



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams
October 25, 2022

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Kara Scheel – Member

Don Baggus

State of Wyoming

Michelle Gess

State of Nebraska

Jennifer Schellpeper – Member

Kari Burgert – Alternate

Justin Ahern

Caitlin Kingsley

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Jeff Runge – Member

Mark Porath – Alternate

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Member

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke – Chair

Brandi Flyr – Member

Jeff Shafer – Member

Nolan Little

Scott Shaneman

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Kyle Whitaker – Member

Joe Frank – Alternate

Jason Marks

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Environmental Groups

Jacob Fritton – Member

Josh Wiese – Alternate

Bill Taddicken

Executive Director's Office

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Justin Brei

Libby Casavant

Seth Turner

Ed Weschler

Contractors/Interested Parties

None



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

10 Meeting attendees were identified from Microsoft Teams. There were no agenda modifications.
11 Revisions to the original draft August WAC meeting minutes were noted. Altenhofen made a
12 motion to approve the minutes, second by Strauch, no objections, approved.
13

14 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates:** *Seth Turner and Ed Weschler, EDO*

15
16 ***Leasing and Recharge Projects:***

17 Turner reported that there have been no excess flow diversions for recharge, and there have been
18 only 2 days above target flows at Grand Island since the end of the EA release at the beginning
19 of July. With perpetual shortages, the 8 recapture wells have pumped a cumulative volume of
20 nearly 2,200 AF this year. Six of the recapture wells are presently shut off for construction work
21 on the pipelines.
22

23 Altenhofen asked about the depletive effects of the well pumping. Turner said that will
24 eventually be factored into the operations accounting, but we do not yet have unit response
25 functions for the 7 new wells and there is no specific timeline for developing them.

26 Runge asked if the pumped water gets diverted by the Kearney Canal and therefore misses
27 sections of the associated habitat reach, and if the project accounting will differentiate between
28 water in the river and the canal. Turner said that is not likely to be trackable given the EDO's
29 current operations accounting methods, which focus on the amount of water at the point of return
30 to the river channel and an estimation of how much reaches Grand Island based on standard loss
31 factors from the WMC Loss Model. Altenhofen asked to clarify whether there are canals
32 diverting at the same time as the recapture pumping. Turner said yes, that has been the case this
33 summer and into the early fall. The pumped water from the recapture network enters the river
34 upstream of the Kearney Canal diversion, but there is no provision to protect that pumped water
35 in the channel.
36

37 Turner said 27,280 AF was released from the Pathfinder accounts (9,600 AF from Municipal
38 Account, 17,680 AF from Pathfinder EA), mostly in mid-August. After subsequent release from
39 Guernsey Reservoir in September, about 21,281 AF (78.4%) reached Lake McConaughy. The
40 transit losses were high but not unexpected given the dry conditions.
41

42 Surface water leasing credits to the Lake McConaughy EA in October included 14,395 AF from
43 CPNRD, 3,306 AF from NPPD, 868 AF from the CNPPID irrigator lease, and 314 AF from no-
44 cost NCCW.
45

46 ***Recapture Network Construction:***

47 Turner reported that while all of the new recapture wells are operational, work to repair leaks in
48 the pipelines is still ongoing. A plan is finally in place, with the contractor set to attempt repairs
49 to the pipeline between wells 2 and 3. The 16" pipelines from well 3 to the river discharge and
50 from well 5 to the river discharge will be removed and replaced entirely with 15" gasketed PVC
51 pipe. Work is to be completed by December 31, 2022.

**Platte Basin Hydrology:**

Weschler reported that Platte River flows near Grand Island continue to be well below median and target flows. There was a period of about 45 days in August-September during which the flow was below 10 cfs; 29 days had zero flow. The real-time hydrologic condition continues to be dry, and the USFWS target flow is 1300 cfs through November 15. Drought conditions continue to persist across most of the Platte Basin, with southwestern Nebraska and far northeastern Colorado in extreme or exceptional drought. Snowpack in the South Platte Basin as of October 24 was 41% of normal. Runge requested a link to Colorado snowpack data, which Scheel provided in the meeting chat.¹

Taddicken noted the continued low river flows, in particular a dry channel at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary, and asked if there is any consideration of EA releases during the fall whooping crane migration. Farnsworth said there generally hasn't been a fall release because there are typically maintenance outages in the NPPD and CNPPID systems that affect the ability to deliver water to the habitat reach in October. Outages this year are scheduled until around November 15. Farnsworth also noted that there is erosion on the Program's Wyoming property, so that water is flowing into the north channel instead of the south, and the split appears to be getting worse. This will be a priority investigation for the Program in 2023. Runge asked if clearwater returns from the Kearney Canal were contributing to the problem. Farnsworth said no, Kearney Canal return is well below the Wyoming Property. The issue was more likely that the side channel is lower than the main channel, which occurs regularly in the Associated Habitat Reach. There was additional discussion of NPPD's Kearney Canal operations during the fall as well as CNPPID's hydrocycling. Steinke said there simply isn't enough water to reach the "high" step of the cycle; while there is some water going down the river, it's not enough to get into the south channel near Rowe.

Marks inquired about the extent of the reach that was dry in August-September. Farnsworth said flows were very low at Wood River, dry at Grand Island, and given the lack of tributary inflows, dry most of the way to the Loup River confluence at Columbus, about 70-80 miles. Shafer noted that Nebraska DNR's Platte River DSS provides flows at key gages down to the mouth of the river. Schellpeper provided a link in the meeting chat.²

Sediment Augmentation Project:

Weschler provided an overview of this year's full-scale sediment augmentation project. This was the Program's 6th year of the project, and the site was just downstream of the original 2017 project site, about 1.1 miles downstream of the J-2 Return. Work was completed by Meyer Construction in September and early October, with about 43,700 cubic yards (65,550 tons) of materials being pushed into the river channel from an adjacent terrace on the north bank. The contractor was successful at hitting the design elevations. The EDO is starting a comprehensive analysis to assess what the project has accomplished to date.

¹ https://www.weather.gov/bou/co_snowpack

² <https://gis.ne.gov/portal/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=f26a3b4a2fd1446f9ce0ce2bf0754b14>



2023 Water Plan Budget/Work Plan: *Seth Turner, EDO and Jason Farnsworth, ED*

Turner and Farnsworth discussed an agreement the Program is working on with CNPPID to fund the Phelps and Elwood recharge projects through the end of the First Increment Extension in 2032. In September, the GC approved an amendment withdrawing the Program from the water service agreement with CNPPID and the State of Nebraska for the J-2 Regulating Reservoirs Project. This will make about \$11.2 million of First Increment Funds available. About \$9.2 million will be allocated for 10 years of excess flow diversions for the Phelps and Elwood projects.

The remaining \$2 million will be the Program's contribution towards the construction of a seepage control system at Elwood Reservoir. Seepage issues were identified below the dam near the pump station in late 2019, and CNPPID has been working with a consultant to diagnose the problem and design a solution. Because of this issue, Elwood Reservoir has been operating at a reduced capacity about 10 ft below full pool (full pool = 37,800 AF, with 25,700 AF of live storage). Construction of the seepage control system in 2023 will allow full recharge operations to resume for the remainder of the Extension. The new agreement is expected to be presented to the GC for approval in December 2022.

Turner reviewed the individual line items in the water plan budget for 2023. With the anticipated approval of the agreement discussed above, no additional funding is proposed for the Phelps and Elwood recharge projects under WPRT-1 and WPRT-2. The single largest item in the budget is for leasing surface/storage water under WPST-1. The EDO is negotiating 10-year lease agreements with CPNRD (about 14,250 AF/yr), NPPD (3,306 AF/yr), and CNPPID (10,000 AF/yr), all at \$90/AF, and it is hoped that the terms will be settled by the time of the June 2023 GC meeting. Total budget for these leases is about \$24.8 million.

The budget also includes \$325,000 for groundwater recapture under WPRT-4. This includes \$125,000 for the recapture agreement with Tri-Basin NRD. The Program will reimburse Tri-Basin for all associated expenses. Seven new recapture wells were constructed in 2022, and the existing Cook well was incorporated into this line item. Some of the annual costs are now known, but electricity costs for well pumping remain highly uncertain. The other \$200,000 is for a consultant study of expanding recapture to include additional wells and/or a gravity outlet from Elwood Reservoir to Plum Creek. The EDO, in consultation with advisory committees, will develop an RFP for this study in the first half of 2023.

Other line items cover water-related items including CPNRD and NPPD canal recharge; maintenance for the Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge project; the Pathfinder Municipal Account and CNPPID irrigator leases; maintenance and taxes for land-for-water properties; surface water, groundwater, and weather monitoring; maintenance of the State Channel Berm at the North Platte chokepoint; and Special Advisors for hydrogeology and civil infrastructure. The total water plan budget proposed for 2023 is \$26,484,000.



Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

2023 WAC Meeting Schedule: February 7, May 2, August 1, October 24. Whether the meetings will be virtual or in-person will be determined later.

Action Items

General WAC

- N/A

ED Office

- Send placeholder invites for 2023 WAC meetings.