

Steve Holland

I: Okay, so today is April 7th. Interview with Steve Holland, interviewer is Jean Eells. Let me make sure I had the date right. So Steve would you start by telling us when you started with the DOT and kind of how that came to be-- if we will kind of start there and I might back us up and go from there.

P: You mean, how I came to be hired at the DOT?

I: Yeah. Mhm hum.

P: Well, now let's see. In 84' the farm crisis I had to get out of farming, and I had had my degree in Agronomy from Iowa State and so I was able to get a job with Lake O' Lakes and a local fertilizer plant to start with and then Land O' Lakes the last half of of 85' and then in 1986, one of our neighbors from in town just happened to drive by the house. They hardly ever do that and wanted to know if I'd be interested in a job as an Agronomist at the DOT. I said, "Well, yeah. I'd like to come back 'cause at that time I had moved back to North Central Iowa to Garner, Iowa as a field agronomist for Land O' Lakes. I went up and interviewed and got the job and it was supposed to last three to five years, I said that'd be great. So I started out-- supposed to teach the roadside people better ways to spray, better timing to spray, better things to do with mowing, timing and all that. So that's the way it started. Three years later then, this new program happened to come out of the legislature and the DOT was a little apprehensive about it being any place but at the DOT because with roadsides, they wanted to be in charge of what they did. So they set the position up eventually in the-- with Lowell Richardson in the county portion of the Department of Transportation and that's kind of where I began but with all the committees and with the REAP organization, getting it started in the first place. Then a committee was set-up with people from county conservation, from DNR, from communities, county level, roadsides and all that-- it was a really good combination of people to try and decide what they wanted to do with this program and so they worked hard on putting it all together. By the time they got finished, they pretty much had what we were supposed to do with the program written down and it's in the legislature-- it's really well written in our legislation...

I: So this is a REAP committee that was form--

P: REAP really started the push to do something different in roadsides. You know, not just change it all together, but to do something more self-sustaining. More proactive towards weed control and water infiltration, everything else-- it was a good program. They took some money from the roadside-- from the Department of Transportation and it had to do with the planting windbreaks and they weren't having a lot of luck getting

people to do that so they took some of that money and put it with the REAP money that was going to come in and see now, I'm kind of put out of my mind...

I: It's okay.

P: But there was another portion of monies that came out as well. There was about a hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth the just regular DOT money then plus the three percent of REAP which we got every year. The very first year it was-- I think it was either nine hundred or six hundred thousand the very first year, and that was before I even got into it. I went and Lowell Richardson was doing the interviewing and no one else from the DOT wanted it, and I said, "Sure I'll take it." It may only last a year, maybe two. I said, "That's okay, it sounded really good. It sounds like it would be a fun project and I'd get to do some really wonderful things and have money to back it up." So I took it and then twenty-four years later retired from it. A lot of it had to do with the fact that it had money to put projects in the ground. So people could see how it acted in the roadsides versus just telling them how good it would be. I think that was one of the main reasons that we kept going and were supported well enough-- people that didn't like it who got to see a small section of road and how it acted in the winter time, all of a sudden would want more. So those were some of the main things that I looked at starting but there's a lot more to it and again, it's written down in all the books about-- and in the legislation about how it's supposed to be spent and we just went with the-- and when I say we, the DOT, myself and others, Kirk Henderson, well he wasn't there right to start, what Daryl Smith and Paul Christensen and all involved in trying to help guide and select projects that would make a good impact and show what the natives could do in the roadside. So that's how it started and as far as that-- and I was hired in November of 1989 and our first round of applications was in the spring of 1990. There was no advertising, not real-- so we ended up with quite a bit of money left over and then the second year, it was pretty much all gone and then by the third year we did away with the second application date because there was usually not any money left. I went from there. Most of the times it started out around two hundred thousand and after that and the one year when Governor Branstad tried to get rid of it, we didn't have any money except for the license plate money, which was around twenty-four thousand dollars and then the DOT monies that were in there, which was another hundred and fifty thousand or so. So we ran on that that year and worked with the counties to do some seed planting where they had some ground they weren't using they wanted to plant it to the most used seed so that they could harvest that seed later on if the money ran out, they'd be able to you know, keep things going. Then it went back and it averaged about two hundred thousand until we got improved and we ended up with around three hundred thousand and then they put it in with something else. I always thought that was funny how this worked, that the legislators got together with the unanimous vote to do [audio cuts out] and as they left office and got down to where there was only one or two left, it became difficult. Then finally, the new Land and Water Act, so they almost-- it seemed like they almost left us out of it.

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I: I'm just going to clip this, I'm just watching how well it's picking up and I want to make sure it catches you best, so I'm sorry. Okay. Yeah, so they were--

P: We had different support at different support at different times and I think one of the interesting things-- probably something I shouldn't mention, but I was very pleased with-- I happened to have gotten an application to do a project up in Lake Mills, Iowa to plant prairie around their Norwegian monument that they had, and it was a really exciting project that way 'cause they had the statue of an immigrant family with a man, a woman, and their two children, and I can't remember his name-- the architect, but anyway, when he heard that we were going to be planting prairie, he redid his model for me and put black eyed Susan's in the little girl's hand.

I: Oh, cool!

P: They were looking out over-- more or less over prairie, and eventually there was windmills and stuff out there now-- which is kind of neat too, but at that time that was when Governor Branstad and the legislature was trying to cut out money so they could make ends meet, and this was one of the programs they were going to take. Virginia Kingsland was the person that I worked with out there on the project says, "Oh, he wouldn't want to do that. I've known Terry since he was a little boy. I'm going to talk to him." And we kept the funding. So if you know just the right people, just the right time is the way that it seems to have helped the thing grow all through the years.

I: And those are really key points that I'm looking for because you know, a lot of times it is about relationships but unless we capture what those relationships are, we don't necessarily know how those things came to be-- so yeah. That's great.

P: As we went along of course, we partnered with Trees Forever and the prairie people didn't like that and Trees Forever was a little bit apprehensive about the prairie people because they always talked against the trees and really it was just so strange because it's all part of the environment and eventually it worked out well, we still had conflicts occasionally but all of a sudden it became a very mutual benefit for both sides and started understanding we need the entire environment-- not just this piece and that piece and so...

I: Tell me a little bit more about the relationship between LRTF and IRVM and how you see them different, and how they have evolved.

P: They work extremely well together. To start with, we were their funding. We were supposed to give so much and that worked out well. It wasn't very much-- it started out at fifty thousand dollars and it was bumped up to seventy-five thousand, which still was very little. But then, Kirk took over and once he started doing it, he was able to get

funding through other DOT programs and other ways to bring money into the county and help support it that way as well as we did at the DOT to take our dollar and make it worth more and that really helped to sustain, otherwise we would have been doing very minimal work. When you look at nine hundred thousand to a million dollars it's a lot of money to me and to most people in Iowa, but when you are trying to cover ninety-nine counties and nine hundred communities and then the state as well, it's just-- you really have to see what you are doing that's going to make the biggest impact on people and I - it might be my fault or my benefit but I always felt that having the plantings in the ground so people could see them-- get used to them, made the biggest difference.

I: That helps explain the philosophical orientation of what we see. You know, to see that.

P: Not all of it worked and it still doesn't today. I still-- I've been retired for almost four years and I drive around and see areas mowed off it hurts because I know what's there and what it could be doing, but there's still people out there fighting for it and understand the benefits and even with snow control, it's better for snow control than a snow fence if they really get a good planting. That's the problem, we weren't always able to establish a good planting for one reason or another. You know, road ditches are definitely a different breed of planting area. It's changed upon the whim of necessity for safety and drainage and so...

I: That has probably been a pretty exciting evolution to think about where we started with planting and roadsides was thought to be the best idea in the first place and when I visited with Jake Landers in Texas he said that it was in the very early years it was very discouraging to him because he was trying to plant into brome and they were trying to plant seedlings and there wasn't any capacity to get out there and water so the seedlings would die and so he said in the early, early years it was really discouraging.

P: Yeah in the 1960's when they first started doing the interstate, they tried to get the prairie in then and they were up here in Ames at the rest area out behind there was about thirty acres that he had planted and part of the problem then was the only seed available came from Texas or Kansas and it didn't grow sustainably in Iowa because the seedlings didn't mature at the right time. Things like that. So yeah, that was the basis and that's also one of the basis of why the former people in charge of landscaping said it just plain doesn't work. You know, but places that had native prairie next to it, especially down south around Osceola-- that really wasn't planted but the pastures had native flowers and grasses that came out into the roadsides and we started looking and you could see that and how much better it was. As we developed the source identified seeds to be able to use that we knew were in Iowa that would mature at the right times, have good viable seed, you know, it started making a difference. You know, our landscape people have done a great job keeping you know, erosion and everything-- with the tree program that was started back in the late 80's they were going to make it
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into a national forest almost, you know, and they joked about that at the time, I said well why not spend half that money and make it into-- back into a prairie? That's about what it was was a joke, but as they went along planting trees, there's only certain places they could go and they were planting them in wide open areas and I said, "Have you checked for prairie before you do that?" Well, no, we are supposed to plant trees. Well once they ran out of places to plant the trees they started planting prairie and that's why we had even more and all of interstate 35 has been planted to prairie, not all of it has taken as well but it is all the way along. When they have to go in and reset the slopes and things like that, it's just tough to see it go, but they are still trying to put it back so there still is a place for that.

I: So are they-- I guess this is a question I can ask Tory and Mark, are they pulling trees out then?

P: No, they really aren't pulling out.

I: They are just kind of blending in..

P: Planting the prairie around still and they have done a great job of trying to do that. The Roads Control Specialist now, used to be Ole Skaar, Mike Heller I think is still there, but I'm not positive but they don't plant any more crown vetch_and you know, things like that. They are just planting their prairie. There is still crown vetch_out there. There probably always will be. There will always be weeds, you know. When I was in the maintenance end of it, they accused me of carrying thistle seed around to have job security so-- but the prairie will help to inhibit it. It doesn't destroy it, but it inhibits itself. Things like that. That are important.

I: Did you have-- because you were a DOT employee, I realize your role is different than like Landers as an ISU professor was, but did you have a-- any interaction with legislators directly? Did they come to you?

P: Only in the first or second year did I have any contact because I was supposed to give a report and then they decided that our report would be our website that we developed that would show where projects were or what they were about and now from what I understand from Mark, that's been removed from the internet and they are supposedly going to start it again at the DOT but it's so large that they are having trouble and their priority is not there, so I don't know how that's coming, but that was a place where everyone could go and see the numbers of projects in their st-- in their county, in the community and be able to look at what's been applied for and what's been funded and how they can use that money and again, I don't know how that's going now with that not being there. We had the plant identification web part that people go in and choose plants by color, by native bloom, by height, by everything and Maria Urice_was

very important in putting that together and other things that were useful are now not available. We put together ID books, we put together posters, we put together things that-- I went every conference I could, wither it was with the Sierra Club or whoever and the guys at the DOT said you can't go talk to them, they are fanatics-- at first and then people-- no no, you need to listen to both sides and listen to what they have to say and it really, it did make a difference after a while and it made it easier to talk to people and more empathetic, sympathetic, whatever you want to say, we could start to understand each other and that we weren't doing anything on either side to try to hurt someone else and I don't know that anyone is going to any conferences anymore or not. So.

I: So that was really something that came from you, it was really, you were willing to go-

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P: Go see people.

I: Go see people and talk to 'em and have that sort of thing.

P: Kirk in the Roadside Department did the same thing. They were always, whatever they could do to put a conference together or attend a conference, Al Ehley was there before Kirk and that's who I was trying to think, and he came from the Soil and Water-- uh, people. Was there temporarily, and then when they hired Kirk he was able to go back to that. He put together brochures on Fire Management and things, which people at Iowa State would ask me, "You mean you are going to burn on the roadside? What a problem!" I said, "Well, we won't burn them all at once hopefully, but-- and we won't burn them every year like at that time was-- we will burn them when they look like they need some burning. We will use it a a tool and those are things that we tried to teach people. They are all tools. Mowing is a tool and spraying is a tool and burning's a tool to be able to have these get established and we can't turn buffalo out to graze them so the mowing can help if we can do it in the correct way which is usually getting rid of everything that we mow. So all those things became apparent as I went to conferences and heard people talk about management and I always was kind of amazed how the prairie people would argue with each other on the best way, and everyone else would argue on the best way and usually someone is arguing because they tried it and it worked for them so this is how you have to do it. Without thinking that maybe that was just a special year or a special time. So those types of things are needed and we are needed and having the money to be able to do these things, to put together, the brochures and the books and all the rest of the things that we handed out got people to come in to where you could talk to 'em. It also left them with some information they could look at every day instead of just forgetting about it, which most people do. You go home from a conference and "Wow, that was really interesting," but after a week or two you know it kind of fades away but when you got a poster on your wall, you go "Oh, I remember, yeah!" and this weed out in my pasture is this one on this poster and that

weed will always be there and you know, people want to change the name of Butterfly Milkweed and things like that because it had it in there, but that's just part of our nature.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

P: I wander a lot here too, and my wife has always told me my mind is too small to be out wandering around so...

I: This is perfect. You are going exactly where I need you to go, so this is fine. Tell me a little bit more about the early technology and how you saw that evolve as far as how things were planted and what got planted and you know, equipment manufacturing and hydro seeding and you know, tell me more about the evolution of that.

P: Well, we did. We did some research and especially with hydro seeding because they did it the same way you would do a cool season grass with lots of mulch and fertilizer and everything else and we had to say no, take the fertilizer out for one thing, you know, the mulch is okay, just don't get it too thick so that you really bury the seed, but it's it's turned out pretty good they used to do broadcast seeding and used helicopters and airplanes and that actually worked pretty well as long as the ground was prepared to take it and you had controlled the weeds and the brome to start with and placement of the seed is important, we went to no-till drills and the people that used no-till drills started out putting it too deep.

I: Ah.

P: And too deep for prairie is deeper than a half inch for ninety percent of the seeds. There's few that will come up deeper than that but so that was difficult so we eventually got so they took every other tube off of the seed drill so that half of it was dropping right on top of the ground and half of it being placed in-case it got too deep. But placement is important. The other important was to pack it, roll it, to get it to get good soil contact. That was more important than a lot of things. Some people in the DOT, the only packer they had was a road packer and it was too heavy and would crush seed and things like that. So a lot of things that we looked at, how to place the seed and whether it should be fertilized or not, if the weeds were growing you didn't need fertilizer, it was kind of a rule of thumb. When you planted it, if you saw Black-eyed Susans, you know your planting would be okay. You know, if you put them in there. Things like that that made it encouraging so that they knew, and then you'd say yes, it's going to get better as years go by. You know, unless you mow it too often or spray it at the wrong time or mow it at the wrong time or you know, there's things you could do to really stress it. One of the things was like Canada thistle control, from mid-June or the end of June anywhere in Iowa you can spray for Canada thistle control 'cause that's pre-bud to bloom stage but it actually comes up in April in Southern Iowa and May in Northern Iowa. People you

know, timing and things. When you got native grasses out there, they really start to grow in June. Mid-June and through July. So when people would come in and mow everything off, yes they open it up for sunlight but they'd also keep it open for the thistles. Who are now starting to put energy into the-- they are going dormant and they are putting energy into their roots. In July, they would go and mow off the tall prairie because it didn't look right. That would stress it down. So forth and so on. So we just kept watching, kept looking. When I first got in, I didn't know what prairie was, my first introduction was actually with Carl Kurtz, who the state's wildflower organization declared him to come to our herbicide training schools and give a half hour presentation on prairie, how to plant it, how to nurture it, and what it was. You know, all of a sudden, it just kind of woke up that you know, these guys aren't doing anything to hurt you. They just didn't know about these plants. They didn't know that they weren't just weeds. That they have a place and after a few years, it was fun for me to be at the training sessions and have the guy come and say, "yeah, my kids really proud of me. We go by and see wildflowers and they say, my dad had something to do with that." You know, it makes 'em feel good. Rather than just mowing everything off. Then we talked to the people who are upset because they are mowing, so well they are supposed to mow of the weeds at a certain time. You know what, if you see one black-eyed Susan clump in a mile long area, that they didn't mow-- call in a compliment about that instead of mowing the entire thing. You'll be surprised, there will be a lot more black-eyed Susan's the next year. They won't you know, get a stiff neck and decide they were just going to mow everything off. So little things like that have been a lot of it-- helped to make a difference. It certainly didn't promote it like some people want, but it just was a slow process and a slower process usually works better than an all-out assault. You know, I looked at Minnesota and Monte Harper Moore did some great things up there and they would get out and right after they planted and put signs up, prairie in progress and everything else with the planting may have failed in two years or three years. I said, let's put the planting sign up when it's developed and we know it's going to do well, if that's what we are going to do. But I also, as a lot of people feel, we didn't want signs on every mile of the roadway. Didn't want them even every hundred miles, basically. So.

I: I will visit a little bit more with Tom Rosburg but with his planting on I-35, can you tell me more about how that came to be-- and--

P: He didn't actually do the planting.

I: Right.

P: That was Trelan Wilson that got-- worked with Pulaski Company they are a contract company down in Ankeny. Oh, I wish I could remember their names, they are nice people-- but he came in and decided what would be planted and where. Over a hundred and twelve species of wildflowers and thirty three species of grasses. Wet dry areas, sand areas. Then we hired Tom Rosburg to come out and do research to see how well
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it's developing. He told me, he said, well at first he told me-- this was just going to be silly because it's just going to be road grass. He said the first year, "yeah it kind of looked that way." The second year, "oh gosh things are coming here." And by the third year, he said, "yeah this was actually a nice place to be." By the time he got done with his inventory, all but three species had come up and were growing. Those were wetland species that he didn't realize, you know, they didn't do so well. That always gets me up to Minnesota where they put in a wetland area along the roads and everything. Planted prairie around it, you know up on the slopes and everything else. It never got to be a wetland because of that prairie. They had to redo things.

I: Because it--

P: The way the water infiltrated in the soil and went away, it didn't just drain down-- surface drain right into the wet area.

I: And they were wanting a wetland. Yeah.

P: Then we-- in recent years they started doing the-- I can't come up with the term where you plant an area in a community to-- for drainage.

I: Yes.

P: And they redo the soil all together and put a lot of sand in and everything else so it will drain quickly, and then plant wetland plants in that. It doesn't stay wet enough to sustain it.

I: To sustain 'em.

P: So you know, those types of things people would understand as they, you know, they had great ideas, but until it actually got in the soil, and that's why I feel good about the fact I wanted to make sure the first thing we did was plant them out where people could see it and understand. Look at it over the years, most research that people want to do is one or two years. You need five to ten years to really look at prairie because it's going to take that kind of time to really see what's happening. The same way with these drainage areas. They are wonderful ideas and they work really well, but they need to plant a little drier planting in the top. Things like that.

I: So within the DOT was there much push, pull, tugging from--

P: It was let's protect this. Don't let it get away or we won't be able to re-do our roadsides. If we start putting in endangered species it'll be protected and we can't do anything. You know, and I-- I was [sounds like putting it] usually, and I said, "You know,

if we put enough in they will become not endangered" but the prairie people didn't like that because we are artificially doing it. That's about the only way you can do it nowadays.

I: Yeah.

P: But ah, They were-- we were low on the totem pole as far as funding and priorities but yet they kept an eye on us to make sure we didn't do anything that would restrict how the roads were done. They've done great things in recent years of you know, putting a curve in the road where they didn't want to, and helping preserve some natural areas, even though we have to go through a natural area. It was always remarkable to me to hear from people from the archeology, the finding artifacts like that that-- if it wasn't for roadsides in Iowa, there would be very little artifact finding done. Most of the great finds were because a road was going through.

I: Yeah.

P: One of our posters was a prairie along the roadside and I've went back to people who were prairie enthusiast and they had cut out the road and put the flowers together. They didn't like that. And I said, "yeah, but wouldn't it be nice if there was prairie along every roadside." We can own-- we manage three percent of the land mass in Iowa. In our roadsides. That's over twice what the DNR has for parks and recreational areas. So you know, I felt we had a responsibility to do better things, now to call them nicer or prettier, you know, not everybody agrees but for what they actually do physically and in water drainage and weeds suppression and adding beauty-- the people from Texas came up and to the National Prairie Conference at UNI that one year in the middle of-- either the end of July or the first part of August and it was so green and lush and beautiful up here and they said, "Gosh, we don't have this in Texas," but everyone goes to Texas to see the wildflower bloom in April and March. March and April. I said, "We've got four to five months of good bloom dates up here and more so we can use that for tourism if we want." We did put together some information on that. Again, it was on the website and things.

I: Tell me a little bit more about some of the ways that the programs evolved, so you mentioned that you started to work with Trees forever and that, as I recall having been part of that, was--

P: More connection with communities. More connection with communities.

I: Tell me a little bit more about that connection with communities. Where did it come from?

P: They were already in the communities. Trees Forever had already done that. My-- what I was supposed to do was city, county and state. Everyone in the county thought I was only state. Everyone in the state thought I was only county. Then I was supposed to do cities, well you are only county and state. Well, you are only city. You know, so it goes that way. Well Trees Forever had a great presence in the cities with all the plantings they did, the promotions they did for trees and when we started working together, they branched out into prairie and the total ecosystem which was really great. I knew they had the interest, they all loved it, but now they actually included it in their training and recommending for plantings and so that helped reach so many more communities that Kirk Henderson and the IRVM program had trouble reaching all of the communities. They were very important in the county level. They did so much good in the county level in supporting those people out there. Then I could concentrate-- what little they'd let me do in the state, and I really didn't get to do that much with state plantings except for the two big plantings on I-235. I-- we were able to put funding towards some down on 163 near the Neil Smith Wildlife area. Then Ole Skaar with the roads control took one of the interchanges and put that to prairie and it's been an awful lot of money because of certain circumstances that caused it, but anyway, so people began working more together that way and with the group of people with Trees Forever they could reach so many more communities and be in so many more meetings and helping promote so--

I: Then-- that was a lot focused on kind of community entry ways and you know, the portal from the highway into the community---

P: Then there came trails along with that. We used to use city parks along with their sidewalks as trails, to try to make things work. To find any way we could to use the funding available in Iowa in a legal way and to make it work to get more funding to do these plantings to help the communities. We still wanted them to contribute time and money and if they didn't have the money, at least the time, and so forth. So they could buy into a program. So somebody couldn't just come in, pay a bunch of money, plant a nice planting and then who cares? We didn't buy it. We didn't pay for it. That's not what we really wanted, that type of thing.

I: Add to that, then stretch to tell me a little bit more about with schools and--

P: The schools started because one of the people that I was able to hire to-- early on when I was in the county with Lowell Richardson and Ron Wright was his name and he was very active with schools and stuff and he got a project going in Sloan, Iowa to-- with a school to plant the roadside in front of the school with natives. All of a sudden that seemed like such a great idea that we just kind of exploded from there and encouraged them to do that because of the training that the kids would have. Seeing these plants as children and seeing them in their roads, their farms, their communities. Knowing that they weren't something bad would make it more acceptable and it was-- it's been a

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great program that way. Providing them with the books and the posters and everything that they have. It was interesting with those posters-- when I first started doing them they weren't in the rolled up packs and I would roll four-hundred sets a night for the state fair. Every night and go in--- and the fair would open at 9:00 and the Governor's Booth at that time, allowed me to be there and I would hand out, and they would be gone by 11:00. People waiting in line. It stopped the day that Governor Vilsack was due to give a speech and there was still a big line waiting to get the posters and they weren't going to get out of the way. I felt really bad, but we did get out of the way, but we were never allowed to do that again.

I: Shoot.

P: So we just found another place to go and so-- but it's interesting, just people wanted that information and we were allowed to put prairie plants in the Governor's Booth to help people understand and that brought a lot of comments from-- you know, state fair in Iowa, everyone comes from all over. Including other states, but all over Iowa they come, and it's a chance to touch at least one or two people from every county almost. The state-- the Farm Bureau had their large plot and-- they worked to put on a planting with switchgrass and just some basic things, well when we got there it just, it seemed to always be over-run because no one was taking care of it so we went in and took that out and put a lot of flowers in and made it supposedly like our pioneer grandmothers flower garden would be and put a fence around it to give it a little more importance and identified the plants and no one at the Farm Bureau-- all the farmers would come in there and no one ever complained about it. They were worried about bees stinging them, I said, the only way you will get stung is if they are on those other plants that aren't native and they are flying back and forth but if they are there they are getting-- it was fun to-- all the different things we could see and do and try to reach more people. We talked about the fact we started out in the roadside program with Al Eli, putting together the ads for TV to air on TV, but to do that they would be on at one or two o'clock in the morning and no one would see 'em. We put quite a bit of money in those. Same way with the radio. So we thought these other things with books and posters and something that people wanted that we could give to them for free and people said you should charge. I said no, we want to make sure everyone will get one. Well why wouldn't they pay for it? Well, that's true and they might throw it away but they might throw it down and someone else pick it up. So...

I: I find it interesting as I travel around Iowa I see those posters framed everywhere. Everywhere. I mean, and all, you know some of the earliest ones to some of the later ones. Everything in between, but they are everywhere and they are still there and I see people's books-- spot a book on the shelves.

P: And we gave away bookmarks!

I: Yeah.

P: Things like that. It was interesting because we got to-- one of the Trees Forever meetings they had Nina Leopold I think it was, came down and we framed a large black one, that Mark-- that-- was a very first one he made and when it was presented, he said who took the time to press all these, that's how good they were. Mark Muhler did such a wonderful-- and he was so willing to work with us-- he got very little compensation for the value of what those were. When we first started he was charging fifteen dollars for that poster and getting it, but he allowed us to give away thousands of them for free and he was just an amazing person.

I: Yeah and they all have a signature look now which I really appreciate, I think that's a cool cool collection at that point.

P: He put together the blooming heights and I recommended he put the buffalo and he said, "I think that's a good idea" and then he did the blooming dates one which is really outstanding when you look at it, when I was at the state fair people wouldn't take it because it's not all that pretty and then I explained what it did and oh, well they put the other one down and take that one and go, oh I'll take the other one too. He made room on that poster so no matter where you had it, you could see this plant blooming and if you were in northern Iowa versus southern Iowa you could write the date that you saw on it versus what the approximated dates were and things. Just great. So much fun! I was so blessed for the people I met and the goodness that they showed and their desire to do good things for other people.

I: Yeah. Came at the right time and the right place. That's--

P: That's been my whole life. Nothing planned. Accidently right place, right time. Keith McGuinness was a wonderful person and did so much in western Iowa to help promote the prairie. Took me to some of these hillside prairie. Loess Hill prairie. It was interesting this one time we went to this one and we found this new plant blooming, he had found it and he wanted me to come and look at it. The Prairie Fringed Orchid. We talked to Mark-- ugh. Come on, I know your name. Over at the DNR, he was in charge of endangered specie-- worked along.

I: Mark Leoschke?

P: Leoschke yes. And he knew there were six hundred and twelve plants in Iowa. He knew that. Keith had him come out there and there were three hundred more plants on that one hill.

I: Yay!

Transcribed by Ashley Kinkade, kinkadea1@gmail.com

P: And things like this. So you know, things that our experts always know and always are certain of, they don't necessarily know everything. And that's the other thing I've enjoyed about what I did there was we would find just the common people that would-- the local farmer or someone just going for a walk that finds things or really enjoys things and points it out to other people. Our roadsides in places look really good and I've talked with farmers who hated it because we were planting weeds and then I explain to them, see 'em, listen to 'em rant at me for a while and then go and show them another place that had the same problem that's now prairie and they start to understand and I start to understand. That's the thing, we both learn when we do those things. People aren't doing this for evil reasons. They are doing it because they don't understand. If we can do it in a way that helps that---

I: I always appreciated that you would say that the only person who didn't like a prairie was somebody that hadn't walked in it.

P: But there are people that walk in them that don't like them still because it's hot and-- It was Rob Roman took-- he always had great meetings and the one day it was around a hundred degrees and it was in July and we were in no wind and he walked a hundred and twenty five people from Marion County through this prairie area that they had planted and it was tall grass and lots of flowers and no one complained and I was surprised because they were out there for a little over an hour and came back to talk and it was-- it's amazing, you know, when people actually learn what's going on and touch those plants and start to realize what they are doing for the water, the soil and the microbes, the insects, the birds, the mammals, you know we cover everything and some of us tend to get tunnel vision and don't see all that so-- when you are growing things in a pot, you don't always get to understand that so--

I: Yeah, you don't always get to understand that. Tell me a little bit more about the relationship with some of the seed providers, Keith McGuinness was one. McGuinness seed.

P: Yeah, and Howard Bright and-- let's see I'm going to forget names because they all meant a lot but even Deeters from up in, Howards Deeters from up in southeast Minnesota came down. They got the contract to do our I-35 planting. I was thrilled to death because they plant prairie and make it work and they did that out here. They know what it took. How to place it and everything else. It-- I didn't lose as much sleep because I knew they were people who knew what they were doing. They all-- we would meet periodically thanks to Kirk and the roadside program. They would put together a conference and come up and we'd all sit together and talk about needs and how we can help promote theirs to make it more worthwhile to help bring down prices and we can't really-- we couldn't really promote it-- but we could at least but what we could and knew we were getting good seed. They did what they could to promote what we do. So that

worked out, about, we had good relationships that way that-- trying to get people to understand the reasons why we do things.

I: Sure. That all translated then, either directly or indirectly to legislative support which led to funding support, which led--

P: These growers would go to the legislature and fight for it, yes. Things that we couldn't do-- yeah. It's a wonderful time. I hope it's still going on! I think it is. I don't know, so.

I: I think that's true. Well, I want to respect your time and understand where you're at. What I would ask is if I, you know, after I kind of process this a little bit, if I have any additional questions, that I might be able to reschedule.

P: Yeah, while I still have it.

I: Yeah. And you do, and you do. That's a great deal. So I'm going to stop this now.