

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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2009 FLOW ROUTING TEST

KEARNEY, NE, APRIL 2, 2009: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in coordination with the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP), plans to implement a “Flow Routing Test” using water releases from the Environmental Account (EA) stored at Lake McConaughy beginning April 9, 2009. The PRRIP is a cooperative basin-wide effort to assist in the recovery of threatened and endangered species in the Central and Lower Platte River. The EA is water dedicated to instream flow purposes, including benefit to the threatened and endangered species that the PRRIP focuses on.

The goal of this test is to implement the essential “first step” the PRRIP agreed upon to prepare for periodic “pulse flow” water releases in future years. The flow routing test is designed to provide information on flow travel-time and attenuation (diminished peak as water moves downstream) and coordination between the partners for the future pulse flows. The PRRIP will evaluate over the next several years the effectiveness of pulse flows in helping to create and maintain habitat for endangered and threatened species (whooping crane, piping plover, and least tern) in the Central Platte River. The pulse flows are intended to mimic the historic river rises that resulted from spring runoff that helped to remove vegetation from the Platte River

and kept the river wide and shallow with bare stretches of sand. This provided a safe place for cranes and other birds to rest at night, allowing the birds to keep predators in sight, and provided sandbars for nesting terns and plovers. However, those conditions changed with water diversions and other changes in land use throughout the Platte River Basin.

The USFWS EA Manager (Greg Wingfield), PRRIP Executive Director (Jerry Kenny), Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) and Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) staff will coordinate closely and be prepared to scale back or terminate releases if required. Weather conditions can change rapidly, so the partners will monitor weather and runoff conditions in order to minimize the risk of exceeding flooding stage. Although there are uncertainties in how releases will travel down the river, the following summarizes current expectations.

- EA releases will be made from McConaughy during the period of April 9 through April 16 (7 days).
- EA water traveling down the North Platte channel will be “ramped up” at 600 cfs/day for the first two days (i.e., 600cfs on Day 1 and 1200 cfs on Day 2) then more gradually for the next five days as the safe-conveyance capacity of the channel at North Platte is approached.
- This pattern is expected to result in flows in the North Platte River at North Platte that rise over a 3-4 day period to a peak of approximately 1,500 cfs for 3 days from about April 15 through April 17.
- The anticipated flow in the North Platte River at North Platte should remain under the designated flood stage of 6.0’.
- Releases from NPPD’s system at North Platte will be timed to coincide with the 3-4 peak days of flow coming down the North Platte River but flows downstream of North Platte are expected to be significantly below flood stage in most locations.
- Of the total flow available at CNPPID’s main supply canal diversion near North Platte during this 4-day period (April 14-17) an estimated 1,500-2,000 cfs will pass through the diversion dam and continue down the mainstem of the Platte River.
- As the 4 days of bypass flows approach Overton, CNPPID will time releases through the J-2 Hydro (3 to 4 days of 1,950 cfs capacity-level release) in an attempt to match peak flow coming down the Platte River.
- Flows at Overton and downstream will be significantly less than flows experienced in late May and early June 2008, which were the result of intense rainfall events. The river at Overton experienced around 10,000 cfs in May 2008, while flows during the test flow release are expected to be about 3,000cfs.

- In the Overton to Grand Island reach of the river, the river level during the peak of the test flow release is expected to raise one foot or less above the level normally seen at this time of year
- We anticipate flows at Overton will return to near pre-release levels by April 20-22 and by April 22-24 at Grand Island.

The PRRIP has liability insurance in place in the event of any associated damages related to the flow routing test. The PRRIP is committed to restoration of the habitat for the endangered species in the Central Platte River, while at the same time protecting human health and safety and preventing damage to associated land along the river.

Contacts for more information:

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