they would not allow for future
12 expansion, you only had (indiscernible) for what you had so
13 that puts us at a stress in adding some people at certain
14 areas. Then we got it connected with South Sioux City so if
15 they run out of water, we can help them, vice versa. A very
16 good community thing.

17 MR. STARR: So the rural water has their own
18 wells?

19 MR. KRAMPER: No, Dakota City is -- they have a
20 well. They purify the water. They pump it to our -- the
21 NRD's tower, which happens to be on my land out here, and
22 from there it goes back to the city when they need it and
23 from the tower it goes to the rural water district all over.

24 MR. STARR: Is that the fancy blue tower I saw?

25 MR. KRAMPER: Yes.

1 MR. STARR: Is that new? I didn't remember seeing
2 that before.

3 MR. KRAMPER: Well, it's been there since the
4 NRD --

5 MR. STARR: Maybe they just repainted it or
6 something.

7 MR. KRAMPER: Well, they did just this last
8 summer. And that's been working good for both the City and
9 for us.

10 MR. STARR: The NRD has another rural water
11 district -- well I think two more, I guess.

12 MR. KRAMPER: Uh-huh, two of them.

13 MR. STARR: They have one down in Fort Calhoun and
14 then one at Pender --

15 MR. KRAMPER: Yes, right.

16 MR. STARR: -- that provides water. I think they
17 give their water -- Fort Calhoun gets from Metropolitan
18 Utilities District and the one down here in Thurston County,
19 they get their water from Pender -- the City of Pender or
20 the town of Pender.

21 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah.

22 MR. STARR: And I think that one's having -- well,
23 it's supplying water to rural residences and, as you well
24 know, there are getting to be fewer and fewer rural
25 residences and that's apparently an issue for them, which is

1 understandable. I don't know how you deal with that when
2 you're providing it to a city or a suburban area, then it's
3 a whole lot different thing.

4 MR. KRAMPER: This one up here is doing very, very
5 well, but we have -- South Sioux City is spreading out and
6 it's easy for the rural water to take them on so we get
7 people adding almost monthly on it so it's been working out
8 very good up here. I know some of them do have a problem
9 (indiscernible).

10 MR. STARR: One of the things that we observed at
11 the national conventions were, there were some people from
12 Nebraska, not you, Vince, certainly, but there were some
13 people from Nebraska who went to those national conventions
14 saying, "You all ought to do NRDs, it's the greatest thing
15 since sliced bread," and that wasn't taken very well in some
16 corners. And so a whole lot of us were trying to say, "We
17 have NRDs. It's good for us. I don't know if it's good for
18 you or not, but this is -- it's good for us." So did you
19 observe that as well?

20 MR. KRAMPER: Yes. Yeah, I did -- I do remember
21 some of that and it's like, you're doing something good and
22 you think the whole world should do the same thing you do.
23 But, like you say, what works here doesn't necessarily work
24 everywhere.

25 MR. STARR: That's right.

1 MR. KRAMPER: So, yeah, I think they did quiet it
2 down and they finally saw the light that you don't tell
3 people what to do in the first place. And it -- yeah, we
4 told them our story and whatever they wanted to do -- I'm
5 sure they quit saying, "You've got to do this."

6 MR. STARR: Well, maybe. Are there any of
7 the -- your original board members still on the
8 Papio/Missouri NRD?

9 MR. KRAMPER: No, I was the last hold-out, I
10 guess.

11 MR. STARR: The last hold-out.

12 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah.

13 MR. STARR: At the time that that happened, that
14 merger, there was some people who said, "Well, should the
15 Middle Missouri merge with the Lewis and Clark instead of
16 the Papio?" or there were a few even that said, "Should all
17 three of them merge?" Did that discussion come up?

18 MR. KRAMPER: I do remember some of that being
19 talked about, but there was good reasons why they didn't
20 think it would work and I guess I agreed with them because I
21 sure was not trying to force anything like that. It just
22 worked out so good for us. Lewis and Clark is a little
23 different land type up there and so forth and I think it was
24 wise to leave it like it is. And they're doing real well.
25 I represented them on the Commission so I'd go to their

1 meetings once in a while. And I always said that Tom Moser
2 (phonetic), their manager, he could do more with less money
3 than anybody I've ever seen. He got good jobs done and they
4 didn't really have a big base of money either, but they just
5 do fine.

6 MR. STARR: Yeah. They have -- Tom's been a good
7 fit for that NRD. I think one of the arguments one time was
8 that, well, the Middle Missouri and the Lewis and Clark,
9 population-wise, were sort of similar, and there would not
10 be that concern about Omaha overpowering the two NRDs. The
11 Middle Missouri and Lewis and Clark were similar size,
12 similar population, mostly smaller towns, whereas Omaha had
13 half a million people, or whatever it is, that might
14 overpower it. And fortunately -- and I've sure observed
15 that, too, that hasn't happened.

16 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah.

17 MR. STARR: I think they've done a good job of
18 doing that under Steve and now under the new manager, Tom.

19 MR. KRAMPER: Yeah. And they work across boundary
20 lines very good, especially rural waters. Those sometimes
21 go from one district to the other and that's all working out
22 real good.

23 MR. STARR: One of the things that happened
24 statewide -- and this probably is not a big issue in this
25 area, but we basically divided up the districts on

1 hydrologic boundaries or surfacewater drainage. Well, as
2 time went on, groundwater became a much huger issue and
3 groundwater doesn't follow the same boundaries, they overlap
4 in a different way. That has been a real concern, but some
5 of the districts are -- they're working it out, it's just a
6 little more complicated.

7 MR. KRAMPER: It seems like it.

8 MR. STARR: A little more complicated.

9 Well, Vince, any more historical facts that you'd
10 like to pass on?

11 MR. KRAMPER: Well, you missed -- yeah, you missed
12 one thing there. The state staff, the Natural Resources
13 Commission, they are the most wonderful people,
14 knowledgeable people. I never could have got through the
15 Commission without their talent and their background and so
16 forth. It just made a difference. And you happen to be one
17 of them, Gayle.

18 MR. STARR: Just one of many.

19 MR. KRAMPER: It was great. Dale Williams
20 (phonetic) was just great. The whole bunch was. Really
21 helped us.

22 MR. STARR: What -- when Dale left 10 years ago or
23 whatever it was, and then at about the same time I retired
24 and then very shortly Tom retired and very shortly Jim
25 retired. Did that make a difference?

1 MR. KRAMPER: Well, I don't think so.

2 MR. STARR: Good.

3 MR. KRAMPER: Everything worked just as well. Of
4 course, where there's new people (indiscernible) say, "Do we
5 have to train them or what?" "No, you don't have to." They
6 knew what was going on and they did a good job. We always
7 say nobody did it like the older guys did, but things change
8 and it works.

9 MR. STARR: That doesn't mean they did it right
10 either.

11 MR. KRAMPER: That's right.

12 MR. STARR: Nobody's irreplaceable.

13 MR. KRAMPER: That's right.

14 MR. STARR: Anything else, Vince?

15 MR. KRAMPER: No. I think it's great that
16 somebody like you guys are putting this together and putting
17 it in history because 40 years, like you say, that's a long
18 time. A lot of these people like myself aren't going to be
19 around that much longer.

20 MR. STARR: None of us are.

21 MR. KRAMPER: That's right.

22 MR. STARR: Well, thanks very much, Vince. I
23 really appreciate your contribution.

24 MR. KRAMPER: My pleasure.

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