

**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP -or- Program)****September 2022 Governance Committee (GC) Quarterly Meeting – Kearney, NE (Crowne Plaza Hotel)**Day #1 – Tuesday, September 13, 2022**Governance Committee (GC)****State of Wyoming**

Brandon Gebhart – Member

State of Colorado

Amy Ostdiek – Member

Emily Zmak – Alternate

Kara Scheel – Alternate

State of Nebraska

Tom Riley – Member

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Bob Mehling – Alternate

Owen Williams – Alternate

Downstream Water Users

Kent Miller – Member

John Shadle – Member

Devin Brundage – Member

Brandi Flyr – Alternate

Executive Director's Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth – ED

Justin Brei

Libby Casavant

Kristen Cognac

Patrick Farrell

Malinda Henry

Mallory Jaymes

Kaley Keldsen

Chad Smith

Michael Steele

Tim Tunnell

Seth Turner

Alicia Uribe

Malia Volke

Ed Weschler

Jon Wentz

Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)

Brock Merrill – Member (2022 GC Chair)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)

Steve Small – Member

Mark Porath – Alternate

Matt Rabbe – Alternate

Environmental Entities

Brice Krohn – Member

Bill Taddicken – Member

Rich Walters – Member

Colorado Water Users

Kyle Whitaker – Member

Deb Freeman – Alternate

Jason Marks – Alternate

Other Participants

Cory Steinke, Dave Zorn, Mike Drain, Cory Steinke – CNPPID

Jim Jenniges, Jeff Shafer – NPPD

Jeff Runge, Brian Caruso – Service (virtual)

Jesse Bradley, Jennifer Schellpeper – State of Nebraska

Kevin Urie – Colorado Water Users

Melissa Mosier – Audubon Nebraska, VESPR

PRRIP ISAC: Jennifer Hoeting, Dave Marmorek, David Galat, Ned Andrews, Michal Tal, Aaron Pearse, Brian Bledsoe (former member)

Carrie Roberts – Crane Trust



#1	WELCOME & ADMINISTRATIVE	Agenda Item Objective: Greetings, roll call, review agenda.
----	-------------------------------------	--

Introductions – Chair Merrill called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM Central Time. The in-person and virtual groups proceeded with introductions.

Agenda – No modifications offered.

Minutes – **GC Motion:** Riley moved and Gebhart seconded to approve the June 2022 GC Quarterly Meeting minutes. **Minutes approved.**

#2	COMMITTEE UPDATES	Agenda Item Objective: General update on recent work of PRRIP Advisory Committees.
----	--------------------------	---

Land Advisory Committee (LAC) – Zorn provided an update on the latest LAC activities. The LAC last met on August 24 and discussed several agenda items related to land agreements (on GC agenda tomorrow); update on land management; and discussion of PRRIP facilities management.

Water Advisory Committee (WAC) – Turner provided an update on the latest WAC activities. The WAC last met on August 2 and discussed PRRIP lease agreements; the J-2 agreement termination; chokepoint; and had a Perkins County Canal presentation from Jesse Bradley of the Nebraska DNR.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) – Merrill provided an update on the latest TAC activities. The TAC last met on July 13. Agenda items included the PRRA and a fishing issue; germination suppression flow; chokepoint; updates on predator management and WC monitoring; WC site selection analysis; PS update; Phragmites study; sediment augmentation plan; and stakeholder science (Joel Jorgensen study on piping plovers and wet meadow research from Crane Trust/Oklahoma State University).

Finance Committee (FC) – Riley provided an update on the latest FC activities. The FC last met on July 14. The FC discussed and approved the bid package for sediment augmentation activities. The FC will need to meet again soon to begin to discuss the FY23 PRRIP budget and work plan.

#3	OUTREACH UPDATE	Agenda Item Objective: General update on PRRIP outreach activities.
----	------------------------	--

PRESENTATIONS

- Mark Pegg virtually presented an update on the Lower Platte pallid sturgeon research to the Middle Basin Pallid Sturgeon Workgroup on August 2, 2022. This work is a Program funded research collaboration between the Program, the University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL), and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC).

EXHIBITS/SPONSORSHIPS

- There were no exhibits in June, July, or August.

UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS/EXHIBITS/SPONSORSHIPS

- UNL graduate students Christopher Pullano and Jenna Ruoss will present, “Pallid Sturgeon Biology in the Platte River and its Tributaries” on September 14, 2022, in Lincoln, NE. The presentation is part of the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit Annual Coordinating Committee Meeting.



- Seth Turner will present on the Program at the Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference in Avon, CO on October 12, 2022. His presentation is titled, *The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program: Using Existing Infrastructure to Restore River Flows for Threatened and Endangered Species.*
- Patrick Farrell will present on behalf of the Program at the Geological Society of American annual conference on October 11, 2022, in Denver, CO. His presentation is titled, *"Predicting the ability of river flow to maintain suitable channel conditions for whooping cranes."*
- The Platte River Basin Conference & 3rd Playa Research Symposium will be held at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney, NE from October 24-27, 2022. The symposium is supported by the UNL Nebraska Water Center. The Program will have the following presenters:
 - Jason Farnsworth presenting on *"An Honest Broker Approach to Adaptive Management"* and participating on a Platte-focused panel.
 - Patrick Farrell and Mallory Jaymes presenting on *"Whooping crane selection of the central Platte River Valley: roost site characteristics and factors related to stopover decisions."*
 - Kristen Cognac presenting on *"Quantifying hydrologic constraints on a wet meadow restoration along the central Platte River."*
 - Mark Pegg presenting on the pallid sturgeon research.
- The Program is exhibiting at Husker Harvest Days in Grand Island on September 13, 14, and 15, 2022 in the Natural Resources Districts building.
- The Program will be exhibiting at the Nebraska Natural Resources Districts Annual Conference on September 25 through 27, 2022 in Kearney, NE.
- The Program will be sponsoring the South Platte Forum on December 8th, 2022, in Lafayette, CO.

MEDIA/OTHER

- Mark Pegg, Kirk Steffensen, Jonathan Spurgeon, , Christopher Pullano, Jenna Ruoss. *Pallid Sturgeon Biology in the Platte River and its Tributaries*. Nebraska Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit Annual Report (Oct 2021- Sep 2022), pg. 42. Brief summary of pallid sturgeon habitat and spawning research funded by the Program as a collaboration between UNL, NGPC, and the Program.

#4	PRRIP BUDGET	Agenda Item Objective: General update on current status of FY22 budget.
----	--------------	---

Farnsworth updated the GC on the status of the FY22 PRRIP budget. Farnsworth previewed budget action items to be discussed by the GC during this Quarterly Meeting. He also provided an update on the 2021-2022 Federal Single Audit results. There were no audit findings.

#5	SECOND INCREMENT POLICY FRAME	Agenda Item Objective: Discussion of latest PRRIP indexing.
----	-------------------------------	---

Smith discussed updates to the Second Increment Policy Frame. The GC discussed the document and provided the following guidance:

- GC members should be thinking about what a Second Increment might look like from the year 2027. It will likely take at least three (3) years to complete the full NEPA process (EIS) and also write a new Biological Opinion (BO), and then we will have to seek Congressional authorization.
- Conduct the analysis of conservations group lands and the prospects for including 19,000 acres in the Program during the Second Increment about 2-3 years before 2027. So, start in 2024 or 2025.



- The GC likes annual check-ins on the Second Increment Policy Frame and the discussion of status and updates. Smith asked the GC about a special meeting or gathering of the GC to discuss the Policy Frame since many members of the current GC are new since the Policy Frame was developed. The GC did not provide specific guidance on this, Smith will re-visit the issue at the next GC meeting.
- The Policy Frame provides a great summary of the “bones” of the Program. The GC should use that summary as a guide to build the Second Increment.

#6	PRRIP SCIENCE ACTIVITIES & TARGET SPECIES	Agenda Item Objective: Discuss Science Plan implementation activities.
----	--	---

Whooping Cranes (WC) – Jaymes discussed PRRIP whooping crane (WC) monitoring methods and the results of spring 2022 WC monitoring. Freeman asked about the inclusion of language related to more specific management hypotheses. Henry said the Science Plan includes alternative hypotheses more inclusive of possible influences beyond just discharge. The GC discussed the options for addressing this language in the WC report and agreed the best approach would be to include the alternative hypotheses from the Science Plan in the WC report.

GC MOTION: Riley moved to approve spring 2022 WC monitoring report with proposed changes regarding additional language from the Science Plan on Alternative Hypotheses; Gebhart seconded. **Motion approved.**

Henry updated the GC on the status of developing an agreement to work collaboratively with the WC Telemetry Tracking Partnership to utilize WC telemetry data over the wider migratory corridor to address Extension Big Questions. Marmorek asked about prospects for developing a data sharing agreement, Henry said the request is for a conversation about collaboration, not a typical data grab as we have done in the past. We will then firm up that collaboration with an agreement document.

Terns/Plovers (LTPP) – Keldsen updated the GC on 2022 tern/plover (LTPP) monitoring and associated predation research. Hoeting asked if fledgling ratios are higher now because of Program predator management activities (fencing, etc.). Kelsey and Henry said we are early in the data collection and analysis process and the EDO will have a better understanding of that toward the end of this year. Riley asked about the 3-year running average for fledgling ratios. Keldsen said results were preliminary and she would go back and check the math. Whitaker asked about take limits (Incidental Take) associated with terns and plovers and why there is a difference between nests and chick take. Rabbe said those were set by the Service but he does not know how those were established.

Pallid Sturgeon (PS) – Pegg updated the GC on the status of pallid sturgeon (PS) research activities in the lower Platte River. Galat asked if the 30 tagged fish have out-migrated to the Missouri River. Pegg said we don’t know for sure, only one of the fish has been picked up in the Platte since late June. Galat asked if any work has been done yet trying to pair out-migration with parameters like temperature. Pegg said not yet but that is something they very much want to work through. Marmorek asked how long it takes to get samples analyzed for genetics by Ed Heist. Pegg said samples sent from captured adults and juveniles took 10-14 days, but they haven’t sent the larval samples yet.

Weschler updated the GC on the status of acquisition of LiDAR data in the lower Platte River and attempt to develop flight triggers/action level for when it would be opportune to fly LiDAR in the lower



Platte and acquire the most useful data. Williams asked if the LiDAR flight occurred. Farnsworth said yes, and it happened under ideal conditions.

Germination Suppression Flow – Henry, Turner, and Farnsworth gave the GC an initial report on the results of implementing germination suppression flows during the summers of 2020-2022. Brundage asked how the EDO intends to weigh the trade-offs of doing another germination suppression flow in the summer of 2023 versus using that water during the WC migration season. Turner said there is a purposeful focus to prioritize germination suppression for at least one more year when planning use of Environmental Account (EA) water to speed Program learning and take advantage of available water. Shadle asked to what extent large-scale use of mechanical means is still applied to the channel. Farnsworth said that continued for many years but to help discern the impacts of germination suppression flows the Program has intentionally not applied that level of mechanical management on Program properties in most instances for the past few years.

Sediment Augmentation – Farnsworth discussed the process of approving a budget increase for sediment augmentation in 2022 because bids came in very high due primarily to increased fuel costs. Riley asked given increased fuel costs and the dry conditions, does it make sense to stop sediment augmentation at this point? How important will it be to acquire this additional dataset (2022 implementation of sediment augmentation)? Farnsworth said this would be the sixth year of full-scale augmentation. The Program only has about 3-5 more years to acquire new data that could be useful in Second Increment negotiations. At this point, we do not want to discontinue experimental management actions until we are sure that we have learned enough. Riley said another thing to think about moving forward is how cost pressure and other items influence the setting of priorities for Program activities and related GC decisions.

#7	VESPR	Agenda Item Objective: Update on other species of concern.
----	-------	--

Mosier updated the GC on the latest activities of VESPR, particularly related to the chokepoint and the group's new Platte River E-Journal. Farnsworth asked if the chokepoint contractors will be making recommendations related to the Program's objective for the chokepoint (increasing conveyance capacity to 3,000 cfs without violating flood stage) or a more general approach to the chokepoint. Mosier believes the recommendations will be broader than the specific objectives of the PRRIP. Rabbe said he did not think the contractors know what the Program's specific objective is at the chokepoint.

#8	NORTH PLATTE CHOKEPOINT	Agenda Item Objective: Update on other species of concern.
----	-------------------------	--

Farnsworth discussed the Chokepoint Policy Frame developed by the EDO and possible next steps. Freeman said she is struggling with the shortness of the VESPR timeframe and does it make sense to sit tight until we have the benefit of that VESPR product. Whitaker said he hates to think of walking away entirely from the chokepoint especially until the VESPR work is completed and shared with the Program. Whitaker asked about whether there are times that water deliveries exceed flood stage. Drain said that does happen, especially when irrigation demand is very high. Small said the Service is nervous and unwilling to just walk away from the chokepoint. It will be important to see what results from the VESPR work, but this is an important milestone for the Program. Small said it is a good idea to investigate the science that relates to the chokepoint as described in the memo. Mosier asked if the Program would continue with vegetation management in the reach. Farnsworth said the EDO intends to stop that because they have not been successful getting local landowners to agree to enter into agreements to



allow vegetation management (i.e., spraying). Freeman asked if the Program has done everything we can to work with the National Weather Service (NWS) on this. Brei said in meeting with them, they have every incentive to lower flood stage but no incentive to raise flood stage. We might be able to push harder but it is hard to see what a successful avenue might be. Freeman asked if we could look at this from the federal level. Farnsworth said that could be something worth looking into. Miller said the NWS dropped the flood level in the past due to public input. Pushing hard on the NWS at a higher level will cause public outcry in North Platte. Brundage said a middle ground could be to not actively work in the chokepoint but be prepared to accept possible solutions that pop up. Merrill said he cannot see upper level administration in the Department of Interior being willing to exert that pressure on the NWS. Gebhart asked what the intent of this document is from the EDO. Farnsworth said at this point don't spend more time with this, let's see what we learn from the VESPR work and then stay in a mode where the Program works on the science but keeps an eye out for other potential solutions.

GC MEETING DAY #1 END**5:30 PM Central Time**

**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP -or- Program)****September 2022 Governance Committee (GC) Quarterly Meeting – Kearney, NE (Crowne Plaza Hotel)**Day #2 – Tuesday, September 14, 2022**Governance Committee (GC)****State of Wyoming**

Brandon Gebhart – Member

State of Colorado

Amy Ostdiek – Member

Emily Zmak – Alternate

Kara Scheel – Alternate

State of Nebraska

Tom Riley – Member

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Bob Mehling – Alternate

Owen Williams – Alternate

Downstream Water Users

Kent Miller – Member

John Shadle – Member

Devin Brundage – Member

Brandi Flyr – Alternate

Executive Director's Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth – ED

Bridget Barron

Justin Brei

Libby Casavant

Kristen Cognac

Patrick Farrell

Malinda Henry

Mallory Jaymes

Kaley Keldsen

Chad Smith

Tim Tunnell

Seth Turner

Alicia Uribe

Malia Volke

Ed Weschler

Jon Wentz

Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)

Brock Merrill – Member (2022 GC Chair)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)

Steve Small – Member

Mark Porath – Alternate

Matt Rabbe – Alternate

Environmental Entities

Brice Krohn – Member

Bill Taddicken – Member

Rich Walters – Member

Colorado Water Users

Kyle Whitaker – Member

Deb Freeman – Alternate

Jason Marks – Alternate

Other ParticipantsCory Steinke, Dave Zorn, Mike Drain, Cory
Steinke – CNPPID

Jim Jenniges, Jeff Shafer – NPPD

Jeff Runge, Brian Caruso – Service (virtual)

Jesse Bradley, Jennifer Schellpeper – State of
Nebraska

Kevin Urie – Colorado Water Users

Melissa Mosier – Audubon Nebraska, VESPR

PRRIP ISAC: Jennifer Hoeting, Dave Marmorek,
David Galat, Ned Andrews, Michal Tal,
Aaron Pearse, Brian Bledsoe (former
member)

Carrie Roberts – Crane Trust



#09	WELCOME & ADMINISTRATIVE	Agenda Item Objective: Greetings, roll call, review agenda.
-----	--------------------------	---

Chair Merrill called the meeting to order at 8:01 AM Central Time. The in-person and virtual groups proceeded with introductions.

#10	WATER ACTION PLAN (WAP)	Agenda Item Objective: Update on recent WAP implementation activities and approve surface water exchange agreements.
-----	-------------------------	--

WAP Project Update:

Turner updated the GC on the status of implementation of the WAP, including:

- Button on the PRRIP website with a collection of all PRRIP Tiered Consultations.
- Recapture well network at Cottonwood Ranch – Riley asked how much is left on the contract related to pressure testing. Brei said about \$150,000, that is a contract with the Tri-Basin NRD but the Program is inserting itself to help get the work done.
- Pathfinder accounts.
- CNPPID irrigator lease.
- History of the WAP – Brundage asked if 5,000 cfs for the short-duration high flow (SDHF) was what drove discussions about focusing on controllable storage water instead of recharge water. Farnsworth said in part, but also because the Program still needs enough water in the right place at the right time to do other flow management experiments like germination suppression flows.
- Water Milestone Summary – Whitaker asked what the “concept” category includes. Turner said it includes water like the Net Conserved Controllable Water lease and recharge water from Elwood Reservoir. Riley asked which WAP projects fall into the “marginal contributions” category. Turner said one example is the CNPPID irrigator lease water, about 2/3 of the enrollment in that program has dropped off.

Farnsworth discussed recent work of the EDO with water entities on potential agreements for water. The State of Nebraska, NPPD, CNPPID, and the Central Platte NRD need more time to work through some issues that might result in longer-term agreements. In the short term, there are one-year agreements for water that are on the GC agenda later today.

J-2 Agreement Termination Amendment:

Farnsworth discussed the purpose for this Amendment, which is to pull the Program out of the J-2 Agreement. Gebhart asked how revenue under this Agreement is divided up. Drain said CNPPID keeps an accounting of the different parties based on relative contributions. Money will be returned to the parties in those same ratios. Gebhart asked if that concept is part of this Amendment. Drain said yes.

GC MOTION: Gebhart moved and Ost diek seconded to approve the J-2 Termination Amendment. All Downstream Water Users abstained. **Motion approved.**

Water Exchange Agreements:

Farnsworth summarized the NPPD and CPNRD Water Exchange Agreements. Whitaker asked if the water has already been conserved. Farnsworth said these Agreements usually come earlier in the year, now they are tied to a good-faith approach that this water has been conserved. Flyr said in the case of the CPRND, some water users have been using their groundwater wells and not taking their surface water allocation as part of this approach.



GC MOTION: Riley moved and Gebhart seconded to approve the NPPD and CPNRD one-year Water Exchange Agreements. The Downstream Water Users abstained. **Motion approved.**

#11	LAND PLAN	Agenda Item Objective: Update on PRRIP land-related activities.
------------	------------------	--

PRRA Program:

Rabbe discussed the proposal to open up fishing at the Leaman off-channel sand and water (OCSW) property. The LAC supported this and helped develop seasons, restrictions, etc. When discussed in June, the EDO expressed some concerns about this due to ongoing tern/plover predation research. The TAC weighed in on this and expressed no concern related to this issue. So, we are moving forward with the plan. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission electro-shocked at the site to better understand what the fish community is at the site, fishing access will be opened within the next week or two. We can then look at the fish community down the road to get a better understanding of the impact of fishing and we are excited to open up this opportunity for the public.

General Land Update:

- Prescribed fire cost-share – Tunnell talked to the Nebraska Forest Service about cost-sharing, that would only work for clearing redcedar in the understory. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture offered up grant possibilities but those did not seem to fit the Program. We will keep looking for cost share opportunities moving forward.
- Land Milestone Summary – The EDO found one error in previous Summaries inadvertently contributing 196 acres to the Extension plus-up. That error has been fixed.
- Tunnell showed a video of Chapman Complex one-year after extensive habitat work.

#12	PUBLIC COMMENT	Agenda Item Objective: Public comment period on PRRIP activities.
------------	-----------------------	--

None offered.

#13	EXECUTIVE SESSION	Agenda Item Objective: GC member discussion of sensitive land, water, and policy items.
------------	--------------------------	--

GC Motion: Shadle moved and Ostdiek seconded to enter Executive Session. **GC entered Executive Session at 10:32 AM Central Time.**

GC Motion: Ostdiek moved and Riley seconded to exit Executive Session. **GC exited Executive Session at 11:07 AM Central Time.**

#14	EXECUTIVE SESSION MOTIONS	Agenda Item Objective: GC consideration of motions discussed during Executive Session.
------------	----------------------------------	---

GC MOTION: Riley moved and Shadle seconded to:

- Approve the Tract 2201 Lease Agreement and count the 19 acres toward the First Increment Extension plus-up.
- Approve the Izaak Walton League (IWL) Trade/Lease Agreement to sell 1.2 accretion acres to the IWL in exchange for a 30-year lease on 18 acres of channel area that would count toward the First Increment Extension plus-up.
- Finalize negotiations and execute a Land Use Agreement for the Dippel Tract and count the 14 acres toward the First Increment Extension plus-up.

Motion approved.



The GC agrees that as a result of these motions, there will be an addition of 51 acres total to the First Increment Extension plus-up. The GC further agrees any portion of this 51-acre total will be subtracted from the Extension plus-up if any of these leases terminate.

#15 GC MEETING REVIEW & WRAP-UP**Agenda Item Objective:** Discuss action items, meeting feedback, and upcoming meeting schedule.

Upcoming GC meetings (in-person meetings depend on local and national public health conditions and travel restrictions):

- **GC Virtual Special Session on FY2023 Budget/Work Plan** – November 9, 2022; 10:00 AM-12:00 PM Central Time *via Teams*
- **December 2022 GC Quarterly Meeting** – December 6-7, 2022 @ *Denver, CO*

GC MEETING DAY #2 END

11:12 AM Central Time

Summary of Action Items/Decisions from September 2022 GC Quarterly Meeting

- 1) Approved the June 2022 GC Quarterly Meeting minutes.
- 2) Approved the spring 2022 WC monitoring report with proposed changes regarding language from the Science Plan on Alternative Hypotheses.
- 3) Approved the J-2 Termination Amendment.
- 4) Approved the NPPD and CPNRD one-year Water Exchange Agreements.
- 5) Approved the following PRRIP land-related motions:
 - Approved the Tract 2201 Lease Agreement and counted the 19 acres toward the First Increment Extension plus-up.
 - Approved the Izaak Walton League (IWL) Trade/Lease Agreement to sell 1.2 accretion acres to the IWL in exchange for a 30-year lease on 18 acres of channel area that would count toward the First Increment Extension plus-up.
 - Authorized the EDO to finalize negotiations and execute a Land Use Agreement for the Dippel Tract and count the 14 acres toward the First Increment Extension plus-up.
 - The GC agreed that as a result of these motions, there will be an addition of 51 acres total to the First Increment Extension plus-up. The GC further agreed any portion of this 51-acre total will be subtracted from the Extension plus-up if any of these leases terminate.