

INTERVIEW WITH STAN STAAB
BY ANN BLEED

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1 MS. BLEED: This is an interview by Ann Bleed and
2 I am now interviewing Stan Staab. And, Stan, could you
3 first tell me just a little bit about your background,
4 where you're from, how you got into the water business, et
5 cetera.

6 MR. STAAB: Well, my name is Stanley Carl Staub
7 and I'm from Ansley, Nebraska. I was actually born in
8 Ansley, raised for the most part in that area in Custer
9 County. I did go to California three different times as a
10 young person. My parents moved out and back, and I
11 attended kindergarten, fourth grade, and tenth grade in San
12 Diego and Sacramento. So, I had that experience of
13 traveling back and forth. And it was always interesting to
14 me to travel.

15 MS. BLEED: I'm just going to stop you a minute
16 and make sure we're getting this recorded.

17 Okay, go ahead, Stan.

18 MR. STAAB: Yes, as I was saying, it was always
19 interesting to me to travel as a young person. I remember
20 especially when I was a young man, one of the very first
21 times we went to California, we went on the California
22 Zephyr, on the train. And my mother and I were going out to
23 meet my dad in San Diego, and I would sit up in the dome
24 and look out over the countryside as we went by, and I
25 could see the rolling hills and then the mountains, and

1 then the mountains transitioned to the beautiful area in
2 California. And it stuck in my mind, and I guess from that,
3 I always loved to travel. As a young person, I was always
4 interested in geography and social studies and those kind of
5 things. And I used to read *National Geographic* probably
6 before it was even -- before any young person like my age
7 was reading it and that sort of thing. And I actually have
8 a collection dating back to 1971 of all the *National*
9 *Geographic's*. But at any rate, I just got interested in the
10 -- I guess, just the people and our natural resources of
11 our beautiful state and also not only our state, but the
12 country and the world. And I've had some real opportunities
13 to travel in this country. I've traveled in 39 states.
14 I've got a few left to go. And this position I have now has
15 given me the opportunity to do that a lot and I really
16 appreciate all of that. So, to make a long story short, I
17 guess I've just been interested in these things since I was
18 a little kid. I always wondered what I wanted to do when I
19 grew up. I went off to college at Kearney State after I
20 graduated from high school. I graduated from Kearney State
21 College in 1970. Graduated, actually, from high school in
22 1965, and went to college and graduated in 1970. I majored
23 in geography and industrial education. After switching
24 majors, I wanted to coach and teach, and I got veered off
25 and got into geography. Cost me a year, so I had to go

1 back and pick up some extra classes. And my mother is a
2 teacher. I have an aunt that's a teacher, another aunt and
3 an uncle that are teachers in California. And so I kind of
4 veered off into education and teaching. And therefore, I
5 got my bachelor's degree in education. So, I ended up
6 teaching geography and social studies, industrial education
7 in two schools, Anslemo-Myrna for three years, which is up
8 in this edge of the Sand hills in Custer County and then I
9 taught three years in Broken Bow, Nebraska, which is also,
10 of course, in Custer County.

11 So, with that background of teaching, my work in
12 geography, and in the spare time, I had several summer jobs,
13 like a young guys does. One of them was working for Sargent
14 Irrigation, as one of the prominent irrigation companies in
15 this state. And I learned a lot working with those guys.
16 I worked with them three different times in the summers,
17 and even after I graduated, I worked for most part of a
18 year. And so, I had the opportunity to really learn from
19 people that knew a lot about the water well business, people
20 that were interested in developing irrigation wells in the
21 state and developing water at that time. Of course, in the
22 '70s -- late '60s and early mid-'70s was a big deal. The
23 center pivot was just catching on in this state, and we
24 drilled many, many wells in the Sand hills, which probably
25 proved to be a mistake as we look back at it today. But I

1 certainly got an education in drilling -- helping drill
2 irrigation wells, working with that sort of thing. I
3 learned a little bit about the water business, certainly a
4 tip of the iceberg, of course. There's so much to learn.
5 And so, after I quit teaching, I decided I wanted to go
6 to -- on to grad school, so I went down to UNL, worked as a
7 full-time student, as a graduate student, worked on my
8 master's degree. And then after that, I went to work for
9 Farm Bureau for a year and got in kind of an insurance
10 business. I didn't really like that, so I changed jobs
11 again and had the opportunity to go to work for John
12 Turnbull in York for Upper Big Blue in 1979. I started
13 Martin Luther King Day in 1979 at Upper Big Blue at York, a
14 wonderful opportunity. John immediately made me manager of
15 the education and information department. We didn't call it
16 in those days. It was called public relations or something
17 else, whatever. And I worked about seven and a half years
18 for John at Upper Big Blue in York, a great mentor for me, a
19 great guy to work for; wonderful people on the staff. Had
20 an opportunity to work with the board of directors on many,
21 many projects and programs, and really got foundation
22 learning about NRDs in that era, from 1979 until 1986.

23 MS. BLEED: So, were you aware of and involved in
24 any way with the formation of the NRD starting in '69, '68-
25 '69?

1 MR. STAAB: I really wasn't. In fact, I didn't
2 know much about the NRDs until I began my work in York in
3 '79. I had heard about them, of course. And it's
4 interesting, really. I was thinking about that the other
5 day. The first time I'd ever heard of an NRD, I picked up
6 a Game and Parks magazine and they had featured the natural
7 resource districts in the late '70s in one of those issues.
8 And I spotted that and I thought, that would be very fun,
9 very interesting type of work. I wonder if I could do that
10 kind of work. I wonder if I could somehow get involved in
11 it and learn and be part of that process. So, for me, it
12 was the late '70s when I came on board with the districts.
13 And they were still new. There was a lot of really
14 interesting things going on at that time, and I don't know
15 how much time we want to spend talking about all that, but
16 certainly, the project -- the district at York was very
17 active, especially in the area of groundwater management,
18 even from the early '70s. And I had the pleasure of knowing
19 Senator Maurice Kremer, who was one of -- we often call him
20 the father of the NRDs. I don't know if that's proper or
21 not, but many of us do that. Senator Dick Marvel from
22 Hastings was another gentleman I knew, a wonderful person.
23 And in that sense I did know some of the early people that
24 were working with the districts. So, I became familiar
25 with Dayle Williamson very early on. I became familiar

1 with the state association with Lee Orton at that time was
2 the state association director. In fact, I was in Lincoln
3 looking for work after I decided to get out of the insurance
4 business. And I saw the opening in York and I stopped and
5 talked to -- just out of -- this was pure good fortune, I
6 guess, stopped and talked to Lee Orton in his office, and he
7 was the very first person that I met that had anything to do
8 with NRDs. And I never forgot his words. He said, "Well,
9 Stan," he said, "if you're looking to make money, you want
10 to get rich, this isn't the job for you." "But," he said,
11 "I'm pretty sure it's going to be rewarding to you. You're
12 going to have a rewarding career if you stick with it." And
13 he was absolutely right about that. And I made a good
14 living. I made a decent living, of course, especially as
15 you get to be manager, the dollars go up some. But when I
16 was teaching, you know, I didn't make a lot of money. All
17 the way through, I wasn't in it to make a big salary. I
18 just wanted to do something that was important that was
19 good, that I felt like there were projects and programs that
20 benefited a lot of people, while still making a living,
21 supporting my family. So, in that sense, I did know some
22 people early on that had a lot to do with the foundation of
23 the districts.

24 MS. BLEED: Since this is really -- these
25 interviews are trying to focus on the foundations of the

1 districts, and so on, do you remember anything about -- did
2 they tell you anything about those early days when the
3 districts were first getting started?

4 MR. STAAB: Well, yes, I did. As I learned -- as
5 I read about the districts, and I learned about some of the
6 early interesting things that they tried to do to get the
7 districts going, and, of course, Senator Kremer was very
8 instrumental in this. And he envisioned a type of
9 government that consolidated many of the local entities
10 together, and I understand at that time, there were
11 150-some, -54, whatever it was, various types of entities,
12 ranging all the way from the old soil and water conservation
13 districts, which, of course, all the other states have that
14 still today. And Nebraska is unique in the fact that we
15 just have the NRDs. We're the only one, I believe. And
16 they talked about -- some of the early meetings I went to,
17 talked about those kinds of things. They talked about how
18 hard it was to get this through the Legislature, to get
19 this concept promoted to the average person. And for
20 people that were on the soil and water conservation boards
21 to give up this type of arrangement that they've known all
22 these years, probably since the 1930s. And I vividly
23 remember -- I don't remember the guy's name, but I think
24 his first name was Carl, maybe right or wrong mentioning
25 his name, but he was down in Geneva in the Fillmore County

1 area, and he was very adamant about and opposed to the idea
2 of NRDs, that this would be a structure that wouldn't work.
3 And he was not real cooperative. I remember, I tried to
4 work with him on this -- work with him on several projects
5 over the years, different things. And he just didn't really
6 like the NRD type of idea.

7 MS. BLEED: Do you know why he didn't like it?

8 MR. STAAB: I think he was just opposed to the
9 idea that we were new. We were the new kids on the block.
10 This was something fresh and new and different. And was it
11 even going to work and could it be successful? And before,
12 of course, the USDA had a lot of authority over the soil
13 and water conservation districts, the old SWCDs, and I
14 think he felt threatened about -- to that to some extent, I
15 believe. And, you know, as I talked to him over the years,
16 we became pretty good friends, but early on, since I was in
17 charge of the information education and all the programs of
18 the district, it was kind of difficult to work with some
19 individuals like that.

20 But I never will forget Senator Kremer came in our
21 office one day and the district had decided somewhere in the
22 middle '70s to try to put water meters on all the wells.
23 And that continued for many years. And Senator Kremer was
24 sitting talking to John Turnbull, the manager, and myself
25 and a couple of other people in the office, maybe it was a

1 couple of board members, I don't remember who, and he said,
2 "This is not going to be easy to do." And he said, "We
3 made a mistake when we passed the Groundwater Management Act
4 in the mid-'70s," which I believe was '75 of '76. "We
5 should have required a meter on all the new wells in the
6 state, and it would have solved a lot of problems. It would
7 have helped us so much if we'd have been able to do that."
8 He said that to me, and that was in the early '80s when he
9 said that, or to our group. And we nodded our heads,
10 "You're right, Senator, it would have made a lot of
11 difference." He said, "But the political opposition was
12 such that it just wasn't going to work." You know, they
13 were lucky to get what they got out of it, get things going.
14 So there was some real interesting things said.

15 And I remember one time, he came in and I was
16 standing there, and he just looked me in the eye and said,
17 "Stan," he said, "whatever you do, you need to fight hard
18 for local control, because it's very important in our state.
19 That's what people want. That's what I want as a senator.
20 My friends, my farmer friends, all my other folks, we want
21 to try to maintain local control over these things if we
22 can." I just remember that so clear.

23 MS. BLEED: Did he say why or just made that
24 statement?

25 MR. STAAB: Well, I think he just felt very

1 strongly. And, of course, you got to remember. He came
2 out of the Aurora/Henderson area up there, which is a very,
3 very strong, independent area of the state in terms of
4 self-control. The schools were, of course, all -- we still
5 had local school boards and stuff, but he just felt very
6 strongly that we needed to maintain local control. And I
7 didn't really press him, you know, exactly, for every little
8 detail on it, but we certainly agreed on that, for sure.

9 MS. BLEED: Yeah.

10 MR. STAAB: But those are some discussions as I
11 think back about it. And Dick Marvel came into the office
12 one time from Hastings, when he was -- this was in the
13 mid- -- or late '70s when I was there. I remember talking
14 to him a little bit, too, about it. And don't remember any
15 particular stories about things, but, you know, they were
16 two leaders in this effort for sure.

17 MS. BLEED: Yeah. So, what were the early days
18 like for the -- for you on the Upper Big Blue?

19 MR. STAAB: Well, you know, it was a big learning
20 curve for me, first of all, to try to find out what the
21 districts were and what they were involved with. We had a
22 pretty active staff. We had a district engineer, in fact,
23 Jay Bitner, and he's still there. Rod DeBuhr is the water
24 department manager. Rod was hired shortly after I was.
25 They hired Dave Clabaugh shortly after myself. Dave also

1 was in the water department. He's the manager today at
2 Lower Big Blue at Beatrice. Rod is still with Upper Big
3 Blue managing at their water programs and so forth. I
4 could see right away that it was a job, it was a career that
5 was going to have a lot of variety to it. It was going to
6 have something new every day. And when you woke up in the
7 morning, you just didn't know for quite sure what you were
8 going to get into. Sometimes you went to work and John
9 says, we're going to work on this, we're going to work on
10 that. And John, after a couple of years, gave me a lot of
11 flexibility in the job. And I was in charge of developing a
12 newsletter, which I sold to the board. They really didn't
13 want to do that. And we went around and did a lot of work
14 promoting that newsletter.

15 I went to a lot of meetings early on, even solo by
16 myself once I kind of got figured out what things were,
17 trying to promote the water meters and the water education
18 and water conservation. At that time, there was a law
19 passed where -- I think it's still in effect that you can't
20 have water running from your irrigation system into the
21 road ditch and on down into other things. There was a lot
22 of interest in building reuse pits in those days. And so,
23 the district got heavily involved in cost share with farmers
24 on reuse pits. And there was just always something
25 different regarding water that was coming up. Jay Bitner

1 was heavily involved in design of the dams. We built
2 several smaller projects. And I would help promote those,
3 get out and talk to people, have public meetings. And
4 everything that we did, we tried to be very transparent
5 about it. We tried to meet with people and explain to them
6 what we were doing. We worked closely with the -- I
7 developed a relationship with -- especially the communities
8 of York, Seward, and Aurora, and developed a relationship --
9 a pretty close relationship, actually, with those folks.
10 And we would have a lot of meetings and, you know, invite
11 people to come and we'd go to the -- I spent a lot of time
12 going to the county fairs. We'd take a booth and go around.
13 Every summer, I went to all nine counties, (indiscernible)
14 nine counties. I did it every year I was there, just among
15 the many things that I was involved in. So, it was an
16 ongoing process of trying to promote and -- promote
17 conservation, water conservation, and how precious and
18 important water was to us in this state.

19 And we also, you know, we were very interested in
20 what happened with surface water as well as groundwater,
21 because we were trying to build these projects and so forth.
22 And the district had some pretty large ideas for
23 impoundments of water off-stream and on the tributaries that
24 had to do with Platte River. So, they were going to build
25 these larger reservoirs for irrigation, for recreation, for

1 wildlife purposes.

2 I remember we worked a lot with John VanDerwalker
3 from the Whooping Crane Trust way back in the early days to
4 try to get cooperation with those guys on some of these
5 projects. So, my opportunities were just limitless. I got
6 to travel. I got to go on these tours. Some of them were
7 out of state. We got involved with that.

8 The thing with Kansas, the lawsuit that we
9 eventually got into, I could see that brewing even back in
10 the early '80s that there was going to be a conflict there.
11 I don't know why I felt that, but I just felt like we were
12 going to end up somehow in a lawsuit, and we did,
13 eventually. It was very interesting to me. Because of the
14 irrigation development, how rapid it was going on, and
15 there was just a lot of interest and concern there. People
16 were very, just kind of upset in those days, that things
17 weren't quite -- I guess they were complicated. And you
18 tried to explain things to people about why you needed
19 certain laws for this and that. And, you know, everything
20 has got a story, but I just sensed there was a lot of
21 issues. There were issues on the Platte River, conflict
22 with the wildlife interest, conflict with a lot of folks.
23 And that built up, of course, until we had the hearings and
24 the lawsuits and stuff in the early '90s, early and mid-
25 '90s. So, very interesting time. But I was in on the very

1 formative years of those things to the point where I was
2 writing stories about things. I was working with the
3 newspapers. I worked with the radio and TV stations. I
4 worked with the chambers. Anything that had anything to
5 do with the projects and programs for the district, John
6 let me have my hands in that. And it was real interesting
7 to say the least.

8 MS. BLEED: So, what was the attitude of the
9 irrigators, the farmers, and others in the district in those
10 early years? Did they like the NRD? Were they a little bit
11 wary of -- what was their attitude toward the NRD?

12 MR. STAAB: I think there was both. I think there
13 was a -- I wouldn't call it a love/hate thing, for sure.
14 And "wary" is probably a good word. They were interested
15 in what we were doing. For sure, they knew that the
16 authority was -- lied a lot of it with the Board of
17 Directors and John, as the manager of that district out
18 there, and for groundwater control rules and regulations,
19 and, of course, the district kept trying to put meters on
20 and promote that. There was early talk of allocation, even,
21 in those days, you know, how they were going to do that,
22 you know, how much it was going to be. It wasn't a lot of
23 talk of allocation, but there certainly was some behind the
24 scenes.

25 I think the public, for the most part, respected

1 most of the programs and projects the NRD did. Especially,
2 they liked a lot of the dams and stuff, a lot of those kind
3 of projects, the reservoirs. And some of them, of course,
4 really appreciated we were trying to manage water the way
5 we were, but when we came up with the big ideas of building
6 dams and then we needed land rights, that set people off.
7 You know, that was a whole different thing. Then they
8 weren't exactly our friends in that respect. But, I think,
9 for the most part, we were pretty well received. It took a
10 long time to get water meters in that district. In fact, I
11 think that's just approved here in 2014, if I'm not
12 mistaken, finally, for the whole NRD down there. So, those
13 kind of things, they're big major efforts. They take a lot
14 of years to do, and that certainly is the case in Upper Big
15 Blue.

16 But those are a few of the memories I have the
17 district. I probably, as I think about it, would have more,
18 but, you know --

19 MS. BLEED: So, what was it like when you switched
20 districts?

21 MR. STAAB: Well, I went from one district that
22 was -- our primary focus was building smaller reservoirs,
23 and, of course, as I mentioned, trying to build the bigger
24 ones down there off the Platte, and pure groundwater
25 management up to Norfolk to the Lower Elkhorn, which the

1 main emphasis up there was flood control. And pure and
2 simple, you know, they were building dams. They had built
3 some dams and they were building flood levies. I got in on
4 the very beginning of that. And we ended up building
5 several flood levies for the smaller communities in our
6 district, as well as a couple of dams up there that are
7 pretty good sized. And as I'm looking at the end of 28
8 years here with my career at the Lower Elkhorn, my primary
9 focus has been on flood control and not so much irrigation
10 or groundwater development just until the last five years or
11 so. And especially the drought of 2012, (since) then, we've
12 started in to talking about and working with groundwater
13 management. And now it's become a very serious thing and
14 we've got a lot going on with that right now. So, there was
15 a big transition. And, of course, the transition for me
16 personally was to go from a kind of a department-type
17 person, where I was doing information education, with that
18 sort of background, into the job as general manager, which
19 I started on Labor Day of 1986, and I took over from Steve
20 Oltmans, who went on to the Papio-Missouri in Omaha. So,
21 for me, it was a big learning curve, working with the board
22 of directors, working with the staff, being in charge of all
23 that. And no matter what people say, the buck stops at the
24 manager's desk, at the boss's desk, whatever it is, all
25 those things. Even the smallest little detail, there are

1 decisions to be made that managers do. And I learned in a
2 hurry how that all works. I made some mistakes early on,
3 hopefully nothing real big, but certainly trying to work
4 with my board was a challenge early on, but I was able to do
5 that. And as the years have gone on, I think it's been very
6 good.

7 I've got a very good board of directors now, and
8 a very good staff, 24 full-time people, and we've grown that
9 staff, based a lot of it on the things that we need to do
10 for groundwater management. I have five people alone
11 working in the -- plus a data processing person, just in the
12 water section alone.

13 MS. BLEED: How many did you have when you first
14 went up there?

15 MR. STAAB: I had about -- I think there was nine
16 or ten. I've essentially doubled our staff. And the other
17 thing that we've done up there, Ann, over the years, is
18 build rural water systems out of necessity because of water
19 quality, and now because of water quantity, some things that
20 are going on. We've built -- we're on our third large rural
21 water system that we're planning now, so -- and we built
22 those from scratch, literally.

23 MS. BLEED: That's a big deal.

24 MR. STAAB: Yeah.

25 MS. BLEED: So, when you first went up there, you

1 were building flood control projects. I imagine other than
2 have to, I assume, take land for the project itself, people
3 were pretty appreciative of those projects, is that a fair
4 assessment?

5 MR. STAAB: Yeah, they were very appreciative of
6 it, especially the flood levies we built for the smaller
7 communities. And I can rattle those off. Scribner was the
8 first one. And then Howells, there was a terrible flood
9 event in the little village -- the city -- community of
10 Howells in the early '90s. A gentleman was killed in that
11 one, and I vividly remember. I was there the day after
12 that flood happened. And the Maple Creek came up and went
13 five or six feet right down the middle of Main Street for
14 quite a ways and did a lot of damage to that community. And
15 we were determined we were going to help protect that
16 community. And because the area is so flat and the flood
17 plain was so broad up there, there's not too many locations
18 for an actual dam on Maple Creek. You have to get off the
19 tributaries to do that. And that could be done, too, and,
20 of course, that has another whole history, the Maple Creek
21 project.

22 But we decided a levy would be the thing to do,
23 and we got involved with Congressman Bereuter who was there
24 at the time, helped us very much. I remember Jim Barr even
25 came to some of those meetings we had in the Howells

1 community. And we got the Army Corps of Engineers out right
2 away and got them involved. And we put that on a so-called
3 fast track and we ended up building. And within about two
4 to three years, a flood levy for the Village of Howells,
5 and it cost about a million and a half dollars. Today, of
6 course, you couldn't build it for that. But that was done
7 because of the flood event, the direct consequence of that
8 flood and that gentleman died in the flood. And I saw for
9 myself the damage that floods -- and it's just impacted my
10 mind so much. The day that I was down there, they were
11 scooping mud out of the stores, cleaning out the community
12 center. It had water four-foot high water line on the
13 buildings. I mean, it's just very vivid to me, the impact
14 and the power of flooding in Nebraska.

15 We went on to build flood control dikes in Pender,
16 Wakefield, Wisner. I think there are five or six of those
17 that we did just over the years. And so, yes, building
18 flood control was very important. It was appreciated by the
19 communities. But when you got off to -- on the tributaries
20 and you wanted to build a dam, that was another story in
21 itself, of course.

22 MS. BLEED: What were some of the other issues
23 that you were dealing with then?

24 MR. STAAB: Well, some of the other things that we
25 did, of course, those are the main things that we dealt with

1 was flood control, but we were also involved in groundwater
2 management, too. We were -- as soon as I got there in the
3 early '80s, actually back sometime in the
4 19- -- late 1970s or 1980, I believe, the district started
5 taking groundwater quality samples. And they also started
6 measuring wells, depth of the water in irrigation wells.
7 And they started building a system of this, very deliberate,
8 very calculated, very professional scientific method with
9 the Conservation Survey Division as our partner and helper
10 in this. We also, over the years, got US Geological Survey
11 involved in it, and we built a water monitoring system,
12 quality monitoring. Every year, we'd go out and gather
13 water quality samples. We're still doing that today to
14 build a database. And over time, as water quality degraded
15 in certain areas of that area, primarily nitrate problems,
16 although that area has iron and manganese issues, and that's
17 why some of the rural water systems have come on line.

18 So, that was going on. There was talk of the
19 rural water systems almost from the very first day I got
20 there. We built the big system over at Oakland. It's
21 called the Logan East System. It's spreads over three
22 counties, about 1,100 customers today. There are three
23 small communities involved in it, three big water tanks,
24 200,000-gallon tanks, three supply wells by Oakland, and
25 over 800 miles of pipeline buried underground.

1 MS. BLEED: Wow.

2 MR. STAAB: And we thought we'd be lucky if we
3 could just get 100 customers with that, and we grew that to
4 the size I just described. It's a huge system. We're real
5 proud of that. It's gone very well. These are managed, by
6 the way, with a very small staff. I only have three people
7 that manage that. It's a manager and a field technician and
8 a secretary/bookkeeper type person in the Oakland office.
9 But, we have an advisory committee, nine people on that
10 committee. And they take care of day-to-day business. They
11 meet every month and they report back then. The manager
12 comes and reports to our board of directors who makes any
13 final decisions and approves motions. And that's the way we
14 handle our rural water systems up there, and it's worked
15 very well for us. The funding for that, by the way, comes
16 from the USDA from Rural Development. It has from day one.
17 They've been easy to work with. Money's been available to
18 us. And once the project qualifies in terms
19 of economic analysis and so forth, it takes right off and
20 you can get with it and build them. But they're
21 multi-million dollar projects. The Logan East System is
22 about a \$13 million project into itself today.

23 MS. BLEED: Let me ask you this. If we didn't
24 have NRDs and local control, if it was done by the State the
25 way it is done in most states, would some of those projects

1 have been done?

2 MR. STAAB: I don't think so. I think it would be
3 very difficult to do some of these projects. I think you
4 could eventually get some things done, and it might happen,
5 but I think it would be more difficult to do without that
6 local impetus, the local interest in it. The board of
7 directors are very accessible. We're meeting once a month.
8 We can fast-track things. We can get them moving. We don't
9 have a lot of the other things that you would go through if
10 you did things on a statewide basis. And I'm not here to
11 put down statewide -- our statewide group either, because I
12 really like working with the Department of Natural
13 Resources. It used to be the Department of Water Resources
14 and Natural Resource Commission. Today it's DNR. And we
15 worked very, very well with those people over the years.
16 We've got funding for our projects, programs. I really like
17 working with those folks.

18 But I think, because of the -- just, for example,
19 the project I explained, the Howells project, we were able
20 to react to that very quickly and bring in other partners
21 and leverage these dollars out and we only had probably --
22 and that Howells project, we only probably have about
23 somewhere around 150- -- probably no more than 200,000
24 invested in a million-and-a-half-dollar project. Because we
25 were able to get cost share from the Corps of Engineers and

1 from DNR through the Natural Resource Commission to help us
2 with those things.

3 MS. BLEED: Yeah, although, presumably, you would
4 have gotten those if it had been the state, but I guess, you
5 wouldn't have -- what I think I hear you saying is you
6 wouldn't have been able to act so quickly and perhaps,
7 would buy-in be part of that, too?

8 MR. STAAB: I think so. I think the buy-in from
9 it and, quite frankly, just knowing -- people know people
10 on the boards, and they were able to promote that, discuss
11 it, whatever. We were able to have that kind of local input
12 as we went through the process. That was always -- that was
13 good; been very successful in my mind.

14 MS. BLEED: Yeah. Anything else you'd like to add
15 about those days?

16 MR. STAAB: Well, you know, I've got a lot of
17 great memories with those days, and certainly the 28 years
18 I've been there as manager have been interesting. I've
19 enjoyed it. To me, it was a job that I enjoyed doing. I
20 got up in the morning and went to work, and I like the
21 people I work with, like my staff, and I just -- you never
22 know, every day's a challenge and there's always something
23 coming up.

24 There's a lot of challenges coming to us in the
25 future with groundwater management as we went through a

1 terrible dry year in 2012. And we had trouble with some of
2 our acreages, and we tried to isolate areas and do better
3 management with that. And that's still -- well, we're
4 still working on that, and we'll see the impact of that for
5 several years, yet. That's just a start for what we're
6 trying to do up there. We're putting -- we've identified
7 dome areas within the district in Madison, Pierce, and
8 Wayne Counties now, that we call subareas by township. And
9 we put water meters on. We put 190 meters on this last
10 year. And we also set those folks up for allocation, which
11 is the first time. Who would have ever thought we'd have
12 meters and allocation in northeast Nebraska in an area where
13 you typically get anywhere from 23 to 30 inches of rainfall,
14 not a problem. But in a dry condition, you have that
15 happen. That's what's going on.

16 MS. BLEED: So, what would you say to other states
17 as we're going into this new challenge? Let me ask you two
18 questions. One is, what about the NRD system do you think
19 is going to make it better to meet these challenges than if
20 we had just the State as it is in most other states?

21 MR. STAAB: Well, I think the same thing will
22 hopefully prevail. We'll have a local component to it, a
23 strong local board of directors. We'll have professional
24 staff that react to this stuff. We're able to have another,
25 I guess, another group of people working on projects, you

1 know, and try to come in like Senator Kremer said and
2 identify those local problems and maintain local control.
3 And I think that the other states, of course, where it's
4 been difficult is -- for them is, we have taxing authority
5 with the use of property tax, and I'm sure that's been
6 explained in the interviews, but that is big for us,
7 because we're able to maintain budgets. We're able to do
8 projects and programs and keep those things moving because
9 of that money we can collect from local communities. But
10 you have to work hard at that. You have to work with the
11 communities. You have to explain things to them, what
12 you're doing and why. All the way from, for example, my
13 area, the city of Norfolk of approximately 30,000 people in
14 that area, down to the very small communities of less than
15 100 or so, I have 49 of those communities. You have to
16 continually work with those people and explain to them what
17 you're doing, why you're doing it. This is whatever. And
18 sometimes they don't always agree with you on these things,
19 but you got to keep working towards it. So, it's so
20 critical to maintain that presence where you're trying to
21 just continually work with people and get the word out to
22 folks, you know, and let them know who you are and what you
23 do.

24 MS. BLEED: And once they decide to fund it, are
25 they more likely to be behind the project?

1 MR. STAAB: And you're more likely to have a
2 chance if it's -- you know, once they decide to go and
3 you've got an opportunity. Those things don't go easy. I
4 mean, if you're building a dam, if you're building --
5 collecting money for groundwater management, all those
6 things have to be explained very well, I think, to the
7 public, give them a chance. Have to have hearings,
8 meetings, whatever it is, to let them react to that. And
9 we've had some very contentious hearings and meetings over
10 the years on this, just in the last few years. But, so
11 far, we've been able to move ahead with it, I think, in a
12 positive way.

13 So, for the other states, for them to try to do
14 this, repeat this system or duplicate our system, I don't
15 think would be easy, but I think it's doable. I believe
16 one other state right now, if I'm not mistaken, the State
17 of Oklahoma is seriously considering this on a watershed
18 basis. And I think that's really important. We didn't
19 talk about that, but having those -- essentially to me, it's
20 a no-boundary deal. Where we have political boundaries, we
21 just don't worry about that. We work across county lines.
22 We work across NRD lines and all that sort of thing.

23 Our rural water system at Logan East, 60 percent
24 of that system is in the Papio-Missouri NRD, which is based
25 out of Omaha. Those customers -- they don't even know that

1 they're over there. We don't worry about that. We provide
2 water, good potable water to folks. You know, everybody
3 deserves a good glass of water to drink. And that's our
4 message behind that.

5 MS. BLEED: So, did you have an inter-local
6 agreement, then, with Papio?

7 MR. STAAB: We have inter-local agreement with
8 Papio, yes. We had that from the very beginning. So -- and
9 they have a system, actually, a rural water system at
10 Pender, that most of it is in our NRD and they operate it,
11 and so we cross over lines.

12 MS. BLEED: That's neat.

13 MR. STAAB: The system that we just completed in
14 2011, it's a smaller system, with Wausau and Coleridge. We
15 get water from Coleridge and bring it to the little town of
16 Belden. It's only eight miles away, but that source is in
17 Lewis and Clark NRD, but Belden's in our district. We get a
18 source of water from Wausau and we provide it to rural
19 customers. And a couple small towns of Magnet and McLean,
20 there's only about 35 miles of line in this whole system,
21 but because of this effort, we were able to get money
22 through USDA to build a new water tower for the city of
23 Wausau, 100,000-gallon water tank that they never had
24 before just for fire protection alone. And they can use it
25 in case of emergency. We have an agreement with those guys.

1 So, that's why it's the Wau-Col System, Wausau-Coleridge.
2 It's been a really -- a fun project to work on. It's
3 frustrating at times, because of the land rights you need
4 for water lines are voluntary, voluntarily given. And so,
5 you got to cross in front of somebody's driveway sometime
6 that he may not like that, but we have to keep working with
7 them and make sure that it's for a good cause.

8 So, those are just a few highlights. I really
9 enjoy working with the rural water systems. I especially --
10 working to build projects. I've decided after all these
11 years that I like to build projects more than I do,
12 necessarily, the groundwater management, which is a
13 challenge, too.

14 MS. BLEED: Often regulatory.

15 MR. STAAB: But it's regulatory --

16 MS. BLEED: Right.

17 MR. STAAB: -- and it's going to be going on
18 forever. Let's face it. A project, at least you can see
19 the beginning and the end somehow along the way.

20 MS. BLEED: Stan, is there anything else you'd
21 like to add?

22 MR. STAAB: Well, I've really enjoyed the
23 interview and I hope people do learn a little bit more
24 about the districts and who we are and what we've done over
25 the years from this. It's a great opportunity to tell my

1 story, and I'm really excited about that. So, I really
2 thank you for giving me an opportunity.

3 MS. BLEED: Well, we thank you very much for
4 telling your story. And I really appreciate it.

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