**Platte River Recovery Implementation Program**

**North Platte Chokepoint Planning Workgroup**

**Virtual Meeting – October 19, 2021**

**DRAFT MEETING NOTES**

Attendance:

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| * Jason Farnsworth, ED * Justin Brei, EDO * Seth Turner, EDO * Ed Weschler, EDO * Jesse Bradley, NDNR * Kari Burgert, NDNR * Jeremy Gehle, NDNR * Jim Ostdiek, NDNR * Tom Econopouly, USFWS * Matt Rabbe, USFWS | * Brock Merrill, USBR * Tyler Thulin, CNPPID * John Shadle, NPPD * Matt O’Brien, NPPD * Jojo La, CWCB * Jeff Cowley, WY SEO * Michelle Koch, NGPC * Erica Gnuse, Ducks Unlimited * Jacob Fritton, TNC |

Discussion Notes:

* Turner recapped the April 2021 workgroup meeting and the 2021 vegetation spraying effort. The plan was to spray riverbanks and dry, overgrown side channels through a reach extending about 3.5 miles upstream from the Highway 83 bridge. All vegetation was targeted (not just phragmites), so permission to do so was requested from landowners. Efforts to contact landowners were coordinated by Rich Walters (TNC, PVWMA) and Todd Herndon (Lincoln County Weed Superintendent). Areas targeted for spraying had to be revised to accommodate landowners who declined to give permission or did not respond. Herbicide spraying by helicopter was completed the week of October 4. Total area sprayed for the Program was about 43 acres.
* Turner presented mechanical removal/disking as a potential action for continued vegetation control in 2022. Areas of the chokepoint were disked between 2007 and 2012. Plans were drawn up for disking in 2016 but not implemented due to other priorities (e.g., State Channel permitting). Disking was also budgeted in 2018 at $200/acre but not completed. New disking operations would focus on the same areas sprayed in 2021. Rabbe was supportive of disking, said capacity improvements in this reach are a critical part of achieving Program objectives. Cowley and Fritton agreed, as long as it is not too expensive and does not take away funding from other priorities. Farnsworth said the unit cost would likely need to be quite a bit higher to entice contractors from the Central Platte to take on this task and suggested an overall budget of $30,000-$40,000.
* Based on concern raised by a landowner, Turner showed evidence of erosion of the south bank over the last decade, particularly as a result of the 2011 and 2016 floods. The EDO had a preliminary discussion of possible solutions with permitting consultant HDR. Potential mitigation (i.e., erosion control) efforts would likely not provide any benefit to the Program in terms of capacity improvements. Cowley, Rabbe, and Econopouly were opposed to any Program action on erosion control, as it is a concern for the individual landowners and not the Program’s bailiwick.
* Econopouly asked about drone imagery of the areas that were sprayed. Farnsworth said it would be 6-8 weeks before the dead vegetation was fully evident. Drone flights can be conducted in late winter and/or spring. This can be done by EDO staff and does not require additional budget.
* Turner said at this point the EDO is soliciting any new ideas the workgroup might have for solving this problem. Rabbe said it would be good to take this discussion to the GC to see how long a leash we might have for big projects and to discuss any related policy decisions. With a preference for everyone to be available in person, it was decided that there will be a presentation on the chokepoint at the March 2022 GC meeting.
* Farnsworth noted that many workgroup members work for organizations that have tools (e.g., condemnation) that are simply not available to the Program. He offered three potential paths forward, all big projects that would need an organization or group to champion:
  + Bypass project: Route water around North Platte
  + Floodplain buyout: Political issue, would need policy to exceed flood stage. If not buyouts, pursue flood easements, pay for damages to property.
  + Major flood-proofing: Essentially construction of an in-channel flood corridor. Bradley described a similar project on Antelope Creek in Lincoln. A project of this magnitude would require a coalition including NRDs, the City of North Platte, and others.
* Koch asked (via chat) if the vegetation treatment actions will destabilize and mobilize sediment. Farnsworth said the goal is to ultimately widen the channel and slow velocities, but if this were to happen, it would be gradual over a period of years. Brei added that the vegetation treatment is certainly beneficial but its likely to have an impact on channel capacity of a couple hundred cfs at most.
* Thulin asked about bypass canal options. Brei said this had been tested as part of a flow release in 2013, with water transported through canals that divert from the North Platte River and have wasteways to the South Platte River. Potential to beneficially use the existing canals was minimal. Turner showed a concept developed by Anderson Consulting in 2016, construction of a new canal with a capacity of 1500 cfs that would parallel the existing North Platte Canal (Platte Valley Irrigation District). The estimated cost of that project was about $13M.
* RECOMMENDATIONS:
  + Budget $40,000 for mechanical removal (disking) of vegetation in 2022.
  + Plan to present to the GC in March 2022.
  + Revisit bypass canal concepts.