

INTERVIEW WITH DAVE LANDIS  
BY ANN BLEED

February 19, 2014

1                   MS. BLEED: This is February 19<sup>th</sup>, and I'm here --  
2 I'm Ann Bleed and I'm here with Dave Landis, who was a  
3 legislator, I believe, at the time that the NRD districts  
4 were established.

5                   MR. LANDIS: No.

6                   MS. BLEED: Is that incorrect? Okay.

7                   MR. LANDIS: That is incorrect. I was a member of  
8 the Soil and Water Conservation District.

9                   MS. BLEED: All right.

10                  MR. LANDIS: And was part of one of the  
11 organizations that was melded into the NRDs. I served on  
12 the NRD for about -- I was elected to the county Soil and  
13 Water Conservation District that merged into the NRD. I ran  
14 for the NRD, but was beaten by a guy out in the area, but  
15 he, then, resigned almost upon taking office because of his  
16 lack of attention span and didn't feel comfortable doing the  
17 work, so they appointed me because I was the other name on  
18 the ballot and had done well, but not won, so they put me  
19 on. And I served up the end of that term, which then moved  
20 into the election of the Legislature. I served, probably  
21 for six years in this area before I won election in 1978 to  
22 the Legislature.

23                  MS. BLEED: And then you served in the Legislature  
24 for how many years?

25                  MR. LANDIS: Twenty-eight years.

1 MS. BLEED: Twenty-eight years and you're now with  
2 the City of Lincoln.

3 MR. LANDIS: I am.

4 MS. BLEED: But you were on the Soil and Water  
5 Conservation Board/NRD for six years?

6 MR. LANDIS: That would be right.

7 MS. BLEED: So, you were there when the first idea  
8 came up.

9 MR. LANDIS: Almost conterminous with the election  
10 to the Soil and Water Conservation District was Maurice  
11 Kremer's successful initiative. You didn't know that you  
12 were going to merge into the NRD. I thought I had a  
13 four-year term. But shortly thereafter, the election -- I'm  
14 sorry, the legislation was successful and it took multiple  
15 elements on the ballot and merged them. The very first NRDs  
16 had 50 to 60 members. And they had them because they were  
17 all the pre-existing memberships were not culled, but simply  
18 moved into an NRD director status until the election process  
19 could get it down to the statutory number that was  
20 authorized at the time. So, we had six months to a year of  
21 meetings with 55 members of the board.

22 MS. BLEED: Wow. What was the discussion before  
23 the -- during the time that the legislation was being  
24 proposed and discussed? What were some of the issues that  
25 you encountered as being discussed?

1                   MR. LANDIS: Probably two ideas; issues that were  
2 generally in the field, or issues about NRDs?

3                   MS. BLEED: Both.

4                   MR. LANDIS: There were two persuasive arguments  
5 by the proponents of the NRDs at the distance of which I was  
6 observing them by reading the paper (indiscernible) first.  
7 Hydrological problems do not fall along political  
8 subdivision lines as any of them were drafted at that point.  
9 And that we needed to give authority for this kind of  
10 regulation to river basin boundaries, not county boundaries.  
11 That was the Lancaster County Soil and Water Conservation  
12 District. Now, there was a Salt Valley Watershed, but the  
13 Salt Valley Watershed was just a part of a larger  
14 hydrological reality. What didn't -- what we didn't have  
15 was a system that reflected hydrological realities. It  
16 reflected pre-existing political subdivision loyalties and  
17 boundaries. So that was argument number one.

18                   And I think the second thing was that we had  
19 fragmented elements of a larger reality. We were doing soil  
20 erosion control in the Soil and Water Conservation District.  
21 We were doing farm ponds. The Salt Valley Watershed was  
22 doing water retention and flood control. Well, flood  
23 control, soil erosions, water quality bear an interrelated  
24 environmental reality. So, not only did we have fragmented  
25 geographical boundaries, we had fragmented disciplines, if

1       you will, in the regulation. The whole point of the NRD was  
2       to reflect environmental reality instead of political  
3       reality.

4               MS. BLEED: Was there any opposition to the  
5       formation of the NRDs from --

6               MR. LANDIS: The fear, I think, generally was that  
7       NRDs might become captured by urban areas. That when you  
8       have counties and they would organize -- remember that this  
9       is a place where *Baker versus Carr* and one man, one vote was  
10      gradually transforming American political culture. But if  
11      there wasn't a *Baker versus Carr* challenge, you had systems  
12      that were operating that gave favoritism on geographic  
13      bases. And there was a concern that what should be the  
14      farmers' business would get taken over by city folk. So,  
15      there was that concern in the background.

16              MS. BLEED: And if I remember correctly, it was  
17      not a one person, one vote distribution of the elect -- when  
18      you were electing board members.

19              MR. LANDIS: That's right. What happened is, they  
20      actually met one man, one vote by allowing everybody to  
21      vote -- everybody, initially, to vote for the subdivision,  
22      but you had to come from a subdivision. So, if you put  
23      subdivisions in rural areas, but let all the voters vote on  
24      that rural subdivision, you ensure that they'll be farmers,  
25      even though they might be elected from the whole area.

1 MS. BLEED: Right.

2 MR. LANDIS: It was a way of making sure we had  
3 farmer control. That gradually wrested away.

4 MS. BLEED: Yeah, the League of Women Voters, I  
5 remember, filed a lawsuit, which they didn't win, but now it  
6 is --

7 MR. LANDIS: And at the same time, I made a motion  
8 inside the NRD to move that so that the goal of the League  
9 of Women Voters and the internal motion to change our  
10 practices, which met with, I think, almost universal  
11 opposition, except for maybe one or two votes other than my  
12 own, and then moved to the Legislature where I think Chris  
13 Beutler had a significant (indiscernible) those alterations,  
14 as I recall.

15 MS. BLEED: And now, of course, our district does  
16 its nomination by sub-district and vote by sub-district on  
17 the one population basis.

18 MR. LANDIS: Uh-huh.

19 MS. BLEED: So, you weren't at all involved in any  
20 of the legislative discussions at the time.

21 MR. LANDIS: No, this was -- I was at the tail  
22 end, as I recall, of the one person, one vote controversy in  
23 the Legislature. But we were four or five years into the  
24 NRD phenomenon by that point.

25 MS. BLEED: And getting back to your discussion on

1 the board itself was the basic reason that people didn't  
2 follow your motion because they wanted to make sure the  
3 landowners had significant impact?

4 MR. LANDIS: Yeah, as if this was -- and I choose  
5 the word carefully when I say, sort of a gentlemen's  
6 agreement. I use the gender choice on purpose. They were  
7 all men, and it was like a sort of a -- well, this is a fair  
8 division of the spoils of politics. We have to recognize  
9 our (indiscernible) brothers. And, for example, in the Soil  
10 and Water Conservation District, we would ask for and secure  
11 permission from farmers to go onto their land to do certain  
12 kinds of measurements, hydrological and soil testing.  
13 Having a board filled with farmers was much easier to get  
14 farmer compliance to letting the soil and water conservation  
15 -- so they had examples of where farmer-to-farmer  
16 conversations had a real world value to it.

17 MS. BLEED: Yeah.

18 MR. LANDIS: And, you know, it's like, well, sure  
19 there's that Constitution thing, but, you know, this is a  
20 coffee klatch and we all have to be able to get along, to go  
21 along. Well, that was -- that carried over into the first  
22 couple of terms of the NRD and gradually worked its way out.

23 MS. BLEED: And when you were whittling down from  
24 the 50 or 60 board members to the 21, I assume it was 21.

25 MR. LANDIS: I think it's unchanged.

1 MS. BLEED: It's unchanged from that time. Was  
2 that a contentious process?

3 MR. LANDIS: Well, you had people who had previous  
4 positions who were placed in competition for NRD positions,  
5 but you also had a lot of people who said, "Fine. I didn't  
6 mind my little area of the world," -- you know, there were  
7 four or five of these conservation districts because they  
8 were by county. But they didn't have the desire to run for  
9 an office, you know, like this. And so, the whittling out  
10 did not come, I think, with hard feelings, political  
11 survivors being stalked by people who lost and came and  
12 shared their bad blood or went to the letters to the editor  
13 or anything like that. This was a down-ballot issue.  
14 Initially, there was almost no campaigning. It was by word  
15 of mouth and name recognition. It was what the New  
16 Englanders call standing for election. Stood up see how  
17 many votes -- how many else raise their hands and fine. You  
18 know, one third of the State of New Hampshire serves in  
19 their legislature at any given time. It was sort of that  
20 quality of, you know, this is a down-ballot issue and if  
21 people know you well enough, you'll be on, and if they  
22 don't, then you don't.

23 MS. BLEED: And there weren't too many people  
24 then, opposing the NRD formation, itself.

25 MR. LANDIS: No. Remember that there was -- Earth



1 Day preceded the NRD. Environmental sensibilities preceded  
2 the NRDs so that there was a natural environmental area for  
3 cities saying, "Well, this is really a good idea. You know,  
4 natural resources, got to be careful about those." And in  
5 the farm areas, I think that they were, you know, if there  
6 was a steady flow of assistance and resources and maybe some  
7 tax dollars, for which I think they saw themselves as the  
8 immediate beneficiaries as the stewards of the land, we'll  
9 have more terracing. We'll have more ponds on our farms.  
10 And we'll largely be in control of these resources. So, who  
11 was there that was, you know, left out and wronged by that?  
12 It was, at least to my recollection, essentially without  
13 controversy or rancor.

14 MS. BLEED: That's good to hear. Is there  
15 anything else you think should be added to a historical  
16 perspective on this?

17 MR. LANDIS: Is it about this NRD or is it just  
18 the NRD process generally?

19 MS. BLEED: NRD process generally. Or both.

20 MR. LANDIS: The work in this area was dominated  
21 by a strong, forceful general manager, Hal Schroeder. Hal  
22 was, I believe, a military man, a tall man with a  
23 considerable presence. And I just remember that the first  
24 three or four years, you know, we'd all talk, then we'd look  
25 down at Hal to see what Hal's reaction was to things. He

1 had a good political sense. He handled people well. There  
2 was not arrogance here, but there was a forcefulness in  
3 which he just dominated the work of the NRD. And Bob Crosby  
4 was the legal counsel.

5 MS. BLEED: And who is Bob Crosby?

6 MR. LANDIS: Bob Crosby, former governor.

7 MS. BLEED: He was one of the youngest governors,  
8 right?

9 MR. LANDIS: Well, he was governor in the early  
10 '50s. This is now 20 years later. So, he's a hugely  
11 respected former governor, lobbyist, and lawyer, practicing  
12 lawyer, a man of just impeccable charm, and also good  
13 thinking skills. It meant that leadership came from staff  
14 (indiscernible). We also came with 55 people who didn't  
15 know each other. So, that happened.

16 Over time, I think the board has gradually become  
17 to have more independence of -- use the staff more.  
18 Although, I think we have a heavy reliance on staff, very  
19 heavy reliance on staff. But in our own case, we have a  
20 very -- Hal picked Glen as his assistant. Glen has a  
21 deferential quality that I think we all appreciate. Hal, if  
22 you asked him a question, would say, "Well, yes, da-da-da-  
23 dum." "Okay, all in favor, say aye." And we did,  
24 overwhelmingly. Anyway, he had a very salubrious, good  
25 quality. I mean, he ran people together. He ran a good

1 organization. It was good leadership. There was some  
2 camaraderie in this organization. There was a great deal of  
3 respect for him. He built a good staff. So, in this area,  
4 Hal, I think, carries a big part of the credit for creation  
5 of the NRD.

6 So, anyway, that's the one piece I had. Anything  
7 else?

8 MS. BLEED: I don't think so. If you have nothing  
9 else to add, thank you so much.

10 MR. LANDIS: I think who you'd really like to have  
11 is somebody was maybe, what, in the Legislature when the NRD  
12 was passed so you could --

13 MS. BLEED: Well, there is a whole number of  
14 interviews going on. Is there anyone you think we should --

15 MR. LANDIS: Well, we can't do Maurice Kremer, but  
16 I wouldn't pass up the chance to talk to his son, Bob. Bob  
17 served in the Legislature, and Bob would have been of an age  
18 that when Maurice was doing this work, he would have been a  
19 young man. He wouldn't have been a boy. He was a man. So,  
20 he would have been following what his dad was doing. And my  
21 impression is, I think they farmed together. I think. And  
22 if they did, I bet there's some time on the tractor when  
23 they're talking to each other and Bob could give you a  
24 pretty darn clear read on what Maurice was up to.