

Henderson 1 5.5.16

I: Okay and so today is May 5th, 2016. Interview with Kirk Henderson. Interviewer is Jean Eells. Let me get the other recorder going here again so I've got a backup. That's going to work, so I'll just try this again. Okay. So we will get without a back-up. I'll get my phone out if I have to. So I can see this going on here, and I'm going to put it on here so if there's any table noise it won't pick up on that and let me get a sound check from you. Tell me when you got started with the IRVM program. How did that go?

P: Yeah. So we are working okay? Do you want me to just start talking then and then you'll interrupt whenever you have a question that you want me to enlarge on or something.

I: Exactly.

P: Okay. I would say, I was a thirty-seven year old person who had gone back to school looking for something meaningful in life and that was 1988. I met Daryl Smith and started you know, learning and loving prairie through him and it was just-- it was just really one of those very chance kind of things that I came on the scene at UNI and Daryl-- right when IRVM was happening at UNI it was just the exact same time. Ehley, who ran the roadside office for three years, he had just started in the fall of '88 which was the same time I came back to school and took Daryl's prairie seminar class. So I didn't work for AI right away, I took just that one two hour course for a semester in prairie and then got laid off from construction for the winter and suddenly was back in school full-time working on a degree in Biology and in the fall of '89 the roadside office had a co-op position and they offered that to me so I was actually working part-time without Eli in the roadside office from the fall of 1989 on and-- but the thing I really want to try to talk about-- my main emphasis is to somehow try to convey to people what a really exciting and kind of intense two or three years it was there at that beginning and to be still looking back seems so magical, so chance that these-- that the right people came together that made this happen because we would get, we were always getting inquiries from other states and they would say, "How did this program get started? How did that happen?" We were out there. We were leading the way, and that was a big part of the excitement when you are doing something and other people keep contacting you and want to know about it and they might be calling from Ontario or Florida and it just makes you feel so important or like you feel like you are right in the center of a moment. So what, you know, to me what seemed to happen so much of it, I just always come back to Bill Haywood. Bill Haywood was the one ingredient that would have been really hard to replace. To find another person who could do just what Bill did. Bill was a wildlife biologist for Black Hawk County conservation. Talking in the early to mid 80's now. And one day he came to work and he told them you are also the county weed commissioner now. So he was a county employee trying to-- you know he wanted to do conservation, wild life habitat kind of stuff, he had weed commissioner responsibilities thrust on him, and that was not a welcomed thing. The weed commissioner position, it still exists in Iowa-- it's kind of-- to me, this weird throwback thing, it really amounts to being, your job as weed commissioner is you provide a buffer between the county supervisors you know, our elected county officials and the land owners who want to either complain

about weeds or have too many weeds and the supervisor, they don't want to have to deal directly with these people and so you have this weed commissioner and this you know, this poor guy is stuck in the middle and anyways so Bill takes that on and this has-- as somebody with a view of Ecology, this thrust him into kind of an uncomfortable position in those days county weed control, in most counties in the state, in the ones especially in the more intensely agricultural regions of the state. Traditional weed control was every spring these old trucks that had some large tank on it for holding a large amount of herbicide and some kind of a boom that extended out over the ditch. The county crew would go out and turn on that boom and leave it on while they drove up and down every mile of every county road. You know, in Iowa with our vast network of secondary roads, that's about a thousand miles in each of our ninety-nine counties. So this was a lot of herbicide being introduced in the environment, and the products you know back in those days they weren't as good, they weren't as selective, they were trying to kill broad leaf weeds, Canada thistle primarily but to Bill Haywood, he saw this as stressing the-- everything that was growing in the ditch because everything got sprayed and weakening the plant community to the extent where you are actually making it easier for weeds to invade and this was just kind of going over and over again and it was a creepy thing. Farm wives would see that county truck coming down the road and they'd grab all their kids and hustle them into the house and at the same time, you always had this balance, you had somebody who would call up and say why don't you spray more, you are not spraying enough, and you'd have the other people on the other side who never wanted to see that thing and didn't understand why are you bothering, you know, controlling weeds in the ditch. That was kind of one of the neat things that IRVM solved for people. It gave the pol-- it gave the county policy makers this compromise. We never said no spraying. It was spot spraying, you know, we were a lot more successful at reducing herbicide use I think because it was about spot spraying, but Bill you know at the time, of course there had been, there had been, a lot of voices, or I think you've already talked about you know, people like Roger Landers, and Paul Christensen who much earlier had talked about using native vegetation as the best adapted plants to help out-compete, you know compete weeds and be more low-maintenance in roadsides and I don't know where Bill picked up on that but that was one of the things that he had in his head and also integrated pest management already existed at that time, this idea of don't rely on just one method to control this pest, or weed and you know, where you kind of integrate a variety of things and so Bill was up on that and then he was really up on this idea of-- he was a people person. He could really relate to people and so it was easy for him to say, "and you should also talk to the land owners and make them understand what you are trying to do and how they can cooperate and actually change the way they farm a little bit and reduce the disturbances in the right of way that also creates openings for weeds." So much of that early excitement, you know, was growing out of this idea of putting prairie in the roadside. That each county you know with that one thousand miles of roads translated into four thousand acres of vegetative portion of the right of way, that was available for improving habitat and for prairie restoration, and you know, Bill being on the County Conservation Board system, I'm imagining, I'm picturing him at one of the county conservation board state-wide events and he's got you know, a group of people around him and he's waving his arms and he's talking away and he's smiling and he's generating all this

excitement and he's got just the right audience-- that was a big part of how this program took off was Iowa had this wonderful system of county conservation boards where every county has one and you've got these employees who are managing county parks-- recreation area. And these people they were-- a lot of them were sportsman you know, they liked to hunt and fish, they understood habitat and just they were very receptive-- they were the ones who could appreciate the idea of prairie restoration, they'd hear of that by then, just the idea that it's cool to re-introduce your native plants and know that that's a neat thing, and then to have all this additional land to manage for prairie and every county in the state had at least some amount of actual prairie remnants here and there in their roadsides and these guys were the ones who might know where those were. And they were the ones who were-- get really upset when the spray crew went by one more time and took out a few more of those plants and you know, they they understood the value of protecting-- preserving, even these puny little roadside prairie remnants that might have one or two native species, you know, so here was this audience and it was this guy who was just-- you know, he could speak, he could write, and he had this charismatic side to him that made people want to do whatever Bill Haywood was doing. That's how he was. You know, I'm glad he was selling something really nice and positive. But to me that was the lighting in the bottle, was that it was this quality that he possessed and he was in a position to where he was in contact with these people and once he started talking about it and talking this up, and by 1986, Scott Zager will tell you that he was the first county employee hired as a roadside manager. That he was the first officially designated roadside manager in the state of Iowa, working under Bill Haywood in Black Hawk County. And at the same time, you know, Tre Wilson was over in Story County, and I don't think he called himself a roadside manager, but he was doing-- he was starting to do some really neat prairie plantings in some nice selective locations in Story County rights of way and a-- I have to pause and think-- the--- okay, yeah sorry. So back to Bill Hayward and then what happened was after he-- you know, after Black Hawk county was actually having a program, and these other counties were hearing about it from him, he started getting requests to, you know, visit these other counties and present the idea to their policy makers and again, I'm having to use my imagination, maybe sometimes it was just come and meet-- we have our regular conservation board meeting this evening, come and present it to our board or maybe sometimes it got more formal where they would also get at least one or two of their county supervisors there if they could-- how often, a county engineer was invited to one of those early meetings, I don't know, but it was, but it was the county conservation board employees who really responded to his message and the principles of this program and so Bill was-- but Bill was starting to get too many of these invitations. It was taking up too much of his time. He had a-- he had a regular full-time position with the county and he was-- the demands on his time to travel to all corners of the state presenting this information was just getting to be too much and so this, you know, this was all happening so fast. In such a short time is what sort of blows you away because by 1988 we had legislation. You know, we had legislation that-- that set things like beginning July of 1988-- there was something you know, institutionalized by that time, so Bill's you know-- he starts shopping around for a parent agency where this program will be housed and my-- the story I remember is that he really-- he tried to-- he approached somebody at Iowa State and at Iowa DNR and he didn't get the

reception that he needed or the interest just didn't seem to be there or maybe they didn't get it, I don't know. So that was just lucky that there was a very active prairie biologist, Daryl Smith at the University of Northern Iowa who was-- was kind of a different professor. Somebody who recognized a great idea. An opportunity when he saw it, had sort of a-- beyond being a professor he had sort of an entrepreneurial side. He was also somebody who liked to have a lot of things going on, that was when-- seemed to be when Daryl was happiest-- being involved in a lot more than just you know, classes, courses and and and and so anyways, so Bill-- I assume Bill already knew Daryl. He approached Daryl and you know, there was no-- I don't think there was any selling required in that meeting. I picture this collision of two high energy individuals and it just took right off from there like okay, let's figure out how to make this happen and you know, maybe I should skip this part because I think Daryl can do the details better but to me, I think there was some-- there was some money that the Iowa DNR had I think that somehow was part of a settlement from an oil spill somewhere and they were administering this money and some grant forms and I think it was Daryl who Bill got fifty thousand dollars from that fund and that that was what funded the beginning of the UNI roadside office. And I can't even tell you where the connection came from that-- who approached-- who brought in the soil conservation service, who provided Al Ehley the employee and put in-- and loaned out Ehley, soil conservationist, for three years, continued to pay half his salary while you know, that initial grant, I don't know if that paid most of his first year, but I know from the legislation that it says from July of 1989-- fifty thousand dollars will go to the University of Northern Iowa to maintain the position of the state roadside specialist and officially that was the title of the person at UNI running the program out of there and so from July of 89 on, but it said-- the way that legislation was originally written, the program at UNI was supposed to be just a short lived pilot program, just set up for maybe-- loan for three years and that was going to be long enough to get the county program up and running and so the legislation said fifty thousand dollars for, you know, starting July of 89 through June of 91. Just two years of funding and then you would have to be renewed by the legislature after that. So that was kind of a tricky thing that sort of had some effects later on but so there was something else going on there at the same time-- Daryl, I think Daryl Smith and Paul Christensen sometime right after the office was started, they-- I think there was an RFP that went out wanting people to submit proposals to get this job of putting together-- doing some kind of survey and study that would lay out the details of what IRVM would be about. That proposal, that project was awarded to George Butler and Associates instead of Daryl and Paul and Daryl thought, well you know, those guys did such a great job of it, maybe it was just as well but my understanding is then-- I think that the document that they produced-- you know, there's a half inch thick book publication from that that really had a lot to do with laying out of what the program would be about, finding out what kind of interest recent activity was out there among the county engineers and such and then how some of that led to the wording of the actual legislation that was produced. I know there was also a committee of some people, I believe Gerry Schnepf was on that committee on the-- one of the co-founders of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. People like that who were working with a group of legislatures, on that committee and a line I got from somebody once years ago was yeah, we were all sitting together in a room and suddenly the legislators were all called

out, they had to go on the floor for a vote and they said, you guys write this while we are gone. He said, so we did and he made it sound like whoever this group was actually did a lot of just the hammering out but whatever-- however it came about it was so well written the four pages that outlined what IRVM was to be and you know, they they caught the spirit of it, they caught all the different angles of why you would want to do this, and you know, after working with the program more than twenty years, I just kept marveling at how I still wouldn't change any of this, they just nailed it so well. One thing that stuck me funny though was that that title that they said-- state roadside specialist is going to be located at the University of Northern Iowa, and I think Al officially used that title during the three years he was there, but when I got-- you know, when I got-- when I inherited Al's job, I was never comfortable calling myself the state roadside specialist. By that time, we had these DOT people and these roadside managers who all knew more than I did. on how to actually, you know, use native vegetation and do all the different things that you had to do with the right of way, so I called myself-- my title at UNI was the-- I was the manager of the UNI-- of the IRVM program at UNI but the responsibilities were still the same working out of there and that was to uh, to provide support for the counties that were in the program, get out there and recruit and bring more counties into the program and just conduct an education program and do-- to do research and provide technical assistance. Getting back to this excitement-- I'm still not capturing the excitement. Yeah, Bill Haywood created a lot of excitement in the county conservation boards responded and just in the time that Bill was so-- that Bill was actively talking about this, and plugging it where ever he went, you know, my belief is that he just created a lot of momentum. There was this momentum thing that was started by 1988 and carried on just kept bringing these counties in-- the conversation boards because by the end of 1992 we were saying we have thirty-seven counties in the program by that time and that was that was part of this fun thing. I mean, I know Al-- Al was working hard and he would go out on the road, and he'd have these meetings in the evening or during the day where he'd get set-up with the county, these key policy makers that you had to work with, again, might of sometimes just been the county conservation board but I think more often by this state with Al, he was including county supervisors and county engineers more often were included at those meetings because you really-- you needed the support of all of those people. You needed everybody on board. You needed those people to understand what you were doing. You had to make it really clear and so, so but-- at times, sitting in that office, it just felt like, welp, there's another county calling in saying yeah, we just hired somebody we are putting, it'll be especially maybe in the spring or late winter. They want to get somebody on board in time to-- so you know, they can hit the ground running with roadside management activities when springtime rolled around and and and it was just so fun and kind of easier in some ways in the beginning because when I first started-- joined Al started working with Al in that office as a student employee-- maybe there were six counties involved so when Al wanted to network with the counties in the program, it was six people that he had to reach and so he'd write this fancy letters out that started out saying Howdy guys, and he talked about some issue or tried to plan a meeting when they could all get together somewhere and you know, those were some really talented people. Outgoing people. People who recognized that this is something neat. This is something new and cutting edge and it's got all these, you know, positive aspects to it

with restoring prairie on all the roadsides and all the great advantages of working with native vegetation and so when these people got together, it was a party! The energy was just flying back and forth across the table with these people who-- they like to talk and they are getting to know each other and so then-- and then you started out with these six counties and by the end of 89 or 1989, 1990 there was ten counties and then suddenly by the end of 91 I think we were up to twenty-five and so you are having these meetings and it's warm. These people are all glad to be there. And they are all connecting. And personalities are emerging around the table and they are interesting people. They are fun, they are capable and this bond is forming because you are all kind of-- it's a neat positive thing, but it's a struggle because you are creating something from zero. From the ground up so that's part of the-- partly why I think the real, it felt really good to get together because then you went home, you went back to your county if you were a roadside manager and you were alone again for the most part, you know, they were alone in what they were trying to establish in their county and there wasn't a hundred support out there, there were battles, I can remember, you know, several years later, you still run into these, some land owners who would say planting that tall grass and wild flowers in the ditch. That's the stupidest idea I ever heard of. There are still people that just couldn't see it as anything but impractical. Just impractical. So it felt good to get together and share your information, the things you were learning, what was sort of working for you, and also your frustrations. That felt really good, and that's just always been a part of it. When the annual roadside conference-- when you are talking with the roadside managers about what kind of program they want for this year's roadside conference, they will always say "Don't schedule so many presentations. Leave open time because the most valuable thing is when I get to talk to the other people," you know, the other people running a county program. Just standing around sharing back and forth. It's the same thing, sometimes they shared-- learned valuable information from each other but a lot of it too was just you know, they are beating their head against the same wall and it just feels good to hear somebody else say, oh yeah, I got this one guy you know, I can't get anywhere with him. Or I got these secondary road guys who you know, they just can't say enough bad things about me and what I'm trying to do there. They just don't get it. They can't relate. Can we take a break?

I: Yeah! I'm ready for a break.



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I: Session Two. Kirk Henderson. May fourth-- or May fifth, 2016. Continuing the interview.

P: So I just want to say a little bit more about the-- that early excitement. It was always one of my frustrations when you know, I was in that position for twenty-one years and over that time new people would come into the program and it was so frustrating-- that that I wanted everybody to have the memory of the initial excitement and our sense of importance about what we were doing and that kind of thing and you know, you just can't, just can't give that to people but we'll give it a shot since we are having this nice little formal history lesson here. Excitement was out around the state it seemed like. It was it was filtering our beyond Iowa. People interested and that kind of thing were tuning into us, but another neat thing though was just right there in our little office in McCollum Science Hall at UNI and that was a fun place to be at that time. It was a, you know, you-- here you are, your office is created and funded with this mission of creating a statewide program again from zero. There's nothing there. So okay, that's a big challenge. That's a huge opportunity though and the extremely creative situation-- you get to make it up as you are going along and Al Ehley was a great one for that. He'd say, let's have a meeting and just take some time now to get idea. That was his line and you know, get ideas. He-- you know, Al-- he was perfect for that job because he was a very solid upstanding guy-- you know, just a, I'm not sure of the right way to say it, just a very upstanding man-- you know, straight talking kind of person. Very reliable, dependable, responsible, but he also had-- you know, he-- you know, he was very upbeat and I think a big part of why it was so very much fun to him was because he was about the same age I was, he was maybe thirty-seven years old when he got that opportunity and so he has been a federal employee in the soil conservation service, very soon to become the natural resources conservation service and so because he'd been in the bureaucracy for a number of years already, where things are kind of set and, you know, he liked his job, but it wasn't quite as dynamic or whatever as-- suddenly to be in this roadside office where he was so much just independent on his own and getting to just create and take him-- run as far as his energy would go and so we had a lot of fun. It was like, okay-- how about we do a calendar poster. How about we do a newsletter? The roadside conference had already been started. Daryl was the-- the first conference was 1987 and I don't know that Al was even at that one. He might not have been there until the second one in 1988. So that was already established and then we started having-- it wasn't called the winter meeting as yet, but Al would have a meeting kind of the opposite time of year from the roadside conference, there'd be a meeting in sort of the off season where just the roadside managers would get together in a classroom at UNI to just to kind of talk among themselves and get on the same page, but between Al and Daryl and then Scott Zager-- came back to school to work on a master's degree-- was very involved then and so it just created this fun kind of energetic situation to sit around and get ideas and run with it. You could think, sure I think LRTF would fund that. Just get a grant just for that project. Maybe that's a Segway-- you know Living Roadway Trust Fund was created at the same time. That was huge. That was the other thing. Another state would say, how did this program get started? How did you do it, you know. Well besides get a Bill Haywood, get a Living Roadway Trust Fund. You

gotta have one of those. That's where, you know, you just, you had this money that was there every year that you could rely on. It was not a huge amount of money but it was there and the way, you know, it really served at the county level, you know, the Living Road Way Trust Fund from the very beginning was split into three pots. One was for state projects and to fund Steve Holland's activities. One was for the counties, which funded the UNI office cause our mission was working with the county roadside programs and then the third one was for City Gateway plantings-- the community and city projects and that money was divided the same way the road use tax fund money was split up and that was thirty seven and a half percent went to state. Thirty-two and a half percent went to the counties and twenty percent went for the city gateway projects. And the LRTF was funded by-- we got three percent of REAP, and we got money from the road-use tax fund every year besides the REAP money and then we also got the profits from the REAP license plate sales that went into the Living Roadway Trust Fund. So maybe in a typical year, REAP gotten million dollars and three percent of that-- three hundred thousand dollars into the Living Roadway Trust Fund and then by the time you added in-- the number's escaping me-- what we used to get a set amount every year from road use tax fund, was it two hundred thousand dollars? Somewhere in that range. It was a pretty good chunk and then it was some smaller amount, maybe twenty-five thousand dollars from those license plate fees. So in a typical year, maybe you would have five hundred and fifty thousand or six hundred thousand dollars in the whole Living Roadway Trust Fund. So then the counties share of that might only be two hundred thousand dollars for a whole year and so it wasn't a huge pot of money that ninety-nine counties were applying to-- to get a share of. Especially the years when the UNI office came off the top of that two hundred thousand. I always felt bad about that and some years Steve Holland would do it differently than other years. That always was a little interesting. Sometimes he would take ours out of the state portion 'cause there was always more money available in that and was a little unpredictable there and 'cause you know, he can justify. He can say well you guys are working with the whole state and anyway, it wasn't a huge deal it was just kind of interesting sometimes that there was a little variation some years but yeah, I always felt guilty taking money away from the county pot because that's what we were all about. We were there for the counties. That's why our office existed to work with the counties, support them and so, but the counties got it. They understood. There's only two hundred thousand dollars in there, I'm not going to get ten thousand dollars for a Truax drill every year and they would just kind of very respectfully take turns. This was especially important later on when you might, you know, where there were forty-five counties and actually a lot more than that because you only had to have an IRVM plan on file with DOT to be eligible to access the Living Roadways Trust Fund so you know, before too long you had eighty counties with a plan on file. Occasionally you'd get applications from those other counties who didn't really have an IRVM program or a designated roadside manager but they kind of just respected each other, you know, some counties took advantage of that fund more than others but that was generally what they were doing was submitting applications to buy prairie grass and wildflower seed for a planting project they knew was coming up or that was how they got their native grass drill paid for and the forty-five hundred dollars that LRTF would give a county to have their roadside vegetation inventory done, which was kind of this thing that we used to draw counties in-- county really wasn't ready to

jump in a hundred percent with a new program, well you should do an inventory first, get 'em kind of involved that way. Here's forty five hundred dollars, you can hire Gene Kromray and show you maps where you already got some prairie in the ditch where your remnant populations are or where you got these other management issues going on. Maybe your serious weed areas, trees and brush that kind of need to be dealt with and maybe some bad erosion going on somewhere but the neat thing was that all right-- this was an incentive to get counties involved, get a county-- you are selling the program and you are telling the county supervisors you can get money to buy stuff-- you can get-- and it's good stuff, you know, that your county kind of would like to have anyway. It wasn't just a prairie grass planter. There was other pieces of equipment that you could get especially once you learned that you actually could establish native vegetation with a hydro seeder. Boy did that take off-- it was a great way to seed steep slopes. You didn't have to drive on them and the county engineers seemed to relate more to this idea of a hydro-seeder 'cause after a project you know, you mix in a bunch of the hydro mulch and you'd have this-- instead of a black soil or clay soil, whatever you'd have left over after some roadwork, those guys could come in and splatter the hydro-mulch and turn it green and the land owners knew the county had actually done something. You know, that was some of the thinking that goes on out there. Stuff that isn't really unimportant for an engineer's point of view. I struggled a lot at times with the county engineers but I absolutely respected their situation. They had a lot on their plate and they were-- they were very good capable people. You know, I have love for county engineers even though, you know, so many of them chose to kind of dig in their heels and resist ever having a program in their county. They are all good guys. So anyway, the trust fund played a huge part and the part I really liked about it was, I think it helped keep good capable people on the job in roadside management because it made their jobs more interesting. They could innovate. They could get an idea about a new piece of equipment or how to-- or just hear about a new piece of equipment that they thought would really help them do their job in roadside management where there was seeding or straw-mulch blowers or some kind of weed control equipment, you could get this idea and you didn't just have to go begging to the county supervisor for your, you know, something that was outside-- beyond your budget. You could count on the trust fund to pay for, if not all of it, a good chunk of it. That really put the energy and the innovation and LRTF really cooperated sometimes if it was something too weird like, "Well how come you need a twenty thousand dollar fire rig?" You know, to burn ditches. Well it's got this valve thing and it does this and that and it's got this extra big hose and power reel and rrrrr. Okay, well, we'll buy one for you and you kind of test it out and let everybody know is this a worthwhile expense and they did that with a few of the different pieces of equipment over the years.

I: Yeah.

P: And so that county-- that county portion of the Living Roadway Trust Fund that was a neat thing. So anyway, Al did a great job recruiting, bringing in these counties, riding that momentum that Bill Haywood had created and then sure enough just like they promised, at the end of 19-- well, getting late into the year, maybe halfway through 1991 Bill or Al Ehley's boss told him, "It's time for you to start looking through the listings of

federal jobs to find where you are going to re-enter the regular federal, you know, workforce out here." So that was kind of sad, Al's time was kind of winding down and we were going to miss him. He'd been so perfect for that position and it was funny though to watch him. Well, there's a job in Alaska. Wonder if Ruthie would like to go to Alaska. That kind of thing, and I don't even remember, did he go right back to go directly to the Webster City area... anyway, he went right back into NRCS and when he was gone-- and to a large extent just by virtue of having been the one sitting in his office twenty hours a week for the previous two years, the job really was mine for the taking. I inherited it from Al, and you know, I loved the program and really wanted to, you know, see it keep going and I thought it was important for somebody to take over who already knew everybody involved and was part of that that network of-- it's just incredible how many people all over the state we knew, not just roadside managers and county engineers, but even beyond that who we knew from all over the state and outside of the state from sitting in that office for a couple years and so that seemed like a good thing and I liked it. I was old enough also to recognize-- hey, this is an opportunity. This is a neat job, this kind of position isn't going to come along and you know, and everything was still feeling pretty new and exciting at that time. So okay, pretty much just like that the job was mine. I think they had to officially post the vacancy and take some applications and go through an interview process we are working with a state agency human resources situation there. So beginning January 1992, I was running the roadside office at UNI and continued to do that for twenty-one years until-- all the way through 2012 and it was-- there were times, especially later on when it actually did finally become a job and feel like work but for the most part, for such a long time, you know, it was just riding this energy of running around kind of insane. Kind of overwhelmed because what we did during those first two and three years in the roadside office we increased the workload. You know, as you were creating things, well let's-- this is something we can do. We can do this and this and this and produce this and this and this and you know, it was me and Al and Scott Zeager all working on these things and then all of a sudden they were gone and all this stuff that we were doing with the annual conference and the winter meeting and writing and producing those brochures and the newsletter and the calendar poster, and keeping all-- quite a bit of that kind of stuff going while you were also supposed to be running around, you know, getting on the road and recruiting, you know, trying to, you know, reach out to these counties that were still, you know, they just weren't falling in line, you know, there's a really a really difficult thing for me to talk about now, and I think I should dive into it-- is the question I've always had to torture myself with is why did it seem like the new counties coming into the program tapered off so much after, you know, after Al left and Kirk took over, you know. I've really had to confront the fact that there were a whole lot of things to do in that roadside office and they required a lot of different skills and abilities and being the-- trying to go out and be a Bill Haywood recruiting and generating excitement, that that's not me. When-- you know, you know, by some point in your life you just realize, you know, I can try and do my best at it in my own way but I am what I am you know, and so that's always something that I have to live with that-- there were other reasons and plenty of excuses that I can list but I really think there was some effect that even though I loved the program and you know, would make the effort to get out there and recruit, I didn't sell as well as somebody could and you know, sometimes I

make myself feel good but okay, when you spot the next Bill Haywood, you'll just get out of the way and let them have the job and that never happened. You know, you are not going to find that guy. But there were other forces at work. I have to say. You know, the - those initial thirty some counties, we were saying thirty seven by the end of 1991 I think it was. Yeah, and okay, there were thirty seven, but you know, several of those didn't turn out to really be programs or they kind of fizzled or never developed or or maybe a couple of them had took them actually a few more years were they actually became an official program and that kind of thing, but a lot of what happened was, you know, from the beginning there were a whole lot of counties conservation boards who liked the idea and jumped right on it, but there was also some polarization going on whereas county engineers saw this happening many of them really dug in their heels and adopted the attitude of, "not in my county!" and this actually got a little bit worse over the years as some counties it seemed like chose to have conflicts between the conservation board that was running the roadside management program and the engineer on the secondary road department. Where they didn't work together as well as they could have or the engineer would get frustrated by some things not getting done or not being done the way they would have done them blah blah blah that kind of thing and so there were some engineers then who were like woah, okay, I'm not having the county conservation board doing these interesting things in my ditches and some of those new county programs, I mean, we were still picking up a few-- one year one there-- and they, at this time it started to lean a little bit more towards the programs-- more of them started to be set up under the engineer. Where sometimes I think it's the county supervisors decided to have a program or the engineer maybe decided okay, I'll start a program but by golly, I'm going to be in control, it's going to be under me. And that was, you know, that was fine. We always had excellent programs both locations. Under the conservation board, under the engineer. Each place had advantages. Under the engineer you were in much more direct communication with with what their projects were and you were more automatically I think called in to do the seeding afterwards and maybe scheduling and they had more money. An engineer department had money, they had tractors, and big trucks and not that conservation boards don't but the engineer seemed to have more personnel and so that was fine. Later over the years there was-- it was interesting then several of our flagship IRVM programs got shifted from conservation over to secondary road. As that was happening, you know, I think there was some concern by that time that the maybe the emphasis on prairie and conservation was was diminishing and the one thing you have to realize is that no roadside manager position was ever created for plant wild-flowers. That's you know, none of these positions were created with that as the main justification. You justified this position in the county budget because this person, you were a county who had to have a serious weed control program and then later brush control became even more of the driver for justifying that position. That was, you know, that was the challenge from someone from our office, you were some guy from the state approaching the county saying you should do this. You should create a new position and hire somebody new where just-- we were so much in this mode of trying to maintain the staff in these different county departments looking for ways to cut spending and save money and not so much in the mode of adding employees to the county pay-roll. That was a tough thing. So anyway, I always kind of joked that there wouldn't have been any IRVM

program in the state if it wasn't for Canada thistle. If we didn't have Canada thistle all the people who desperately believed in-- that that needed to be controlled. There wouldn't be roadside managers out there planting natives in the ditches, 'cause they wouldn't-- you are not going to create a program at the county level just to plant prairie grass and wild-flowers. There's another thought that pops in and out of my head as I'm saying that-- hopefully it will come back later but so that was a challenge. Create a position-- the-- [long pause] it started to get tough. It was hard on the, it was hard on the roadside managers at one point because when you are a county roadside manager out there in a remote county, you really feel better if all the counties, all your neighboring counties also have a roadside manager. Not just for local support and that kind of thing but you feel more secure in your job and your program feels more secure once you reach this critical mass where it becomes this accepted thing. Well, that's what counties do. They hire a roadside manager and have an IRVM program. It's just what we do in Iowa. So there was-- you know, I would feel this pressure from some of the roadside managers, you know, their frustration that things were kind of slowing down, you know, we need some help out here. We could use some more county programs getting started. Let's get going on that and you know, nobody got real hard on me and I was probably maybe extra sensitive but that was part of the situation. That was part of what I dealt with all of the time. Trying to live with that and the frustration that the more counties-- but-- weren't getting involved but one of the other things that happened too was was-- the county conservation boards that jumped on it initially over the initial years, a lot of reality set in that yeah, it was great to plant the natives and establish this stuff in the roadside, they loved that, but you know having an IRVM program entailed some of these other activities that really aren't in our mission. Maintaining-- some of the spray truck and all these, you know, herbicides and going-- having our staff out there applying, you know, herbicides in the ditch all over the county even though we are just spot spraying, that's kind of a little bit different thing for a conservation board to be involved in and especially when brush control became a bigger and bigger issue than you are also out there having to remove the trees and brush that grow in the county right of way and that felt like eliminating habitat a lot of times and both of these things, the weed-- being responsible, being the responsible party for the weed control, and having to go out and cut trees and brush, not only were they outside of the conservation boards mission-- they also were headaches because they involved such potential PR problems, spraying too much. Spraying not enough. Cut too many trees. Didn't cut enough. You are out there you know, kind of taking a beating sometimes in the public because everything you do you know, it's in front-- you are working in a fish bowl. You are just out there in front of the public with all that you do so you know, you were inviting some headaches into your whole department there doing that and, you know, I don't know if that-- how much of an effect that had. It just seemed like maybe that slowed things down a little bit too. I don't want to get too carried away with being defensive about the fact that fewer counties started coming on, but the comparison that I always make is that about the same time is that IRVM is coming along was when counties started creating the naturalist positions. That was really very similar in fact, some of the early-- some of the roadside managers in the beginning wore both hats. They were naturalists and the roadside manager and that worked out pretty well most of the time. But what I point out in my own defense is that the counties continued hiring naturalists

and everybody got one without an office at UNI promoting that. It was just something that fit and really, you know, was really, really belonged there and was what-- whereas with roadside management a lot of counties, especially the southern tiers, they never sprayed. It wasn't as intensive farming. They were-- part of your job sometimes was to convince a county to make a big deal out of the ditches where they never sprayed or they never spent a lot of money on that to begin with. Another factor was the herbicide dividend, I call it. In the beginning, all these counties had a big chunk of money in their budget for their spray crew who was doing this big weed control program or they were hiring a private contractor to come in and do this big weed control program. IRVM was very successful from the beginning in getting almost every county to stop blanket spraying. The way these early programs, many of them were funded, they took the savings from that cutting out the blanket spraying and put that-- used that to create this system of roadside manager so that was part of what was going on there but also then what happened was a lot of these counties quit spraying or cut way back but absorbed that money just back into the budget and didn't hire so then when you are coming around five years later you are asking them to find new money to create this program and that's enough. That's enough on that subject to for for posterity to be aware of you know, just what was really a huge issue for me was that-- I did a whole lot of things really well for that program for a long time and just loved trying to keep that energy going and I was good at a lot of the things but that was my frustration. You know, we will say it that way. Sometimes I think of it too kind of like a, you know, sometimes the baseball team just needs to fire the manager, and you know, you get rid of that manager and somehow you know, you get somebody new in there. Some fresh chemistry going on and your players-- next thing you know, this guys winning twenty games. Last year he was barely five hundred. So I got out. It was time. Should we have another break?

I: Let's have another break.



Henderson 3 5.5.16

I: Session three. May 5th, 2016. Kirk Henderson. Resuming our interview.

P: Should I back up..

I: Tell me a little about Daryl.

P: Little..

I: Yeah. Daryl's skills and abilities.

P: I like to talk about Daryl. The unique things that that he brought. The things that impressed me over the years that you know-- Daryl was a-- I used the word entrepreneur type before-- the neat thing that he could do was, you know, he really-- as far as his involvement in the IRVM program at UNI. He, you know, the whole time that Al was there and I was there, he really had nothing to do with the day to day grid of the IRVM program. That was not his role and I don't think he was that interested in doing that part of it, you know, he was very conceptual. He liked to, he liked to create and have ideas and come up with these things and it was up to somebody else then-- their job was to come through and carry it out. That's-- that's what Al and I did there. But what Daryl brought, you know, he was the kind of guy where he could recognize an opportunity and cease on the moment. One thing that, you know, Daryl did do, he went to IRVM meetings. He was on the LRTF committee. He was a great person to have at a meeting because in a conversation with people around the table, he would spot an opening and jump right in there and cease on it-- where-- and as a result, something happened right there at that meeting, where, most of us, it's the next day when you realize there was an opportunity there and of course now it's pretty much too late. Daryl just had that gift for being able to spot it and respond, you know, come up with how to take advantage of that moment. You know, that's a very rare thing. That's where his, that's where his energy ran.

I: That's a nice match then to Landers and did you know or interact much with Paul Christensen-- having to do with prairie or native plants or any of that in any more detail?

P: Well, Paul chaired the-- he chaired the Living Roadway Trust Fund committee. Ideally, Steve Holland isn't chairing the meetings. Ideally, he appoints someone who is the chair and runs the meetings and that takes some of the heat, some of the responsibility of the outcome off of Steve Holland and Paul, when he, you know, the years he was active, he chaired that meeting several times, or several years and really got to appreciate his style. It was, he was, you know, such a gentleman. [mic dropped for a second] He was really good at feeling the group and sensing-- respecting other people's agendas-- agendas, that's not really a fair word but when you are at the table and you are wanting something, Paul was, Paul wasn't focused on his own self-interest. He was out there, you know, so that made him ideal to chair that committee because the committee was getting together and reviewing the other people's requests and it was very rare that Paul put in funding for a project of his own.

I: Did you have any interaction with Larry Eilers? That's another one that--

P: I missed Larry Eilers. At the time when I came to UNI, I missed him exactly by-- you know, his replacement was in her first year at running herbarium and teaching plant systematics. Larry still came around, I was aware of how much students and other faculty appreciated him and knowing Daryl was having weekly breakfasts with Larry for a long time, they were close but no, I didn't get to have any Larry for myself. [laughter] And I've always regretted that, 'cause I knew it was obvious that I missed out on somebody there.

I: Sure. Let's go ahead and continue with anything else that you wanted to jump in with-- people that--

P: I don't wan-- I don't want to belabor the the a the-- what happened to the county programs thing too much, but another thing that happen-- was going on was-- is that the-- after a while the honeymoon was a little bit over and the counties realized that IRVM was a whole lot more than just planting prairie, that was one small part of a roadside managers job. The rest of it was just plain hard work and you know, not all that interesting. When you are, you know, when you are just going up and down the road controlling weeds or having to get down into the ditch with a chainsaw and then drag whate-- you know, it's one thing to go in there and cut all those things and treat all those stumps and then to have to drag all that material back up and feed it into the chipper, that's a workout. That was, you know, one thing I thought I saw over the years was-- a lot of those early roadside managers, a lot of them had some skills and abilities administrable wise. It seemed like after that initial excitement for them would wear off-- so many of them moved on into a less physically demanding job, if they could. Yeah. And it's, you know, especially not a-- it's a young man's job, especially. Not that there aren't some sixty year olds out there still fully capable but--

I: I can appreciate that.

P: Let's see. One thing I really want to touch on, this isn't the most positive thing, we'll just call it human nature. It's always interesting to me that the-- again and their wisdom, the people who wrote the original IRVM legislation, the wording says Iowa DOT shall do this, you know, develop and IRVM program and the counties may do this. That's interesting psychology, you know, and human nature is that someone mandates, you know, we all hate the mandate but so to me, that explains somewhat why in the beginning, it really looked like it was the counties who jumped on and fully embraced IRVM whereas the DOT was a little bit slower to really get with the program. In fairness, I should point out that Ole Skaar had been using natives in his erosion control mix along state roads for a few years before the legislation, at least, I know he was doing it for sure in 1985 and maybe even a couple years some before that. I don't know for sure but I just noticed getting ready for this interview that in the 1985 Iowa Code, there was a paragraph section 314-19 that said, that stipulated that the DOT could use prairie grass in their seeding mixes. I don't think I ever knew that was there already before the IRVM legislation came out in '88 '89. That was, that was in there before. I don't think it's in

there now, probably came out was replaced by 314-21 and 22. But the-- there were, I'd forgotten about this-- this feeling that the DOT-- there was some slowness about jumping on board. And a little bit of it was again human nature where there was some turfiness, maybe it was a mistake to call the person at UNI the state roadside specialist, because I believe some people in the DOT roadside development office may have reacted like, "What? Is this some person who thinks they are going to tell us what to do?" I mean, those people were, they were very solid professionals established in roadside development and suddenly there someone at UNI called the state roadside specialist. That was partly why I was never comfortable with that title. I think, you know, it came between us a little bit.

I: What relationship did you have then with the state roadside people that might-- did you have interaction then with any of the regional engineers or anybody that would oversee maintenance or was that strictly coming from the DOT? I didn't know if there was much for interaction?

P: Yeah, that's a good question. I-- you know, somebody else might have had developed relationships further up within the whole department, but mine were very strictly with, you know, mostly with Steve Holland, who was administering the trust fund and Mark Masteller who became ultimately Steve's supervisor. There was some re-organizing that went on over the years, I can't remember. There was a Don Eastman who at some point might have early on been Steve's supervisor. I never knew him, it was you know, the group that I'll always think of is Mark Masteller and Ole Skaar, and Steve Holland and Joy Williams, and there's two other people that I regret that I can't say their names off the top of my head-- it'll come to me as soon as we are done here, but you know, that was a really good group. And I was, you know, there were, you know, once in a while, things that I wished I could get them to do but for the most-- they were still all very excellent professionals. At UNI, we thought, why don't they burn? Come on! You can burn those roads, and as soon as you brought that up it would go down some hideous safety engineer direction that, you know, you couldn't you know, what it would take to get this past the DOT's safety engineers, the whole idea and by the time they were through you were so bogged down and just the bureaucracy that, well, that idea would go away again for another year or two before you brought it up. Of course once in a while we try to hammer on Ole about the things that he would include, you know, he'd have this wonderful list of native species grasses and wildflowers but then he'd always sort of hedge his bet and put a bunch of fescue or something in there-- but of these non-native cool season things that, you know, we were like, well wait a minute, you just created two much competition for your natives and Ole was more like, I put them all out there and let them duke it out I think was his words. But that, you know, there's always some of those minor frustrations working with other people. For the most part, I thought we had a good relationship. I thought we really enjoyed Steve Holland's open-minded way that administering the trust fund. He was very easy to get along with there, I felt that all I had to do was just about any idea I came up with, I could bring to the committee and it would be funded. That was a wonderful thing to be able to count on. I think we ticked them off one time though. You know, the legislation was written such that the-- initially that funding to the UNI office had to be renewed every two years.

And I can't remember if that went on for four years before it got changed or if it wasn't until 19-- well 1995 if you go into that legislation now it says that-- and each year seventy-five thousand-- seventy-five thousand dollars goes to UNI to maintain the position of the state roadside office and the wording no longer is-- it just says "and continuing" and that happened as a result of, I'm pretty sure the efforts of the UNI lobbyists, you know that they brought about that change where the funding got bumped up from fifty-thousand a year to seventy-five and then it was made ongoing so then we didn't have to sit on the edge of our seats anymore wondering if we were-- you know, going to be packing up and shutting down the office at UNI.

I: Makes sense.

P: I must be running out of energy. Let's see. What else did we want to hit? One of things I want to say, this is just going back and harping some more on the excitement in the office, but one of the challenges for me was to keep my focus on the county mission because there were so many distractions. When the program was hot and I guess this still happens to some extent but you know, we would get so many requests from around the country for information. We were always packaging up pieces of our-- bundles of our literature and sending them off somewhere and that's kind of time consuming but it's so flattering. How could you resist? We were also getting these requests from different, mostly trade type publications, hey, write an article for us, well again the ego would go [wrrrrang] and next thing you know, you are spending two days just writing and not getting anything else done and that was happening a lot. You'd also get these wonderful requests from a-- other states to come and give a presentation to some of their policy makers to describe the program to them and you know, that didn't happen so often that you were turning down a lot of those but we did get a lot of other kind of requests for presentations that at some point will all of these things, the articles, the talks, the stuff you had to kind of narrow it down and really make an effort to just do the ones that were really serving more of your county mission. I mean, when the newsletter first came out-- that happened clear back in December of '89, was the first of the fifty issues of Roader's Digest that I did and right after that came out, Larry Stone back in those days was the outdoor writer for the Des Moines Register and Larry picked up on that-- he was an early supporter of IRVM and Larry put right in the register that the roadside office at UNI had a new newsletter. All you had to do was call this number and you'd get a free subscription, so BAM! all of a sudden we had three thousand people on our mailing list and that was fun, that was useful because this was going in to roadside prairie enthusiastic people all over the state and they could help spread the word and plow the ground a little bit for new programs in some new counties but also, you know, part of this was that there was a hunger, there was a hunger for this kind of information and not just in the state of Iowa but all over the country. It was big that any way to the combination of reducing herbicide use and using native plants. Your native plants and we would get requests from all over the country before very long, Roader's Digest was going out to thirty eight different states and half the Provinces in Canada. We had a pen pal coming from, I think it was Belgium-- you know, that was the fun stuff. That was really fun. Some of that again, didn't all really serve our mission but it was irresistible. Not too be a part of that network. There just wasn't anything out there you know, once

we wrote-- once we created the IRVM technical manual, we started having to charge for those when we'd get requests from Ontario or other states, things like that. We, you know, an example of how it was going, where did I put that. Listen to this. Over the past two years, Iowa's roadside program has been written up in a dozen magazines. This was from the November 1994 Roader's digest. Several of these have nationwide distribution. Each time that happens we get a few more letters and phone calls from around the country. After Sheila Daar of the Bio-integral research center in Berkeley, California featured Iowa's roadside program in the latest issue of the IPM Practitioner, this office received several calls. They were information requests from such places such as, Tindle Airforce Base, Florida, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario, Canada, San Francisco Water Works, New York Committee for Alternatives to Pesticides, Noxious Weed Advisory Panel, Angelwood, Colorado, Agricultural Resource Center, Carrboro, North Carolina, Kansas Department of Transportation and a Landscaper from Texas designing one-hundred acre run-off retention zones for Wal-Marts huge new distribution centers. All interested in the use of native vegetation. You know, that was fun, it felt really good, but boy it got distracting supplying information for all these things, just kind of flooding the office it seemed like. We'd get invited to speak-- this is where people would pay all my expenses to come to California for three days and speak at the California Native Grass Association the first day and then the second day go into Sacramento and meet with, you know, a small group of legislators in the California assembly, and at Penn State was the only other office I ever came across that was similar to ours, an office located at a university funding by Penn DOT to come up with-- to do research and come up with ways for controlling weeds and so Art Glover from there, we were- we went back and forth for a while and he finally got me out to Happy Valley to speak to the heads of all the different Pennsylvania DOT maintenance districts, that was kind of neat. See-- our dear friend Bonnie Harper-Lorr, she had me out to Washington D.C. to participate in the-- oh there's some giant transportation event with six thousand people from all over the country come to that thing and she decided, we need to have vegetation session included in this you know, national event so we-- I got to go out there and do that-- the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, one year they had a managing-- I guess they had that two years, Managing Roadsides Naturally Conference, and I got to go speak at that. That was such a fun time, when they called back for the next year, I told them that-- well Daryl Smith is a fun guy, too. He can talk a lot so we-- Daryl and I both went down to that second one and with him on the program. A lot of that kind of thing happened. It was-- it was heady stuff. Those were the things that made you feel like, wow we are it! We are in the center of it and you know, then part of what you-- what I would try to do is gather information on these events, these travels and communications, things to share with the county guys, but mostly you know, just tell them about it, too. So they can kind of feed off that energy and that feeling and those county guys, though, they were enjoying something similar to that on their own because way back in the early 90's especially, they soon became the prairie guy for their county, so many counties in those days they didn't have someone on staff who was knowledgeable on prairie restoration and so the roadside manager you know, he was a big deal in the local county as the person who you would contact to give you help, not just like we did. We were always feeding people what to plant, how to plant it, where to get seed, those were the three big questions the county guy could go

one step further and in a lot of cases come out with his drill and actually do the seeding. That independence varied from county to county. They had to be careful about how much work they did on private lands but a lot of counties saw that as a way to ingratiate themselves to local landowners just by doing that and many of them routinely would rent out their native grass drill as people got more and more into CRP. One thing that was interesting, speaking of planting and stuff, here's Daryl Smith again recognizing opportunities-- he you know, restoration in this state was really taking off and by 1990, you know, large projects were happening. Projects that outgrew the availability of real Iowa native seed and so you know, his dealing was if you are going to be doing these plantings let's use seed that came from actual Iowa prairie remnants and the Iowa eco-type project, you know, grew out of his head and again, he could conceive of this idea knowing that there was a roadside value to it, therefore the living roadway trust fund would be a possible place to get it funded and so you know, it was neat. It was really an extremely interesting process to be the fly on the wall was my job at that time. Watching the bureaucrats come together from several different agencies, Bob Lawson from Iowa Crop Improvement and the guys from the Elsberry Missouri Plant Materials Center, John Reed and Jimmy Henry and Al Ehley's boss, Bob Davidson, he was-- he was a plant materials agronomist guy from the Iowa NRCS and Steve Holland was at those meetings and later, eventually the Iowa Seed Producers were at those meetings and you know, you developed this process which is too kind of detailed to go into, great depth but we were working towards coming up with eventually a mass production of real native Iowa plant material. Where seed became more available in terms of you know, the quantities were out there and they were being produced so where you got cheaper prices due to the economy of scale and so that obviously became more available as a result of that and then the tricky part was though, these growers needed almost a pretty much guarantee someone was going to buy that seed and pay a little bit of a premium for it because they were going through all of this extra work to produce it. They were having to dedicate land and machinery and storage and equipment space just to that seed. Couldn't use that same stuff that you know that they used for the non-Iowa native seed being produced and we were kind of stuck for a while the growers wouldn't produce it in large enough-- the growers wouldn't produce it in large enough quantities to supply Iowa DOT they would buy it, so the neat thing was that just in time, the inter-modal surface transportation efficiency act ISTEA came along and was making, there was money available for transportation type projects and it took a few years but by 1998 I finally put it together in my head, okay, we will put in for-- I put in for a hundred and forty-two thousand dollars on behalf of all the counties in the program to make one large purchase of seed that the counties then would each take home their share for that years plantings and by doing that one two three years in a row, you know, buying a large amount of seed and that money amount increased from a hundred and forty-two thousand dollars the next year it was three-hundred and twenty-thousand dollars, and three-hundred and eighty-two thousand dollars. A couple years of four-hundred and sixty one thousand dollars' worth the seed where you were making this giant purchase and over those first few years then the growers realized okay, and somebody is buying a whole lot of seed who is interested in local seed enough that they are willing to pay a little bit extra, you know, for our effort to produce it and it was so it was that transportation enhancement money that we were getting at UNI for the county seed that

really finally drove the mass production and then eventually it got to the point where Iowa DOT could specify local source identified seed for their projects, too and-- we really enjoyed kind of a hay day there for a while, I don't know that Iowa DOT is buying as much native seed as they were for a while but I think between the big annual county purchase and the DOT purchase, that's still quite a driver for the source identified seed project and that was, you know, most satisfying things that I was able to do in sixteen years a total of four million dollars from the transportation enhancement program. Every nickel of which went for prairie grass and wildflower seed for the county plantings and that really bumped up the number of acres that the counties were planting each year then and that's still ongoing. [Long pause] Okay.

P: One of the funny things that happened along the way though was initially this idea of spot spraying was going to be people wearing a back-pack and walking up and down the county ditches. Oh, here's a thistle plant, squirt, squirt and you know, that I can't remember how many counties were trying to do it that way or if everybody did for one or two years, but soon-- real soon it became obvious that it just wasn't very realistic that you could put enough people with backpacks out there to get all the way around the county often enough to really you know, stay on top of the weeds and so luckily at the same time better spray truck technologies were developed that you could, you know, have a large truck with some kind of sprayer that targeted smaller spots a whole lot better. You know, no matter what kind of truck you had, it was still up to the person with their finger on the trigger to wither or not you were spraying a nice minimal spot versus big spots. That was something that sitting in the office at UNI, you didn't know, you crossed your fingers sometimes. Sometimes you got bad feelings about this county or that county-- they called it a spot sprayed program but how big were the spots? Again, we were not a regulatory agency, we could just advise, advise, promote promote these practices as much as possible. One thing that changed, you know, the internet, really changed the UNI roadside office a lot. In the beginning we called ourselves a clearing house of information. We had the time to sit and go through periodicals, you know, the different publications out there that might focus on vegetation management and native plant related subjects. We would photocopy them and mail them out to the counties and you know, with the internet and so many of the roadside managers having access to that, you don't hear the word clearing house of information anymore because everybody has so much access. So you know, that took a little bit away from our role but at the same time we were able to-- though the university set-up a what do you call it-- an online email list, a listserv where you know, the roadside managers could just email the list with some hot information or question they wanted and that thing went out instantly to all the other counties and the roadside managers, you know, did that in such a kind of professional way, people didn't abuse it with bad jokes or superficial kind of things, it was, but it was very, it functioned really well. I think that really enabled them, just was this whole 'nother way they could feel the other counties you know, without having to travel or get on the phone, you could fire a question off and get some feedback immediately from the people who really knew what was going on. Over the years, you know, we had roadside managers that had been there-- we used to give out plaques, first we'd give out a ten year awards and then we eventually we were even giving out some twenty year awards to roadside managers who had been in the program that long

and that was great, but what if your job was to put together the annual conference and with a program made up of experts to come in and tell these guys how to seed the ditches. They were the experts. There was nobody else out there with more experience and who'd put more into it than they had. So that became kind of a challenge. Something else that I really enjoyed a lot was kind of a neat thing, the LRTF was a very easy place to get funding to bring in other kinds of experts to put on workshops for the roadside managers, we would get just a general professional development grant from LRTF and we put-- initially those were prescribed burn workshops, getting all the roadside managers there certified in their-- S130, S190, we must have done close to ten of those over the years about the same time the DNR really took over offering that kind of certification by that time most of the county roadside managers had their certification so those workshops went by the wayside and so we branched out into other things-- used the fund to send people to storm water runoff certification workshops and there was a lot of stuff out there. We got real big into the-- always trying to provide professional development that would increase the value of the roadside manager to their county and wetland delineation was quite the focus, I-- you know, we must of done half a dozen different wetland delineation workshops eventually got it hooked up with the Army Corps and had them come to the Tall Grass Prairie Center, I think maybe that's still going on and offering that. One time we even like put on one, they brought in Meg Flenker, we called Wetland Delineation for Road-builders and that was a neat couple of days where we had the county engineers, several of them from all over the state to sit and listen to her talk about wetland delineation and it was interesting though because a lot of them made it obvious right there on the spot, they'd be like-- she'd be like telling them, everything that was a wetland and they had no idea how often they were impacting what technically was a wetland. A lot of them, I don't know if it changed the way they did business but they had their eyes opened a little bit. That was kind of fun. We did soils, we brought in Iowa State people and did a neat soils workshop where I got to send everybody home with-- what's that book called?-- that has the colors of all the-- those things are like a hundred dollars apiece. We sent every county home with one of those plus their own soil probe and so that was, I think we had ninety people at that winter meeting. Again, there was you know, several thousand dollars' worth the stuff paid for by the trust fund that the counties really seemed quite pleased to go home with.

I: I don't have a lot more questions because you are covering the stuff that I would have need to prompt you with so you're doing just fine so--

P: There was a neat moment in 1994 when Des Moines county and Lee county co-hosted the roadside conference and Don Dahl had a hydro-seeder and showed us beautiful stands of warm season grasses established with his hydro seeder. Up until that time, the conventional wisdom was it didn't work. That you couldn't establish natives very well with hydro-seeding and so that was a fun moment for Don to say, look! and you know, so the very next year, Black Hawk county puts in for a hydro-seeder and the committee says, okay we'll fund one for you. You come back and tell us how it goes and they-- you know, by 2010, they had purchased thirty hydro-seeders for the different counties and those things were a high-- those things were thirty-plus thousand dollars

and the trust fund would go, I don't know what it is now, I think got onto maybe twenty-four thousand dollars towards a hydro-seeder and that's a big deal. It's a huge thing to do for the counties. It was kind of interesting, you know, that brush control by the mid to late 90's became a bigger issue, I've always wondered, was that, you know, in county right of way, it is so narrow, you don't have a lot of room for trees and brush before they do become a visibility problem so a lot of engineers have a zero tolerance rule for trees and brush and most of the time that's in their dreams that they are going to keep up with the entire county and keep the ditches that clean, but that's kind of what they are shooting for with their efforts but I've always you know, started to wonder-- did trees and brush in county right of way get worse when we quit blanket spraying? Is that-- was that a, you know, collateral damage, just one more thing that really was kind of kept down a little more. I don't know. It just it just seemed like in the 90's later on the engineers became more and more worried about their liability that they-- you know, the nightmare was that somebody's gonna-- their car, their vehicle will leave the road and go into the ditch and smack into a tree with a trunk big enough, you know, to be an immovable object and there will be, not just the death but a huge lawsuit and the engineers rational was, well, if I cut down a big tree that somebody loved I might get sued for ten-thousand dollars. If someone hits a tree and dies, you know, I might get sued for ten-million dollars. Something along those lines. I was always pretty sympathetic with the engineers. That made sense. So anyway, there were in the mid to late 90's there were several roadside managers hired in new counties mostly because of their concern-- their need to do more brush and tree removal, cutting trees and brush in roadsides. That became an incentive. A motivation for some of the county engineers. We worked with them on that a fair amount, the Iowa Highway Transportation Board, they had funding and they put out an RFP for someone to do a county right-of-way tree and brush removal manual so I applied for that so we spent a year and produced the brush manual. One time the county engineers, somebody tried to say that it was illegal-- it's against the Iowa Code for the Board of Supervisors to give roadside management to county conservation. That they-- they thought they found language in the code that kind of made it so that wasn't even legal and so we had to-- they went to the attorney general for an opinion and it was more like the attorney general came back and advised them that no, the county supervisors do have the right to designate conservation boards as a home for the roadside manager. Another thing we went through was somebody in Hardin County complained and their local legislator started trying to pass some-- develop some legislation that actually would have made it illegal to spend state funds on wildflowers for roadside plantings. But this was, it wasn't so much calling it frivolous although I'm sure that's how they thought of it. We stopped using the word beautification after that and started producing things like this--

I: Native vegetation at work. Yes.

P: T-shirts and the whole conference theme and-- but what was-- their rationale was that if you put wildflowers in the ditch, that interfered with a farmers right or ability to earn a living because they had to be so careful applying herbicide to their crops so as the drift didn't carry over and kill the wildflowers and get them in trouble with the county. So their solution was-- we should stop seeding wildflowers in the ditches and you know,

that was one of the functions of the office at UNI. I wasn't a lobbyist but we had a lot of friends and our own local legislators who were sympathetic or very supportive of IRVM and our office and we could-- we could stave off, you know we could fight these-- those kinds of efforts that popped up from time to time. It was a challenge. Planting natives in the roadside is a challenge and I had a lot of frustrations later in years that kind of was built up in my head where you know, it was a really, it was a lot of work getting that transportation enhancement money through all the bureaucracy and administering that fund. That really started to over-whelm my job once I started doing that because it was an eighteen month process from the time you applied to the time you were passing out seed so you always had, you had three, you were applying at one time, you had another one in the process and then the seed was showing up so you sort of had three of those in the air at one time and it was, you know, to me it felt like the most important thing I could do but it was a whole lot of work and so when things would happen to these plantings it just kind of would break your spirit a little bit and you know, some of these things, some of the things that happened were beyond anybody's control, you'd have right after the initial planting season, you know, there'd be a huge downpour over a big chunk of the state and these things would get washed out in the county would be applying for seed next year to plant the same ditch again. That was kind of hard but those things, you know, wasn't any body's fault but sometimes you know, this-- the county to get photographs of their counties for the calendar. This was one of my favorite things to do, you know, I knew the guy the person in each county who knew where all the cool stuff was out there in the roadsides. Remnants and their best plantings and you'd go there and they would have such fun generally, driving me around showing me, you know, what they had done and I'd spend forever getting photographs and but part of those tours always included, "well, this was a great planting but this guy-- just he mows it in the middle of the summer every year." He just mows it and over time, you know the cool season grasses are favored by that mowing and the planting just gets so compromised or sometimes even worse you know, the land owner is spraying the ditch because they are pretty sure they own it, you know, technically the county right of way is an easement but the landowner has no rights to be, you know, doing anything in that county right of way, but that doesn't really erase their sense of ownership and it was tough to ride along-- and here's a compass plant that starts our growing straight and then it just starts bending and twisting all these different directions as it's reacting to the chemicals that it gets bombarded with and-- well maybe I said that wrong. I think mowing was really a bigger problem for the survival, quality of some of those plantings. As if it wasn't hard enough, you know, just establishing ditches-- challenge-- or establishing prairie in that tough environment and get it started and even without those types of things, the mowing and the spraying, you know, you are talking about such a narrow planting the margins and just constantly assailed by disturbances, you know, you got the little bit of encroachment from the last furrow getting turned over and kind of spills down the back slope and next thing you know, you have that bank of ragweed all along there or the snowplow comes by and scraps the shoulder and then you get a million little Canada thistle plants growing all up along there and the gravels buried the good stuff down in the bottom of the ditch and these are just natural-- unavoid-- you know, you are never going to win all those battles and prevent all of that stuff so life is tough for any prairie planting, anywhere. Then the roadside, you've got roads and bird

perches right above so the birds sit up there on the wire or the fence and deliver seeds of various woody species that naturally germinate and thrive and very curious to come back fifty years from now and just see the state of things in these plantings. I think it'll be a real mixed bag for some reason, some of those stretches of road continue to do really well, even without much or any burning. Other times you know Reeds canary grass just [woof] comes in and seems to take over and so that got kind of tough. It was interesting, once I was so involved in providing that seed, uhm, yeah. My feeling of ownership went way up and

[Laughter]

I: Yeah.

P: Got a little discouraging at times.

I: Sure.

P: But mostly that was going out and taking those pictures, that was just a really favorite thing to get to do.

I: Well, we are coming up on another line...