

INTERVIEW WITH ERVIN MATULKA  
BY JIM BARR

October 30, 2013

1           MR. BARR:  It's October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013.  This is Jim Barr.  
2           I'm interviewing Ervin Matulka north of Valparaiso.  And a  
3           nice wet day today, so would you kind of give us a little  
4           bit of your background and --

5           MR. MATULKA:  Well, I grew up on the farm and the  
6           only time that I left the farm is when I went to the Navy  
7           for a couple years.  Saw the world, basically, I did.  I  
8           mean, traveled all over.  Then I came back and got married  
9           and started into farming.  And then I became involved with  
10          the Water and Soil Conservation.  I don't even remember what  
11          we were called.  There were conservative districts and  
12          watershed districts, and I was on the watershed board for  
13          this area, Oak Creek Watershed Board at that time.  And of  
14          course, I continued to farm for many years and then farming  
15          wasn't treating me too well, so I went into construction.  
16          So, that's where we're at today.  We're putting in swimming  
17          pools.  That's what we're doing.

18          MR. BARR:  Did you, in your construction, do any  
19          dam or do any conservation type work or anything like that?

20          MR. MATULKA:  No, I don't.  I do just strictly  
21          residential stuff, you know, anything for the residential.  
22          You know, I might have used my tractor here for myself, you  
23          know, but that's about it.

24          MR. BARR:  What do you remember about the time  
25          leading to the formation of the natural resource districts?

1           MR. MATULKA: Oh, yeah, I remember there was a lot  
2 of people that were involved back then, and, you know, local  
3 people like myself, you know, people that were in the local  
4 district, local concerns, involved with the local people,  
5 you know. And that's what I liked about it. And I guess I  
6 kind of like, you know, there's some political atmosphere to  
7 it, too, at that time, even back then. And I kind of like  
8 that kind of thing, you know, getting involved. So, that's  
9 how it came about --

10           MR. BARR: What was the name of your district, do  
11 you remember? Or which -- what general area did it cover?

12           MR. MATULKA: I think it was the Oak Creek Valley  
13 Watershed.

14           MR. BARR: And it would have covered the Oak Creek  
15 Watershed.

16           MR. MATULKA: Yeah. Oak Creek Watershed.

17           MR. BARR: And was it all -- which counties were  
18 that --

19           MR. MATULKA: Would have been Saunders County and  
20 part of Butler County.

21           MR. BARR: Did you get involved any in the  
22 discussions of whether to form a natural resource district?

23           MR. MATULKA: Yes, I did. Matter of fact, I was  
24 an opponent to it. I was a lobbyist opposing the natural  
25 resource districts, because my concern was, you know, once

1       you start creating bureaucracy, why then you start dropping  
2       people that have the -- their local interest at heart and  
3       start dropping them off the edge of the map. And then, they  
4       don't become involved anymore. I mean, they're gone.

5               MR. BARR: What all did you get involved in during  
6       that process?

7               MR. MATULKA: Oh, we had to organize meetings, you  
8       know, around, trying to get some opposition towards it, you  
9       know, and trying to retain what we had, let the powers that  
10      be. Of course, the outcome is -- you know the outcome.

11              MR. BARR: Were you involved in a lawsuit on this,  
12      too?

13              MR. MATULKA: Yes, we were.

14              MR. BARR: And do you want --

15              MR. MATULKA: And you know that.

16              MR. BARR: Yeah, I mean, I used to read the  
17      papers.

18              (Laughter.)

19              MR. MATULKA: Yes, we did. We did, and we had the  
20      (indiscernible) firm represented us. An of course, we  
21      weren't successful in that, too, because we were told that  
22      it's over with, period, you know, so -- and, you know, I  
23      guess the courts can deem what they want, you know, at any  
24      given time. Everybody knows that, whether you like it or  
25      not. You know, if you don't like it, it's wrong. If you

1       like it, it's right.

2               MR. BARR:   What were the main issues involved?  
3       Just local control or --

4               MR. MATULKA:  Yeah, well, it's a lack of a, you  
5       know, local control and getting control of our destiny out  
6       of our hands.  And that's basically what we were after, you  
7       know.  And we weren't successful.

8               MR. BARR:  What kind of projects had the Oak Creek  
9       Watershed done up until then?

10              MR. MATULKA:  We had some of the dams approved.  
11       You know, at the time, before the NRD took over, we had the  
12       one over here west of Valparaiso on the Ivan Nord (phonetic)  
13       farm.  That was one of them.  Then we had, I think, one or  
14       two up in the Brainard area that were in the making at that  
15       time that we were negotiating (indiscernible).  And that's  
16       as much as I remember back then.

17              MR. BARR:  What about -- now, the Branched Oak, is  
18       that on Oak or is that on (another watershed)?

19              MR. MATULKA:  That was a bigger project that -- I  
20       think that's a federal project, isn't it?

21              MR. BARR:  Yeah, but was that in the Oak District  
22       or was that --

23              MR. MATULKA:  It would have been in our district,  
24       yeah.

25              MR. BARR:  Was that -- that was built about that

1 time? I can't remember when that --

2 MR. MATULKA: Yes, it was. And, you know, at that  
3 time, too, there was a lot of opposition to it, you know.  
4 And as time transpired, you know, those people were right,  
5 because they got bought out at bottom -- bargain basement  
6 price, whereas, some of their heirs and even some that are  
7 living yet today would have been pretty well off if they had  
8 that land in their control yet.

9 MR. BARR: That, I take it, was taken through  
10 condemnation?

11 MR. MATULKA: Yeah, a lot of it was.

12 MR. BARR: Well, when the district formed, how did  
13 that affect the people in the Oak Watershed?

14 MR. MATULKA: You mean, when the NRD formed?

15 MR. BARR: Yeah.

16 MR. MATULKA: Well, the first thing that  
17 transpired, which we knew was going to happen, they were  
18 going to hire a manager, even though they wasn't -- that,  
19 you know, during the process, that that wasn't going to be  
20 necessary. But that's the first thing they did. They  
21 established a bureaucracy, basically. They hired a manager,  
22 then, of course, the first few years, the manager had  
23 probably one assistant, and then you can see what's happened  
24 since then, it's just grown and it's become a big business.

25 MR. BARR: How do you think it's worked out over

1 the course of time?

2 MR. MATULKA: Well, I think probably, you know,  
3 and I don't know what it's due to, but I think you're seeing  
4 less conservation practices, which we were pushing, like  
5 terraces, you know, and which evolved back into parallel  
6 terraces in later years, and I don't think you see any of  
7 that going on. Anyway, I don't. I can't say it's not  
8 happening, but it's not evident around here anymore.

9 MR. BARR: Now, parts of the country that's, at  
10 least in my area, a lot of the terraces and dams have gone  
11 out, and supposedly they've been replaced with minimum till  
12 projects or practices, which --

13 MR. MATULKA: Yeah.

14 MR. BARR: -- keep material on the ground. What's  
15 happened in your area here?

16 MR. MATULKA: I think that's pretty much, you  
17 know, people don't -- they don't cultivate, they don't plow,  
18 they don't disc unless they have to. I think that's true.  
19 But, you know, the sedimentation, I think, in our lakes is  
20 proof of what's happening. It's -- they're having to clean  
21 out the lakes, you know, before they're supposed to have to,  
22 you know, the time limit. And I think it's part due to --  
23 that's my opinion of it.

24 MR. BARR: Now, you know, I'm in kind of a flat  
25 area with irrigation. How is this conservation --

1 conservation in general regardless of the NRD, how has it  
2 evolved since you were on the board?

3 MR. MATULKA: Well, since we were pushing, you  
4 know, there was a lot of terracing being done back then, you  
5 know, parallel terracing. Waterways were being installed,  
6 you know, and everything. You don't see that happening  
7 anymore. If you see a waterway being established, what  
8 they're doing, they're pushing trees out so they can farm  
9 right across it. And they're planning up and down the  
10 hills, you know, they're not, I guess, due to being -- the  
11 farmers are getting bigger. They don't have the time to  
12 have short rows, you know, so everything wants to be as long  
13 as possible. And I guess you can't blame them for that  
14 either, you know. But the terraces are being flattened out  
15 by farming over the top of them. That's one of the big  
16 things that have happened.

17 MR. BARR: Do you have any other observations  
18 about how this has all worked out or what you thought maybe  
19 would have been a better way to have had it work out?

20 MR. MATULKA: Well, you know, I would have like to  
21 have seen some way that more people would have been involved  
22 in the process, because, you know, my opinion, I've been in  
23 politics for a lot of years, and I understand that once you  
24 establish somebody in a position, he's not happy in that  
25 position. He wants to become -- he wants to be a bigger

1 position than what he was established at, so he starts  
2 getting more people around him, and then with that process,  
3 then, of course, he gets elevated. And that's the number  
4 one endeavor in life. I mean, they're never happy with  
5 what's happening. And I would think today, if you ask  
6 anybody who walked down the street, I'll bet 60 or 70  
7 percent of the people don't even know who's on the NRD board  
8 anymore. Or they don't even know where the NRD office is.  
9 They may take a stab at it. They don't even know where it's  
10 at or what it's called.

11 MR. BARR: Any other general observations you'd  
12 like to offer?

13 MR. MATULKA: Times are good.

14 (Laughter.)

15 MR. BARR: Oh, I was going to ask you about other  
16 people that were involved in this area, particularly. Were  
17 there any other folks that --

18 MR. MATULKA: There were some people that were  
19 involved. I think most of them, you know, that I was --  
20 Julius Helrick (phonetic) has passed on, and myself, and  
21 Albert Jambor from Prague. You know, if he is alive -- I  
22 haven't heard, but if he is alive, why he doesn't get around  
23 very well anymore. Yeah, things are changing, you know.  
24 We're getting older.

25 MR. BARR: That is for true, that is for true.

1           MR. MATULKA: And us, us that are up and around  
2 and can get around, the good Lord has treated us very well.

3           MR. BARR: Exactly.

4           MR. MATULKA: I don't know what's going to happen  
5 in the future. You know, it's going to all depend on what,  
6 you know, who's right on the climate change, you know,  
7 whether that's cyclical or if it's a thing that's going to  
8 be continuing, you know. Water usage is going to be a big  
9 thing. Maybe in that respect, the NRDs are going to have a  
10 little bit more power to control what's going on, you know,  
11 where the watershed has been a small unit and couldn't  
12 accomplish anything in itself. So there's some good things  
13 and some bad things -- or some disappointing things and some  
14 good things that are happening. But I shouldn't say bad  
15 things, because that's a matter of judgment.

16           But all in all, it's been interesting what's  
17 happened, you know, to the districts. The Lower Platte  
18 South and Lower Platte North, I don't even know who's on the  
19 Lower Platte North.

20           MR. BARR: Well, there were a couple of names that  
21 were familiar, one guy that lives on the highway there with  
22 cattle. I think he's still on the board. Oh, gosh, I can't  
23 think of his name. Kavan, Don Kavan I think.

24           MR. MATULKA: Don Kavan's still on it?

25           MR. BARR: I think he's still on it. That was

1 about the only name I -- there might be Ervin Boll  
2 (phonetic). I don't remember if he's still on it.

3 MR. MATULKA: Ervin Boll was -- yeah, he was a  
4 player from Yutan. I don't know if he's still around or  
5 not.

6 MR. BARR: I think he is, but I don't know for  
7 sure. But he was a little older than I was, I remember.

8 MR. MATULKA: Yeah, he's into Cattlemen's big  
9 time. And well, then, there was Al Smith from --

10 MR. BARR: Oh, yeah, we did interview Al.

11 MR. MATULKA: What's he doing these days?

12 MR. BARR: Well, he's watching after little kids  
13 of his.

14 MR. MATULKA: Where's he at?

15 MR. BARR: He lives up there where he's been, you  
16 know, up north of David City.

17 MR. MATULKA: Oh, he still lives out --

18 MR. BARR: Yeah, out in the country, yeah.

19 MR. MATULKA: I thought he sold all that.

20 MR. BARR: No, he was out there. That's where we  
21 interviewed him.

22 MR. MATULKA: I haven't seen him for years.

23 MR. BARR: No, he'd probably enjoy visiting with  
24 somebody. He's pretty much still Al.

25 (Laughter.)

