



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams
August 3, 2021

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Jojo La – Member

Erik Skeie - Alternate

State of Wyoming

Jeff Cowley – Alternate

State of Nebraska

Kari Burgert – Alternate 1

Jesse Bradley – Alternate 2

Justin Ahern

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tom Econopouly – Member

Matt Rabbe

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Member

Mahonri Williams – Alternate

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke - Chair

Jeff Shafer – Member

Brandi Flyr – Member

Nolan Little

Randy Zach

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Luke Shawcross – Alternate

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

Environmental Groups

Josh Wiese – Member

Bill Taddicken

Executive Director's Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Justin Brei

Kristen Cognac

Julia Grabowski

Seth Turner

Kevin Werbylo

Contractors

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

Meeting attendees were identified from Microsoft Teams. There were no agenda modifications. A few edits to the draft May meeting minutes were noted. Strauch made a motion to approve the minutes, second by Cowley. There were no objections, and the May WAC meeting minutes were approved.

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

The Program signed one-year agreements to lease surface water from CPNRD and NPPD at \$90/AF, which will be credited (exact volumes TBD) to the Lake McConaughy EA in October. Diversions into Elwood Reservoir for recharge from May 19-30 totaled about 1,650 AF. The Cook recapture well pumped 140.5 AF between April 20 and June 21. Since then, the EDO has been working with Bill Hahn (Special Advisor for Hydrogeology) and Downey Drilling to resolve issues with surging and cavitation.

Per a May 19 letter from the Wyoming Water Development Office (confirmed again by email in July), there will be no water available for the Program to lease from the Pathfinder Municipal Account this year. As of July 31, the volume in the account was 11,429 AF. Also as of July 31, the volume in the Pathfinder EA was 9,931 AF. This is far less than any previous year, with the previous low volume being 14,471 AF. From 2012-2020, releases from the Pathfinder EA for the Program averaged 27,982 AF.

Turner also provided an update on the proposed lease of Glendo water from the Enterprise Irrigation District (EID) that was discussed earlier in the year. In April, EID sent draft terms of a potential agreement to the EDO, but also noted that there were unresolved issues related to other Glendo contractors. There have been no further discussions since then. Progress on the Nebraska Grand Water Bargain has slowed due to COVID and other factors. PRRIP is waiting for an update from the parties involved in those negotiations.

Platte Basin Hydrology Update:

Excess flows were available to divert for recharge in late May (diversions were only made to Elwood Reservoir). An EA release for germination suppression was made on May 24 and in June. Real-time hydrologic condition was DRY in May, NORMAL in June (due to higher flows at Grand Island in late May), the DRY again in July and August-September. Target flows are to be 800 cfs through September 15, then drop to 600 cfs for September 16-30.

For the Platte River near Grand Island, the 2021 daily peak flow was 5,560 cfs on March 15. The instantaneous peak was 6,440 cfs on the same day. Cumulative flow volume at Grand Island through July 31 is about 604,250 AF, which is roughly half the flow volume through the same day in 2020. Of that flow at Grand Island, about 53,460 AF was EA water released from Lake McConaughy.



Drought conditions in the Platte Basin have improved since April, with nearly the entirety of eastern Colorado no longer experiencing any level of drought. However, much of the North Platte Basin in Wyoming and the Nebraska Panhandle remain abnormally dry or in moderate drought, with areas of severe drought near Glendo and Casper, WY.

North Platte Chokepoint Update:

The EDO is coordinating with Rich Walters and the Platte Valley Weed Management Association (PVWMA) to plan for vegetation treatment at the North Platte chokepoint this fall (September-October). The plan is based on recommendations from Anderson Consulting several years ago and focuses on the reach upstream of the Highway 83. There is a stretch of single-thread channel that is believed to be a significant source of sediment that deposits at and below the bridge. The plan calls for spraying a 50-ft strip along the river banks in an attempt to begin widening that channel as well as several dry, overgrown channels on the north side. Most of the targeted areas are upstream of residential properties at the chokepoint. Walters is working with Lincoln County to get permissions from landowners, and there will be written agreements between PVWMA and those landowners. Taddicken asked about disking the treated areas. Turner said that could likely be planned to follow next year.

Recapture Wells Pilot Project: Kevin Werbylo, EDO

Recapture well network specifications have been turned over to the Tri-Basin NRD and the project is out for bid. From this point on, Tri-Basin will manage the bidding, construction, and operation of the project. Bids are due to the NRD on September 7 and the hope is to begin construction early this fall. The NRD and their consultant will be working with Program Special Advisor Bill Hahn during construction. Bill Hahn and the NRD have received reports of low materials availability and higher costs due to supply chain issues. Final construction schedule is dependent on materials availability and issuance of a Section 404 permit (permit application was turned into the USACE a few months ago).

The network will be operated and maintained by the NRD, and Program involvement will be via an executed water service agreement. Operations should begin right when construction is complete, hopefully this fall. An update on contractor selection and construction will be provided at the next WAC meeting.

Altenhofen asked if all 7 wells in this network are new, Werbylo said yes. Werbylo noted that there are also two existing wells that the Program owns in Sections 15-16 of the Cottonwood Ranch property that could potentially be tied into the recapture well network in the future, but that isn't being discussed or seriously considered at the moment.

June Germination Suppression EA Release: Tom Econopouly, USFWS

The spring whooping crane release totaled 12,496 AF from March 30-April 13, of which 10,788 AF (86 percent) reached Grand Island. The intent of the germination suppression release is to target 2,000 cfs at Grand Island from June 1 through mid-July. About 57,000 AF was released from June 2-July 2, and about 42,000 AF reached Grand Island. The experience of germination



suppression releases in 2020 and 2021 has identified several challenges, including the approximate 7-day travel time from Lake McConaughy to Grand Island, channel capacity at the North Platte chokepoint, timing of releases that coincides with near peak climatological thunderstorm activities, ramp up rates for releases, hydrocycling, and desired carryover storage to ensure adequate supply for future releases.

USFWS is using multiple tools to help guide EA release decisions, but these are not foolproof. For example, the germination suppression release was initially started on May 24 but cut off after the 5-day forecast showed expectations of 2-3 inches of rainfall across central Nebraska. Unfortunately, this rainfall did not materialize, flows at Grand Island dropped well below 2,000 cfs, and given the river travel time, it was hard to catch back up. Precipitation that did occur at the end of May was then followed by about 21 days with no rain. There was also some discussion of the behavior of the river between Kearney and Grand Island with regard to gains and losses.

CNPPID's hydrocycling operations raised an interesting question (and potential benefit) to be considered for future releases: given daily swings in flow of several hundred cfs or more, is it more important to focus on daily peak flows (which may approach or exceed the 2,000 cfs target) rather than daily average flows? Other lessons for future EA releases include hedging risk (knowing that plans and forecasts are never 100 percent correct), stepping up ramp rates, using both the North Platte River and NPPD's Sutherland system to carry water if practicable, and knowing what to prioritize (such as peak vs mean daily flows).

Projected future volumes in the Lake McConaughy EA are around 126,000 AF on October 1, 2021 and 166,000 AF by May 1, 2022.

Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

The next quarterly GC meeting is scheduled to be held in person in Kearney on September 14-15, subject to changing COVID conditions. The next WAC meeting is scheduled for October 26.

Action Items

General WAC

- N/A

ED Office

- N/A