

Interview Transcription

Interviewee: Randy Ray, Executive Director, Central Colorado Water Conservancy District

Interviewer: Mitchell Schaefer

Location: Central Colorado Water Conservancy District, Greeley, Colorado

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Transcribed by: Zach Lewis

Abstract: In this interview, Randy Ray discusses his role as Executive Director for the Central Colorado Water Conservancy District regarding the 2013 floods in Northern Colorado. Ray's work for Central is to augment the river depletions created by pumping and consuming local alluvial ground water for agricultural purposes. His office qualified for FEMA monetary aid in the wake of the flood—they had lost a fair amount of electronic measuring equipment—but only after some confusion about their status as a local government. Ray stresses the importance of forming pre-existing relationships with local, state, and federal agencies involved with water management and rivers to ease communication during a disaster. His office offered their community aid during the flood by providing their storage pits as diversion areas and guiding local folks to state and federal assistance.

MS: I am Mitchell Schaefer, a graduate student and researcher with the Public Lands History Center at Colorado State University, working on the 2013 Colorado Flood Oral History Project. Today on August 8th, 2014, at 2:00 p.m., I am at the Central Colorado Water Conservancy District in Greeley, Colorado, interviewing Randy Ray, who works as the Executive Director for the Central Colorado Water Conservancy District. In September 2013, Mr. Ray worked in that same capacity during the flood events that affected several counties in Colorado. Today's interview will focus on his role in responding to that crisis. To start, could you give us a brief background of where you're from and how you ended up in this position?

RR: Sure, Mitch. I grew, uh, up south of Greeley, on a small dairy farm—about three hundred acres. And Dad milked about eighty or ninety cows. The farm was between LaSalle and Gilcrest, and, uh, I was active in the farming and dairy operation, went to high school at, uh, Valley High School in Gilcrest, and continued to farm, graduated, um, 1988 and went to Northeastern Junior College in Sterling, Colorado. And spent two ye— two years there, got an Associate's Degree in Production Agriculture, and then I transferred to Colorado State University in Fort Collins, and I, um, got a Bachelor's Degree in Agronomy. Um. So I got those two degrees, and the last would be my Junior— my Sophomore, Junior, and Senior year, I worked here at Central Colorado Water Conservancy District, or CCWCD, as an intern for those three summers, and what I did was pick up the, kind of the middle of a water quality grant that the district and, uh, there's two grants actually, the district and EPA had a grant. Then there was a District and a Department of Health 319 grant with the State of Colorado, and we were taking a look at effects on irrigated agriculture

as related to pesticides and nitrogen in surface water and groundwater. So I spent those three summers mainly collecting water samples—myself and another intern. Central usually had two interns, and we would collect soil and water samples, do general field duties. We started to assist, the last year I started to assist more and more with the augmentation plan that Central operates, and being sure that the, uh, water supply for the augmentation plan, um, the ditches were delivering the water and we were getting proper measurement and those kind of things. But my internship was mainly around, uh, water quality in the 90s; it was the summer of 1990, 1991, and 1993.

Then I graduated from Colorado State University December of 1993, and shortly thereafter, I think a week or two thereafter, the Board of Directors here at Central—there's fifteen active and retired farmers on our board—they went ahead and hired me full-time at that board meeting in December, and I've been with the District ever since. My job duties early on as a full time employee was continuing the water quality; the one grant with EPA got wrapped up but we were still a year or two left in the 319 State Department Health grant, so I assisted the then-manager at the time, executive director Tom Cech, assisted him to wrap up that study and get the final report out, and I continued to work very closely with the staff Engineer, his name was Forest Leaf, and learned more and more about water resources, and groundwater, and what the task of the Central, the job that Central had to do. We had an augmentation plan, and I learned more and more about that, attended every board meeting. Um, Tom and Forest were very good at, kind of bringing me on and showing me the ropes.

In the late 1990s, um, with change in the administration and Washington, we were seeing when the Republicans took office there was less of a, um, issue with water quality it seemed like, and I think that the District did a really good job with, um, collecting data, doing reports, working with landowners, and showing that irrigated ag really wasn't a, as big of a contributor to nitrate pollution in the Louisville Aquifer as once was suspected. Um, so as that kind of transitioned then we started getting into the years where the climate was sort of drying up a little more. The 80s through like the 1996-1997 were really wet; '98, '99, uh, we weren't getting quite as much snow, and precip down here in the summer. And about 1998, '99, there was some grumbling, um, from senior water right holders that augmentation plans weren't up to snuff, so, um, it was about 2002 that our Staff Engineer left, Forest Leaf; he went on to pursue a career on his own. And Central hired a consulting engineering firm, and there was a whole chain of events that led to requirements for full augmentation of our, at the time, about 1500 wells that we provided augmentation for. So there was about five, six, seven years there that, ah, there was a lot of work involved in transferring from water quality into water supplying kind of work. The Central—the two sub-districts from Central, well only one of them were formed at the time—GMS—they went to the voters in 2004 or 2005, and were successful in getting some bond funds. Um, so that also was a good learning experience for me because we went out and built a lot of gravel pit water storage facilities. Bought a bunch more water rights—senior water rights—and developed more groundwater recharge. So I quickly became, ah, Construction Supervisor and worked

closely with contractors and engineers doing design work, and, between Tom Cech and I and help from the Board of Directors, we were real successful in getting a lot of these projects done.

And then in 2004, after the Groundwater Appropriators of the South Platte—um, their acronym is GASP—in Fort Morgan shut their doors down, there was about four thousand wells that didn't have a home. They didn't have an augmentation plan; they couldn't legally operate. So over the course of a year, this board of directors, these fifteen farmers and retired farmers, decided to create another subdistrict, which is the Well Augmentation Subdistrict, and they brought in about 440 new well, started a new augmentation plan, started collecting taxes, passed some more bonds, and we did the same thing with GMS. We bought water rights, built recharge, developed gravel pit storage. And, uh, then for the next two years, from '04 to '06, um, both of those big augmentation plans ended up getting decreed, so then I got a real quick education on water rights and, ah, how to get through water court and objectors, and that, ah, definitely was a learning experience.

So we're at about 2005 now, 2006. My next big task in '05 and '06 was the, ah, requirement in those aug plan¹ decrees to install flow meters on the wells. We now had to not just estimate the consumptive use, used of ground water, we had to actually measure, measure that, so it was my task, my responsibility, to have 1500 flow meters installed within a couple of years. So we hired another staff member. His name was John Begram, and I got a good start on them, and John helped wrap those up and we got them all installed. That was— so now we're at about 2008. From 2008 to the current, um, it's been, ah, it's been a process of getting any lingering senior water rights and recharge projects that we had decree, or that we had applied for. We purchased the water rights and filed the applications to change them. It takes two, three, four, sometimes five years to get them through water court. So between '08 and 2011, um, we pretty well got all those water rights changed for use in our aug plan. And then in 2012 Central's Board of Directors, there was one district left that didn't go to the voters for some indebtedness, and that was the main district, CCWCD, so November 2012 we put a ballot question on and asked the voters to approve \$60 million in debt to secure additional water rights and water storage. So for the last year and a half we've been evaluating, almost two years now, we've been evaluating projects, and we've got 28.4 million of that 60 million committed to, um, water storage in the Chatfield Reservoir Reallocation Project. That project is 20,600 acre-feet of new storage. Central owns a 1983, 1983 appropriation, '84 water right, and ah, we now have 4,274 acre-feet in that project. So half of the money roughly is committed to Chatfield, and the balance, uh, we've made one transaction on a farm and some water rights by Fort Lupton, and that was about three and a half million, so the remaining twenty-six, twenty-seven million, we haven't executed any of those contracts yet, but we've got some good projects evaluated, and working with those owners.

MS: Okay.

¹ augmentation plan

RR: So that's where we are with that, and right now this, we're planning on putting another question to the voters, in this fall of 2014, and we're going to ask them if they would consider de-Brucing CCWCD, which gets us out from the requirements of the Tabor Act, the "taxpayer's bill of rights act," and also another mill levy question, and the purpose of that is to collect somewhere around a million dollars a year to pay for operation and maintenance, O&M, and replacement of facilities that are already in existence and/or will be built with the \$60 million in bond funds.

MS: So what exactly is the purpose of the Central Colorado Water Conservancy District? You described kind of a lot of what the projects are,...

RR: Umhmm

MS: ...and you kind of hinted at kind of a transfer, and what's the responsibilities, what is in now?

RR: Well our duty, from the— We were formed in the Conservancy Act of 1965, like all...

MS: In the State of Colorado Act?

RR: In the state, yup. U.S., yup. And our duty as a Conservancy Act is to develop, promote, and provide water resources for our constituents within our district boundaries. Early on, when the district was formed and created, we were a big part of the trans-basin projects, Two Forks Reservoir on the upper end of the South Platte, and we were also one-third owner in the Harden and Narrows projects, between Greeley and Fort Morgan. And those, all those projects, of course, didn't get built but—. So that's the main task, and that's our, that's what I tell people is we're a Conservancy District obligated to create water supplies for our members. We're predominantly, right now, most of our work is directed towards our augmentation plans, and our water supplies are for about 95 percent agricultural irrigation uses. And, uh, we see in the near future, with the projected growth, a little bit of a change in that dynamic, as, ah, water supplies and everything start to shrink and growth in population occur, we'll probably end up getting into a little more of municipal and industrial, commercial type supply.

MS: When you say augmentation projects, what exactly are you referring to? What is being augmented?

RR: We have two augmentation plans. It's a good question; I went over that pretty fast. Um, the 95 percent of our membership, they pump alluvial groundwater wells, and alluvial meaning that ground water is hydraulically connected to the river, to the streams, mainly the South Platte River in our situations.

MS: So the river supplies the water into those wells that they're pumping out into— to water crops and other things?

RR: Yeah, that's pretty close. The irrigation canals, they pull water out of the river, and they

create, the leakage from those canals and the irrigation is what creates the aquifer, and if it wasn't for the wells pulling out that water as that seepage migrates back downhill, by gravity to the river bottom, that water would all make it there, but our members have wells that divert that water before it makes it to the river, and consume it, so our requirement is to augment the depletions created by pumping and consuming the alluvial ground water.

MS: Okay.

RR: And it's a very lengthy decree, a whole lot of people involved in getting those two big plans decreed, so that's what we do is we augment the depletive effect of upping alluvial ground water.

MS: Okay, and what is the geographic area that this district covers?

RR: We start, from the south, near Commerce City, and follow the South Platte River as it flows North, and when the river starts to turn East at Greeley, our district lands follow the South Platte basically to Fort Morgan. We also have the old South Platte River Channel used to flow through Beebe Draw, so we're also in Beebe, Beebe Draw, and Box Elder Creek, and then in southwestern Weld County, uh, we have district constituents that pay taxes to us in Lost Creek. So, I don't remember the stats off the top of my head, but there's a lot of acres in the district.

MS: And you've kind of, you've mentioned this a couple of times. Is it primarily funded through taxes and through federal and state grants, or does, what money come in from other sources?

RR: Our primary source of income is taxes. Taxes pay our operating bills. Taxes pay the debt on the bonds. And then our members also pay an assessment so it comes privately from the irrigators. And we collect somewhere close to about 1.8 million a year comes in from agricultural assessments, and ah, we have been recipients of other grants other than the water quality I mentioned earlier. The Well Augmentation Subdistrict that was created in 2004, when the drought hit and CWCD—Colorado Water Conservation Board—um, had drought disaster assistance funds, um, since was, was de-Bruced, they could collect state grants.² But at the time GMS—Groundwater Management Subdistrict—was not de-Bruced, so they couldn't collect those grants. But GMS did get de-Bruced in 2012, so now we can use those, that assistance.

MS: You mentioned members a couple times; who are members and what socio-economic backgrounds do they usually have?

RR: Members are typically, um, the average farm and ranch operation, if I were to just guess from the knowledge of being here a while, I think the average farm is between three to five hundred acres, and uh, there's usually a family or two that operate it. They typically, in this, uh, agricultural environment here, one or two of those family members have jobs outside of the

² “De-Brucing” is the process of opting out of revenue limits on taxes imposed under Colorado’s Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR), which mandates that Colorado governments must either refund tax revenue above limits set by a complex formula to taxpayers or get voter approval to keep the revenue. The term references Douglas Bruce, the author of TABOR.

agricultural operation. We do have a couple of larger corporate farms, like Sakata Farms in Brighton and Petrocco in Brighton. But the majority of them are those smaller family operators.

MS: Apart from working primarily, or, or quite a bit with farm and agricultural interests, do you deal with any small business owners, people within, say, the town of Greeley, or outside of your town? What other people do you work with or is impacted by the work that you guys do?

RR: We don't have contracts that supply water directly with, um, very many businesses, um, but the ability for the family farm to function and irrigate and grow crops, that dollar, as we like to say, trickles down to the businesses. A successful, irrigated agricultural community supports these local businesses.

MS: So would you say that Greeley is primarily supported by the agricultural, um, institution, or does the local university or college in the area?

RR: University of Northern Colorado? Yeah.

MS: Are those the primary sources for income for the area? Or—

RR: There's not a whole lot of industry, large industry, in Greeley. One of the, you know Greeley historically was a farming community, and they have grown, and they've got some technical type of operations and jobs here in town. But one of the newest additions to Greeley is the Leprino Cheese plant, and that plant here in Greeley, the new one, I don't know if it's as big as the one in Fort Morgan, but it's one of their largest ones in the country. They produce all the mozzarella for the majority of the pizza companies, and they employ a lot of people. So there are a lot of businesses.

MS: Okay.

RR: Yeah, and in the smaller towns like, ah, Hudson, Platteville, Fort Lupton, that are within our district, Kersey, you know, you could really still call them agricultural communities.

MS: Okay. Um, we kind of talked about programs and activities, I guess let's move on to the flood itself. How did you become aware of the severity and magnitude of the 2013 flood?

[Pause].

RR: Well, honestly we were a little bit surprised. I didn't think that there was enough awareness, or maybe we just weren't in the loop with the right people. And I was really taken, taken— I was surprised. I don't know if that's a common thing that you're hearing from other folks, but I hope that we learned a lot from it, um, because I had no idea it was going to be as bad as it was. I had zero idea. We, ah, we operate— A lot of our water supplies use gravel pits that I'm talking about, those are junior water rights and we just came off, at 2012, one of the driest years next to 2002, and our pits were empty, and we were able to put a little bit of water in them in '13, but not everything was full so— We do keep a pretty good eye on what the gauge stations are and what

the rivers are, and our staff here are in constant contact with the River Commissioners. If you get precip events, and we see the gauges rise, we're typically on the phone with the River Commissioners saying, "When's it going to go free? When will there be adequate water in the rivers so that our junior water rights are in priority so we can fill?" It's very important for a water right holder, um, like us to get out there immediately and turn on water because you don't know how long it's going to last. So after two or three days and watching the South Platte at Kersey rise to over, I think, 10,000 cfs³ on the twelfth—eleventh or twelfth of September? Finally at about 6:30 a.m. on the twelfth the River Commissioner said, "Yes, go get your water, it's going free. We've got a lot of water coming down." So our five field staff and myself, we split up and went out and started diverting.

MS: What day do you think that would've been?

RR: I'm guessing it was the twelfth.

MS: Okay.

RR: I think it was.

MS: September twelfth?

RR: Yup, and I was on Route 32 about four miles east of Platteville, on the way from my home, which is near Milton Reservoir, and I was heading to our shores pit by Firestone to go turn it on. I was just begging the River Commissioner to turn, so we can go free. I remember where I was, and I remember it was about 6:30 in the morning, but I'm not sure if it was eleventh or twelfth. I think it's the twelfth.

MS: Okay, and how were, since you were dealing primarily with farms and whatnot, how were they affected by the flood? What damage did it create within or without the City of Greeley or other surrounding towns? How were areas of your Conservancy District affected by the flood?

RR: Yeah, so that's probably a two-part— Are you asking about the actual farms that our members own and then our facilities, or—?

MS: Yeah, how, because you mentioned that you got quite a bit of water, from it, I'm assuming, so how did that help? And then also, how did the flood actually, what damage did it incur within you district?

RR: Oh. Okay. Yeah, we were able to start filling reservoirs, um, I think on the twelfth, like I said, of that morning. Our diversion structures are rather large so we were able to divert quite a bit of water into them, get them filled up. Um, I can't remember what storage contents were, but the majority of our pits were able to be filled or nearly full when the river started coming out of their banks on the thirteenth and fourteenth, after it kind of came down from Boulder and Longmont.

³ cubic feet per second

Um, so that was a benefit to have, when the rivers did come out of their banks it was a benefit to have those reservoirs full because the water was able to kind of sheet-flow across the top of everything. If you have a reservoir that's empty, and you've got the flood coming over, and it cascades down the side of the banks, it erodes that whole slope away, and in our gravel pits we have a slurry wall that goes around the perimeter, and those things are very expensive to install, expensive to replace, expensive to repair. So as that wedge gets eroded from that water cascading down the slopes, you've got to go in there and fix those. And ah, after everything, it took a really long time for the water levels in the rivers to go away, as you probably remember. It took us some time to get out there and really evaluate the damages; a lot of it was still underwater. But during the evaluation process for the next three or four months after the flood, the majority of what happened to us was damages to some of those slurry walls and slurry wall caps. And electronic equipment that we use to record diversions into reservoirs: data loggers, cellular modems, you know, those kind of things. If the equipment was not sitting high enough, it got submerged, or in some situations the, the boxes that held the equipment got washed away. We had one over by LaSalle, a box that, um, we never could find it. It probably got washed in a hole and got buried somewhere.

So, and when we, ah— After the flood happened, ah, my quickest response is, “We've gotta figure out how to get this fixed,” because our operators can't wait two or three years for us to come back online with water storage and delivering water to the river because we know that a lot of times what follows a flood is a dry event, and vice ver-versa; it's cyclical. We needed to get out there. So open houses for FEMA, open houses for other opportunities. Where do you go to get help? Who are you coordinating with? All that really started up, so we started going down that road.

MS: How did the flood cause damage within this area?

RR: Well, like I said, we had the damages to our water structures, gravel pit water storage. Damages to electronic equipment. We had a lot of canals that were filled with gravel, filled with sediment. Some roads were impassible, couldn't get to things.

MS: Were any farms ruined or damaged as a result?

RR: Yeah, the only piece of land that the district owns that suffered a lot of damages was our Orchard Recharge Project, west of the town of Orchard. The farm borders or straddles the Morgan County and Weld County line. When the water came out of the river, it eroded and exposed some pipelines of ours. We had to work with the local ditch companies, hired a large earthmoving contractor. So we worked with them to get their ditch fixed, get our pipelines fixed, get the erosion around our wells backfilled and compacted, and that was the biggest problem to our land. Agricultural operators and small businesses, industrial parks that were next to the river, there was the same thing that happened at Orchard, on those farmlands, nice fertile level irrigated crop lands, there was gullies six to eight feet deep, width kind of depended on the severity of the

water going across it, but there's two or three farms that I know that were several hundred acres that—I don't know honestly know today if they've fixed them. The winter following they told me that there's not going to be enough money to fix them, and they're wondering if the water district, if Central, is interested in using their land somehow to develop water storage or recharge or something, because they don't have the funds to fix them and the government assistance that was out there, small business loan, grants, and NRCS—Conservation Service—just wasn't enough.

MS: For lands and property that the district incurred as a result of the flood, do you have an idea of financially how much it is going to cost or has cost?

RR: When you work with FEMA, um, you are assigned a, an agent, and our agent's name was Arnie, and he was retired from the Tennessee Valley Authority. Um, he contracted with FEMA to come up here, and he ended up being our agent to start with, and ah, Archie met with me several times to get a kind of an overview of Central, who we are, and I got him introduced to two of our field men, Rod Asmussen and John Fingerlin, and Rod and John both spent countless hours with Archie developing what they call project worksheets for each specific parcel. So they looked at everything from soil erosion to something as small as a battery that powered a data logger to collect flow data. They inventoried everything, and in FEMA if the sum of your project worksheet was greater than \$67,500, it was considered a large project, and if it was less than that it was considered a small. And we had five large and, I think, four small, a total of nine projects, and they summed, the sum of those nine was about 1.8 million. So you work up the spreadsheets, you get the total, and then the next thing that happens is if you have insurance, um you, you see if you can get insurance to reimburse you, and then anything that is not reimbursed by the insurance company, FEMA pays 75 percent, the State of Colorado pays 12.5 percent, and then Central pays the balance, the other 12.5. And ah, we have insurance through Glatfelter Insurance, Charles Hix, Hix Insurance in Boulder, he was our agent. Charles' office was right off of South Boulder Creek or Boulder Creek, or one of the tributaries to Boulder Creek, and so Charles was not able to be in his office and work because it was under water. But thankfully Charles is, was a savvy guy. Him and his daughter and his staff worked from their homes, and they had all their data on the Cloud,⁴ so they were able to operate from home, and they helped us out, worked really well with us.

The Glatfelter home office is in Pennsylvania, so I had a little bit of involvement, but most of the involvement was Rod and John. They worked with the agent from Glatfelter in Pennsylvania. They actually flew out their adjustor, so Rod and John not only showed Archie everything in the world, but then they had to show the adjustor everything in the world. So the adjustor presented Glatfelter with: these are the things that need to be replaced. And I think the insurance company was shocked, so they flew out from, I think, Michigan and Illinois two engineers to come and review to make sure that, I think, the guy's name is Roy, the adjustor, was doing everything correct, and they're not paying more claims than what they needed to. So we had a little bit of a

⁴ Apple iCloud, a shared memory-storage system

disagreement on some of the electrical components. Roy, the adjustor, and our staff and John, as an electrician by trade, they had a little disagreement on some equipment that was wet or could have been wet. And we wanted it replaced; they didn't want to replace it. The reason why we wanted it replaced was for a safety issue; if any of those kinda components get wet and you reenergize them and turn the switch, they can explode. So we had a battle with the insurance company, and they finally coughed up the money and covered those claims. But according to Charles Hix, there was only two conservancy districts in the state that he had flood insurance. One was Central, and one was Northern Water District in Berthoud, and I think the insurance company paid about \$300,000 in claims.

MS: Wow.

RR: So, we got, you know, very lucky, so—

MS: You mentioned that you, ah, you worked briefly not only with the insurance companies but also with a couple of other agencies like FEMA. What was your involvement with them within the recovery and mitigation of the relief? And how— What agencies did you work with, and what was the relationship while you were working with them?

RR: Well FEMA, to start with, you know, they teamed up with the local disaster team in Colorado, the Office of Emergency Management, and I talked to their director, offered our office if FEMA needed to set up here and all that good stuff. I really wanted to get our district introduced, let them know that we've got concerns, we've got some repairs, we don't have the money in the budget to repair these on our own, that kind of thing. We had some real good assistance from some of the federal delegation, their local aids like Pam Shaddock from Udall's office, Senator Udall. She was very helpful. We were rolling along pretty good with FEMA, and then we went through about six weeks of, um, trying to determine, trying for *them* to determine and evaluate that we were a local government, that we were eligible for FEMA, because when I was interviewed and talked to them, we told them that we mainly provide water for agricultural irrigation, and the guys from FEMA that are trained, they come here from east of the Mississippi, they're told that ag irrigation, ag irrigation, those guys, they don't qualify for FEMA; it's for local governments. So it took me a very long time, and got some assistance from the Department of Local Affairs, or DOLA, to get that identified and get us actually recognized as a local government, and we can comply. I think we were one of the first in Weld County to have a kick-off meeting with FEMA. I think a lot of our persistence, and a lot of that help from Pam Shaddock, that really helped us, um, get up there in the forefront. Really, that's really who we worked with. We're still in the process of, ah, uploading to the FEMA website our actual invoices and reimbursement from insurance so that we can get, um, paid. They have paid on the small grants, on most of them, but they haven't reimbursed us for the large grants. Um, I think our estimate of 1.6 [million] minus the insurance minus the actual costs, because the 1.6 was based on estimates, I think we are at about 800,000 that we're expecting from FEMA and the state, and then we'll have to kick in another 100, 150 thousand of our own money.

MS: You said you briefly worked with the state as well? What agencies specifically did you work with from the State of Colorado?

RR: Well, Department of Local Affairs, to get this whether or not we're a local government straightened out. Office of Emergency Management, and then, um, I do also have to say that we really had strong coordination and, um, collaboration, I guess, so to say from the South Platte River Water Commissioner, Brent Shantz. Brent was very good at sending out email blasts and collecting information from myself and other water users, and trying to evaluate what kind of damages were out there. And I think all of us water users and Brent, one of the other goals that we were trying to accomplish was, we thought that it wasn't right that only local governments were able to collect some revenue from the damages. These private ditch companies, which are agricultural operators, that, they don't have large budgets. They needed to get some help. And so then the push from the local ag irrigation guys up to the state and up to the federal level, I can't remember the details, but there was some type of congressional action that allowed ditch companies to get some reimbursement. So that was really helpful, so.

MS: I think you were just talking about this but what kind of programs or activities does your, your office offer to help with the general public, local governments, or other smaller businesses that weren't like the farms? What activities or programs did you offer them to help get financial relief from the flood?

RR: From the flood? We didn't, we don't have any programs here. I think the thing that was the most helpful was being involved and kind of knowing what was out there and what was available, and uh, knowing some of the landowners and ditch companies that needed help; we would direct them to the proper organizations that were doing that assistance. Um, Tammie Rush, who's our receptionist, is our webmaster. She published a lot of information, ah, tried to keep everything as active as we could on our webpage. I don't know how many people viewed it, but we were trying to keep things going. Kathy Parker, she's our Public Information Officer, she was doing a lot of things on Facebook, and you could see a lot of people following that. So we really were trying to act as an information, um, source as far as assistance. Our field guys, they did in a lot of times, if they had to go from point A to point B evaluating what's going on with the flood, if somebody was needing help, you know, in between point A and point B, they would drop what they were doing and go help people, you know, that kind of thing.

MS: How well prepared do you feel your office was for the challenges of this flood?

RR: Well, like I said at the beginning, we were definitely not ready for this. It was a surprise. I think there should have been a lot more communication, but we did do some training in the past for these type of events, and, you know: who talks to the media, when you're a field man, where do you go? You stay at high ground. You don't try to forge through fast-flowing water. Don't drive around cones, you know. So I think when we were out there in the field assessing, and at sometimes we were trying to get out there and open gates to let water through so structures didn't

get washed out. So our staff is pretty well-trained in safety. They think safety first. They know that if they're risking their life and in jeopardy, then they just don't do it. So I think with training and being prepared, even though we were a little surprised at the magnitude, I thought we handled it pretty well.

MS: What were some other important lessons that your office learned from this flood?

RR: Well, I think the obvious one is, you know, we'll know to keep a little bit better eye and try to have more coordination and communication with the river commissioners. They're the ones that are able to know what's happening at each gauge station. I think communication with those guys sooner would have been better. That's a definite thing that we should have learned—or that we did learn—that we need to react and enact next time. That's the big one. I don't think there's a whole lot else. We probably could be a little bit more in-tune with the Department of Local Affairs, so they know more about who we are, what we're up to. Maybe that could have saved a few hiccups on that issue we had with FEMA, as far as determined whether or not we're an eligible local government. A lot of contacts have been made. I think everybody kind of learned the same thing, is collaboration and sharing information is really good. We did get drowned by a lot of those emails; at some point, you know the phone was going crazy. Email's going nuts. There were just too much keep up with, so.

MS: How were you, or, sorry— Was your— Were you or your home, or this businesses, other than what you've already discussed, directly affected by the flood?

RR: No. You know really, our members, there's a lot of farmland, a lot of homes, et cetera, that were a long ways from the river, you know. They saw five, six inches of rain in some places. It was very welcome moisture. But to be honest with you, there wasn't the magnitude; it was all concentrated on the flood plain. So that was kind of a blessing. You know, the moisture was a great thing to have, but it just, it just came in a way we don't really like to have it.

MS: How long have you lived here, in this area? Your whole life, right?

RR: I was born in Greeley in 1970.

MS: Okay, how does the flood of 2013 compare to any other natural disaster that you've experienced in your lifetime?

RR: You know, the Cache la Poudre has gone out of its banks lots of times, and when they were talking about all the rain and all the flooding on Boulder Creek, I was thinking: Cache la Poudre. You know, I've been around it, I've seen 83rd Avenue and the Cache la Poudre shut. I've seen 71st Avenue under water; you can't cross.

MS: Here in Greeley?

RR: Here in Greeley. Seen it happen quite often, so that's kind of the, that's the kind of flood I

was expecting to see. I wasn't expecting to see what happened.

MS: On a side note, does the Cache la Poudre, does it flow into the South Platte?

RR: Yes.

MS: Where does it connect with the South Platte?

RR: On the east side of Greeley.

MS: Okay, so right here in town.

RR: Yup. In Greeley, from LaSalle, Evans, and Greeley, Kersey, that was probably the most amount of flood plain flooding damage out of anywhere, because you've got the St. Vrain River comes in east of, or west of LaSalle, almost west of Gilcrest. By then you've got the Big Thompson River comes in east, west of La Salle. And then you've got the Cache la Poudre east of Greeley. You add all those tributaries that were just flowing out of their banks, coming into the South Platte that was pretty full. The guys on the South Platte River from Denver down, they saw a lot of water, you know, First, Second, and Third Creek flowing from the prairie, flowing east across DIA⁵ and all that rain they got in Aurora that evening, it swelled the South Platte but not to the point where it was really out of its banks causing a whole lot of damage. Most of that water came down, um, Boulder Creek and St. Vrain.

MS: Um. [Pauses]. How, kind of just briefly, how were other businesses, how was Greeley the city affected? Was there flooding in any homes or businesses around here, especially where the confluence of the rivers was at?

RR: Oh yeah. Yup. There was, uh, all along the Cache la Poudre from basically Windsor through Greeley. Any home or business that was in that hundred or five-hundred-year flood plain, yeah, they were under water. Definitely.

MS: Well, are there any topics that we have discussed that you'd like to return to and clarify a little bit?

RR: I don't think so.

MS: Okay, any other new topics you'd like to bring up?

RR: No, I don't think so.

MS: Okay, can you think of anybody specifically that we should consider speaking with as part of this project?

RR: I do. The president of the Plumb Ditch Company, him and his wife are long-term, long,

⁵ Denver International Airport

long-time residents north of Kersey, and Ron would be, and Marsha, his wife, would be very good people to talk to about—

MS: Is that his name, Ron?

RR: Ron Baker, B-A-K-E-R, and Marsha Baker. [Pauses]. Residents of the Kersey area.

MS: How do you spell Kersey?

RR: K-E-R-S-E-Y.

MS: Okay. Anybody else?

RR: Ron came to mind as somebody that would enjoy doing this, and somebody that has a lot of history, and I can't really think of anybody else.

MS: Well okay.

RR: Yeah.

MS: Well, we appreciate your time and willingness to talk to us.

RR: You bet, Mitch.

MS: Thank you very much.

RR: Yeah.