

NRD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW:

MILT MORAVEK AND RON BISHOP
BY JIM BARR, May 29, 2013

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1 PROCEEDINGS, May 29, 2013:

2 MR. MORAVEK: I'm Milt Moravek, Assistant Manager
3 of the Central Plains Natural Resources District, also
4 Projects Director.

5 MR. BISHOP: And I'm Ron Bishop, General Manager
6 of the Central Platte for another month.

7 MR. BARR: This is May 29, 2013. Jim Barr
8 interviewing Ron and Milt here in the Central Platte
9 Conference Room.

10 And if one of you would just kind of give a little
11 background on Ron, or, Ron, do you want to start on
12 yourself, and then Milt, and then we'll go from there?

13 MR. BISHOP: Sure. My career in conservation-type
14 work started shortly after I got out of high school back in
15 '57. I went to work for a conservation contractor over at
16 Aurora, Nebraska, that did land leveling, mostly land
17 leveling, but he also did some terraces and dam work. He
18 was needing a surveyor, so he hired me and taught me how to
19 survey, and I ran the survey then and laid out land leveling
20 jobs and some terrace work and work of that type that he was
21 involved in. I worked for him for probably a year and a
22 half.

23 Spent about six months on a survey crew out in
24 Colorado at Broomfield Heights. Broomfield Heights at that

1 time was just a little country elevator and a few houses,
2 but it was feeling the boom from Denver as Denver was
3 expanding in size, and so the area around Broomfield was
4 developed as a housing development and grew into quite a
5 town. But I worked on the survey crew there. We were
6 laying out the streets and curb and gutter and that sort of
7 thing for the contractors doing the earth work and getting
8 ready to lay parking lots and streets and curb and gutter.

9 I spent about six months out there and then came
10 back to Aurora and went to work for the Soil Conservation
11 Service in Aurora, Nebraska. Spent, maybe, a year there
12 working with the Soil Conservation Service. During that
13 year's time, I was applying for a full time status with the
14 Soil Conservation Service. It was kind of funny. They sent
15 me out a notice of an opening and there was Kimball and
16 about four or five other towns that were listed. And so, I
17 signed up for the four or five other towns and didn't hear
18 from them. A month or so later, I got another one, and it
19 was advertising for Kimball and two new towns. So, I signed
20 up for the two new towns and didn't hear from them. And
21 then, about two months later, they sent me another notice.
22 And it was an advertisement for an opening at Kimball. And
23 so, I signed up for it and I got the job right away.
24 Evidently, nobody wanted to go to Kimball at that time

1 because they were in the middle of the oil boom, as well as
2 the -- setting the missiles, the Atlas missile and the
3 Minuteman missile sites. And when I pulled into town to
4 start looking for a place to live, there wasn't anything
5 available, not even motels in Kimball. So, I ended up, with
6 the help of the District Conservationist there at Kimball
7 and a farmer that he knew out in the country, moving into
8 his house that he had on his place that was used by the
9 folks coming up from Mexico to help him with the bean thing
10 and that sort of thing that happened to be available. So,
11 we lived out there for about a year and a half, until we
12 could find an apartment in town, a basement apartment in
13 town. And at that time, you could have a television, but
14 you only could draw one station, and that was Cheyenne,
15 Wyoming. And Cheyenne, Wyoming, was an independent station,
16 meaning that they took the worst of the three networks and
17 that's what you watched. And they didn't come on until
18 about noon and they signed off at 10:30 p.m.; and so, it was
19 very limited entertainment as far as television was
20 concerned.

21 But I worked out there at Kimball for the Soil
22 Conservation Service until about 1966. And then, there was
23 a job opening in Omaha working as a manager of the Douglas
24 County Soil and Water Conservation District. So, I went

1 down and interviewed for that. A fellow by the name of
2 Duane Chamberlain that worked for the Natural Resources
3 Commission contacted me and suggested that I go down and
4 interview for that job because he thought it would be
5 something that might work into a pretty good job at some
6 time. And Duane was that kind of a guy with individuals,
7 especially us younger people. He'd try to see that we got
8 ahead. If he liked us, you had a life-long friend. And so,
9 I went down and applied for that and ended up getting the
10 job. I was the first manager for a Soil and Water
11 Conservation District that was hired in the state. But Dick
12 Beran happened to be there. And, at the same time, Sarpy
13 County Soil and Water Conservation District decided that
14 they would hire someone. And so, they were interviewing and
15 they ended up hiring Dick Beran and he started the week
16 before I did. So, he was the first that was actually
17 employed for a Soil and Water Conservation District.

18 And so, both of us then worked in that area
19 working on the Papio Watershed, primarily on the soil
20 conservation service side, the erosion control dams and the
21 sediment control dams and that type of activity. And others
22 were working on the Corps of Engineers' flood control plan.
23 Worked there for two years. And then a job opened up here
24 in Grand Island with the Mid-Platte Valley Watershed Board.

1 It was a Board similar to what was going on down there at
2 the Papio, and so I came out and applied for it. Again,
3 Duane Chamberlain told me about the job and suggested that I
4 might want to go out and interview, and I did. And they
5 ended up hiring me in 1968.

6 MR. MORAVEK: And it was formed because of the
7 1967 flood.

8 MR. BARR: Okay.

9 MR. MORAVEK: Three counties got together,
10 Buffalo, Hall, and Merrick, and formed the Mid-Platte Valley
11 Watershed.

12 MR. BISHOP: So, I was hired as the manager then
13 in 1968, and I worked for a few months and then decided that
14 we had a project out there that I needed some help. And so,
15 Duane Chamberlain again suggested that I interview a fellow
16 by the name of Milt Moravek that was working down there in
17 Lincoln. And he came out, I interviewed him, and I hired
18 him. And so, Milt and I were working in late 1968 -- I
19 guess it was probably 1969 when Milt came on board and
20 worked for the Mid-Platte Valley Watershed.

21 One of the first things that we did was to look at
22 the timber and trash and debris that were in the streams,
23 especially in the Wood River. The Corps had been out and
24 looked at it, and they were estimating that the capacity of

1 the Wood River had been cut in half because of the trash and
2 debris and trees that had fallen in. It was, among other
3 things, dutch elm disease that was going around at that
4 time, and it was pretty tough on the trees. And so, we
5 started out doing the same clearing projects on the Wood
6 River, primarily trying to open it up, starting on the
7 bottom end in Merrick County and working up toward Grand
8 Island. We had limited funds because we were financed just
9 by the three counties, Buffalo, Hall, and Merrick. And so,
10 to carry out the work there, there was several fund drives.
11 Several of the folks connected with the banks here in Grand
12 Island were kind of the leaders in gathering funds to do
13 that snagging and clearing. And so, we got started doing
14 that. And then we hired Diane Schmidt at that time, Diane
15 Miller now, to do secretarial work for us, keeping track of
16 us and keeping track of the things we were doing.

17 MR. MORAVEK: And bookkeeping.

18 MR. BISHOP: And the bookkeeping, yeah. And then,
19 in 1969, there was talk at the state association conference
20 among directors from across the state about maybe
21 reorganizing. And the Natural Resources Commission had come
22 out with a report on modernization of resource districts in
23 Nebraska, and they had several recommendations in that
24 report. And that ended up being the model that was followed

1 or used when the legislature passed legislation to create
2 natural resources districts in 1969.

3 MR. MORAVEK: LB1357.

4 MR. BARR: Right. Do you want to take a break now
5 and go back and give us a little of your background, Milt?

6 MR. MORAVEK: Well, it's going to be a lot
7 shorter.

8 MR. BARR: Lead us up. Lead us up.

9 MR. MORAVEK: Yeah. It's going to be a lot
10 shorter than Ron.

11 Just to let you know, when I came out here in 1969
12 and interviewed for the job, I was under the impression that
13 I was going to be competing with two or three other
14 individuals. And so, I got out here in front of the Board
15 and in front of Ron, and I found out I was the only one that
16 he had considered because of Duane Chamberlain's
17 recommendation. So, basically, I had the job, you know.

18 MR. BARR: If you didn't stumble over something.

19 MR. MORAVEK: But before that, I started with the
20 Soil Conservation Service in Lincoln, kind of like Ron did,
21 but I worked in the state office. And I was a
22 photogrammetrist, which was developing the topographic maps
23 for the watersheds to where they would either design the
24 dams or the terrace or the grassed waterways or whatever.

1 And so, I worked for the Soil Conservation Service in
2 Lincoln for about two and one half years, and they put me on
3 the night shift. I had been on the night shift for quite a
4 while there running this -- it's called a kelsner plotter.
5 You have two different colors of glasses of red and blue.
6 Or maybe it was red and green. And you had to switch them
7 when you went to the other side of the table to develop
8 these. You saw these aerial photos in three-dimensional,
9 and it would bring them down so you could see them
10 three-dimension. And that's how we developed contours.
11 Now, it's all done on computer.

12 But they put me on night shift and it made me mad,
13 so I went to work in Kansas City for an aerial photography
14 firm that developed topographic maps for cities and towns
15 and power plants and stuff like that. And they promised me
16 no night shift. Well, I was there for about a month and
17 they put me on night shift. So, I worked there for six
18 months and came back and went to work for the Soil and Water
19 Conservation Commission, which is now the Natural Resources
20 Commission. But in those days, it was the Soil and Water
21 Conservation Commission.

22 And I actually worked for Warren Fairchild, who
23 was the head of the Commission at that time. And a lot of
24 people don't seem to give enough credit to Warren Fairchild

1 -- I'm going to give a little talk on Warren Fairchild.

2 MR. BARR: Sure.

3 MR. MORAVEK: They don't seem to give him -- he
4 doesn't get the credit he deserves for getting natural
5 resources districts adopted. Maurice Kremer seems to get
6 most of the credit because he was the director with the Soil
7 and Water Conservation Commission -- or, I mean, he was a
8 senator and he was the one that kind of brought the bill
9 forward and kept it going. But Warren Fairchild worked
10 behind the scenes and he lobbied all the state senators to
11 the point you wouldn't believe. Saturdays, Sundays,
12 evenings, he was busy all the time lobbying these 46 or 47
13 state senators, wining and dining them constantly, to get
14 the votes. And so, he is the main reason that NRDs exist..

15 MR. BARR: Warren was actually the first one I
16 interviewed about 10 years ago.

17 MR. MORAVEK: And he probably never gave himself
18 enough credit.

19 MR. BARR: Well, I tell you what, before we leave,
20 I'll give you -- I think I've got a copy of the interview.

21 MR. MORAVEK: That's okay.

22 MR. BARR: And I'll just let you have it. But he
23 is -- actually, the fact that we had done that interview,
24 and that was kind of one of the reasons we decided to try to

1 expand it way beyond that.

2 MR. MORAVEK: And another person that needs a lot
3 of credit for the development of the NRD bill more is Ron
4 Bishop right here. He was working for a subdivision of the
5 government, the Mid-Platte Valley Watershed, and the
6 reorganization would have meant that the organization that
7 him and I worked for would disappear. But Ron worked
8 tirelessly, working with state senators and the Soil and
9 Water Conservation Commission and whatever, supporting and
10 backing up Warren on the development of this new watershed
11 system.

12 MR. BARR: Who were some of the key senators and
13 supporters of this idea, particularly from this area at this
14 formation phase of the legislation?

15 MR. BISHOP: Well, Maurice Kremer we call our
16 senator because he's right next door over here at Aurora.
17 He was primarily the main pusher as far as the senators were
18 concerned. But there were several others at different
19 times, at key times, that would come in and give Maurice
20 support. I can't --

21 MR. MORAVEK: I can't remember the names.

22 MR. BARR: Yeah, that's fine. And even about just
23 citizen support, was there any citizen support or --

24 MR. BISHOP: Yes. Herman Link, who was the

1 Chairman of the Mid-Platte Valley Watershed Board out here,
2 was a strong supporter of NRDs and gave me a lot of
3 flexibility to go do things to support the system. So, he
4 was a strong supporter. Harold Kopf from Lexington was a
5 strong supporter. Carl Gangwish was a strong supporter.
6 They were all involved in the local soil and water
7 conservation districts or the Mid-Platte Valley Watershed or
8 both. And there was John Jefferson out of Merrick County.

9 MR. MORAVEK: Central City.

10 MR. BISHOP: Yeah, out of Central City and Merrick
11 County, was a strong supporter. Actually, the board members
12 that we had, all the locals on the water conservation
13 districts for the most part, especially on the Mid-Platte
14 Valley Watershed, they were strong supporters of the concept
15 of developing an organization that had some financial
16 ability and could unite across county lines, people, and
17 problem areas to come to reasonable solutions.

18 MR. MORAVEK: But, as you know, we didn't have the
19 statewide support.

20 MR. BARR: That's what I was going to say. Some
21 places --

22 MR. MORAVEK: A lot of areas, especially the
23 Nemaha area that fought it, even for several years after the
24 NRDs were adopted.

1 MR. BARR: Was there any particular opposition in
2 this general area?

3 MR. MORAVEK: Well, not what you would call major.

4 MR. BISHOP: There was some isolated opposition
5 from folks, like there was one or two Soil and Water
6 Conservation Service staff people from the area who were
7 opposed to the idea. But I talked to them more than once.

8 MR. BARR: Was there anybody in Soil Conservation
9 Service that was kind of a supporter of the idea? I know
10 there was a lot of opposition in various places.

11 MR. MORAVEK: I think, for the most part, they
12 kept quiet. They were, as you know, the county -- what were
13 they called?

14 MR. BISHOP: Soil conservation district, soil and
15 water conservation districts.

16 MR. MORAVEK: The soil conservationist, okay, in
17 each county, you know, they kind of had their own little
18 world. And one of the biggest concerns with them was, okay,
19 the NRDs adopted boundaries that were hydrologic in nature
20 and not political. And so, a lot of their counties got
21 split up. And their concern was, you know, how are they
22 going to work together?

23 MR. BISHOP: And we've seen, both of us have seen
24 over the years, a complete about-face in the Soil

1 Conservation Service, now the Natural Resource Conservation
2 Service, one of the NRDs' strongest supporters.

3 MR. MORAVEK: And they've actually reorganized
4 themselves to match the NRD boundaries.

5 MR. BARR: We might just expand on that just a
6 little bit for the record here, how they've reorganized.

7 MR. MORAVEK: Well, they changed their area
8 conservationist's duties as far as boundaries so that an
9 area conservationist would pick up one or two NRDs versus,
10 you know, 10 counties or whatever. And it just makes it
11 more efficient, because then we only have to deal with one,
12 or we can deal with only one area conservationist, and that
13 that person talks to the people within his counties. And
14 it's worked out very well.

15 MR. BISHOP: They still have as a boundary for
16 their work effort, they still have county boundaries. But
17 as far as the administration and coordination liaison with
18 the NRDs, it's as Milt said. The district conservationist
19 works directly with us, and that's where most of our contact
20 is, although we still have contact with the local
21 conservationist, too. But his primary assignment is to
22 oversee the people within our natural resource district that
23 work for NRCS and to coordinate between them and the
24 district.

1 MR. BARR: There's kind of an interrelationship
2 between techs and -- don't you support?

3 MR. BISHOP: We have programs across the state.
4 The most common is where we provide clerical assistance for
5 the NRCS offices. An example is, here in our district, we
6 pay for secretarial or clerical help in Dawson, Buffalo,
7 Hall, and Merrick Counties. But we also have parts of about
8 six or seven other counties. And so, wherever that county's
9 NRD headquarters is -- Howard County, for example. We've
10 got about 15 percent of Howard County, but their NRD is up
11 at Ord, and so we pay the NRD at Ord for a percentage of the
12 clerical assistance there at Howard County. And that's true
13 across the District.

14 Many of the districts also have technicians that
15 they hire and then place them in the NRCS office to help
16 them carry out their workload. And we had one out in Dawson
17 County until about a year ago. And he went on full time
18 with the NRCS, but they didn't have quite enough money to
19 pay for his salary. And so, we have a 50/50 arrangement
20 with them, and we still pay half of the salary and benefits
21 for that individual to get the technical work done within
22 Dawson County.

23 MR. BARR: At the time of the -- well, when the
24 legislation was under original consideration in the

1 legislature until it was finally adopted and you had your
2 first NRD meeting as such, what are some of the things that
3 happened in that period of time that you might want to
4 comment on?

5 MR. BISHOP: Well, that's quite a lengthy period
6 of time.

7 MR. BARR: Yes, I know.

8 MR. BISHOP: The bill was passed in 1969, and it
9 wasn't until July of 1972 that we came into existence. And
10 so, in the meantime, there was a lot of holding your breath
11 when they had the second session of the legislature for fear
12 that they would mess it up or change it or do away with it
13 or whatever. And there was also --

14 MR. MORAVEK: The League of Women Voters that
15 filed a lawsuit later on to try to stop the NRDs from coming
16 into existence?

17 MR. BARR: What was their main objection?

18 MR. BISHOP: You know, it's been long enough. I
19 forget.

20 MR. BARR: Was it one man, one vote?

21 MR. BISHOP: Well, that was one of the issues.

22 MR. BARR: But were there others that they had?
23 There were other objectors, too, besides the League. But
24 the League, I remember one thing was the one man, one vote.

1 MR. MORAVEK: And it's still that way, but most
2 all the NRDs now have gone to one person, one vote.

3 MR. BARR: And they did that more or less on their
4 own?

5 MR. MORAVEK: We did it, yeah, did it on our own
6 and did it over a period of time.

7 MR. BISHOP: Well, there was also encouragement
8 from the senators to change that. The Mayor of Lincoln,
9 when he was a state senator, it was always an issue with
10 him.

11 MR. MORAVEK: And one time, we had a formula we
12 used, three to one, and with the land area valuation and
13 population all being involved, and Ron worked up a formula
14 to try to make it more equitable. But now, we just
15 basically do a one person, one vote boundaries.

16 MR. BISHOP: The Mayor of Lincoln.

17 MR. BARR: Was that Sam Swartzkopf, or who was the
18 mayor then?

19 MR. BISHOP: The current mayor.

20 MR. BARR: Oh, the current, Chris Beutler.

21 MR. BISHOP: Chris Beutler. When he was in the
22 legislature, that was always -- we could always count on
23 Chris to introduce legislation to convert to one person, one
24 vote. Almost every session, he had a bill that he

1 introduced. Sometimes it didn't get out of committee, but
2 he was a stickler for one person, one vote.

3 MR. BARR: Were there any other major hurdles,
4 either legal or -- I mean, irrigation districts decided not
5 to go in, and there were some other discussions going on at
6 that time of who would be in and who would be out. Any
7 thoughts you might have on those issues, particularly in
8 relation to your district?

9 MR. BISHOP: I think it probably worked out for
10 the best in our district the way it was set up. The only
11 thing that we've been faced with is the -- some of the
12 drainage district, we had some early drainage districts that
13 were formed back in the early 1900s, 1920 and through that
14 period. And they did -- the law did allow them to merge
15 with the natural resource district. The problem is, most of
16 the Board members were dead by the time we became a natural
17 resource district, and you couldn't find enough members
18 still alive that was enough of a quorum to try to merge with
19 us. And so, we never did merge with any.

20 MR. BARR: So, what happened? Do they still exist
21 or --

22 MR. BISHOP: On the books.

23 MR. MORAVEK: On the books, they do.

24 MR. BISHOP: They still exist, but the original

1 work that they did back in 1920 grew up to trees that were
2 up to four foot in diameter and right down in the drainage
3 ditch is where they grew.

4 MR. MORAVEK: Drainage District No. 1 over in
5 Merrick County. Probably, evidently, the first one that was
6 built in Merrick County and, if I remember right, the date
7 was, like, 1916. Well, they never had -- they built the
8 project, had never spent a dollar on maintenance, and so the
9 cottonwood trees started growing up right away. And so,
10 there were probably cottonwood trees this tall in 1917. And
11 so, when we got involved, I went over and did an evaluation
12 of it and had to determine that it would be cheaper to build
13 a drainage ditch next to the old drainage ditch rather than
14 maintain the existing one, because it was going to cost so
15 much to remove the trees.

16 MR. BISHOP: Thousands and thousands, tens of
17 thousands of dollars.

18 MR. MORAVEK: And they didn't go along with it, so
19 it's still the way it was. Nothing ever happened with it.

20 MR. BARR: Any other things in that lead-up period
21 to the first organization of the NRD? There was the
22 Mid-State Project. Was this any involvement in that or --

23 MR. BISHOP: Only on the periphery of things. We
24 worked with them and kept up with them because it was a

1 major, major water project across three of the counties
2 here. So, we worked with the irrigation district until they
3 were disbanded, voted out. Some of the heart of the problem
4 areas, the residents there came back and approached us to
5 try and help them get some type of irrigation project
6 because they were facing water shortages and declines. And
7 they ended up forming the Prairie Bend and the Twin Valley
8 Projects. Prairie Bend was primarily in the Shelton, Wood
9 River, Cairo area, and Twin Valley was more over in the
10 Overton, Odessa, and the upper parts of the Wood River
11 Valley. So, we worked with both those groups. Prairie Bend
12 was quite a little ahead of -- earlier than Twin Valley, but
13 it started out Prairie Bend, and we worked with them for
14 several years and faced some obstacles in the water right
15 that they had submitted. It ended up getting turned down
16 because of the supposed sighting of a whooping crane within
17 a quarter of a mile of where they proposed the diversion dam
18 on the Platte River. And so, someone was concerned that
19 whooping cranes would then come back and use that same area
20 and might drown or something in the deep water. And for
21 whatever reason, the water right was turned down. It was
22 denied.

23 MR. BARR: Roughly when was that? Do you
24 remember?

1 MR. BISHOP: That would be --

2 MR. MORAVEK: Late 70s?

3 MR. BISHOP: Yeah.

4 MR. BARR: You had worked with them for quite a
5 while between --

6 MR. MORAVEK: Yeah. And another reason why
7 Prairie Bend, I guess you could kind of say it fell apart,
8 because we went through a long period of time there where we
9 had above average rainfall almost every year and some of the
10 locals just kind of lost interest in it. They just thought
11 it was going to continue raining more and more all the time,
12 and it just kind of foundered.

13 MR. BISHOP: It's feast or famine. And when you
14 got a --

15 MR. MORAVEK: It foundered more because of the
16 environmental concerns. There was a lot of opposition from
17 organizations, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
18 against these types of projects. Not just Prairie Bend, but
19 all surface water irrigation projects in general. And it
20 just wore everybody out, is what it did. It'd make one step
21 forward and two steps back.

22 MR. BARR: Well, unless there is something else,
23 can we get back to kind of -- could you kind of go over how
24 you managed to start an organization -- or, I mean, the

1 legislature started the organization, but how you organized
2 and how you got it going and the hurdles that you might have
3 run into as you were doing that and --

4 MR. BISHOP: Well, we had a leg up here in this
5 area because the Mid-Platte Valley Watershed was one of the
6 organizations that was merged into and became a part of the
7 natural resource districts. And we had already established,
8 between Milt and I and Dianne, we come in and had an
9 organization going that was a part of the function, at
10 least, of the natural resource district. So, we had a feel
11 for what needed to be done as far as organization and that
12 sort of thing. When we first started, we had 150 board
13 members.

14 MR. BARR: An hundred and fifty.

15 MR. BISHOP: A hundred and fifty board members.

16 MR. BARR: How was that determined? Was that a
17 combination of the old organizations?

18 MR. BISHOP: All of the board members of all of
19 the groups that were merged into the natural resource
20 districts, so there was many soil and water conservation
21 district directors from part or all of 11 different
22 counties. There were all of the directors for the Mid-
23 Platte Valley Watershed. There were also urban
24 representatives that were set up to be on the original NRD

1 board. And so, it was all of these reps representing
2 various interests or various organizations. The Box Elder
3 Watershed Board, they became a part of the natural resource
4 district. And so, we ended up with 150 at that first
5 meeting. And one of the first things that they did was
6 decide that they needed an executive committee to carry out
7 the month-to-month stuff, and that the board would only meet
8 once or twice a year until after the first election.

9 MR. BARR: When was the first election?

10 MR. BISHOP: It would have been --

11 MR. MORAVEK: Probably '74.

12 MR. BISHOP: Two years later.

13 MR. BARR: '74, so they would have taken over
14 January or so of '75.

15 MR. BISHOP: Yeah. So, we went from July of '72
16 until about January of '75, as I recall, with 150 board
17 members, but with a 21-member executive committee, and the
18 executive committee was elected by the whole 150 board
19 members.

20 MR. MORAVEK: Even appointed. Some of them were
21 probably appointed and not elected. Don't you think? Like
22 a county would say --

23 MR. BISHOP: Some of them were serving on there
24 because they legislation called for certain representatives.

1 MR. MORAVEK: But, maybe, like a soil conservation
2 district would say, okay, we're going to send Joe because he
3 lives in the area and he knows more about it. The other
4 ones kind of bowed out. I know it happened in Hall County.

5 MR. BISHOP: So, we ended up with the 21 executive
6 committee members that came to the meetings once a month and
7 did most of the stuff. And then, maybe once a year, we'd
8 have to get the whole 150 together to --

9 MR. BARR: Did they come up with the number to be
10 elected or how is the number to be elected?

11 MR. MORAVEK: That was determined in the
12 legislature, in the law. It allowed a maximum of 21 board
13 members, but then you could have had, what, a minimum --

14 MR. BISHOP: As few as seven.

15 MR. MORAVEK: As few as seven.

16 MR. BISHOP: It had to be an odd number. No less
17 than 7 and no more than 21.

18 MR. BARR: And what is your board?

19 MR. BISHOP: Twenty-one.

20 MR. BARR: And it's been that way --

21 MR. BISHOP: Been that way since day one, since
22 the executive committee.

23 MR. MORAVEK: And that was kind of decided by the
24 board because of the length of our district. We're about

1 180 miles long from east to west, and they felt that, to get
2 good representation for the entire area, they needed to keep
3 a larger board.

4 And to be honest with you, a bunch of people had
5 concerns with that, you know, the first two or three
6 meetings as to whether that was going to be workable. It
7 just worked. We didn't end up with the group that kind of
8 broke out and said, "This is the way we want things," and
9 this group broke out -- that didn't happen. You know, you
10 get into, like, some county boards -- still have three
11 county board members. Well, if you get two of them voting
12 one way, the other person doesn't even really have a vote.
13 And we were kind of afraid that 21 --

14 Well, we broke ourselves down into committees
15 right away: eastern projects committee, western projects
16 committee, programs committee, water resources committee.
17 So, we were able to go the committee route. Didn't make any
18 decisions at the committee level, but they'd make
19 recommendations. And so, that committee then brings back
20 the recommendations to the full board and it's just worked.
21 You couldn't ask for it to work any better.

22 MR. BARR: And you kept the same subcommittees or
23 changed?

24 MR. MORAVEK: We've got a budget committee and --

1 MR. BISHOP: Our base committees, our core
2 committees, have basically been the same all the way
3 through. As different projects come up, special projects or
4 special activities, like we might have had a subcommittee of
5 the water resources committee for developing the water
6 quality plan. They come and go with the issue. But for the
7 most part, we've had the eastern and western project
8 committees, programs committee, and the water resources
9 committee as the base committees. And then, the chairman of
10 each of those committees, along with the officers, make up
11 our budget committee.

12 MR. MORAVEK: And the executive committee.

13 MR. BARR: What kind of issues have been a major
14 occupation of your time?

15 MR. MORAVEK: Flood control has always been one of
16 the major problems in the Platte Valley, and so it's one of
17 the problems we addressed right off. Ron talked about the
18 snagging-clearing projects. We still do that today. We've
19 snagged and cleared over 500 miles of rivers and creeks in
20 our district and some of those now we have gone back and
21 re-snagged some of the bad areas. We do some new rivers and
22 streams that haven't been done before.

23 And like Ron explained, the Corps of Engineers
24 said the Wood River had only about half of its flow

1 capacity. They'd come up with that study by saying, if you
2 have a clean channel and you have clean banks on both sides,
3 the velocity of the water through a river is the highest
4 within the channel and about half the width of the channel
5 on each bank. So, if you had, say, a 70-foot wide channel
6 and you cleared 35 feet on each bank, you've really
7 increased the flood capacity of that river before it really
8 spreads that water out, because the velocity slows down the
9 more you spread it out.

10 We have proven that time and time again through
11 our snagging-clearing projects. By getting the log jams
12 out, with the debris from underneath the bridges, cleaning
13 the channels and the side slopes back, you know, up to 35
14 feet, leave a few live trees in there if the people want it,
15 and you actually have more wildlife habitat because, then,
16 the grasses grow. You reduce erosion because your grasses
17 grow along the banks rather than being totally shaded with
18 trees. So, it's had many benefits.

19 In the '67 and '68 floods in the Platte Valley,
20 most of the damage was caused by bridges and roads being
21 washed out. You'd have a bridge that would wash out. It
22 would create a domino effect, and parts of that bridge would
23 come down and, maybe, lodge against the next bridge or a
24 bridge two or three miles down. And then, it would take

1 that bridge out. And so, these snagging-clearing projects
2 have just really saved the counties millions of dollars in
3 replacing bridges and fixing roads and so forth. Of course,
4 with our flood control projects, like the Wood River Project
5 south of town, has taken the entire southern part of the
6 city proper out of the flood plain. We built another
7 project identical to it at a smaller scale at Central City,
8 which has taken just about all of Central City out of the
9 flood plain. And we're building another project northwest
10 of Grand Island here that's eventually going to take the
11 entire northern part of the City of Grand Island out of the
12 flood plain. We're done flood control projects in the
13 Kearney area to improve water leaving the Kearney area
14 called the Kearney Northeast Project. We've built 30-plus
15 dams, most of them in Polk County on the Platte break land
16 on the south side of the river where the water would shoot
17 down into the valley and flood Clear Creek and all the land.

18 MR. BISHOP: All of those projects that Milt just
19 mentioned had an awful lot of urban benefits, but they also
20 have a lot of ag benefits, too, because, as you're
21 protecting the town, you're also protecting the ag land
22 upstream and downstream from it.

23 MR. MORAVEK: We built dams on French Creek and --

24 MR. BISHOP: Buffalo Creek.

1 MR. MORAVEK: Buffalo Creek and French Creek out
2 west, to help protect -- reduce the flooding in towns like
3 Lexington and Overton. And we've done some drainage
4 projects across the district, some of them organized, some
5 of them just working with the local landowners and getting
6 them to do some of the work themselves rather than trying to
7 form some special project. It's just been amazing what
8 Central Platte has been able to do with the tax money that
9 we are able to generate.

10 And we hardly ever do a project just with the NRD,
11 we always have co-sponsors and that will include state funds
12 through the development fund, it will include environmental
13 trust funds. But even smaller projects, we work with
14 counties and towns and cities, and we help the cities out on
15 some of their smaller projects. Right now, the town of
16 Gothenburg is rehabbing Helen Lake, which is a lake in town.
17 We were helping financially with that. The towns of Clarks
18 and Silver Creek, right now we're working with the town of
19 Clarks on getting their town taken out of the flood plain
20 because, if we develop more accurate topographic maps
21 because of the lidar that was flown and turned it over to an
22 engineering firm -- the town's paying part of the cost, the
23 NRD's paying part of the cost. And we're going to get the
24 entire town of Clarks taken out of the flood plain, then

1 we're going to go to Silver Creek and do it there, go to
2 Archer and do it there, and it's just those kind of
3 projects, and that's how you keep the support for the NRDs,
4 is you don't just target one area. We've worked with all
5 the towns. We've done projects in Cairo, in Duncan, in Wood
6 River, all the towns. We try to spread it around to where
7 we can do a project to help that community out and the
8 agricultural community around it, and we've just made sure
9 we did that all these years, and it's just really worked.

10 MR. BARR: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

11 MR. BISHOP: You asked what some of the priorities
12 were, and Milt's right, flood control has been a major and
13 ongoing one. But over time, there have been other crises
14 that have developed and we've established additional
15 priorities. Groundwater quality was a big one, and we've
16 spent a lot of effort and funding and study on our
17 groundwater quality issues, especially with nitrates. And
18 in more recent years, then it's become water supply,
19 especially with the advent of the Platte River Program and
20 the state's commitments to supply water and land for the
21 threatened endangered species because of the Platte River
22 Program. And then LB962, it called for all of the districts
23 to get back to no more than a fully appropriated status.
24 And so, water supply is now a major part of our program.

1 So, that's not to say that we've forgotten about the flood
2 control, because that's still ongoing. We've got -- Milt
3 was out this morning looking at a project that we've got
4 here that --

5 MR. MORAVEK: A new dam is half done and another
6 one is just starting.

7 MR. BISHOP: And the water quality stuff goes on
8 because we haven't won that battle yet. We're gaining.

9 MR. MORAVEK: We're the first district in the
10 state to establish a groundwater management plan where we
11 had rules and regulations that the farmers, producers, have
12 to follow to comply with the NRD rules.

13 MR. BISHOP: Water quality. On water quality.

14 MR. MORAVEK: On the water quality. Other parts
15 of the state have high nitrate issues. A lot of them are
16 just finally getting to the point where they're having to do
17 something. Like I say, we established --

18 MR. BISHOP: This is about all NRDs, not just
19 Central Platte.

20 MR. MORAVEK: Say what, now?

21 MR. BISHOP: This is about all NRDs, not just
22 Central Platte. We like to blow our own horn.

23 MR. MORAVEK: Well, and we deserve to blow our
24 horn. And a lot of it has to do with a good, progressive

1 board. We've been lucky with having good, progressive
2 people on our boards, not just farmers, but also urban
3 people.

4 MR. BARR: Would you like to mention any
5 particular names in terms of, particularly the early leaders
6 and any that -- particularly that have been on for a long
7 time or something?

8 MR. BISHOP: Yeah, absolutely. Dick Mercer has
9 been on the NRD board since day one. Carl Gangwish from
10 Buffalo County was a strong leader for years and years.
11 John Jefferson from north of Central City over in Merrick
12 County was a strong leader that was on the board for years
13 and years. Harold Kopf from out in Dawson County was
14 another one.

15 MR. MORAVEK: Arlen Garrett from Gothenburg area.
16 You know, these people didn't just say, okay, I live over
17 here in Central City, and so I'm concerned about this area.
18 They looked at the entire district.

19 MR. BISHOP: The big picture.

20 MR. MORAVEK: The entire state and said this is
21 for the good of the people that we need to work on these
22 projects. So, we had just as much support from the eastern
23 directors for a project out west and vice versa. They just
24 stopped their localized thinking and thought more of an

1 entire watershed or watersheds to carry out these projects
2 because they knew that, you know, if you do something out
3 west, it's going to help the east. If you do something in
4 the east, well, when that money is spent, the next money's
5 going to go out west. And so, we've been able to spread out
6 the projects and programs clear across our district.

7 MR. BARR: Do you think the NRD structure, as
8 such, has helped people see a bigger picture than they might
9 have had they not had an NRD system?

10 MR. BISHOP: Absolutely.

11 MR. MORAVEK: All you have to do is go to a
12 conservation district national meeting, okay, where you have
13 49 states that have county-wide conservation districts.
14 Well, you know, California has, you know, some spotty-type
15 organizations like NRDs. But you go to these meetings and
16 they sit down and they're wondering whether they're going to
17 get enough money to even keep their office open to have a
18 part time secretary and to buy office supplies. Okay. We
19 eliminated that problem in 1972. We're not wasting
20 taxpayers' dollars, but the people also see of what was
21 accomplished because of the NRDs. Look at the Papio NRD and
22 all the flood control works they've done on, like, the Papio
23 Creek and all the dams. And they've worked with developers
24 and so forth where the developers buy the land and pay for

1 the easements and the NRD comes in and builds the dam and
2 then there can be development around it. Look at Lincoln,
3 with their big flood control project right downtown and all
4 the hike/bike trails they've done. You would never have
5 anything like that without NRDs. The soil conservation
6 districts in each county have no way of having any tax
7 authority. They had to depend on the county boards. And as
8 you know, county boards, they're broke too, you know, now.
9 And so, that money would have just dried up.

10 MR. BARR: Would you like to mention a little bit,
11 since you're on the Platte River and involved in a number of
12 different NRDs, would you comment a little bit on the
13 interrelationship of the NRDs that are on the Platte River?

14 MR. BISHOP: One of the legislative directives was
15 that NRDs within a basin get together at least once or twice
16 a year. But, especially in more recent years, we've seen an
17 expansion of that as far as getting together, as far as
18 cooperation and working together. The Platte River Program
19 has brought about five of us together very closely. And
20 then, LB962, with the requirement to get back to at
21 least -- back to fully appropriated, us and the other five
22 NRDs within this reach that's been classified as
23 over-appropriated, we not only get together once or twice a
24 year, we also have developed a basin-wide plan that we each

1 follow in our own individual integrated management plans.
2 And so, we have -- we're constantly getting together to meet
3 on one thing or another and how we're going to achieve the
4 goals of the basin that have been set out. So, it's
5 been -- it's always been a working relationship. But in
6 more recent years since the Platte River Program and since
7 LB962, it's developed into a close working relationship.

8 As an example, we've got three irrigation projects
9 that Central Platte NRD is working with out in Dawson
10 County, that we're working with to try to revitalize and
11 reactivate those projects, rehabilitate the canals and their
12 systems, the drops, the turnouts, and that sort of thing,
13 because we know that we can convert some water back to the
14 river at critical times by re-timing, for example, when
15 there's excess flows above what the Fish and Wildlife
16 Service say is necessary. We can take them into those
17 canals and let it seep back to the river through recharge.
18 The district right above us, the Twin Platte, and the
19 district right across the river, the Tri-Basin NRD, are
20 contracting with us to help supply some of the water demands
21 that they have to meet their criteria. The Tri-Basin could
22 be a long-term commitment. The Twin Platte is a short-term
23 contract during the first increment of the Platte River
24 Program. Once that increment is done, then they'll have to

1 find their own water for the river. But until it's done, to
2 give them some time to find their own projects and to carry
3 out some of their own things, we're going to be working with
4 them until at least then. Part of the plan is that we can
5 get water to the river from operating these three projects a
6 little different.

7 MR. BARR: Looking at the original purposes of the
8 NRD, has there, over time, been any significant changes in
9 either dropping or adding or major change to purposes?

10 MR. BISHOP: The 12 purposes have stayed pretty
11 much the same as far as the law is concerned. In each
12 district, as conditions change, there is different
13 priorities in a given year or given decade sometimes,
14 depending upon what's going on and what the crisis is at
15 that particular time. And so, the individual districts may
16 change as far as the emphasis on the priorities, but,
17 overall, the 12 authorities the natural resource districts
18 were given are still pretty much in place.

19 MR. MORAVEK: And of course, there has been
20 legislation passed over the years that has given the NRDs
21 some additional authorities, some additional
22 responsibilities.

23 MR. BISHOP: Water quality is a good example.

24 MR. BARR: You've both been with this too long,

1 since it started, anyhow. Let's leave it at that.

2 MR. BISHOP: Yes. They're going to run us off the
3 end of next month.

4 MR. BARR: So, you came in together and you're
5 leaving together?

6 MR. BISHOP: That's right.

7 MR. BARR: I mean, based upon your original
8 expectations or thoughts of how this would develop and what
9 has played out over the years, any observations that either
10 of you would like to make?

11 MR. MORAVEK: Well, in our wildest dreams in 1972,
12 where it was Ron and I and a secretary/bookkeeper, you know,
13 you couldn't imagine what we have been able to accomplish in
14 that 43 years. Of course, the NRD has grown. All the NRDs
15 have grown. That's just typical of government. But I think
16 we can sit back and say, okay, we've got more staff, but
17 look at all the stuff we're doing now compared to what we
18 did in '72. In '72, we really had one project, and that was
19 snagging and clearing. In '73, we expanded to more
20 projects. '74 -- and it's happened every year. Another
21 thing you can't --

22 MR. BISHOP: It just kept growing.

23 MR. MORAVEK: You can't forget the maintenance
24 responsibility that you have on some of these projects. You

1 take a project that gets resource development funds through
2 the state, your responsibility is to maintain that project
3 in good working order for at least 50 years. Corps of
4 Engineers projects, probably a lot longer.

5 MR. BISHOP: Without that, you could go back to
6 the condition that we have with the drainage districts.

7 MR. MORAVEK: So, we've spent a lot of effort on
8 maintaining projects that we've built in the past. We
9 inspect all of our dams every year. The state does too. On
10 our snagging and clearing projects, we still have trees
11 dying, we still have log jams, we take care of every year.
12 We have an ice jam program on the Platte River that we have
13 money set aside to address the ice jam situation. You know,
14 the Papio has major problems with that, and our problems
15 aren't near as serious as theirs, but we don't want to see a
16 lot of damage because of that. We've had a program where we
17 actually blew up old bridge pilings in the river, Platte
18 River, because they were causing ice jams. We got them out
19 of there. So, you know, we could not have imagined that
20 stuff being done in '72.

21 MR. BISHOP: The fun way, with dynamite. The only
22 bad thing was they wouldn't let Milt or I set it off.

23 MR. BARR: Okay. Do you just have anything you'd
24 like to -- and observations whatsoever about the whole NRD

1 process, either your own NRD or the general NRDs' situation
2 throughout Nebraska, that you'd like to make?

3 MR. BISHOP: It make me extremely proud to be
4 associated with this type of an organization. We've got
5 some outstanding work being done by the natural resource
6 districts across the state that, without NRDs, it never
7 would have gotten done. Through our state association,
8 then, we've got a group formed that helps mold us and keep
9 us together and on track working for one common goal. And
10 so, we've been very fortunate also to have some good
11 leadership with the state association. And the good that
12 it's done for the state of Nebraska and the residents in the
13 state from flood control and water quality down through the
14 stabilization of the soils and the sandhills and some of the
15 erosive soils in the east, they've just done an outstanding
16 job that I know wouldn't have gotten done without natural
17 resource districts.

18 MR. MORAVEK: There's just so many dedicated
19 people with the natural resource districts, it's just
20 amazing. You know, you always hear about government and how
21 government is so wasteful and government employees do
22 nothing. If you look at the NRDs and the stuff that's been
23 accomplished over the years, and a prime example is the
24 Nemaha NRD, you know, when they first thought the natural

1 resource districts -- see them today. They have been
2 building dam, flood control projects, down there that never
3 would have happened without some local funding and a staff
4 that could handle all that stuff. You know, you don't get
5 free easements anymore, you have to go out and work for
6 them. And it's the dedication of the board of directors,
7 the dedication of the staff members, and the NRDs have got
8 this stuff done.

9 MR. BISHOP: Well, just the maintenance on those
10 watershed projects in southeast Nebraska is a major, major
11 effort that they don't get enough credit for because
12 it's -- you know, that dam has been there for 30 years or
13 more, but it's had maintenance for 30 years to keep it still
14 functioning and doing the job that it was built to do.

15 MR. MORAVEK: The thing that concerns me, and this
16 is a future project that goes back to snagging and clearing,
17 you've heard of the Emerald Ash Borer.

18 MR. BARR: Yes. Yes.

19 MR. MORAVEK: It's already hit Kansas City. It's
20 going to jump the Missouri River within the next five to 10
21 years. It's going to kill 50 million ash trees in Nebraska.
22 It's going to kill every ash tree in Nebraska.

23 MR. BARR: We came in on this on the elm disease,
24 didn't we?

1 MR. MORAVEK: Half of the trees along our rivers
2 and streams in our district are ash. Well, we're luckier
3 than some of them, because we cleared that 35-foot swath. A
4 lot of those trees that are going to fall down are going to
5 fall -- not going to fall in the river, but they're still
6 going to be laying there dead. The water, if we have a
7 flood, can pick them up. And so, that project is going to
8 continue forever, those types of projects.

9 MR. BARR: One other thing I wanted to just get
10 your observations on was the interrelationship with local,
11 state, and federal agencies.

12 MR. BISHOP: We've developed a good working
13 relationship with counties and cities around this area
14 through our co-sponsoring projects with them. The Wood
15 River Flood Control Project is a good example here. That
16 was a cooperative effort between federal government, the
17 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the state government through
18 the Department of Natural Resources and the water resources
19 development from there, and our natural resource district,
20 the City of Grand Island, Hall County, and Merrick County.
21 We all came together to develop that project because we all
22 saw a need that had been there for years and years. And so,
23 everybody agreed to help participate, not at the same level,
24 but to help participate some to see that that project got

1 built and to continue that project through maintenance.

2 MR. MORAVEK: Let's say you go down --

3 MR. BISHOP: It's repeated all across the
4 district.

5 MR. MORAVEK: Let's say you go down to Lincoln to
6 go to the Nebraska Natural Resources Commission and ask for
7 some resource development funds. When you can go down there
8 and say, "Okay, we've got five co-sponsors on this project.
9 This is the support we have", it's a lot easier to get
10 approved down there than if you come in with a project just
11 with the NRD and, maybe, the city and the county don't like
12 it that well. And so, you do your homework to start with,
13 you get your ducks in a row with all your co-sponsors, and
14 then you go ask for the money, and you're so much more
15 successful.

16 MR. BISHOP: That's on the local level. Federal
17 level, we've worked with the Corps. They were the major
18 sponsor of the Wood River Flood Control Project. We've
19 worked with them on a number of other projects, although
20 it's getting more and more difficult with them all the time
21 for more than one reason. We've worked with the Soil
22 Conservation Service, the Natural Resource Conservation
23 Service now. I started with the SCS, so it keep calling it
24 Soil Conservation. But the cooperative effort that we have

1 supplying clerical help and technical help across the state
2 to their offices is to get the joint effort done. They're
3 always pressed for money. Congress seems to always have
4 them squeezed down pretty tight. And so, to get the job
5 done, well, we have to work together and we have to provide
6 a little clerical help or a little technical help once in a
7 while through efforts. So, we've got a good working
8 relationship there. At the state level, the DEQ, the
9 Natural Resources Department, we have a good working
10 relationship. We have a good working relationship with them
11 that has developed, especially in recent years.

12 MR. BARR: Any other final observations that you'd
13 like to -- not that we can't reignite an interview if you
14 think of major things that you might want to add. Just any
15 other thought you might want to offer?

16 MR. BISHOP: I think I've about spoke out enough.

17 MR. MORAVEK: I think I have too.

18 MR. BARR: About worn you both out here.

19 MR. BISHOP: Yeah.

20 MR. BARR: Okay. Well, thank you both very much.

21 MR. BISHOP: You bet. You bet. Thank you for
22 doing this, Jim.

23 MR. BARR: Let's see if I got it stopped.

24 MR. MORAVEK: Then, you'll probably have to edit a

1 lot of that stuff out.

2 MR. BARR: Well, you know --

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