

INTERVIEW WITH RON WUNIBALD  
BY GAYLE STARR

July 26, 2013

1 PROCEEDINGS, July 26, 2013:

2 MR. STARR: This is an interview with Ron  
3 Wunibald, former manager of the Lower Republican Natural  
4 Resources District and currently working for the Nebraska  
5 Department of Environmental Quality. This interview is  
6 being conducted for the Nebraska Natural Resources District  
7 Oral History Interview Project. The interviewer is Gayle  
8 Starr. The interview is being conducted on July 26<sup>th</sup> at Mr.  
9 Wunibald's office in Holdrege, Nebraska.

10 So, first of all, thanks for doing this, Ron.  
11 Appreciate you taking the time. Why don't you give me a  
12 little idea of your background and what you've been up to in  
13 your life?

14 MR. WUNIBALD: Okay. Be happy to do that, Gayle.  
15 Thanks for the opportunity to do this.

16 My background is that I grew up on a dairy farm  
17 south of Lincoln, Nebraska, just north of Hickman, Nebraska.  
18 And from the dairy farm, then, I graduated from Norris  
19 Public Schools and, after I graduated from Norris Schools, I  
20 went to school for a year at Nebraska Wesleyan University  
21 and then spent three years in the Army and one year in  
22 Vietnam.

23 So then, after that, I basically went back to  
24 school again, but I went to the University of Nebraska and  
25 majored in natural resources, which was a new major at that

1 point in time for the University. And started into  
2 forestry, and my counselor, who was a forester, encouraged  
3 me to maybe consider something else.

4 And at that time, we had a class as a senior where  
5 you would -- different people could come and present  
6 different occupations that they had available in that field  
7 that we were studying in. And a person named Dwayne  
8 Chamberlain made a presentation to that class and I thought,  
9 "You know, maybe that's something I'd like to do." And they  
10 were, at that point, looking for managers, the NRDs. This  
11 was in early fall of 1972. NRDs were just recently formed  
12 and they were looking for managers. I was looking for a  
13 job. And so, that's what I did. I interviewed for a couple  
14 of different NRD positions, and interviewed for the one in  
15 Alma, Nebraska, for the Lower Republican Natural Resources  
16 District and began to work the first of January, 1973, for  
17 the Lower Republican NRD as a manager of that NRD. And  
18 then, I served at that capacity until February -- well, I  
19 take that back -- August of 1973 -- 1998. So, at that point  
20 in time, I went to work at -- with the Department of  
21 Natural -- or Environmental Quality, and I'm still working  
22 with them and soon to have spent 15 years with them this  
23 next month. So --

24 MR. STARR: When you first went to work for the  
25 NRD -- the Lower Republican NRD down in Alma, what was your

1 first impression of the job? What was your reaction of what  
2 the role was?

3 MR. WUNIBALD: I was impressed when I found  
4 out -- actually, when I interviewed, I probably didn't have  
5 a clue what I was getting into. I was right out of college  
6 and moving into a manager's position. My staff consisted of  
7 one person, the -- a secretary, the administrative  
8 secretary. Thank goodness that she'd been around with the  
9 soil and water conservation districts for a while, so she  
10 pretty well helped me manage the NRD for the first, at  
11 least, couple of years. Actually, she did while she was my  
12 administrative secretary.

13 The NRDs at that time -- my board consisted of  
14 over 37 directors. And that was overwhelming. I never got  
15 to meet all of my directors because they not -- they never  
16 came -- some of them didn't come to a board meeting while I  
17 was the manager. Maybe I had something to do with that, I  
18 don't know. But I got to meet most of them, and that, yeah,  
19 that was a pretty overwhelming thing. I thought, probably,  
20 at that point in time I could handle anything, and I made  
21 mistakes and found things out. And, thank goodness, I had  
22 some other managers in the state who were able to help me  
23 out, people like Ron Bishop. Ron would -- I'd call him and  
24 I'd say, "Okay, we've got this going on. What do I need to  
25 do?" or, "What do you think?" and --

1                   But you pretty much had a list of responsibilities  
2 by the State of Nebraska. Most of those responsibilities  
3 probably were not being addressed much or at all by the  
4 district that I was involved with. These were not things  
5 that these directors had had any experience working with.  
6 So, when you get involved in some of those areas, especially  
7 recreation kinds of things, that was kind of a "we don't  
8 have time for that" type of thing. But -- So, my challenge  
9 was, I guess, was taking a look at those responsibilities,  
10 trying to address those things and to try to come up with  
11 programs that our NRD could answer to all of our  
12 constituency that, you know, we have your interest in heart  
13 too. I mean, we believe these responsibilities are things  
14 that will benefit you. So we, you know, we really got  
15 involved in some things that -- and we all stumbled through  
16 some of those things as we tried to figure out, you know,  
17 just what our roles were in those areas and how do we go  
18 about addressing them.

19                   Shortly after I started, within about a year after  
20 I started, we were told that we were going to have political  
21 subdivisions for voting purposes. We had to go through the  
22 general election process. So, that was a challenge that I  
23 remember going through and trying to determine, you know,  
24 how we would divide our district up so that we would come up  
25 with ways for us to address the law the way it was set up

1 and come up with elected directors that would represent in  
2 our entire NRD. And spent quite a bit of time doing that  
3 early on. And that was interesting. But --

4 MR. STARR: Was it a real challenge for those  
5 directors moving from their previous jobs with the soil and  
6 water conservation districts and the like into a whole lot  
7 more authority and a whole lot more responsibility?

8 MR. WUNIBALD: I think it was, Gayle. You know,  
9 and I don't -- some of them, I'm not sure they ever got it.  
10 But I don't know that they realized the tremendous amount of  
11 authority given to NRDs by the legislature. It's pretty  
12 open and pretty wide open, if you really want to pursue  
13 things. And, no, they -- I'm sure they didn't understand  
14 all those things.

15 They didn't have those kinds of authorities in the  
16 soil and water conservation district set ups, and  
17 we -- obviously, with the soil and water conservation set  
18 up, it was a county by county basis. A big challenge was,  
19 is to take people from multiple counties, some of which  
20 didn't really care so much for the adjoining county, and  
21 then transfer their assets to the natural resources  
22 district, and you're working with money as a whole, and not  
23 everybody's individual little pot that they had set -- you  
24 know, set up through different programs that they might  
25 administer.

1                   We had some NR- -- We had some soil and water  
2                   conservation districts that were actually pretty aggressive  
3                   in making money for that district. And they did that by  
4                   having terracing equipment, they did that through tree  
5                   planting, they did that through grass seeding and sales.  
6                   And a lot of those same kinds of things were carried over  
7                   and some weren't, but the transition of those kinds of  
8                   things into what we were doing. And, now, my, it's  
9                   way -- they -- a lot of them still do that. Probably most  
10                  of them still do some of those things with the tree  
11                  planting, grass seeding, and stuff, but they've gone way  
12                  more into more administrative kinds of things with natural  
13                  resources and making real tough important, but tough,  
14                  decisions for the state of Nebraska.

15                 MR. STARR: Did -- When you were with the Lower  
16                 Republican through '98, did the Kansas-Nebraska water issues  
17                 come up while you were there or has that been since you were  
18                 there?

19                 MR. WUNIBALD: No, it certainly came up before I  
20                 left in 1998. We had many discussions over those issues and  
21                 that specific issue. And I had the opportunity as a manager  
22                 to attend some of the Compact, the annual Compact meetings  
23                 that they had, those Department of Water Resources and  
24                 Department of Natural Resources now. And tried to relay  
25                 some of that information back to the board so they could

1 make informed decisions. It was pretty obvious to me, and I  
2 think probably most of the managers in the basin, if not all  
3 of them, that Kansas seemed very serious about trying to get  
4 their fair share of the water through the Compact. And that  
5 they were absolutely convinced that groundwater was part of  
6 the deal. Part of the Compact deal, even though it wasn't  
7 written in the Compact, as such, but it was part of the  
8 deal. And that, I knew and the other managers knew, would  
9 have a significant potential impact on the irrigators of our  
10 NRD.

11 MR. STARR: Was there much discussion among your  
12 board about the need to have the NRD involved in any  
13 regulation of irrigators or water use of any kind?

14 MR. WUNIBALD: There was some at that time. Yes,  
15 we had some discussions. Because, obviously, what -- we had  
16 a director on our board, and his name was Terry Wolan  
17 (phonetic), and he actually was part of a task force from  
18 the state of Nebraska and represented irrigators to try to,  
19 I think the goal was to try and negotiate a little bit with  
20 the state of Kansas over the Republican River Compact  
21 things.

22 And with that in -- with that representative in  
23 some of the meetings I would go to, you know, we would  
24 discuss with our board some potential things that were  
25 coming down the road. Things like alluvial well



1 restrictions. And then, how we would handle, you know,  
2 would we -- if we set up restrictions, would we set it up  
3 just for the alluvial-well people, the closest ones to the  
4 Republican River? And, again, that was pretty seriously  
5 being discussed at that point. Or would we go beyond that  
6 and would we impact all the people within the area or within  
7 our NRD? And we had quite a few discussions over that.

8 We had discussions over, are we really  
9 fully-appropriated, whatever that meant. We had quite a  
10 limited amount, we felt, of state information available to  
11 us to make an informed decision on some of these things.  
12 And, obviously, you don't implement those things and meet  
13 public approval within your NRD unless you have a game plan  
14 or suspected game plan for the future and a need for that.

15 And, of course, there were groups out there that  
16 were trying to encourage us not to get involved with  
17 anything to do with groundwater regulation. And our board  
18 was, as other boards would be, they were tempted to listen  
19 to those groups and believe those groups. And we even had  
20 some pretty high state officials who tried to indicate to us  
21 that we were silly for thinking about groundwater  
22 regulations because of the Compact.

23 At that point in time, Gayle, we really didn't  
24 have any conflicts, that we knew of. Maybe there was a  
25 couple places in the NRD, if I try and recall. Really any

1 conflicts that, within the groundwater irrigators, that  
2 would justify setting up groundwater restrictions because of  
3 a decrease in groundwater that affected the people in that  
4 area. So, what we really were talking about if we were  
5 doing that was it was because of the Compact and the issues  
6 of the Compact.

7 MR. STARR: Was there much interaction between  
8 you, as the manager, or your board members with the  
9 irrigation districts in that area, the Bostwicks (phonetic)  
10 and those folks? Was there much interaction between the two  
11 of you or how was that? How did you see that?

12 MR. WUNIBALD: Well, one of the things is the  
13 challenge working as a manager in the Lower Republican NRD,  
14 there's two surface irrigation districts, one upstream from  
15 the Harlan County Reservoir and one downstream from the  
16 Harlan County Reservoir. And, obviously, the  
17 water -- surface water needs upstream, if they were to be  
18 met, then that could affect the people downstream. And  
19 then, you complicate the fact that, really, natural  
20 resources districts are primarily, at least were  
21 particularly then, more centered around groundwater  
22 development and groundwater interests because that's part of  
23 our specific responsibility, is groundwater issues.

24 But with the Compact discussions that related to  
25 both ground and surface water issues for our state, we

1       formed a group of both the NRDs and the irrigation  
2       districts, the two irrigation districts.  Actually, all the  
3       irrigation districts within the whole valley, the whole  
4       Republican Valley.  And we started -- with those meetings,  
5       we started discussions over things of common interests,  
6       common concerns.  You voiced your feelings about what's  
7       going on as far as the water issues.  And I'm hoping that  
8       those kinds of things helped to develop a comprehensive view  
9       of the water resources in the state of Nebraska.  I think  
10      it's the Republican River Coalition, or something like that.  
11      I don't remember exactly the name of it, but I was -- I feel  
12      I had a part in putting that together, because I discussed  
13      that with both of the two surface irrigation districts at  
14      different times, where I'd go and meet with them personally  
15      and said, "We need to get together."  We felt we need to get  
16      together to go into battle with, maybe, the state of  
17      Nebraska, but, for sure, with the idea of helping to team up  
18      with, maybe, the state of Nebraska in protecting the basin's  
19      interest as far as Kansas and the Compact's concerned.

20               MR. STARR:  Obviously an issue that involved the  
21      whole valley, not just the Lower Republican.

22               MR. WUNIBALD.  Uh-huh.  It -- Yes.  We kind of  
23      started that way and I discussed it with the other managers,  
24      and then all three NRDs and all the surface water irrigation  
25      districts were part of that group.  We really never got to

1 the point where we had any official legal status, but it was  
2 more of a way to try and determine how we were going to  
3 address both of our interests, if we could.

4 MR. STARR: How did you see your board evolve from  
5 that first board and then the elected board and then to what  
6 you had in -- 25 years later? How did you see that  
7 evolution? What kind of a change or no change did you see?

8 MR. WUNIBALD: Well, one of the things that -- I  
9 saw a change in the fact that they realized they had to  
10 keep, if they really were going to make informed decisions,  
11 they needed to keep up with more water law stuff and things  
12 that were changing and bills that would relate to water  
13 issues. The water issues were the big things. I mean,  
14 that's where we really, really changed from. We changed  
15 from cost sharing on just terraces and waterways and things  
16 like that to more water-conserving practices for irrigators.  
17 And we did that --

18 And then, we also set up a special protection area  
19 with the Little Blue NRD. And that was the second, maybe,  
20 special protec- -- first or second special protection area  
21 that was set up in the state of Nebraska, and it was set up  
22 for water quality reasons.

23 And so, we really -- When I first started, we  
24 weren't talking water quality. We really weren't talking  
25 water conservation. The water conservation they mention

1 is -- was triggered as much by the Compact as anything. The  
2 water quality thing is because we were to come up with  
3 making plans for our district. We had to show the State of  
4 Nebraska that we were doing things in that area of  
5 responsibility that was given to us to address. And we had  
6 some problems in the superiority area, and that's where we  
7 set up a special protection area.

8 So, we had to work with two NRDs then, and that  
9 was the first time we really had to work together, teamwork.  
10 And then, of course, then later on, they're trying to work  
11 together now as -- with the Compact stuff. But --

12 MR. STARR: Looking back, how do you see  
13 that -- what you thought the NRD was back in 1973 when you  
14 finally got acquainted with it, and as you see it now? What  
15 do you see as the evolution they've come through or what's  
16 happened in your view?

17 MR. WUNIBALD: I think what I see, after I  
18 realized, like you mention, and I don't know how long it  
19 took me to realize what all -- what kind of responsibility  
20 the NRDs were given by the State of Nebraska. I think what  
21 I see is that, I think the NRDs, and we saw that somewhat  
22 with our board and I try to keep up a little bit with the  
23 Lower Republican NRD Board still because I'm still  
24 interested in what they're doing. I think their -- the  
25 responsibilities and the authorities that are given to the

1 NRD are huge. I think it's a real challenge for the NRDs to  
2 make really, really tough decisions that I think a lot of  
3 people think they should be making because they live in the  
4 area where they're making those decisions. It's easier for  
5 Lincoln -- and I work for a state agency now -- it's easier  
6 for Lincoln to make the decisions and go home and you never  
7 see those people you made those decisions for. But that  
8 isn't true with the NRD. The NRDs, those directors go home.  
9 They may be on school boards with these people. They  
10 certainly live within those communities. Those decisions  
11 that they make not only affect those people, but they affect  
12 themselves, too, a lot.

13 And I think it's tough for the NRD directors, and  
14 a lot of them -- and our board was made up primarily of  
15 farmers on the board. Maybe some ranchers and stuff. But  
16 these people serve -- they serve basically without pay. So,  
17 they make a decision. So, they're sacrificing their time  
18 and they have to believe in what they do. If they don't  
19 believe in what they do, they don't stick around very long.  
20 And I had directors who were on the board for years who  
21 believed in what -- the cause, and some who didn't as much  
22 and just found out it was too time consuming. They just  
23 didn't have the time to do it.

24 The challenge is, too, is finding younger people  
25 for the boards that are going to be affected for years by

1 the decisions that are made or -- and they can look, maybe  
2 down the road. Maybe they've had recent classes or  
3 something through their university set up or educational set  
4 up, and they realize this is going to affect me and,  
5 certainly, my kids. Whatever decision I make today is going  
6 to affect them. So, I think that's --

7 I think that, as far as my board, I think they are  
8 starting to realize more and more, and maybe even since I've  
9 left, maybe there's a reason for that, but they're seeing  
10 that they've got that big or bigger decisions to make all  
11 the time. And they're not -- the easy part of  
12 doing -- buying another grass drill. Can we afford another  
13 grass drill? Do we still sell grass seed? They -- that  
14 might be part of some of the decisions that are made now.  
15 Or what pickup do I buy? Or do we buy a pickup? They've  
16 got way bigger, longer-term decisions to make in natural  
17 resources, and especially in the water arena. Big-time  
18 decisions.

19 MR. STARR: And what you see and hear now of  
20 the -- not just the board, but the general population in the  
21 Lower Republican area in regards to the water issue with  
22 Kansas, what is the general feeling in that regard?

23 MR. WUNIBALD: I can tell you a little bit about  
24 before I changed occupations, what the feeling was. And I  
25 think some of that feeling has still carried over until now.

1           I think part of it is, you really don't know what  
2 your problems are until you live close to them. You don't  
3 know what it's like to farm in that area unless you farm in  
4 that area. There's similarities, but there's definitely  
5 differences.

6           I think they -- Let's see, how do I answer this?  
7 I think the people in the state of Nebraska, and it started  
8 before I changed occupations, feel critical of the Lower  
9 Republican NRD. And because of some decisions that have  
10 been made in the past and various different things. Maybe  
11 some personalities. That's possible that that had something  
12 to do with it. I don't live in Alma, Nebraska, any more. I  
13 live in Holdrege, Nebraska. And that's real close. It's  
14 only 25 miles apart. But the area here and the farming  
15 here, even though you use the same equipment pretty much, is  
16 different. And it's more -- it's easier to be involved in  
17 farming. Some people will probably be upset with me. And  
18 it's not easy. It's hard work. I grew up on the farm. I  
19 know it's hard work. But it's easier if your resources are  
20 such that it produces better than the struggles that you  
21 have, and it changes as you go south of Holdrege into the  
22 Lower Republican NRD. And it very much changes the closer  
23 you get to the river because, instead of having an abundance  
24 of groundwater, closer to the river you don't. You don't  
25 have much of an aquifer in that area. So, instead of



1 getting a thousand-gallon-a-minute well if you live close to  
2 the Platte River, you don't get that when you go close to  
3 the Republican. It's just not there.

4 So, there is differences and stuff, and I think  
5 it's -- I think that's caused some frustrations. I think  
6 that the frustrations is -- that I used to hear and I see as  
7 valid is, if we're setting up controls, and there has been  
8 controls that have been set up on groundwater use in that  
9 NRD now, as you know, they're not doing it, as I mentioned  
10 before, because they're running out of groundwater in their  
11 area necessarily. They're doing it because they're being  
12 told they need to do it for the state of Kansas -- well for  
13 the State of Nebraska's obligation to the State of Kansas  
14 because of this Compact. And that makes it more challenging  
15 to feel good about that situation. And I can understand  
16 that, since I was part of that area for 25 and a half years  
17 of my life.

18 MR. STARR: How do you feel about how the  
19 individual NRDs interact with, not the state agencies, but  
20 the state in terms of the legislature, in terms of the  
21 governor, in terms of your -- the association that the NRDs  
22 have? Is that a -- how do you feel about that relationship  
23 and working with all the NRDs in the state, not just those  
24 in the Republican?

25 MR. WUNIBALD: Well, certainly, the formation of

1 the association, the Nebraska Association of Resources  
2 Districts, helped considerably, I think. It hasn't solved  
3 the issues. There's still problems, animosities, between  
4 NRDs because water's pretty darned important. And, I mean,  
5 water is important. And so, you're going to try and look  
6 after your own interests. I don't know that that's any  
7 different than what happens in the legislature. I don't  
8 know that that's any different than what happens in  
9 Congress. You're representing a certain group of people,  
10 and they expect you to try to take care of and protect their  
11 interests and their needs.

12 But as far as getting along with the NRDs, I'm not  
13 sure how that's working now. I -- What I see, the way I see  
14 it now, you know, and I, like I said, I try to keep up a  
15 little bit on it, I think most of them make a real attempt  
16 to try to work things out. If you don't work things out, if  
17 you can't do your job, you won't have a job to do. And I  
18 see that with the NRDs. If they can't take on the  
19 responsibilities that are given to them, and they're getting  
20 tougher all the time. Especially in dry years, we know how  
21 tough they are. But tougher all along. They won't be in a  
22 position to do that.

23 And the way I used to look at it is, the NRD set  
24 up -- or the legislature set up our responsibilities. They  
25 created us and they can take it away. Giveth and taketh

1 away, you know? I'm not saying they're God, but I'm just  
2 saying that, you know, they do have the authority to do  
3 that. And I think that could be done if it isn't -- if they  
4 don't take on those responsibilities. And I think that most  
5 of the NRDs realize that. And I think they're trying to  
6 work together. And they realize there is -- certainly,  
7 water doesn't stop at anybody's NRD line or county line or  
8 state line. It's -- So, it's just important as we try and  
9 share that important resource and do it wisely and protect  
10 it as far as water quality is concerned. Because that's  
11 just as big a deal. Of course, I'm really plugging that now  
12 because of where I work. But --

13 MR. STARR: The changes that were made over the  
14 years from 1972 on, for the most part, gave NRDs more  
15 authority and more responsibility. How did those various  
16 changes, in terms of groundwater regulation, et cetera,  
17 impact what the Lower Republican NRD did or how they looked  
18 at things?

19 MR. WUNIBALD: Yeah. I think in the area, at  
20 least when I -- I can speak when I was there and before '98,  
21 those extra areas of responsibility were met also with  
22 accountability by the state. And that's why these  
23 comprehensive plans that we had to develop for ground and  
24 surf- -- in groundwater quantity and quality reasons, those  
25 were always reviewed by the State of Nebraska to see if we

1        were trying to impose something that would not be in the  
2        best interest of the State of Nebraska. So, I feel that the  
3        state was still monitoring what we were doing, and I think  
4        that was right for that to be that way because, like I  
5        mentioned, groundwater doesn't stop at a certain place. I  
6        mean, you've got this sharing. So, they had that. So, yes,  
7        there was more responsibilities.

8                MR. STARR: The Groundwater Management Act, which  
9        I don't recall --

10               MR. WUNIBALD: The Groundwater Management Act had  
11        a lot to do with it.

12               MR. STARR: -- what year it was passed, but it had  
13        a huge impact on the NRDs.

14               MR. WUNIBALD: Uh-huh. It really did. Yes. And  
15        so, that forced us -- I mean, you can be happy about -- I  
16        don't know. You had to take this and try and figure out  
17        whether this was a good thing or bad thing, as far as the  
18        NRD. You might feel good that the State of Nebraska thinks,  
19        "You guys can handle this." In the same respect, you might  
20        go, "I don't want to handle this." And yet, we had to  
21        handle it. I mean, we were given that responsibility and if  
22        we didn't do things, you know, state funding and everything  
23        else could be affected by that.

24               So, there were -- Yes, you're right, Gayle, there  
25        were additional responsibilities given to us. And the

1 reason, I'm sure, that they did that -- well, at least one  
2 of the reasons they did that, is because, I feel, the NRDs  
3 up to that point in time had a vote of confidence from the  
4 majority of, at least, the legislators. Not all of them,  
5 but the majority of the legislators that said, "You know  
6 what? This system is a good thing. This system can work.  
7 This system allows for local input where, oftentimes, you  
8 hear the state makes the decision, Lincoln makes the  
9 decision, and we have to live with it. We don't have  
10 anything to say about it, and it's silly or it's stupid, a  
11 decision."

12 But that's where I guess I see it. So --

13 MR. STARR: As you know, in many states both the  
14 groundwater control and the surface water control is kept in  
15 the state, and Nebraska is somewhat unique in that it's  
16 shared. Granted, as you know, the state has a lot of  
17 oversight over the groundwater, but do you feel that that  
18 was a good decision to provide that authority to the natural  
19 resources districts as opposed to keeping it at the state  
20 level?

21 MR. WUNIBALD: There's days that I change my  
22 answer on that.

23 I think what you need to have is the state needs  
24 to have some generalized goals and, of course, with the  
25 Compact thing, that brings you into pulling everybody

1 together. And you have to work together, because if you  
2 don't, you die otherwise through the Compact. But  
3 it's -- technically, it should be a good thing. I mean, on,  
4 you know, philosophically, I should say, it should be a good  
5 thing. I think, for the most part, it is.

6 It makes it really challenging where you've got a  
7 different way to administer groundwater than surface water,  
8 where one's "first in time, first in right" with the surface  
9 water and groundwater it's more a "share and share alike".  
10 I think it's good that a lot of the NRDs now are starting to  
11 get enough data together that you can start modeling things  
12 and you can see what groundwater pumping can do to surface  
13 water areas.

14 And I think the challenge is, is the state always  
15 has to decide, if you're going to have to give up something,  
16 what do -- who's going to make the decision to give it up?  
17 Certainly, in the Lower Republican NRD, even though there's  
18 two surface water irrigation districts here, still the vast  
19 majority of the irrigators are groundwater irrigators.  
20 That's true for the state of Nebraska. So there's a lot of  
21 political clout with trying to not mess with groundwater any  
22 more than you have to. You better have a really, really,  
23 really good reason to mess around with my -- how much water  
24 I can pump before I'm just going to not pump it so there's  
25 water that runs in the stream for whatever purpose. And

1 especially, if you don't see any of those surface water  
2 benefits yourself, it's pretty hard to handle that.

3 MR. STARR: Well, Ron, I've kept you here for  
4 nearly 45 minutes now. And is there any --

5 MR. WUNIBALD: It's been enjoyable.

6 MR. STARR: Is there anything else you'd like to  
7 impart?

8 MR. WUNIBALD: No. I still believe the NRD system  
9 is the thing to keep going. I'd be opposed, if I'd be  
10 asked, I'd be opposed to eliminating the NRD system. I do  
11 talk to people all the time who are critical of the NRD  
12 system because they don't think they can handle it. They  
13 don't think they're doing enough. And some of those people  
14 are real interested in surface water and think that the NRDs  
15 are strictly focused on just groundwater or the state's  
16 groundwater resources. And I try to remind them that that's  
17 their primary responsibility, but I don't think that that's  
18 true. And you're seeing some of the NRDs in the state who  
19 are setting up groundwater restrictions with the idea of  
20 providing for surface water benefits in the future.

21 But the challenge is, is somebody still has to  
22 say, "We've got this much water to work with, whether it's  
23 ground or surface water. How are we best going to manage  
24 that resource for the benefit of the state of Nebraska?"

25 MR. STARR: Well, thank you very much, Ron.

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MR. WUNIBALD: You're welcome.

MR. STARR: I appreciate your cooperation.

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