



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
 Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams
 February 1, 2022

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Michael Hein
 Amy Ostdiek
 Kelly Romero-Heaney
 Brent Schantz

State of Wyoming

Jeff Cowley – Alternate
 Michelle Gess

State of Nebraska

Jennifer Schellpeper – Member
 Jesse Bradley – Alternate
 Kari Burgert – Alternate
 Justin Ahern
 Jeremy Gehle

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Jeff Runge – Member
 Mark Porath – Alternate
 Matt Rabbe – Alternate

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Member

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke – Chair
 Brandi Flyr – Member
 Jeff Shafer – Member
 Mike Drain – Alternate
 Scott Dicke
 John Shadle
 Tyler Thulin
 Randy Zach

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member
 Joe Frank – Alternate
 Luke Shawcross – Alternate
 Nathan Baker
 Jason Marks
 John Rusch
 Kyle Whitaker

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Environmental Groups

Jacob Fritton – Member
 Melissa Mosier – Member
 Andrew Caven – Alternate
 Rich Walters – Alternate
 Michelle Koch

Executive Director's Office

Jason Farnsworth, ED
 Justin Brei
 Kristen Cognac
 Julia Grabowski
 Malinda Henry
 Chad Smith
 Tim Tunnell
 Seth Turner
 Ed Weschler

Contractors/Interested Parties

Ryan Donovan
 Beth Eckles
 Katie Leone
 Matt Lindburg
 Renata Rimsaite
 Kara Sobieski
 Julianne Woldridge



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

10 Meeting attendees were identified from Microsoft Teams. There were no agenda modifications.
11 Minor edits to the draft October meeting minutes were noted. Shafer made a motion to approve
12 the minutes, second by Altenhofen. There were no objections, and the October WAC meeting
13 minutes were approved.
14

15 **Perkins County Canal Project:** *Jesse Bradley, Nebraska DNR*

16 Bradley provided an overview of the 1923 South Platte Compact. This Compact applies
17 downstream of the western boundary of Washington County, CO, where it crosses the South
18 Platte River. In the Compact, this is referred to as the “Lower Section.” In Colorado today, this
19 is administrative Water District 64. The Compact allows Nebraska two water rights: (1) 120 cfs
20 during the irrigation season (from 4/1 to 10/15) with 1897 priority to meet the demands of the
21 Western Canal, which diverts just east of the CO-NE state line, and (2) 500 cfs during the non-
22 irrigation season (10/15-4/1) with a 1921 priority for a proposed Perkins County Canal (aka
23 South Divide Canal) that would divert in Colorado for use in Nebraska. Some construction of
24 this canal was done prior to World War I (and prior to the South Platte Compact) and some
25 remnants still remain, but the canal was never completed.
26

27 On January 10, the Governor and Attorney General of Nebraska held a press conference
28 announcing the intent to construct the Perkins County Canal. They are working through the
29 Nebraska legislature to secure funding and agency authority to proceed with the project. Bradley
30 noted that this is just step one in a thousand-mile journey. Nebraska is thinking of ways for the
31 project to be supportive of PRRIP goals, not inhibitive. The Nebraska New Depletions Plan
32 (NNDP) limits depletions to 1997 levels, and state law does the same. At this point, no specific
33 technical or legal analyses have been conducted. The project proposal was sparked by concern
34 that Nebraska needs to protect its South Platte rights as Colorado continues to develop water
35 upstream.
36

37 The proposed canal would divert from the South Platte River near Ovid, CO and may convey
38 water to one or two new reservoirs in Nebraska. Nebraska intends to work closely with other
39 water users in the Platte Basin. The project would not be used as a means to expand irrigation
40 but may serve existing irrigation through exchanges; specific details are all still to be determined.
41 The intent would be to preserve and protect operations that are already there.
42

43 Bradley noted that there was a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation study in the early 1980s that
44 provided general cost estimates for several proposed canal and reservoir projects, including this
45 one. Altenhofen asked if it was possible to get a copy of that study to post on the website for
46 WAC members, Bradley said he’d check on it. Altenhofen also asked about the timeline for
47 adding more definition, technical information, etc. Bradley said this project will take a long
48 time, several years to more than a decade. The first step is to get the necessary appropriations
49 and authority to move forward, then look at design, permitting, and other aspects. Altenhofen
50 noted that there are some old documents that describe the canal as perhaps supplying the
51 Republican Basin. Bradley reiterated the intent to preserve and protect uses in the Platte Basin,



and that the water would be used there (thus the name being used for the canal is a bit of a misnomer, as the canal wouldn't necessarily deliver water to Perkins County, NE).

Runge noted the potential 7- to 10-year time frame and asked if this would factor into discussions for a potential Second Increment for the Program. Bradley said it's possible the project could move in that direction, it could be implemented in phases with potential elements that could address issues for the Program (such as North Platte chokepoint capacity). It will take a larger institutional push by entities in Nebraska to move this project forward. Runge asked if reservoirs would be integrated from the start or added on later. Bradley said the project would likely include some water storage component, whether than means additional new storage or expansion of existing storage is unknown.

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

Leasing and Recharge Projects:

Turner noted a few recent project operations numbers: 688 AF was diverted into Phelps County Canal in December. The Cook well pumped about 324 AF from August 25-December 17. Total pumping in 2021 was 541 AF. Enrollment in the CNPPID irrigator lease is 1,157 acres for 2022, up from 1,030 AF in 2021. Runge asked about using EA water versus excess flows for recent recharge. Turner said all recharge diversions into Phelps in December were excess flows; although there was discussion last year of using EA water for recharge at Cottonwood Ranch, this was not done. Farnsworth said there was a preference for not reallocating EA water to other projects. Turner added that EA water would only be used at Cottonwood Ranch if excess flows are not available in the spring and water is needed for infrastructure testing and/or operations training.

Platte Basin Hydrology Update:

Excess flows were available December 6-13. The real-time hydrologic condition for December-February is normal, and target flows increased from 1,000 cfs to 1,800 cfs on February 1. The annual hydrologic condition for 2021 was normal, based on annual flow volume of 813,575 cfs and average flow of 1,124 cfs. Altenhofen asked about the volume of excess flow in 2021, Turner said that could be calculated and provided later.

Drought conditions across much of the Platte Basin have generally worsened since late October. Storage in Lake McConaughy was at 64.6% of capacity on January 31; present EA volume was unknown, as it has not been formally updated since October. The USFWS finalized the EA Annual Operations Plan for WY2022 in late December. The highest priority release planned for 2022 is for germination suppression between June 1 and July 15. Storage in the Pathfinder EA was 3,465 AF on January 29, and the Municipal Account held 13,018 AF. South Platte Basin snowpack in Colorado was tracking at or below median early in the season but increased sharply in late December and early January. North Platte Basin snowpack in Wyoming was at or above median in the upper North Platte and Sweetwater at the end of January, but well below median downstream of Pathfinder Reservoir.

**North Platte Chokepoint Update:**

The EDO is developing plans for disking the same areas that were sprayed in fall 2021. The includes about 43 acres along riverbanks, island perimeters, and side channels. Landowner permissions for access and disking need to be obtained, and an RFQ will be released to solicit contractors. This work needs to be accomplished before irrigation water deliveries ramp up. The EDO is also conducting preliminary investigations into the bypass canal concept. This includes modeling EA releases with a modified flow routing tool as an input to channel width modeling. More information will be presented at the Science Plan Reporting Session and the March GC meeting. Altenhofen asked about using NPPD's Sutherland system for bypass. Turner said the EDO had a preliminary conversation with NPPD. There is no consistent surplus capacity in the system, and any available capacity depends on the hydrology of a given year. In addition, enlarging or running parallel to the Sutherland Canal to Paxton would be about 20 miles, compared to about 5.5 miles for the alternative parallel to PVID/North Platte Canal.

Permitting Services RFP:

An RFP to solicit proposals for 2022-2025 permitting services for the Program was released January 5, and a pre-proposal meeting was held on January 19. Proposals are due to Turner on February 2 at noon central time. The GC appointed a selection panel in December. Contractor selection will be based only on proposals, no interviews, and the selection panel is expected to have a recommendation for approval at the March GC meeting. Altenhofen asked what types of permitting. Turner said federal Section 404, state, and local permits as needed for activities such as construction of Water Action Plan projects, habitat projects, and sediment augmentation. Permitting activities can also include wetland delineations, determining if nationwide permits are applicable, and so forth.

Revised Colorado North Platte Basin Depletions Update:

Colorado submitted a revised North Platte Basin Depletions Update in November. Irrigated acreage in the basin was reduced for 2020, which reduced the irrigation consumptive use (CU) and increased the CU underrun relative to baseline conditions.

CNPPID Elwood Project: Tyler Thulin, CNPPID

Thulin provided an overview of two projects at CNPPID's Elwood Reservoir. Elwood Reservoir was constructed in the mid- to late-1970s to provide supplemental irrigation supply when demands in the E65 system exceed the capacity of upstream siphons. In recent years, the average water surface elevation in Elwood has been at higher levels due to use of the reservoir for recharge. Significant seepage was observed below the Pump Station Dam in 2019. Consultant RJH was hired to investigate and determined that there was potentially unsafe seepage at both the pump station and main dams when the water surface elevation is above 2597 ft (10 ft below normal max of 2607 ft). The design of seepage management systems below the dams is 95% completed and was submitted to the state (Nebraska) for review. Construction is estimated to cost \$4.2 million and is expected to be completed in 2022 and 2023. Altenhofen asked what type of repairs will be made. Thulin said wells to lower groundwater levels, toe drains, and weighted filter blankets will be included. Cowley asked what will happen to the



collected seepage water from the wells and drains. Thulin said it will go back to Plum Creek. Runge asked if Tri-Basin NRD is using Elwood for recharge. Steinke said 50% goes to the Program and 50% is split between Tri-Basin and the state.

The other project is a new E65 canal and siphon to convey water into the north end of Elwood Reservoir by gravity rather than pumping. The existing E65 canal has three siphons with 350 cfs capacity, but irrigation demands can sometimes exceed 500 cfs. The siphons include about 7,300 ft of 78” to 84” steel pipe that has been in service for over 80 years and is near the end of useful life. The new alignment is approximately 2 miles shorter than the existing, with about 5,500 ft of new canal and 5,800 ft of new siphon. The capacity is estimated to be about 450 cfs. With better capacity to meet irrigation demands, more reservoir space will be available for recharge. These system improvements will also allow CNPPID to capture rejected irrigation water that was already diverted from the river but no longer needed for irrigation due to rains. A feasibility study was completed by JEO. Construction is estimated at \$15 million; CNPPID applied for and received a Water Sustainability Fund Grant for \$8.9 million. An RFP for design is expected soon, with construction planned for 2023 and 2024.

Wet Meadows Project: *Kristen Cognac, EDO*

Cognac provided an update on the EDO’s work on wet meadow hydrology. Since 2013, the Program has been monitoring and collecting data on both hydrology and climate at two wet meadow sites: the Fox site is restored cropland, and the Shoemaker site is a native wet meadow. Extensive work was completed in 2021, including comprehensive data QC (a significant undertaking given the amount of data collected), development of hydrologic study objectives and methodology and presentation to the GC, testing and calibration of analytical models, and data analysis. Objectives of the study are to (1) quantify relationships between hydrological and meteorological variables and groundwater levels, (2) develop hydrological management targets, and (3) develop a tool to inform management decisions. Cognac presented several illustrative examples of the data analysis and results.

Recapture Network Construction: *Seth Turner and Justin Brei, EDO*

Turner provided a status update on construction of the new recapture well network near Cottonwood Ranch. Downey Drilling was awarded the contract for well construction with a bid of \$178,000 (followed by a change order for \$22,000 for stainless steel mesh screen and deeper drilling of some wells). Pipeline construction was awarded to J&G Dirtworks with a bid of \$803,800. Pipeline construction began in mid-November, and all of the pipe was installed by mid-December. Well drilling and construction was completed the week of December 13. Several of the wells have production capacities less than anticipated (for example, well 4 and 5 are at 390 gpm and 330 gpm, respectively), but efforts were made to improve production as much as possible. Pump sizing is to be finalized soon so those can be ordered. Several construction items remain to be completed, including discharge structures, pump-outs, installation of pumps and motors, and fittings from the wells to the pipelines. Completion is expected by March 31.



Turner also discussed the existing Cook recapture well. Persistent surging and/or valve cavitation issues were observed during 2021 operations, and consistent long-term pumping in the 630-640 gpm range is less than the design capacity of the current pump. Downey Drilling completed a pump test on January 14 and observed similar flow rates. A new, smaller pump will be installed in the Cook well, and the existing pump will be used in one of the new recapture wells at Cottonwood Ranch. In addition, a SCADA system will be installed on the Cook well, and Tri-Basin NRD will take over operation and maintenance of the well as part of the larger recapture network. This will likely require an amendment to the Well Augmentation Agreement for the recapture network, which will be presented to the GC for approval in March or June.

Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

Upcoming meetings were noted from the agenda. The next WAC meeting is scheduled for May 3, tentatively to be held in person at the Lake McConaughy Visitor Center, subject to covid conditions and enough meeting substance to justify the drive for everyone.

Runge asked about the timing of the spring EAC/RCC meeting. Turner said usually early March. Steinke said he can coordinate with Mark Porath (USFWS) and maybe have the meeting later in the spring if the primary focus is going to be the June-July germination suppression release.

Action Items

General WAC

- Provide 1980s USBR canal and reservoir study to post on PRRIP website for WAC members (Bradley).
- Reserve conference room at Lake McConaughy Visitor Center for May 3 WAC meeting (Steinke).

ED Office

- Provide estimate of 2021 excess flow volume (Turner).