



Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP -or- Program)

PRRIP Second Increment Policy Frame

December 2020 *(June 2023 Update)*

The Governance Committee (GC) conducted a series of mock negotiation workshops in the fall of 2020 to develop a Second Increment policy frame. The Policy Frame is intended to help structure Program learning during the First Increment Extension (“Extension”) and to identify critical information needs for development of a Second Increment later in the Extension. The GC conducted this exercise with the understanding that they cannot be held to workshop outcomes, but these outcomes are a useful way to identify information needed to inform actual negotiations. This document presents the architecture of a Second Increment Policy Frame and associated key policy and science questions. The Policy Frame is presented as a living document and is subject to updating and revision based on GC direction and Program learning throughout the remainder of the Extension (2020-2032).

- *June 2023 EDO Update – This version of the Second Increment Policy Frame includes updates and status reports on the key Policy and Science questions noted below. The EDO intends to revisit the Policy Frame regularly with the GC (at least once a year) to provide additional updates and get GC guidance on how to proceed on key issues.*

The PRRIP Second Increment – Scope of Responsibility

The Program will continue to function as a Recovery Implementation Program. The Second Increment is intended to be maintenance focused. **Additional target species are not anticipated** nor are changes in the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) management objectives, particularly for the bird species.

Key policy question:

- Can contribution to pallid sturgeon research (Program-sponsored or conducted by partners) fulfill the Program’s requirement to provide defined benefits for that target species?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – As per the Pallid Sturgeon Policy Frame and GC direction, the PRRIP remains engaged in both pallid sturgeon genetics research with Southern Illinois University and pallid sturgeon habitat and use research (in the lower Platte River) with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.*

The PRRIP Second Increment – Regulatory Certainty

Regulatory certainty in the Second Increment will be based on achieving Milestones that reflect the defined contributions of land, water, and money and continued implementation of the Program (including science activities). The existing separation between Endangered Species Act (ESA) coverage and provision of benefits to target species outcomes will persist. However, having a clear understanding of any connections between Program actions and species outcomes at a broad scale (particularly poor species outcomes) will be informative for Program decision-making around continuation and refinement of management actions in a Second Increment.



Key policy question:

- What is the best way to communicate target species outcomes to the GC in regard to Program decision-making (i.e., whether the Program is/is not meeting target species management objectives)?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – In September 2023 the EDO will discuss with the GC a recent publication regarding whooping crane (WC) use of herbaceous and agricultural wetland areas in the central Platte River valley (CPRV). Given the publication includes analysis with a direct overlap to PRRIP analysis and includes authors representing GC entities, there has been much internal Program discussion regarding the generalities of non-PRRIP science onboarding and the specifics of the analysis contained in the publication and potential implications for PRRIP analysis, conclusions, and management. This issue will be discussed with the GC at the September 2023 Quarterly Meeting.*

1.1 Defined Contributions – Water

The Second Increment Water Milestone will likely fall between 130,000 and 150,000 acre-ft and will be negotiated based on an understanding of incremental target species benefits and costs, constrained by water availability and the ability to route flow through the North Platte Chokepoint. An initial list of potential water uses to further Program learning includes:

- Spring and fall releases during whooping crane migration to increase the proportion of cranes stopping on the Platte.
- Spring releases to support wet meadow hydrology for potential whooping crane use.
- Baseflow releases to provide defined benefits to the fish guild hypothesized to comprise a significant forage base for whooping cranes.
- Spring/summer releases to suppress germination of in-channel vegetation for the purpose of maintaining suitable in-channel whooping crane roosting habitat.
- *June 2023 EDO Update – The four bullet points above have been modified into the following set of flow-related Extension Big Questions (EBQs) to be addressed through implementation of the Extension Science Plan:*
 - EBQ #1: How effective is it to use Program water to maintain suitable whooping crane roosting habitat?*
 - EBQ #2: How effective is Program management of Phragmites for maintaining suitable whooping crane roosting habitat?*
 - EBQ #4: What factors influence WC decision to stop or fly over the AHR?*
 - EBQ #5: What factors influence WC stopover length within the AHR?*
 - EBQ #6: Why is spring WC use of the AHR greater than fall WC use?*

The relative benefits of these potential uses must be balanced against the feasibility or acceptability of securing additional water contributions and the benefits and costs of using water versus mechanical and/or chemical approaches (where possible) to create and/or maintain species habitat.

1.2 Defined Contributions – Role of Target Flows

The GC determined that the Second Increment Water Milestone and Program water operations will NOT be based on a requirement to offset remaining deficits to existing or revised target flows. Consequently, there is not a need to peer review target flows or modify them through the Extension Science Plan. Existing target flows will remain as a water administration tool, used to determine the timing and



magnitude of excess flow availability for recharge and/or retiming. **Existing Program Water Action Plan (WAP) project scores based on target flows will remain and be memorialized.** During the Extension, the Program may test flow management actions that exceed or deviate from target flows during certain times of the year. Protection of Program releases that exceed target flows is a key consideration for the Second Increment.

Key policy question:

- What regulatory tools could provide protection for flow releases that exceed target flows?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – This issue will be addressed later in the Extension.*

1.3 Defined Contributions – Land

The Second Increment Land Milestone will comprise contributions expected to come primarily in the form of counting previously uncredited habitat land owned by environmental entities **in 1997** within the Associated Habitat Reach. **The extent of current non-PRRIP conservation ownership and the extent to which those acres support the management objectives for the Program’s target species are currently unknown.**

Key policy questions:

- Is there a need for crediting existing conservation lands and/or acquiring additional target species habitat in the Second Increment, based on the expected benefits and status relative to target species management objectives?
- What conditions must be met for conservation lands to be credited towards a Second Increment Land Milestone?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – Per GC direction in September 2022, beginning in 2024 or 2025 the EDO will begin working with conservation groups to conduct an analysis of conservation group lands and the prospects for including 19,000 acres in the Program during the Second Increment.*

The PRRIP Second Increment – Extension Science Framework

Program science during the Extension will be guided by a Science Plan that includes adaptive management (AM) as a component where applicable. Some Program science activities in the Extension will focus more on refining incremental benefits of management and will entail more typical and consistent monitoring activities. Other Program science activities in the Extension will have direct linkages to Program decision-making and communication of outcomes from those activities could serve as a useful input to making those decisions. In those cases, the Program will develop and implement a robust AM approach utilizing the six-step process of AM (Assess, Design, Implement, Monitor, Evaluate, Adjust) and components familiar to Program entities including conceptual models, hypotheses, experimental design, synthesis, and Structured Decision-Making (SDM).

Key science questions:

Management objectives:

- How should we identify and communicate target species outcomes as well as our ability to influence those outcomes?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – This is addressed in part through implementation of the GC-approved Extension Science Plan. The EDO intends to revisit this topic continuously as a way to improve*



Science Plan communication with the GC and as a means for including target species in a Structured Decision Making (SDM) process later in the Extension leading up to Second Increment negotiations.

- In what specific ways will the continuation of Program management actions in a Second Increment contribute to Management Objective #4 (non-target species)?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – Started addressing this issue with small group and discussing possible actions with the GC. One action taken is the planting of violets for Regal fritillaries on Program properties.*

Management actions:

- How does current chokepoint capacity constrain ability to implement flow management actions and what are the incremental and relative benefits of increasing capacity?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – The PRRIP issued an RFP via a competitive selection process for North Platte Chokepoint Engineering Services and selected Anderson Consulting Engineers, Inc. to conduct the work. That work is now under contract as of late May 2023 and will include an evaluation of alternatives for increasing chokepoint capacity. Also, the PRRIP purchased a land tract along the chokepoint in early 2023.*
- What are the incremental and relative benefits and costs of using water versus mechanical/chemical means to create and/or maintain suitable in-channel species habitat?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – Science Plan implementation is now focused on the specific management action of germination suppression flow to address the ability of such flows to maintain channel width for whooping cranes. A germination suppression flow release is ongoing.*
- What are the incremental and relative benefits to target species (or target species habitat) of other potential flow actions?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – As noted above, Science Plan implementation is focused on germination suppression and flow during whooping crane migration. During development of the Science Plan, the Adaptive Management Working Group (AMWG) moved all other potential flow management actions into the “parking lot” for potential consideration later in the Extension.*

Land in the Second Increment:

- How much of the 19,000 acres of pre-1997 conservation land remains under conservation ownership and how many acres have been acquired (non-PRRIP) since 1997?
- What proportion of existing non-PRRIP conservation lands benefit target species or species of concern as defined by the Program?
- Are existing PRRIP and non-PRRIP conservation lands sufficient to meet the target species management objectives as detailed in the Extension Science Plan?
- *June 2023 EDO Update – Per GC direction in September 2022, beginning in 2024 or 2025 the EDO will begin working with conservation groups to conduct an analysis of conservations group lands and the prospects for including 19,000 acres in the Program during the Second Increment.*