



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
Lake McConaughy Visitors Center  
May 2, 2023

PRRIP Water Advisory Committee Meeting Attendees		
Name	Affiliation	Member or Alternate
<b>Department of the Interior</b>		
Brock Merrill	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR)	Member
Mark Porath	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Alternate
Matt Rabbe*	USFWS	Alternate
Drue DeBerry	USFWS	
<b>State of Wyoming</b>		
Bill Brewer	Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO)	Alternate
Michelle Gess	Wyoming State Engineer's Office (WY SEO)	
Jay Smith	WWDO	
<b>State of Colorado</b>		
Kara Scheel	Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB)	Member
Emily Zmak	CWCB	Alternate
Andy Nicewicz	Colorado Attorney General's Office	
<b>State of Nebraska</b>		
Jennifer Schellpeper	Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NDNR)	Member
Kari Burgert	NDNR	Alternate
Justin Ahern*	NDNR	
Avery Dresser	NDNR	
Ryan Kelly	NDNR	
Caitlin Kingsley	NDNR	
Stefan Remund	NDNR	
<b>Upper Platte Water Users</b>		
Dennis Strauch	Pathfinder Irrigation District	Member
<b>Colorado Water Users</b>		
Jon Altenhofen	Northern Water	Member
Kyle Whitaker	Northern Water	Member
Joe Frank*	Lower South Platte Water Conservancy District	Alternate
Jason Marks	Denver Water	
<b>Downstream Water Users</b>		
Cory Steinke	Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) – 2023 WAC Chair	Member
Brandi Flyr	Central Platte Natural Resources District (CPNRD)	Member
Jeff Shafer	Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD)	Member
Nolan Little	Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (TBNRD)	
Tyler Thulin	CNPPID	
Randy Zach	NPPD	

This document is a draft based on one person's notes of the meeting. The official meeting minutes may be different if corrections are made by the Water Advisory Committee before approval.



PRRIP Water Advisory Committee Meeting Attendees		
Environmental Entities		
Jacob Fritton	The Nature Conservancy (TNC)	Member
Melissa Mosier	Audubon Great Plains	Member
Carrie Roberts*	The Crane Trust	Member
Rich Walters	TNC	Alternate
Executive Director's Office (EDO)		
Jason Farnsworth	Executive Director	
Seth Turner	Water Plan Coordinator	
Justin Brei	Engineering/Colorado Coordinator	
Libby Casavant	Hydraulic Engineer	
Kristen Cognac	Hydrogeologist	
Helen Davis*	Geospatial Analyst	
Sarah Fancher	Fluvial Geomorphologist	
Ed Weschler*	Water Resources Engineer	
Other Participants		
n/a		

\*Denotes virtual meeting participant.

**Welcome and Administrative:** *Cory Steinke, 2023 WAC Chair*

Introductions were made. There were no agenda modifications. There were no revisions to the original draft of the February 2023 WAC meeting minutes. Shafer made a motion to approve the minutes, second by Merrill. No objections, minutes approved.

**Brief Water Updates:** *Seth Turner and Ed Weschler, EDO*

**Leasing, Recharge, and Recapture Projects:**

Turner reported that construction of the pilot-scale recapture well network was substantially completed in January. A final inspection walk-through was held on March 6, attended by the contractor (J&G Dirt Works), construction administrator (Miller & Associates), TBNRD, and the Program EDO. The project was complete after the contractor completed one pipeline repair later that week. Recapture well pumping resumed during shortage conditions on March 31. Cumulative pumping by the Program's 8 recapture wells in 2022 was about 630 AF through April 27 (around 10-12 cfs).

There were no recent excess flows to divert for recharge, but CNPPID and NPPD secured new temporary recharge permits from NDNR in March. Work on long-term surface water lease agreements with CPNRD and NPPD was ongoing. Volumes in the Pathfinder accounts as of April 25 included 14,318 AF in the Municipal Account and 8,488 AF in the EA. A preliminary estimate of Pathfinder Municipal Account lease volume was expected soon from the WWDO.

A project team led by Anderson Consulting Engineers was selected for the North Platte chokepoint study.

This document is a draft based on one person's notes of the meeting. The official meeting minutes may be different if corrections are made by the Water Advisory Committee before approval.

**Platte Basin Hydrology:**

Weschler reported that Grand Island flows have been below both target and median flows for most of the year so far. There were ice conditions from mid-November through late-February, and the USGS had not yet posted estimated flow data for that period.

Extreme drought conditions continued to persist in parts of the lower North Platte River basin in the Nebraska panhandle and far eastern Wyoming. There was little change in drought conditions in the South Platte River basin in Colorado since early February, with severe drought persisting in the northeast corner of Colorado, and the rest of the basin generally in moderate drought to abnormally dry.

Pathfinder Reservoir was at about 37% of capacity as of April 25 and Seminoe Reservoir was around 44% full. Big inflows are expected this spring given high snowpack, which was 185-190% of median in the upper North Platte and Sweetwater basins. Snowpack was also well above media in the North Platte/Laramie basin in Colorado and slightly above median in the South Platte Basin.

**Expanded Recapture RFP: Seth Turner, EDO**

Turner gave an overview of the forthcoming Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Expanded Recapture Reconnaissance Study. The Program, State of Nebraska, and TBNRD are seeking to maximize the deficit-reduction benefits of groundwater recharge projects south of the Platte River, including Phelps County Canal, Elwood Reservoir, and the Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge project. This will be a reconnaissance-level study to evaluate opportunities to install additional recapture wells, construct a gravity outlet from Elwood Reservoir to Plum Creek, and tradeoffs associated with combinations of these two options. The gravity outlet piece will likely focus on estimating safe conveyance capacity in Plum Creek and identifying obstructions, land issues, etc.

The RFP is to be presented to the Finance Committee on May 30. If approved, the Governance Committee will appoint a selection panel at the June 13-14 meeting. The RFP is expected to be released on June 15, with a mandatory pre-proposal meeting on June 29 and proposals due on July 18. The selection panel will complete an initial review by August 2. If needed, interviews would be around August 15-17, and a final consultant selection is to be made by August 24.

The project budget is \$200,000 and the project is expected to take about a year after a consultant is selected.

**Lake McConaughy EA Update: Mark Porath, USFWS**

Porath said there is not a formal Annual Operating Plan (AOP) for the Lake McConaughy EA this year, but the planned germination suppression release is the highest priority. Turner said the germination suppression release will attempt to achieve 1,500 cfs flows at Grand Island throughout the month of June. In order to reach 1,500 cfs on June 1, the EA release will start no later than May 25. Twice-weekly coordination calls between the USFWS, CNPPID, NPPD,



NDNR, and EDO were very effective last year and will be continued for the duration of the EA release this year. USFWS and the EDO will coordinate on a press release announcing the EA release. Turner said the 2022 germination suppression release was nearly 80,000 AF, and if flows at Grand Island stay as low as they were recently, similar release volumes could be expected this year.

There was discussion of the many factors considered when determining how much EA water to release, including the 8-day travel time from Lake McConaughy to Grand Island, capacities in the North Platte River (particularly at the chokepoint) and Sutherland Canal, irrigation demands, thunderstorm activity, etc. Steinke noted that NDNR has the difficult task of “coloring” water after it is released and dealing with the accounting to make sure EA water does not get diverted into canals. Scheel asked how long those adjustments can take. Steinke said usually a couple days, and Thulin added that it happens a lot at the start of EA releases because of changes to gains and losses when a lot of water is added to the river channel.

Farnsworth said this will be the last year for the current germination suppression test cycle, which will be followed by comprehensive evaluation by the EDO. He said this drought is setting up much like that of the early 2000s. There was about 200 ft of channel width loss in 2002 and only half that much in 2022 after the germination suppression release. There is not much mechanical work being done in the river channel, but there are a couple reaches with channel splits that need to be dealt with. Phragmites spraying was discussed. Walters said about \$600,000 is being spent on spraying by helicopters and airboats each year, usually encompassing 2,000-2,500 acres, but sometimes up to 4,000 acres, between Kingsley Dam and Columbus. Farnsworth added that there is really good GPS data from the spraying work.

**Colorado Depletions Plan Updates:** *Kara Scheel, CWCB and Jon Altenhofen, Northern Water*  
Scheel presented Colorado’s North Platte River Basin report for 2022, including irrigated acres, population, and new post-1997 water uses. Total consumptive use (CU) in was less than the baseline CU by 23,536 AF.

Altenhofen presented Colorado’s South Platte River Basin report for 2022. Assumptions for the analysis are updated every 5 years, most recently in 2020. Population in the basin has increased by about 2.1% per year since 1997. Per capita water use has dropped to 0.1771 AF/person/year (compared to 0.2504 AF/person/year in 2020). The South Platte Water Related Activities Program (SPWRAP) collects assessments (\$1.26 per tap in 2022) to pay for Colorado’s water obligations to the Program. Aerial imagery is used to track irrigated acres. After the 2002 drought, about 100,000 irrigated acres and 900 wells were lost in the South Platte Basin, with many of the wells shut down because of inadequate augmentation. There are still about 5,000 wells in the South Platte Basin, but irrigated acreage is about 170,000 acres less than in 1997.

Colorado’s Plan for Future Depletions (CPFD) mitigates for depletions at the CO-NE state line due to population growth. In 2022, May and June depletions were 2,351 AF (average 2,270 AF



since 2007) and replacement supplies from managed groundwater recharge accretions were 3,027 AF (average 4,937 AF since 2007).

Altenhofen also gave an update on Colorado's Tamarack 1 project, which was the state's initial water project contribution to the Program. Accretions from managed groundwater recharge are credited to Tamarack 1 when they reach just past the CO-NE state line and there are both no river calls in Colorado and there are target flow deficits in Nebraska. From 2007-2022, SPWRAP paid about \$9.1 million for CPFD and Tamarack 1 creditable supplies.

Tamarack 1 credits at the state line were 7,601 AF in 2022 and averaged 8,255 AF from 2008-2022. There were frequent target flow deficits in Nebraska in 2022, but there was also a call on the South Platte in Colorado about 50% of the time versus 20% typically. These calls resulted in the river being swept and accretions not reaching the state line. As a result, there was a decline in shortage reduction credits even though the actual magnitude of shortages was greater in 2022.

**Federal Depletions Plan Update:** *Matt Rabbe, USFWS*

Rabbe reported that 5 tiered consultations relying on PRRIP coverage were completed in 2022, all in Wyoming. There was one Federal depletion for a project in Colorado in 2022, but consultation was not completed because relevant MOAs need to be updated. Reporting and offsets were still consistent with PRRIP coverage. Since 2007, there have been 222 total tiered consultations. Rabbe noted that the EDO compiled a database of tiered consultations that was posted to the Program website last year and will be updated before the June GC meeting.

**Nebraska Depletions Plan Update:** *Jennifer Schellpeper and Kari Burgert, Nebraska DNR*

Schellpeper presented an extensive review of Nebraska New Depletion Plan (NNDP) requirements, including the overarching premises of the NNDP, water uses not subject to the NNDP, and implementation tasks. Detailed information was included in a slide presentation that will be posted to the Program website. Schellpeper also reviewed the 2019 Nebraska Basin-Wide Plan and Integrated Management Plans (IMPs). A Robust Review update is underway in 2023 and will be updated again in 2027. Overall, Nebraska has completed all tasks required in the NNDP, Nebraska is mitigating post-1997 water uses through various management actions, and the IMPs will result in statewide compliance exceeding post-1997 mitigation requirements by 2029.

Altenhofen asked when it will be appropriate for the proposed Perkins County Canal to be assessed in the context of the NNDP, since it is a post-1997 project and the Program will want to understand how it will replace depletions. Schellpeper said the timeline is unknown; Jesse Bradley is the NDNR lead for that project.

Burgert presented Nebraska's annual update on 2021 permitted activities (2021 instead of 2022 because of the way Nebraska's reporting cycle is set up). In 2021, water use permits issued by the NRDs and NDNR included 60 groundwater transfers, 47 groundwater wells, 8 groundwater variances, and 10 surface water permits. These included uses both within and upstream of the



Program's Associated Habitat Reach. The 10 surface water permits were all temporary recharge permits. Analyses show that mitigations will exceed new uses through 2032. Altenhofen asked how Nebraska is replacing depletions. Schellpeper said much is done through irrigation retirements and buydowns.

**Wyoming Depletions Plan Update:** *Michelle Gess, WY SEO*

Gess reported that Wyoming continues to meet its depletions obligations. For Baseline No. 1, Wyoming complied with the Modified North Platte Decree intentionally irrigated acres limitations for the 2022 irrigation season. For the sub-basin above Guernsey Reservoir, there were 190,212 intentionally irrigated acres, well below the 226,000-acre benchmark. Kendrick Project irrigation complied with the 24,249-acre limit.

Baseline No. 2 looks at irrigation, municipal, industrial, rural domestic, retired/mitigation uses, and post-1997 new water uses. Aggregate water uses remained below baseline limits in water year 2022, with underruns translated to the state line of 50,937 AF for the irrigation season and 5,507 AF for the non-irrigation season. For Baseline No. 3, post-1997 storage in the South Platte River Basin of Wyoming totaled 80.56 AF.

**Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, 2023 WAC Chair*

Turner gave a preview of the water projects tour that would start after lunch. The tour was to visit 12 sites between Kingsley Dam and the Program's Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge and recapture projects, including key infrastructure in the CNPPID and NPPD power and irrigation systems.

2023 WAC Meeting Schedule: August 1, October 24. Locations (in-person or virtual TBD).

**Action Items**

**General WAC**

- N/A

**ED Office**

- Post Weschler and Schellpeper presentations to the website.