

**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP -or- Program)****2024 Q4 PRRIP Governance Committee (GC) Quarterly Meeting – Sterling, CO***Tuesday, December 10 to Wednesday, December 11, 2024*

Sky Ranch Golf Course

Drue DeBerry, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – 2024 GC Chair

Jason Farnsworth, PRRIP Executive Director (ED) – Moderator

PRRIP Governance Committee (GC) Meeting Attendees Tuesday, December 10, 2024		
Name	Affiliation	Member or Alternate
Department of the Interior		
Brock Merrill	Bureau of Reclamation (USBR)	Member
Drue DeBerry	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – 2024 GC Chair	Member
Mark Porath	USFWS	Alternate
Matt Rabbe	USFWS	Alternate
State of Wyoming		
Jason Mead	Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO)	Member
Barry Lawrence	WWDO	Alternate
State of Colorado		
Amy Ostdiek	Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB)	Member
Emily Zmak	CWCB	Alternate
Kara Scheel	CWCB	Alternate
State of Nebraska		
Jesse Bradley	Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	Member
Jennifer Schellpeper	DNR	Alternate
Upper Platte Water Users		
Dennis Strauch	Pathfinder Irrigation District	Member
Bob Mehling	Goshen Irrigation District (virtual)	Alternate
Owen Williams	Upper Platte Water Users Association	Alternate
Colorado Water Users		
Kyle Whitaker	Northern Water	Member
Deb Freeman	Trout Raley (virtual)	Alternate
Downstream Water Users		
Devin Brundage	Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District (CNPPID)	Member
Kyle Leibig	Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD)	Member
Kent Miller	Twin Platte Natural Resources District (TPNRD)	Member
Lyndon Vogt	Central Platte Natural Resources District (CPNRD)	Member
Environmental Entities		
Rich Walters	The Nature Conservancy (TNC) (virtual)	Member
Brice Krohn	The Crane Trust	Member
Melissa Mosier	Audubon Nebraska	Member
Executive Director's Office (EDO)		
Jason Farnsworth, BCES	Executive Director	
Chadwin Smith, Ph.D.	Science Policy Coordinator	
Tim Tunnell, M.S.	Land Plan Coordinator (virtual)	
Seth Turner, P.E.	Water Plan Coordinator	
Malinda Henry, Ph.D.	Science Plan Coordinator	



Justin Brei, P.E.	Water Resources & Engineering Manager
Patrick Farrell, M.S.	Statistical Ecologist
Other Participants	
Justin Lavene	NE Attorney General's Office
Abigail Boudewyns	WY Attorney General's Office
Andy Nicewicz	CO Attorney General's Office
Caitlin Kingsley	Nebraska DNR (virtual)
Cory Steinke	CNPPID
Dave Zorn	CNPPID
John Shadle	NPPD (virtual)
Jeff Shafer	NPPD (virtual)
Jim Jenniges	NPPD (virtual)
Mike Archer	Nebraska Game & Parks Commission (NGPC)
Brandi Flyr	CPNRD
Mark Czaplewski	Public

Terry Strobe, USBR

Gene Manuel

John Altenhofen

Luke O'Brien

Mike Drain

Dave Zorn

Cory Steinke

#1	GC Meeting – Welcome & Administrative	Agenda Item Objective: Greetings, roll call, review agenda.
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Introduction – Chair DeBerry called the meeting to order at 2:10 PM Mountain Time. The in-person and virtual groups proceeded with introductions.

Agenda – Move Agenda Item #6 (ISAC Discussion Questions) to tomorrow morning.

Minutes:

GC MOTION: Mead moved and Merrill seconded to approve the 2024 Q3 PRRIP GC Quarterly Meeting Minutes. **Motion carried.**

GC MOTION: Merrill moved and Bradley seconded to approve the November 2024 PRRIP GC Special Session Minutes. **Motion carried.**

#2	Committee Updates	Agenda Item Objective: General update on recent work of PRRIP Advisory Committees.
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LAC – Zorn said the LAC last met on October 16 and approved land management plans and the 2025 land budget.

WAC – Steinke met late October and went over basically the GC agenda for the next couple of days.

TAC – Rabbe said much of TAC agenda on GC agenda the next couple of days. Some discussion about reporting of WC number trends, WC data analysis, sed aug peer review



FC – Merrill said met on November 5. Approved public outreach RFP.

#3	Executive Director's (ED) Report	Agenda Item Objective: Update on PRRIP budget, implementation, and other key activities.
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Farnsworth summarized EDO activities and the PRRIP budget status summary.

Outreach Report – Uribe summarized the latest PRRIP Public Outreach activities:

NEED REPORT

#4	PRRIP FY25 Budget	Agenda Item Objective: Discuss/approve FY25 Budget, FY25 Work Plan, and 2025 PRRIP EDO Contract Amend.
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FY25 Budget and Work Plan:

Mead asked if this version of the FY25 budget includes the extra money for phragmites. Farnsworth said no, just the \$300,000 originally anticipated. The additional money for potential phragmites monitoring was removed from the budget.

GC MOTION: *Strauch moved and Merrill seconded to approve the FY2025 PRRIP Budget and Work Plan.* **Motion carried.**

2025 EDO Contract Amendment:

GC MOTION: *Mead moved and Ostdiek seconded to approve the FY2025 PRRIP EDO Contract Amendment.* **Motion carried.**

#5	PRRIP Science Plan	Agenda Item Objective: Discuss recent Science Plan implementation activities.
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Tern and Plover Monitoring – Vogel summarized 2024. Freeman asked if the skunk predation was one animal or several. Vogel said a few individuals. Farnsworth said we do think we have repeat offenders that avoid traps.

Whooping Crane (WC) Monitoring – Ideus summarized fall 2024 WC monitoring. Whitaker asked about the different bins of data shown in the spring 2024 monitoring report. Bradley asked about the denominator which is the USFWS population count. Henry said we track it, it is the case that their methods changed in 2014.

#6	PRRIP Independent Science	Agenda Item Objective: Discuss PRRIP Independent Science activities.
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ISAC contracts – Mosier moved and Merrill seconded. Contract amendments approved.

Discussion of 2025 Q1 ISAC Discussion Questions postponed to tomorrow (12/11/24).

Meeting Break – 3:10 PM (:15)

#7	PRRIP Science Plan (continued)	Agenda Item Objective: Discuss recent Science Plan implementation activities.
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PRRIP Grassland/Wet Meadow Management:



Rabbe discussed the history of central Platte River wet meadow and grassland research and management and its relationship with the Program. Rabbe said if this approach is approved by the GC, the Grassland Working Group will begin work in 2025 on grassland management strategies for the Cottonwood Ranch and Binfield properties. Whitaker asked about the structure of our grazing leases. Farnsworth said they are standard ag lease one year terms. Merrill asked what feedback the Program has received from current tenants. Tunnell said not much, the main concern is just being open and transparent with them and they can adapt to changes in intended Program management. DeBerry asked how difficult it will be for the Working Group to get to consensus. Rabbe said he is convinced they will get to a consensus, starting small with just two properties to see where things go. Liebig asked if target flows were initially set to support wet meadows. Rabbe said a component of the early spring pulse flow is intended to hydrate wet meadows.

GC MOTION: Mosier moved and Merrill seconded to approve TAC Recommendations. Motion carried.

Sediment Augmentation:

Smith summarized the peer review process.

GC MOTION: Mead moved and Bradley seconded to approve the PRRIP Sediment Augmentation Data Synthesis Compilation Peer Review and associated final edited document. **Motion carried.**

Lewis summarized the proposed monitoring plan for implementing the “No Sediment Augmentation” Alternative in J-2 Return Reach. Whitaker asked about the accuracy of the aerial sediment sampling. Lewis said early tests show we can be accurate into coarse sand sizes, even beyond gravel and cobble. Brundage asked how far downstream we will be monitoring. Lewis said a couple of the cross sections below the Overton Bridge to keep an eye on any potential incision migration. Liebig said a worrisome event would be reported to the TAC, can you explain how that works? Lewis said if data received and evaluated in May that shows up as incision progressing, we have to share that information and the Program will have to decide whether to alter management. Farnsworth said our first thought was a numerical trigger but we found it difficult in the TAC to get agreement on that trigger. Instead, everyone agreed to bring information back to the TAC each year and discuss and the TAC can elevate the issue to the GC if necessary. Porath asked why we use the 9-foot number for incision. Lewis said it’s the most sensitive class to get information and learn what is going on, we can improve on that over time. Brei and Farnsworth added how that is used relative to the reference slope.

Mosier asked if the No Augmentation Alternative is 2023-2027. Lewis said yes. Mosier asked about 2028, Lewis said based on TAC comments that is a review year to decide what to do next. Mosier asked if we could add something to the Science Plan that reflects this new approach and timeline. Henry said yes, we will update the living links and match this schedule up to the timeline flow chart.



GC MOTION: Mead moved and Whitaker seconded to approve the No Sediment Augmentation Monitoring Plan. **Motion carried.**

#7	2025 Environmental Account (EA) Annual Operation Plan (AOP)	Agenda Item Objective: Discuss 2025 EA AOP.
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Rabbe summarized the draft 2025 EA AOP. Priorities include germination suppression (highest), WC migration (medium), and channel maintenance (medium). Rabbe also summarized the TAC discussion about continuing to implement a germination suppression flow. The Service wants to keep it as a water release priority after five years of implementation. Rabbe said it appears that the germination suppression flow is at least partially responsible for keeping the channel in good condition relative to vegetation. The Service is concerned about losing channel conditions if we cease the flow release to learn what happens without a release, this is a risk the Service is not willing to take at this point. Ostdiek asked how this fits within the context of the Science Plan. Rabbe said the thinking at the time was do this for five years because we were going to run out of water or for whatever reason, we didn't anticipate at that time what comes next so we are just starting that thinking now. Bradley said it would be helpful to add water releases for the Extension and for what reason the water was releases. Rabbe said that can be done. Scheel asked if we still think we won't have the water for germination suppression in several years or if that has changed. Rabbe said there is a quantity issue related to the EA, but there is also a capacity issue because of the North Platte Chokepoint.

#8	PRRIP LAND PLAN	Agenda Item Objective: Update on recent Land Plan implementation activities.
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Tunnell summarized the management plans for the Broadfoot South Property and the Lindstrom Property. Nicewicz asked if northern long-eared bats were considered in the development of these plans. Tunnell said yes we used the Service's guidelines to get clearance for the tree clearing work, that work will be done this winter to get it completed before sensitive bat timing.

GC MOTION: Merrill moved and Ostdiek seconded to approve Broadfoot. Motion carried.

GC MOTION: Mosier moved and Whitaker seconded to approve Lindstrom. Motion carried.

Farnsworth discussed the language in the Program Document regarding potentially counting conservation lands during the Second Increment. Freeman asked if Farnsworth is asking the GC to appoint a group to work on a game plan for inventorying how much land is out there and map out decision points regarding habitat, what the Program's obligations are, etc. Farnsworth said yes. Drain said maybe you start with a group focused on the technical inventory, then develop another group working on the policy side. Freeman asked where the 29,000 acre number came out of. Rabbe said the Joint Management Study. Freeman asked if that has any correlation to recovery plans. Rabbe said the WC recovery plan doesn't get that into the weeks and doesn't specify the amount of acres for the Platte. Farnsworth asked if the LAC should do this with the conservation groups. The GC agreed.

Farnsworth discussed the potential approach of partnering with others through an MOU to increase the probability of success of implementing prescribed fire.



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157 **GC MOTION:** Ostdiek moved and Strauch seconded to approve the Prescribed Fire MOU. **Motion**
158 **carried.**

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GC MEETING END – Day #1	5:30 PM Mountain Time
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Sky Ranch Golf Course

Drue DeBerry, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – 2024 GC Chair

Jason Farnsworth, PRRIP Executive Director (ED) – Moderator

#9	WELCOME & ADMINISTRATIVE	Agenda Item Objective: Greetings, roll call, review agenda.
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DeBerry called the meeting to order at 8:04 AM Mountain Time and the group proceeded with introductions.

Agenda Modifications –

ISAC questions set

Smith discussed the original draft ISAC Discussion Questions and the proposed edits from the State of Colorado. Ostdiek summarized the proposed edits. Mosier asked if there is anything specific for the ISAC to look into. Merrill said the idea is to not look backward but to look forward to future Program work.

#10	PRRIP WATER PLAN	Agenda Item Objective: Update on recent Water Plan implementation activities.
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North Platte Chokepoint:

Michelle Martin from Anderson Consulting Engineers and Brian Murphy from RiverWorks delivered a presentation on the North Platte Chokepoint and potential options for addressing capacity. Whitaker asked about the equilibrium reached at the diversion and whether dredging is offsetting new sediment coming in. Murphy said the river system has come into equilibrium with sediment moving through the diversion, including dredging. Rabbe said it seems to be contradictory that we are in equilibrium but we would have to continue to do sediment removal at the diversion every year. Martin said the backwater effect indicates that sediment will replace anything removed. Drain said we have a slowing of the water that changes the hydraulic slope, so we have an ongoing settling effect. Porath asked if there is an estimate of the sediment load from the North Platte River and South Platte River. Martin said it is about a 60/40 split, with the higher amount from the South Platte River. Porath said he would be interested in the sediment transport rate from the North Platte River, Martin said that is included in the final report. Porath asked if increased flow in the South Platte River would carry more sediment and exacerbate the problem. Martin said that would likely be the case.

Whitaker asked about the Sutherland clear return. Martin said they focused on the North Platte River so their modeling only includes a very small portion of the South Platte River and doesn't extend to that point. Freeman asked if it is correct that this study was not scoped to look at alternatives that would accomplish something less than the 3,000 cfs at the chokepoint. Martin said that is correct. Mosier asked about monitoring current capacity and if we have the data to deal with changing capacity from year to year. Turner said DNR does flow measurements monthly and the current rating curve says there is 1,930 cfs at that location but the capacity is more realistically in the 1,700-1,750 cfs range. Steinke said the WAC has looked at this issue for a long time, they decided not to recommend a particular alternative and now it is up to the GC to decide what to do.



Farnsworth said we are largely stuck with something we can do in a defined area without having to deal with multiple landowners. That leaves working with the diversion, but that is a no-go because it would require replumbing the system and

Miller said he has watched the GC talk about this for something like 20 years. He thought the GC was already at the point in Cheyenne a year or two ago to stop looking at the same alternatives, it seems like there is no way to solve this issue. Is this the meeting where the GC finally says there is no alternative and we need to stop investigating this? Farnsworth said it is totally up to the GC, the previous decision point was related to buying one property and taking one last hard look now instead of waiting until the Second Increment (as the Service said). Mosier said she doesn't want to forestall any options that could at least maintain current capacity. Miller said he has heard that before and thinks it is time to clearly say we are done looking at the chokepoint. Farnsworth said the Program will certainly continue to watch current capacity to watch for problems, but it is beyond the structure of the Program to be able to solve the problem on its own. Porath said it is too much to say now we are not going to do anything because we could lose capacity and limit tools to move EA water which would be a bad thing for everyone.

Brundage said one thing to consider is that we have been able to implement germination suppression flows without problems, maybe we can implement useful actions that are below the 3,000 cfs mark. Rabbe said the amount of water needed for germination suppression flows could change, we may need to move more water. The EA is useless if we can't use the water. I can see putting further studies on the shelf but the entities should still talk about this on an ongoing basis. Vogt said he thought we were doing this for the species and the species' numbers are going the direction we want and we are able to take actions with what we have. Rabbe said he wanted to re-iterate that things could change and we don't want to cut off any options to ensure we can move EA water through the chokepoint. Freeman said we are operating under the activity commitments under the Extension documents that has a couple of chokepoint bullets. Are we doing what we need to do under the Extension document requirements? Bradley agrees – says “practically achievable with available resources”. Right now, there is not a practically achievable option within our constraints.

GC Guidance – everyone in the room agrees with the proposition of doing no further studies and revising the September 2022 Chokepoint Framing Document to reflect this, reflect continued monitoring of the chokepoint, and noting that conditions may change that warrant more discussion in the future. Farnsworth and Smith agreed to work on updating that document, Merrill agreed to help with the language, and that will be brought back to the GC in March 2025 for discussion and approval.

Water Agreements:

Turner summarized both agreements.

GC MOTION: *Bradley moved and Merrill seconded to approve the CNPPID Cottonwood Ranch Amendment. Downstream Water Users abstained. Motion carried.*

GC MOTION: *Merrill moved and Mosier seconded to approve the CNPPID Irrigator Lease Amendment. Downstream Water Users abstained. Motion carried.*

**Water Modeling:**

Turner discussed water modeling needs and current tools. The OPSTUDY model is out of date and we need an updated tool to help with water project scoring, updated analyses, etc. How do we begin this process, and does the GC want us to work on this? The EDO would like to get initial reaction to this. Farnsworth said the genesis for this, OPSTUDY was the tool used to evaluate and rank all the water alternatives for NEPA. Ostdiek asked if this would only be used for items related to the Second Increment. Turner said no, we could use this tool to score existing and future projects, expand on Cottonwood Ranch recharge evaluation, and other items that we currently don't have a way to evaluate now with the OPSTUDY model or other existing tools. Bradley said he is reluctant to start tweaking OPSTUDY without sitting down with all parties about how to move forward framing a Second Increment. He would support creating a Work Group to start talking about this. Freeman said she agrees and we need to be thoughtful about identifying what building blocks of the Program that we don't want to disrupt. She has not thought through what a Second Increment NEPA process looks like, and what tools we might need. A group should get together to start looking at these big picture items. Whitaker asked what drove this agenda item, was it scoring or was it something else? Turner said the scoring issue started this, we don't have a tool for groundwater recharge projects and the score analysis tool is based on a study period that ended 30 years ago. Farnsworth said we would want the tools for scoring and the tool for Second Increment negotiations to be the same thing. It could be using existing tools, or adapting them, or building something new, we just wanted to start this conversation and get some early guidance. Drain said the 1947-1997 hydrology is the foundation of the Program. The OPSTUDY was always a hatchet, never a scalpel. The GC has the authority to decide the score, there is no requirement to use a particular tool. The Scoring Subcommittee uses modeling runs plus other knowledge to propose scores. I think you may be overconcerned about the detail necessary to develop project scores.

Freeman said the NEPA process will be shaped by the vision and direction set by the GC. The NEPA process is currently uncertain. It will be helpful for this group to let some of the current legal and political wrangling over the NEPA process quiet down and give that process time, as well as give the GC time to frame what the Program might look like in a Second Increment. Strobe said there is currently a two-year time period to complete NEPA, and that is likely to remain. You can do prep work ahead of time and then decide when you want to file to start the process with a Notice of Intent. Freeman said that drives the importance of the pre-NEPA work – scope, technical support, baseline characterization, etc. That needs to be built in now.

#11	Public Comment	Agenda Item Objective: Public comment period on PRRIP activities.
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None offered.

#12	GC Executive Session	Agenda Item Objective: GC member discussion of sensitive land, water, and policy items.
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GC MOTION: *Brundage moved and Ostdiek seconded to enter Executive Session.* **Motion carried,** entered Executive Session at 10:29 AM Mountain Time.

GC MOTION: *Merrill moved and Vogt seconded to exit Executive Session.* **Motion carried,** exited Executive Session at 10:41 AM Mountain Time.



#13	GC Executive Session Motions	Agenda Item Objective: GC consideration of motions discussed during Executive Session.
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None offered.

#14	GC MEETING REVIEW & WRAP-UP	Agenda Item Objective: Discuss action items, meeting feedback, and upcoming meeting schedule.
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GC MOTION: *Whitaker moved and Ostdiek seconded to appoint Mead as 2025 GC Chair, Merrill as 2025 GC Vice Chair.* **Motion carried.**

2025 GC Meeting Schedule:

- **2025 Q1 GC Quarterly Meeting:**
March 25-26, 2025 @ Kearney, NE
- **2025 Q2 GC Quarterly Meeting:**
June 10-11, 2025 @ Cheyenne, WY
- **2025 Q3 GC Quarterly Meeting:**
September 22-23, 2025 @ Kearney, NE
- **2025 ISAC Meeting (joint with 2025 Q3 GC Quarterly Meeting):**
September 22-24, 2025 @ Kearney, NE
- **GC Virtual Special Session on FY2026 Budget & Work Plan:**
Monday, November 17, 2025
10:00 AM-12:00 PM Central Time *via Teams*
- **2025 Q4 GC Quarterly Meeting:**
December 9-10, 2025 @ TBD in Colorado

GC Meeting End	10:54 AM Mountain Time
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Summary of Action Items/Decisions from 2024 Q4 GC Quarterly Meeting:

- 1) Approved the 2024 Q3 GC Quarterly Meeting Minutes.
- 2) Approved the November 2024 GC Special Session Minutes.
- 3)