

**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM****Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**

Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams

October 26, 2021

**Meeting Attendees****Water Advisory Committee (WAC)****State of Colorado**

Jojo La – Member

Erik Skeie - Alternate

**State of Wyoming**

Jeff Cowley – Alternate

Michelle Gess

**State of Nebraska**

Kari Burgert – Alternate 1

Jesse Bradley – Alternate 2

Justin Ahern

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Tom Econopouly – Member

Jeff Runge – Alternate

Matt Rabbe

**U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

Brock Merrill – Member

**Downstream Water Users**

Cory Steinke - Chair

Jeff Shafer – Member

Brandi Flyr – Member

Nolan Little

Randy Zach

Scott Shaneman

**Colorado Water Users**

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Luke Shawcross – Alternate

Jason Marks

Kyle Whitaker

**Upper Platte Water Users**

Dennis Strauch – Member

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)****Environmental Groups**

Jacob Fritton – Member

Melissa Mosier – Member

Josh Wiese – Member

**Executive Director's Office (EDO)**

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Justin Brei

Julia Grabowski

Tom Smrdel

Seth Turner

Kevin Werbylo

Ed Weschler

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

Meeting attendees were identified from Microsoft Teams. Turner introduced Ed Weschler, a new junior engineer in the Headwaters Lakewood office and also noted that this was Kevin Werbylo's last day with Headwaters. There were no agenda modifications. A minor edit to the draft August meeting minutes was noted. Cowley made a motion to approve the minutes, second by Bradley. There were no objections, and the August WAC meeting minutes were approved.

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

There have been no excess flows since late May, and therefore no recent recharge operations. Credits to the Lake McConaughy EA in October from the CPNRD and NPPD surface water leases, CNPPID irrigator lease, and No-Cost NCCW totaled about 18,600 acre-feet (AF). With flows at Grand Island below targets, the Cook well has been pumping to the river continuously since August 25. When the meter was last checked in late September, about 99 AF had been pumped, and another 80 AF is estimated since then. Total pumping for the year is approaching 400 AF, and the EDO expects the well to remain on for at least another few weeks. Total release from the Pathfinder EA was 9,863 AF, of which 7,789 AF eventually reached the Lake McConaughy EA.

**Platte Basin Hydrology Update:** *Seth Turner, EDO*

Except for two short precipitation-driven spikes in flow, the Platte River near Grand Island has been consistently below target flows since late July. Still, the real-time hydrologic condition designation for both the August-September and October-November periods was normal. Target flows are presently 1,800 cfs through November 15, then drop to 1,000 cfs until November 30. The October 19 US Drought Monitor map shows that drought conditions have worsened cross most of the Platte Basin compared to late July. With the inclusion of the Pathfinder EA transfer, the September end-of-month storage in the Lake McConaughy EA was about 103,600 AF. With additional credits in October, the volume will end the month around 122,000 AF.

**North Platte Chokepoint Update:** *Seth Turner, EDO*

After meeting with the chokepoint planning workgroup in April, the EDO developed a vegetation treatment plan for the reach upstream of the Hwy 83 bridge. This required coordination with PVWMA and the Lincoln County Weed Superintendent to get landowner permissions; a number of landowners declined or did not respond, and the areas targeted for spraying had to be adjusted accordingly. Focusing on riverbanks and dry, overgrown side channels, about 43 acres were sprayed during the week of October 4. All vegetation in those areas was sprayed, not just phragmites.

The workgroup met again on October 19. The plan for 2022 includes budget for disking in the same areas sprayed in 2021 as well as funds for as-needed maintenance of the State Channel berm. The EDO will also take another look at bypass canal concepts to present to the GC in March 2022. Mosier asked about funding, and Turner said this initial investigation would just involve EDO staff time. Altenhofen inquired about the need for eminent domain to construct such a project, would this just put us back in the same situation that was faced for the J2 Reservoirs project? Farnsworth confirmed that the Program does not have the authority to condemn land, so a canal project would need to involve a project sponsor



who can do that if necessary. Steinke asked about sediment transport modeling, and Turner said it was included in several of the past studies, both upstream and downstream of the Hwy 83 bridge.

***Recapture Wells Network: Kevin Werbylo, EDO***

Werbylo gave an update on the recapture network project, which is a series of 7 groundwater wells and pipelines that will be constructed, owned, and operated by the Tri-Basin NRD. The NRD will operate the project to reduce deficits for the Program via an executed water service agreement. The project has been a long time in the making and construction is finally commencing, as the NRD recently received a 404 permit for construction of the pipelines. The construction work was advertised as two separate bids, one bid for drilling and install of the groundwater wells and one bid for install of the pipelines and associated discharge structures. The original bids were due in September and opened at an NRD Board meeting. The bids for well installs were straightforward, and the winning bid from Downey Drilling was \$178,000. Altenhofen asked if this price includes all 7 wells and pumps, which it does. The bids for the pipelines did not meet specifications and were consequently all rejected by the NRD Board. The consensus was that supply chain issues are resulting in high costs and limited material availability. As a result, the NRD extended the completion date of the work, added clarifications to the bid, and rebid the pipeline work. Bids will be opened publicly at the NRD Board meeting tonight (Tuesday, 10/26). Right now, the wells are scheduled to be drilled in the next few weeks and construction of the pipeline is scheduled to be completed by spring 2022.

***Cottonwood Ranch BSR Project: Kevin Werbylo, EDO***

Werbylo gave an update on the Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge project. There have been no diversions of excesses this year, but the project partially filled from rainfall and runoff a couple times. Altenhofen asked about the capacity of the project, and Werbylo said about 460 AF. It is likely that deliveries will be ceased until the spring (even if there are excesses this winter) as more fillings are desired before winter deliveries are tested. Steinke noted that there is ongoing maintenance of Phelps County Canal that would prevent diversions for the next few weeks anyway. A fence project was completed in the spring and the site will be put back into the grazing rotation starting in 2022.

At the request of the EDO, CNPPID submitted an application to Nebraska DNR to use EA water at Cottonwood Ranch. The EDO spoke with the TAC about potentially filling the project with EA water in dry times during the migration seasons to ensure that water would be present for whooping cranes. The TAC was against giving a general recommendation to use EA water to fill the recharge project for habitat. Farnsworth clarified that this was likely a result of other TAC discussions regarding the limited use of palustrine wetlands by whooping cranes. Turner noted that EA water could be used to test the gates and an unresolved cavitation issue in the pipeline, particularly with new staff involved in project operations. There were no objections to using EA water for these limited purposes. Ideally, the project will be filled using excess flows in the spring, but a few hundred AF of EA water could be available if excesses do not materialize.

***Water Projects Accounting: Seth Turner, EDO***

Turner presented an overview of the water projects accounting updates, which included a thorough review of data sources and calculations in the previous analysis (through 2018) plus the inclusion of operations data from 2019 and 2020. Turner first described the hydrologic context for project



operations in 2019 and 2020. There were excesses in the first half of January 2019 and shortages in February 2019, followed by a bitter cold snap and then flooding downstream on the Platte and elsewhere in Nebraska. Flows at Grand Island were above targets for most of the time from mid-March 2019 into June 2020, after which conditions quickly turned much drier. Flows were mostly below targets from August through the end of 2020. Turner then walked through accounting highlights for each of the Program's water projects.

Overall Program water acquisitions from 2007-2020 include about 868,000 AF from in-kind/unpaid sources (e.g., Storable Natural Inflows in Lake McConaughy, Pathfinder EA releases, No-Cost NCCW) and more than 300,000 AF from paid sources, including all other recharge and leasing projects except Tamarack. Lake McConaughy EA releases represent by far the Program's largest contribution to river flows. In total, more than a million AF have been added to the North Platte, South Platte, and Platte rivers from Program projects, of which nearly 812,000 AF reached Grand Island, and about 526,000 AF reduced target flow deficits. Individual project contributions vary, but the overall deficit reductions represent about 65% of all Program water reaching Grand Island and 51% of all Program water added to the river system.

Runge noted the importance of being able to characterize species benefits, not just reductions to target flow deficits. Turner said that's why the accounting analysis results include both total volumes reaching Grand Island and the deficit reductions. The estimated deficit reductions are directly related to the Program's water objectives, but total water reaching Grand Island indicates other species benefits through the habitat reach.

Turner requested that any comments on the Draft Water Projects Accounting Update memo be submitted by Tuesday, November 16.

**2022 Water Plan Budget:** *Seth Turner and Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

Turner and Werbylo reviewed the proposed water plan budget for 2022, most of which consists of leasing and recharge costs associated with Water Action Plan projects. Unit costs for recharge projects increase 3% annually; lease terms are generally unchanged. Budget for the Phelps County Canal recharge project also includes about \$11,000 for electrical power, general O&M, and a SCADA system for the Cook well. There are no new construction costs. Budget for the Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge includes costs for maintenance of the Rubicon gates and controls, site monitoring and maintenance, and electrical power. Per agreement with CNPPID, there will be no water delivery costs until the construction cost of the pipeline is exceeded. The budget for the recapture wells project covers admin and electricity/pumping costs, per agreement with Tri-Basin NRD. Other budget items include maintenance and taxes for properties acquired for future water projects; water monitoring, including stream gage cost-shares and weather stations; diking and maintenance at the North Platte chokepoint, and Special Advisors for hydrogeology and civil infrastructure. Total proposed water plan budget is \$4,222,850.

**Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

The GC Special Session to review the 2022 budget will be a virtual meeting on November 10. The next quarterly GC meeting is scheduled to be held in person in Denver on December 7-8. The schedule for



2022 WAC meetings is as follows: February 1 (virtual), May 3 (in person), August 2 (virtual), October 25 (in person).

### Action Items

#### General WAC

- Submit comments on draft accounting update memo by Tuesday, November 16.

#### ED Office

- N/A