

NRD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEWS:

DAYLE WILLIAMSON/GAYLE STARR
BY JIM BARR, April 1, 2013

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1 PROCEEDINGS, April 1, 2013:

2 MR. BARR: This is Jim Barr, introducing -- or
3 working on the NRD Oral History Project, going to interview
4 Dayle Williamson and Gayle Starr. It's April Fool's Day in
5 2013. We're located in Lincoln, Nebraska, for the
6 interview.

7 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, thanks, Jim.

8 As we were sitting here getting the recorder
9 going, we -- it was just a happenstance I thought that on
10 April the 1st, 1969, the NRD law passed. So, we're 44 years
11 into the NRD legislation. So, this is unreal.

12 Well, my task here today is sort of to tell some
13 of the very early history, how the idea came about. And as
14 I remember, I was working with the commission. I was the
15 assistant secretary, assistant executive secretary, along
16 with Warren Fairchild, who was the executive secretary. One
17 day, he said, "Dayle, we need to go out to the University.
18 Clayton Yeutter is going to give a talk. He was in the
19 Economics Department, and he's going to talk about districts
20 in California, and we ought to listen to that."

21 So, we went out there, and Clayton had a whole
22 presentation about the many, many overlaps of districts in
23 California. And it really excited Warren, because we had
24 that same overlap in the State of Nebraska.

25 As I came on board with the commission in 1958, my

1 job was to organize watershed conservancy districts as the
2 law had just passed. Watershed conservancy districts were
3 sub-districts of soil and water districts, although the
4 watershed conservancy districts had a taxing power and the
5 soil and water conservation districts did not. But the
6 watershed conservancy districts, even though they had a
7 taxing power, some of them were very, very small and their
8 levying authority just wouldn't pick up the amount of money
9 that was needed. And we were really pushing the federal
10 public law PL-566 watershed program at the time. And so, we
11 needed to find a funding mechanism. And so, that was the
12 initial thrust, to figure out how these watershed
13 conservancy districts and soil and water districts could
14 start to reorganize and get some money, get financial
15 assistance into the program.

16 And then, we moved on and, lo and behold, began
17 looking at drainage districts that hadn't been in operation
18 for some time, and just all kinds of different districts out
19 there. And we even looked at reclamation and irrigation
20 districts early on, because there was still a great overlap.
21 And those districts did have some authority to raise funds.

22 So, that was a major issue, and there was a lot of
23 overlap. And so, even though a lot of overlap existed in
24 California and I'm sure every state, Warren Fairchild
25 recognized the great overlap in Nebraska and said,

1 "Something has to be done."

2 MR. BARR: Well, actually, Dayle, what were some
3 of the early steps after you had the idea germinate?

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, some of the early steps,
5 our association of soil and water conservation district,
6 they were very active. We had a real good, strong board on
7 that. But we knew that they really liked the association,
8 and we knew that the districts really liked their own
9 operation, because some districts were better funded than
10 others and because a lot of them had their own projects
11 underway. Some of them had construction equipment. A lot
12 of them had grass drills. And so, that's how they made
13 their money and they liked it. Other districts weren't
14 nearly that active, but they had a nice social event each
15 year by having an annual meeting where they brought in the
16 people and presented them some pictures. And it was always
17 nice. We had a lot of fun going to those. So,
18 the big issue was, how do we approach the association of
19 soil and water conservation districts to help them get
20 behind some of the ideas to do this? And that was a
21 challenge. Warren Fairchild was a great salesman, I tell
22 you. Nearly every person on that board would, after a
23 while, when they thought about it, they started giving
24 support that we needed to have some type of reorganization.
25 And it was their job. We were divided into eight different

1 areas. It was their job, then, to begin working with the
2 districts in their area. And so, that was a challenge too.

3 Our state staff was mighty small. And so, we
4 couldn't work with all 87 districts, or 87 soil and water
5 districts. We were pretty busy still trying to organize
6 watershed conservancy districts. I can't remember when the
7 last one was organized.

8 MR. BARR: When did they start thinking about
9 legislation to formalize this consolidation into the Natural
10 Resource Districts?

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. As I recall, it probably
12 took about a year after we heard Clayton talk about that,
13 because, luckily, we didn't go out the very next day and say
14 this is what had to be done, because we knew there was a big
15 selling job there because anytime you're going to change
16 boundary lines and do different organization. So, a lot of
17 the effort was done through the association and through
18 their annual meetings.

19 As far as our commission itself, some of the same
20 people were on both organizations, and I can't ever recall
21 the commission, having any major problems with it. They
22 gave the staff the go-ahead to do that, and it was mainly
23 the association that we worked through, as I recall.

24 MR. BARR: Would you -- What year do you think
25 this kind of got started? We can look it up.

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. I would say in, oh,
2 probably '66 or '65. Yeah. Yeah.

3 MR. BARR: Do you have some idea?

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: I bet '65. Yeah.

5 MR. BARR: Okay.

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: 'Cause it took quite a while.
7 There was --

8 MR. BARR: Do you remember when LB1357 was
9 introduced?

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Oh, it was introduced in '69.

11 MR. BARR: Okay.

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: It was introduced in '69.

13 MR. BARR: So, what kind of activity happened
14 between '65 and '69 that kind of laid the groundwork for the
15 legislation?

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yes. There was a lot of
17 activity, because that was the major discussion at the
18 annual -- always at the annual meeting of the soil and water
19 districts. And that was always a big annual meeting, and it
20 was well attended. Nearly every district would have
21 representatives there, and some would have several. So,
22 when you had 87 districts and other affiliated
23 organizations, it was a good-sized meeting. And that was
24 the major issue for a couple of years. And I can't
25 remember, I suppose it was in the '68 meeting when we had

1 the final thrust, where it was really close. And we had a
2 gentlemen from DC that had helped organize the -- a lawyer
3 that had helped write the old soil -- the conservations
4 district law. Phil Glick, a lawyer from DC, was here and he
5 helped sell the idea.

6 MR. BARR: What kind of opposition did you find?

7 MR. WILLIAMSON: There was always a certain amount
8 of opposition, and a great deal of the opposition came from
9 the Soil Conservation Service(SCS). The chief employee from
10 the SCS was a conservation district work unit
11 conservationist, and was in charge of a county district.
12 Some, were in charge of two counties. They could really
13 run their programs really well with their five-member board.
14 And so, they were worried that their program may not be
15 carried on if it was expanded.

16 So, we could get along good with district
17 supervisors when we got them all in a big bunch. We always
18 had area meetings. And they'd go home pretty enthused, and
19 a few weeks later, they'd come back a lot less enthused.
20 And I would say, "When was the last time you talked to your
21 work unit conservationists?" And, in fact, they'd even
22 admit that he'd asked them to come in.

23 And the state conservationist was really pushing,
24 too, on that, because he didn't think this was a very good
25 idea. After all, it's been working this way. Why change?

1 And people resist change.

2 MR. BARR: Yeah.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: And so then, some of the
4 districts got a lot more active. It was very
5 interesting. Southeast Nebraska, they were some of the
6 early districts in the early group that didn't want
7 districts in the first place, and it turned out they were
8 such an active area, doing all kinds of good things. But,
9 again, they resisted going into a bigger area, and they had
10 all kinds of watersheds and everything. But it was just
11 something.

12 MR. BARR: Who were some of the early supporters
13 of the NRD idea?

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: We had very stalwart supporters.
15 The people I can think of, Milton Fricke from the Papio
16 District, he always hung in there. Warren Patefield from up
17 in the Laurel vicinity, he was on the association board. He
18 always --

19 MR. STARR: Warren Patefield.

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: Oh, Warren Patefield, yeah.
21 Excuse me. Warren Patefield. I'm glad that was corrected.
22 And he was always there. We had Wes Herpoldshimer from out
23 in the Kimball area. He always seemed to be supportive.
24 They were a little bit leery in that area. Wes was a
25 contractor. He did a lot of work. And a farmer, and he

1 could see those expanding. Oh, we had a number of people
2 that were always very supportive early on that I remember.
3 Yeah.

4 MR. BARR: Gayle, would you like to add some
5 things here and give Dayle a little rest?

6 MR. STARR: Sure. Well, my earliest
7 recollections, Jim, don't go back as far as Dayle's. Mine
8 came a little bit later. I started with what was then
9 called the Soil and Water Conservation Commission in 1965, I
10 believe it was. And I was part of the state water planning
11 group that was another one of Warren Fairchild's ideas he
12 developed. And one of the first things that we were
13 involved in was some recommendations about water resources
14 in Nebraska. And one of them resulted in a publication
15 called, I think, *Modernization of Multi-purpose Districts*.

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

17 MR. STARR: That was a different name than natural
18 resource districts, multi-purpose districts. And that
19 outlined a number of ways in which districts could be
20 consolidated, the types of districts that did exist, what
21 their authorities were, and so forth. So, that considered a
22 number of types of districts that were not eventually
23 involved in the consolidation, like irrigation districts,
24 drainage districts, for various pretty valid reasons they
25 weren't included. And somewhat involved in that, 'cause I

1 always attended the commission meetings, and somewhat
2 involved in some of the earlier things.

3 The primary introducer of LB1357 was Senator
4 Maurice Kremer from Aurora. There were other names on the
5 bill, but he was the primary introducer. And after the bill
6 got introduced, there was certainly considerable discussion,
7 opposition, questions raised, et cetera. And while Maurice
8 was a real leader in natural resources, he was, how to say
9 this? He was not a strong individual in terms of really
10 pushing things hard in the legislature. And he had some
11 concerns about, you know, can this really happen? And I
12 recall him coming to a one of our commission meetings and
13 saying, "Tell me what to do. If you vote that I should go
14 ahead with this, I will go ahead with this. If not, I will
15 drop it." And the commission voted by a pretty narrow vote,
16 I think it was, like, four to three or five to four, to go
17 ahead with it. And Senator Kremer said, "Fine, I'm with
18 you. I'm going ahead with it."

19 Well, I think had we had some different legal
20 advice at the time, in accord with the commission's
21 statutes, that probably was not a passing vote. 'Cause I
22 think it required a majority of the commission, not just a
23 majority of those that were there. And so, that probably
24 would have been a failing vote if Mike Fischer, or Jim Cook,
25 or Lee Orton had not been there to advise. So, that's one

1 of my early recollections.

2 And then, we went into the, you know, it finally
3 has been mentioned, it passed on April 1, 1969, and then we
4 went into starting with implementation. But as time went
5 on, there were a number of amendments proposed, some
6 adopted, some not adopted.

7 One of the significant earlier things was to draw
8 up the boundaries of the districts. And there were a number
9 of iterations and, finally, one that the commission finally
10 said, "Okay, this has worked," was, I believe, 33 districts.
11 And for whatever reason, the legislature said something,
12 like, "That's not right, and if you can't do the job, we'll
13 do it." So, I think they went out and held a hearing, a
14 committee of the legislature, probably the Natural Resources
15 Committee, held a hearing in all 33 districts and come back
16 and essentially said, "We can't do it either. Try it
17 again." And so, that's why they came up with the 24
18 districts, and there were some other compromises in there in
19 terms of some of the specific districts that happened that
20 eventually led to the adoption of the 24 districts.

21 But there were a lot of other things that had to
22 be done. There were the establishment of what was called an
23 interim board, which was all of the existing ones plus there
24 were added some municipal representatives. And I think
25 every community of maybe 800 or 1000 or something like that

1 got one representative appointed by the mayor, and so forth.
2 So, there were some boards, the Nemaha, for example, that
3 was enormous. I think 150 or something like that.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: A hundred and fifty-four, I
5 think.

6 MR. STARR: Something like that. A huge board.
7 But -- And which, you know, is a convention. It's not a
8 board. And so, some of them selected an executive committee
9 to do the work for them, and we went out and had meetings
10 with all of the districts around the state. And there were
11 some of them that were pretty hot. They were pretty hot in
12 the areas where there was significant opposition. I hate to
13 pick on the Nemaha, but the Nemaha was where there was the
14 most opposition. But there was other opposition, no doubt.
15 And, some of it, was very valid. And then, some of it, at
16 least in my opinion, was not very valid.

17 So, we moved on from then to July 1 of 1972, when
18 the districts came into effect. And we, frankly, had some
19 concerns that some of the districts wouldn't do anything.
20 They just wouldn't do anything. But they all did. They all
21 went ahead and selected an executive committee, determined
22 how many board members they were going to have.
23 Consolidated the resources of all the existing districts,
24 which was a difficult thing because some districts had a
25 significant amount of assets, road graders, bulldozers,

1 grass seeders, whatever, and some districts had virtually
2 nothing. And so, it was, kind of whether the rich can get
3 along with the poor. But, fortunately, that
4 all took some time. Some of those assets in some of the
5 districts weren't actually consolidated for several years
6 after the original organization.

7 And districts moved on then and most hired a
8 manager. Some had a manager of a preceding district who
9 kind of moved into it. Others hired people that had no
10 experience at all. And I think, for the most part, a pretty
11 good bunch of managers, some of which are still there as the
12 managers. Two or three, I believe, are still there.

13 MR. BARR: You want to add anything for that
14 period, Dayle? One question would be, what were some of the
15 special purpose districts that did not -- that were -- ended
16 up not being included in the natural resource districts that
17 there had been some discussion of including?

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, we had quite a discussion,
19 'cause -- about irrigation districts and reclamation
20 districts. And there was tremendous objection to that. And
21 so, those were not included. The Farmer's Home
22 Administration, we were putting in a lot of rural water
23 districts at that time. Farmer's Home was making loans to
24 them, and they really liked their rural water districts, and
25 they really objected to the natural resource district. And

1 so, there was a compromise there. Those existing districts,
2 as I recall, did not go in, but there weren't to be any
3 future rural water districts, other than those that would
4 come under the leadership of a natural resources district.
5 So, that was one thing.

6 The drainage district thing was really interesting
7 because drainage districts started soon after Nebraska
8 became a state. And drainage district law was always on the
9 books, and some drainage districts were in existence but you
10 couldn't find any records or anything. And so, drainage
11 districts were encompassed in that, too, but not taking up
12 the old drainage districts that had a lot of legal problems,
13 so to speak, and a lot of financial problems, but when
14 drainage issues came along in the future. So, that was a
15 lot of the discussion.

16 Just finding some of those districts, you know, we
17 were very familiar at the state level with the soil and
18 water districts and the watershed conservancy districts.
19 So, those are the ones we had worked for. And under the
20 state water planning effort, we became quite familiar with
21 the reclamation and irrigation districts so I know Warren
22 Fairchild would have liked to have seen them involved in
23 that too. But that was going a little beyond what our
24 multi-purpose districts were doing.

25 MR. BARR: What kind of political machinations

1 were involved in taking it from introduction to passage? Do
2 you have any recollections, either of you?

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, yes. And naturally, people
4 against it would talk to their senators, which they should.
5 That's 'cause they're the ones that did the voting. And so,
6 we definitely had senators against it. And you always
7 wonder about the people for it, how vocal they would be.
8 Maybe they weren't quite as vocal as the people against it
9 sometimes. That's often the way it goes.

10 And in the interview today, Gayle has mentioned Senator
11 Kremer and what a great person he was. People would beat on
12 him really hard, since he was the lead person, and I recall
13 him coming to our office on more than one occasion and
14 saying, "I think we just need to give up. We just can't
15 make it 'cause we're really getting a lot of heat down
16 here."

17 And maybe I have to give a lot of credit, maybe,
18 to Warren Patefield up there. His senator was Jules
19 Burbach. Jules Burbach would hear that Senator
20 Kremer, and they were good friends, the Senator would be at
21 our office thinking about quitting and then Jules would be
22 right up there and say, "Oh, we can't quit now." And then,
23 he'd go find Senator Kremer.

24 Our offices were really close. We were in the
25 Capitol, and they were just down the hall from us. So, we

1 had a lot of meetings and people would sit around and say,
2 "Oh, we'll do this. Let's change this a little bit. Let's
3 go."

4 And so, Senator Burbach was quite active in that.
5 And it got involved in politics a lot because Senator
6 Burbach wanted to be governor then, too. And so, he was
7 running in the primary against a person name J. James Exon.
8 And Burbach was for the NRDs. J. James Exon sided in with
9 our heavy outside components, Mr. Gove and Mr. Matulka. And
10 so, it was a very interesting primary, and Jim Exon won the
11 primary, of course, and later got elected governor. And so,
12 we had a governor against the NRDs when they were coming in.
13 But, it wasn't long that he found a way to support the NRDs.

14 MR. BARR: Speaking of the governor's office, was
15 the previous governor's office involved any in this process?

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: The previous governor's office
17 was highly involved in the process because I had mentioned
18 Clayton Yeutter, and Clayton, at the time we were going
19 through this, was the governor's administrative assistant.
20 Our governor at the time we were going through this was
21 Norbert Tiemann. And since he was the father of the sales
22 tax and the income tax, he was the father of the NRDs too.
23 I mean, he pushed NRDs pretty hard because it didn't take
24 Nobby Tiemann very long to pick up an idea and run with it.
25 So, he was a strong supporter. We knew that he'd support

1 MR. BARR: Anyhow, we got to the governor's office
2 and he was just saying, "Well, I just finished a meeting
3 with one stubborn Dutchman, and now I've got one," with Doug
4 Bereuter. And you and Warren Fairchild were there and Doug
5 and I were there. I don't know what we ever resolved out of
6 that meeting, but I'll let Gayle comment on that.

7 MR. STARR: I won't comment a lot on the meeting,
8 but I do remember one thing that the governor said. He
9 said, "When I got elected governor," he said, "I assumed,
10 you know, that there was one state government, and I soon
11 came to understand that there are really three state
12 governments. There's the Department of Roads, there's the
13 University of Nebraska, and there's the rest of us."

14 I might comment, Dayle was talking about earlier
15 the districts that were not included in the consolidation
16 but were prevented from forming new ones, in other words,
17 the rural water districts and the drainage districts, and
18 that any new ones had to be sponsored by the NRDs. The
19 NRDs, at least a half a dozen of them, have sponsored rural
20 water supply areas, mostly around the eastern part of the
21 state, to where both water quality and water supply are an
22 issue. And some of those are fairly large and cover a
23 fairly big area. So, that's been an impact that they've
24 had.

25 And then, there have been, I think, a couple of

1 drainage districts have, in fact, merged with NRDs. Have
2 allowed them to be taken over. As was commented earlier,
3 some of the drainage districts were not very active to say
4 the least. And I remember a lot of those drainage districts
5 were either along the Missouri River or along the Lower
6 Platte River in the Dodge/Saunders County area, and so
7 forth. And I remember one telephone call I made to the
8 county clerk in Dodge County about a specific drainage
9 district because the counties were supposed to have records
10 because they collected the taxes that were levied on the
11 various landowners and so forth and they would have those
12 records. And so, I asked her about a drainage district,
13 whatever the name was that I don't remember. And she looked
14 at her records and said, "Well, yeah, that drainage district
15 exists," you know. And I said, "Well, who could we contact
16 to find out about this drainage district?" And she looked
17 and found the record and read off the names of four or five
18 people, the directors, and she made a pause and said, "You
19 know," she said, "I think all those people are dead." And
20 so, I said, "You mean there's really no drainage district
21 there?" And she said, "Well, probably not." She said,
22 "I'll take it up with the county board." And what happened,
23 I don't know, but I assume it was probably dissolved for
24 lack of interest. So, that was an interesting thing that
25 happened along the way.

1 And I would just echo what Dayle just said about
2 Senator Kremer. He was a fine gentleman and it may not have
3 happened had he not been in there to do that. But he was a
4 very fine gentleman.

5 And, also, about the election, the primary
6 election for governor was between Burbach and Exon. There
7 were some that said, and I have no idea if this was, in
8 fact, correct or not, but some said that had the NRDs not
9 been happening at that time, that a different person would
10 have been elected as the Democratic candidate for governor.
11 And who knows? We'll never know.

12 MR. BARR: In a related area on groundwater,
13 there were some groundwater conservation districts?-

14 MR. STARR: There were. There were.

15 MR. BARR: How did that get to be resolved?

16 MR. STARR: Mostly in the Blue basin and mostly on
17 a county basis. York, Clay, Fillmore, I think, all had
18 groundwater districts, and their financing mainly came, I
19 believe, through the county boards, the county board of
20 commissioners in each county. And they had an association,
21 I guess you would call it, an individual who was their
22 director headquartered in York, I believe, who did some
23 things and those districts had really no authority, if I
24 recall. They could collect information, groundwater
25 measurements, quality, and groundwater levels, and that type

1 of thing. And there was some conflict, I guess, there that
2 they didn't want to be included and were not included for
3 whatever reason. And eventually, particularly the Upper Big
4 Blue NRD in York and the groundwater association became very
5 closely involved with each other. They work together, as
6 far as I know, very well. And the groundwater districts,
7 for the most part, I think they all just dissolved at some
8 point, and I don't know if that was by their own county
9 commissioners or by state legislature. I don't know.

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: I think so.

11 MR. BARR: I can't remember either. I can't
12 remember if it was a formal thing or not. We can ask John
13 Turnbull probably some time.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, I'm glad we picked up the
15 idea of groundwater districts, 'cause that was so important.
16 And as I recall, the groundwater district association was
17 something that the university pushed a lot. And Deon
18 Axthelm was highly involved with the groundwater districts.
19 Although he always supported the idea of natural resource
20 districts, he was a little bit like the Soil Conservation
21 Service, he didn't want us to fiddle around too much with
22 his groundwater districts.

23 And the groundwater districts at that time, like
24 Gayle had said, really only had the responsibility to do
25 measurements, you know, water level measurements. But it

1 was a good start. So, at least, we got an early record.
2 And I'm sure the Conservation and Survey Division was highly
3 involved in that because the director of that division was a
4 member of our commission. So, he was highly involved with
5 the groundwater districts and provided a lot of advice too.
6 But as I recall, a gentleman in Ag Engineering, Deon
7 Axthelm, really pushed the groundwater districts.

8 MR. BARR: Could you just describe the makeup of
9 the Soil and Water Conservation Commission at that period of
10 time, in terms of the numbers and just the -- who they
11 represented and that sort of thing?

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. I think Gayle mentioned
13 before. I don't remember the numbers too well. But we did
14 have several people from the original law as part of the
15 university on -- the Director of Extension, the Director of
16 Conservation and Survey, and Dean of the College of
17 Agriculture. We had three. And as we came through the law
18 in additional detail, why that was sort of a conflict of
19 interest. So, those people no longer stayed on the
20 commission as the NRDs progressed.

21 MR. STARR: DWR Director too.

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: Pardon me?

23 MR. STARR: DWR Director too.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Dan Jones
25 was our DWR Director. And Dan was always pretty positive on

1 things. You could see another agency probably fighting it.
2 I never remember Dan fighting it. His responsibility was to
3 the irrigation districts and the reclamation districts.
4 Those were the big districts he worked with, and I'm sure he
5 got a lot of flak when Warren Fairchild started talking
6 about taking those in. But Dan was always such a gentleman
7 and another gentleman who worked with him, Marion Ball, they
8 were like Senator Kremer. They just wanted to work things
9 out and compromise and work together. And it was always
10 pleasant. No matter that we had a lot of discussion. Why
11 no one was ever really mad at one another. Well, we were
12 always mad at a couple of guys, but that was all right. And
13 they weren't in government.

14 MR. BARR: Anything else?

15 MR. STARR: I would just add a little bit about
16 the makeup of the commission. The commission, and the other
17 members of the commission were selected through the state
18 association of soil and water conservation districts by
19 areas throughout the state. And I don't know if there were
20 six of them or seven. Something like that. And then, there
21 was one member elected, the watershed districts had an
22 association, and they elected one member. Bob Bell from
23 Bellwood was that member.

24 In terms of opposition, I don't know if this was -
25 for sure, but we understood that the USDA agricultural type

1 agencies, what's now the FSA and Farmer's Home
2 Administration, certainly SCS, and I think the SCS was
3 probably the leader in this, we understood that they met on
4 a regular basis with the main topic on their agenda being
5 how do we defeat NRDs. Now, we never attended those
6 meetings, obviously, so we don't know for sure, but that was
7 our understanding. And we did get a lot of opposition when
8 we went out to these interim board meetings. As many of
9 the questions that we got asked came from the NRCS, then
10 SCS, now NRCS employees, than it did from the directors.

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: It's great to have a joint
12 interview here, as Gayle brought up Bob Bell. Telling the
13 story after the NRD law passed, Warren Fairchild decided
14 that he had a good opportunity to go work as an assistant
15 commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation in Washington,
16 D.C. And so, the commission decided, well, that I'd been
17 the assistant for a long time, so that was my job to head
18 the implementation effort. And Warren said, well, he'd
19 maybe burned some bridges and so on, and he had this good
20 opportunity. And I'll never forget, and Gayle probably
21 remembers this too, that when Warren was leaving, Bob Bell
22 always thought about things deeply, and he said to the whole
23 group one day, "Well, Warren could buzz up more wood than
24 the rest of you guys could ever cut up." And for posterity,
25 you know, buzz, we used to use buzz saws to cut wood. We

1 didn't have chain saws. We'd put a whole log we could lift
2 on a buzz saw run by a tractor and, man, would we ever cut
3 wood. So, Warren was running the buzz saw, and the rest of
4 us couldn't split it all up.

5 MR. STARR: I remember that real clearly.

6 MR. BARR: One of my recollections of Warren, in
7 particular, was his philosophy on meetings. Basically, if
8 he thought the meeting would take about an hour to wear down
9 his opposition, he'd schedule it for eleven or four o'clock
10 in the afternoon. If he thought it was a really big one and
11 it was going to take all day, it would be an all day
12 meeting. But, basically, within the last 15 or 20 minutes
13 of whatever time he had allotted, he would figure out a way
14 to bring it to a conclusion in his general direction.

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: A great guy.

16 MR. BARR: Anything else at this point?

17 MR. STARR: Along that same line, our commission
18 meetings were often, like, at nine or ten o'clock in the
19 morning. And if we weren't through by noon, drawing to this
20 conclusion, Warren would say, "Well, why don't we just pick
21 up and go over to the Cornhusker and have lunch and finish
22 this up?" which he knew would mean it finished up very
23 quickly. And under the open meetings law, was probably
24 totally illegal.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: That was probably before open

1 meetings law.

2 MR. BARR: Oh, yes, it was.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

4 MR. STARR: Undoubtedly, it was.

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: 'Cause when the open meetings law
6 came in, why we felt pretty comfortable on the commission
7 because our legal staff really kept us in line. So, I have
8 to give them a lot of credit. I think we were probably one
9 of the state agencies that -- in the commission, that
10 followed the open meeting law very, very closely from an
11 early start.

12 And I'd forgotten the original vote that Gayle
13 mentioned a while back on that, but that was probably right.
14 We didn't have a majority of the commission there.

15 MR. STARR: Yeah.

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. But that's how all that
17 got started. And so, here we are, 44 years from the date.

18 MR. BARR: That's -- That is pretty interesting.

19 MR. STARR: And that brings up a point about the
20 vote for Maurice Kremer on that issue. At that time, we
21 always had a concern every commission meeting about whether
22 we were going to get a quorum to have the meeting. And
23 Warren would always have the secretaries call around for a
24 quorum. Well, the three university employees were not the
25 most regular attenders and some of the other members. We

1 always had a problem getting a quorum, but we usually
2 managed that. But after the law changed and everything, we
3 never had a problem with a quorum after that. Sometimes, it
4 was even unanimous. And I might mention Vince Dreezen, who
5 Dayle mentioned was the Director of the Conservation and
6 Survey Division, was a supporter. I think he was one of the
7 most for Senator Kremer to go ahead. But he had a lot of
8 concerns.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: Uh-huh.

10 MR. STARR: Particularly with the groundwater
11 districts and some other issues that he had. Vince and I
12 were real good friends for several reasons. And at one
13 point some time later, maybe 10 years after the NRDs were
14 formed, he told me, he said, "You know," he said, "I was
15 always concerned about the NRDs, was not a full supporter,
16 although I did say I supported it, but I was not a strong
17 supporter." But he said, "You know," he said, "the one
18 concern that I still have is that the districts were big
19 enough." He said, "And that's," he said, "the ones that
20 exist now," he said, "they still should be bigger than they
21 are," in his opinion.

22 MR. BARR: Well, thank you.