



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams
May 4, 2021

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Jojo La – Member

Erik Skeie - Alternate

State of Wyoming

Jeff Cowley – Alternate

Brandon Gebhart

State of Nebraska

Jennifer Schellpeper – Member

Kari Burgert – Alternate 1

Jesse Bradley – Alternate 2

Justin Ahern

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tom Econopouly – Member

Matt Rabbe

Jeff Runge

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Member

Downstream Water Users

Jeff Shafer – Member

Brandi Flyr – Member

Tyler Thulin

Nolan Little

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Luke Shawcross

Jason Marks

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

Environmental Groups

Jacob Fritton - Member

Melissa Mosier - Member

Rich Walters - Alternate

Executive Director's Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Justin Brei

Julia Grabowski

Tom Smrdel

Seth Turner

Kevin Werbylo

Contractors



Welcome and Administrative: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

Meeting participants were identified from Microsoft Teams. There were no modifications to the meeting agenda. There were no edits to the draft minutes from the February WAC meeting. Merrill made a motion to approve the February WAC meeting minutes, second by Marks. No objections, minutes were approved.

WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates

Leasing and Recharge Projects: Seth Turner, EDO

Dawson County Canal net recharge from January 7-15 was 563 AF. Phelps County Canal (1,168 AF) and Elwood Reservoir (2,114 AF) both diverted for Program recharge March 15-24. The Cook recapture well pumped 67 AF during shortages in February-March and was turned on again April 20. The Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge project filled with an estimated 100 AF as a result of significant rainfall in mid-March. The Program intends to pursue one-year surface water lease agreements with CPNRD and NPPD again this year.

Cottonwood Ranch BSR Project: Kevin Werbylo, EDO

Werbylo gave an update on the Broad-Scale Recharge project indicating that the project filled with precipitation and runoff in March. Altenhofen asked whether there was any standing water in the Cottonwood Ranch recharge cells prior to the March precipitation events and whether the water that accumulated from rain and runoff has since seeped out. Werbylo said there was a bit of water in the low-lying areas, and that much of the water from March has indeed seeped into the aquifer.

Werbylo stated the Program's intended operations plan to fill Cottonwood Ranch by diverting excess flows. The Program is hoping Platte River flows will ramp up and that this will be possible later in May or in June. Werbylo also noted that an intentional fill hadn't happened yet this spring because of limited excesses and an ongoing project to reinstall fencing to allow grazing at Cottonwood Ranch.

Platte Basin Hydrology Update: Seth Turner, EDO

Turner reviewed Grand Island flows from January-April 2021. Outside of the precipitation events in mid-March, streamflows have been tracking generally at or below median flows and below targets. Compared to 2020, flows are averaging about 1,675 cfs less in 2021. Observed precipitation from March 14-24 was 4-7" in and around Program project areas in Dawson, Phelps, and Buffalo counties, and 8-9" around Grand Island. Snowpack in the South Platte Basin was tracking below average for most of the season but caught up to 100% of average at the end of April due to several snow and rain events in March and April. Parts of the Platte River Basin remain in moderate to severe drought, but conditions have improved significantly since early February, when much of the basin was in extreme drought.

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

The Chokepoint Planning Workgroup had a virtual meeting on April 13 and reviewed the options evaluated by the Program to improve capacity and/or bypass flow around the chokepoint since 2005. The EDO is developing a vegetation treatment plan for a reach extending a couple miles upstream of the Highway 83 bridge and will be coordinating with Rich Walters to get that implemented.

Recapture Wells Pilot Project: *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

Werbylo gave an update on the recapture wells pilot project to be constructed in the area of Cottonwood Ranch. The project requires a 404-permit due to its impact on a very small acreage of wetlands along the pipeline routes and at the discharge structures. The Program's permitting consultant, HDR, completed the wetland delineation and draft preconstruction notification (PCN), which is currently being reviewed by the EDO and the Tri-Basin NRD. The goal is to turn in the PCN within the next few weeks, as to have a permit for construction by late summer or early fall.

Spring Whooping Crane EA Release: *Tom Econopouly, USFWS*

The Lake McConaughy EA volume at the end of March was 167,562 AF. The Spring Whooping Crane Release was made for 15 days from March 30-April 13, with 12,496 AF released. Of that total, 10,788 AF (86 percent) reached Grand Island. Approximately 12 whooping cranes were observed on the Central Platte during the release period.

The next EA release will be for germination suppression, targeting 2,000 cfs for the entire month of June. The median release volume is estimated to be about 78,000 AF, with a possible range of 0 to 123,000 AF. If the actual release is at the median level or higher, there will be no additional EA releases this year. Estimated future EA volumes are 128,000 AF on October 1, 2021 and 169,000 AF on May 1, 2022.

Colorado Depletions Plan Update: *Jojo La, CWCB and Jon Altenhofen, Northern Water*

La provided Colorado's update on North Platte Basin accounting for 2020. Irrigated acres totaled 97,689 in 2020, a decline from 112,464 acres in 2019. Population declined slightly, but by a statistically insignificant amount. There was also a substantial decline in industrial usage, from 960 AF in 2019 to 70 AF in 2020. There were no additional new piscatorial, wildlife, and environmental uses in the North Platte Basin, and consumptive use (CU) of this type held steady at 25 AF. Total CU from all four use types was 81,298 AF, representing an underrun of 30,487 AF relative to the baseline amount.

Altenhofen presented an update on Colorado's Tamarack I project. Credits for shortage reduction at the CO-NE state line totaled 6,452 AF in 2020, and the overall annual average from 2008-2020 is 8,128 AFY. Altenhofen reiterated that this is less than the 10,000 AFY score credited to the project because excess flows availability in December through March has been considerably less during the first 14 years of the Program than during the 1947-1994 period used for scoring. The Program Document recognized this possibility and determined it was



acceptable as long as the Tamarack project was constructed and operated as described. Altenhofen added that pipelines for 6 of the Tamarack wells that had been damaged in flooding were finally replaced, so the project is now back to pumping 16 wells. Power costs are paid by SPWRAP.

Altenhofen also provided an update on Colorado's Plan for Future Depletions (CPFD), which covers the South Platte Basin. As is required every 5 years, a questionnaire was sent to water providers in 2020 to collect updated data on the mix of water sources. Returned surveys represented about 75 percent of the South Platte Basin population, and Altenhofen reviewed the updated assumptions that will be used for CPFD analyses for 2020-2024. Population has continued to increase about 2.2 percent annually since 1997. Notably, per capita water use declined from 224 gpcd to 158 gpcd based on the updated survey data. South Platte Basin population growth results in a net depletion in May-June due to new native South Platte flow development and reuse. In 2020, the May-June depletion was 2,264 AF which was effectively offset by managed groundwater accretions of 4,811 AF at the CO-NE state line during the same period. For 2007-2020, average May-June depletions are 2,261 AFY and average accretions are 5,063 AFY.

Bradley asked how it is that the effect of conservation is net zero. Altenhofen said it is assumed that conservation water savings resulting from efficiency upgrades to old houses is then used in new houses, resulting in no net effect at the river. This has been the assumption from the start.

Nebraska Depletions Plan Update: *Kari Burgert, Nebraska DNR*

The annual report for the Nebraska New Depletion Plan for calendar year 2019 was submitted at the end of 2020. Burgert reviewed permits issued by Nebraska DNR and the NRDs in 2019 for groundwater transfers, groundwater wells, groundwater variances, and surface water permits. These are also reported as being upstream of or within the Program's critical habitat reach. The largest number of groundwater well permits was for replacement wells. Most of the surface water permits issued were temporary annual permits to divert excess flows for recharge. In combination with various mitigation measures, the new uses were shown to have a small net positive effect on the Platte River through 2032.

Burgert noted that the 2019 report was the last to fall under the first increment of the Nebraska DNR and Upper Platte NRDs integrated management plans (IMPs), and that second increment IMPs became effective in September 2020. Burgert also said there will be robust review updates in 2023 and 2027, and that both the COHYST and WWUM models are being updated to the MODFLOW 6 platform.

Wyoming Depletions Plan Update: *Jeff Cowley, Wyoming SEO*

Cowley reported that Wyoming continues to comply with its three baselines. For Baseline No. 1, irrigated acreage in the sub-basin above Guernsey Reservoir was 199,503 acres, well below the benchmark of 226,000 acres. Baseline No. 2 accounts for irrigation, municipal, industrial, rural domestic, retired/mitigation uses, and post-1997 new water uses. Translated to the WY-NE state



line, Wyoming has underruns relative to baseline requirements of 48,724.37 AF during the irrigation season and 4,265.88 AF during the non-irrigation season. Baseline No. 3 applies to new post-1997, on-channel storage in the South Platte Basin of Wyoming. Cowley noted that previous years' calculations had included facilities that were either off-channel or existed prior to 1997. For 2020, the reported storage excluded those facilities and was revised to 79.07 AF. Wyoming also submitted an addendum to their 2013-2019 reports to correct a calculation error related to water use at the sugar beet processing plant in Torrington.

Federal Depletions Plan Update: *Tom Econopouly, USFWS*

Econopouly reported that USFWS completed five tiered consultations relying on ESA coverage provided by the Program in 2020. Two were in Colorado, one was in Nebraska, and two were in Wyoming. Three of the projects (one in each state) resulted in new or continued federal depletions to the Platte River. The individual projects were detailed in tables provided to the WAC.

Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

There is a virtual GC meeting on June 9, and the next WAC meeting is scheduled for August 3.

Cowley asked a question about how Colorado and Nebraska administer possible depletions from stream restoration projects. Altenhofen said it would matter if the Corps of Engineers is reviewing the project or only the state. In Colorado, if the Corps determines a restoration project has depletive effects (this has not happened for any projects in Colorado), then the project would have to enroll in SPWRAP.

Action Items

General WAC

- N/A.

ED Office

- Post PDF of the WAC meeting presentations to the website.