



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP or PROGRAM)

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Virtual Meeting Minutes

Friday, October 30, 2020

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)

Brock Merrill – Member (2020 TAC Chair)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)

Matt Rabbe – Member

Jeff Runge – Alternate

Tom Econopouly – Alternate

State of Colorado

JoJo La – Member

Erik Skeie – Alternate

State of Wyoming

Jeremy Manley – Alternate

State of Nebraska

Elizabeth Esseks – Member

Environmental Entities

Rich Walters – Member

Andrew Pierson – Alternate

Upper Platte Water Users

n/a

Colorado Water Users

n/a

Downstream Water Users

Jim Jenniges – Member

Dave Zorn – Member

Participants

Joel Jorgensen – NGPC

Dan Sternkopf – Nebraska DNR

Executive Director's Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Patrick Farrell

Scott Griebeling

Malinda Henry

Kaley Keldsen

Kari Mohlman

Mallory Jaymes

Chad Smith

Tim Tunnell



WELCOME & ADMINISTRATIVE

Introductions

Merrill called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM Central Time. Smith noted the use of the Microsoft Teams participant list would be used to identify meeting attendees. No agenda modifications.

Minutes

Discussion of TAC meeting minutes from August 17, 2020. Henry identified edits received from TAC members.

TAC MOTION: *Walters moved and Rabbe seconded to approve the amended August 17, 2020 TAC virtual meeting minutes. Minutes approved.*

FINAL 08 17 20 PRRIP TAC Virtual Meeting Minutes

LAND MANAGEMENT

Tracts 2019001 and 2020001 Restoration and Maintenance Plans

Tunnell summarized the plan for Tract 2019001. La asked about the use of prescribed fire in the options. Tunnell said Option C was to use fire initially instead of clearing any trees mechanically. Rabbe asked if Option C is something that has been done in the past and how successful could we expect that to be. Tunnell said the Program has not tried Option C on any Program properties previously. Rabbe asked if the EDO is aware of anyone else doing this. Tunnell said he does not know of anyone else doing this on the central Platte River. We tend to implement Option B which is mechanical clearing and then starting over from scratch. Rabbe asked about income from grazing. Farnsworth said we typically are lucky to raise enough income to pay the property tax bill at most, generally it is a very small number. Walters said he is concerned about burning mature cottonwoods, it could be tough not to have a crown fire and would be a fire management challenge. Walters asked if cleared, is this group comfortable counting this property as wet meadow acres and would it count toward wet meadow acreage goals. Rabbe said this would change acres from buffer habitat to wet meadows but would fall short of Land Plan guidelines. Jenniges said Option C would not prevent you from going back and clearing trees so why not give it a try. This approach would be more like how areas naturally reverted to wet meadows as opposed to always using a mechanical approach. This is an interesting management scheme that may have value, why not try it. Zorn asked if Options B and C anticipate fire on an annual basis. Tunnell said yes. Rabbe asked if Option B, if re-seeded, would it be normal to apply fire every year right away instead of waiting a year or two to rest after seeding. Tunnell said that option probably should not have had burning estimated the first year after seeding.

Merrill said he does not have a problem trying Option C but the biggest fear is problems with fire spreading to neighbor property and fire crew safety. Rabbe said the end result should be that desired wet meadow/grassland mosaic condition no matter which option we recommend. Tunnell said he is hearing Option C. Farnsworth said the first issue is if we can carry a fire through the area. Merrill said we should know after the first time if it will work. Walters said his main concern is fire management. Tunnell said we have been burning cottonwood understory on the McCormick Tract for several years with no problems. Zorn said he is hearing try Option C but if it doesn't work go to Option B. La asked about the incremental benefits of each option in relationship to cost differences. Rabbe said we would be removing line of sight obstacles for whooping cranes; increase usable area of wet meadow; and promote that side of the river being used over the north side where there is a power line. Farnsworth



asked how important it is for the Service to have wet meadows at all Program habitat complexes. Rabbe said it might not make sense at certain complexes based on conditions but this particular site has hydrological conditions that may favor success. He said he does not have the expectation that we are going to go back and re-visit our overall approach.

Farnsworth said the TAC provides advice and input on these land management plan. It seems like the general direction of TAC guidance is to try Option C and if it does not work move to Option B. Walters said he likes the idea of trying the approach, just need more thought and information on what the true costs might be (for example, any cost estimate changes based on mechanically removing dead skeleton trees instead of live trees).

Tunnell discussed the plan for Tract 2020001. Farnsworth said the TAC had asked the EDO to get input from our permitting contractor about the in-channel islands. Their assessment was those areas are above the high water mark but have swales that could be classified as wetlands. We could shape the site if we are pushing sand around on the island and not into the channel. Looking at the amount of soil development and biomass on the islands now, we would have to be creative in how we do that work. It would be tough to turn these into MCA island. Rabbe asked if we could consider spraying these by helicopter each year. Tunnell said helicopter would be the best option but it would be an issue of timing as to when the crew is here doing phragmites work. Walters said it would be a separate contract and there are some local contractors that might be interested. Farnsworth said we are already managing a couple big islands like this at the Pawnee Complex. Rabbe said the main hurdle will be the cost being in excess of what the GC agreed to.

SPRING 2020 WHOOPING CRANE REPORT

Henry discussed the draft 2020 WC report and asked for input and edits. Rabbe said he struggles to see location points in the pictures that use the double-box markers instead of a single point on the map for each located bird. Henry said the double boxes are symbols used in the previous tables but we can just put the crane group or bullet point on the pictures to make it easier to identify locations when reading the report. Henry agreed that going forward the EDO would make figures larger and reduce the size of point location markers. Esseks pointed out a typo in the report that Henry said would be corrected.

TAC MOTION: *Walters moved and Jenniges seconded to approve the amended spring 2020 WC monitoring report. [Report approved.](#)*

2020 LEAST TERN AND PIPING PLOVER MONITORING SUMMARY

Mohlman gave a presentation on the results of 2020 tern and plover monitoring. Merrill asked if we think additional predator management has contributed to increases in nesting and/or nest success. Henry discussed what we have learned so far and pointed out that the study was designed as a multiple-year, multiple-site study in order to gain enough statistical power to test effects.

2020 AMP DRAFT BUDGET

Farnsworth introduced the draft FY21 PRRIP AMP-related budget items and the group discussed each line item.



TAC MEETING REVIEW & WRAP-UP

Henry said we will look to a TAC meeting around the second week of January 2021 to update the TAC on AMWG progress on terns and plovers. Smith said the 2021 AMP Reporting Session will be virtual and we are targeting the second week of February for that.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 AM Central Time.