



Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP -or- Program)

PRRIP Second Increment Policy Frame

December 2020

The Governance Committee (GC) conducted a series of mock negotiation workshops in the fall of 2020 to develop a Second Increment policy frame. The Policy Frame is intended to help structure Program learning during the First Increment Extension (“Extension”) and to identify critical information needs for development of a Second Increment later in the Extension. The GC conducted this exercise with the understanding that they cannot be held to workshop outcomes, but these outcomes are a useful way to identify information needed to inform actual negotiations. This document presents the architecture of a Second Increment Policy Frame and associated key policy and science questions. The Policy Frame is presented as a living document and is subject to updating and revision based on GC direction and Program learning throughout the remainder of the Extension (2020-2032).

The PRRIP Second Increment

Scope of Responsibility

The Program will continue to function as a Recovery Implementation Program. The Second Increment is intended to be maintenance focused. Changes to target species are not expected nor are changes in the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) management objectives, particularly for the bird species.

Key policy question:

- *Can contribution to pallid sturgeon research (Program-sponsored or conducted by partners) fulfill the Program’s requirement to provide defined benefits for that target species?*

Regulatory Certainty

Regulatory certainty in the Second Increment will be based on achieving Milestones that reflect the defined contributions of land, water, and money and continued implementation of the Program (including science activities). The existing separation between Endangered Species Act (ESA) coverage and provision of benefits to target species outcomes will persist. However, having a clear understanding of any connections between Program actions and species outcomes at a broad scale (particularly poor species outcomes) will be informative for Program decision-making around continuation and refinement of management actions in a Second Increment.

Key policy question:

- *What is the best way to communicate target species outcomes to the GC in regard to Program decision-making (i.e. whether the Program is/is not meeting target species management objectives)?*

1.1 Defined Contributions – Water

The Second Increment Water Milestone will likely fall between 130,000 and 150,000 acre-ft and will be negotiated based on an understanding of incremental target species benefits and costs, constrained by



water availability and the ability to route flow through the North Platte Chokepoint. An initial list of potential water uses to further Program learning includes:

- Spring and fall releases during whooping crane migration to increase the proportion of cranes stopping on the Platte.
- Spring releases to support wet meadow hydrology for potential whooping crane use.
- Baseflow releases to provide defined benefits to the fish guild hypothesized to comprise a significant forage base for whooping cranes.
- Spring/summer releases to suppress germination of in-channel vegetation for the purpose of maintaining suitable in-channel whooping crane roosting habitat.

The relative benefits of these potential uses must be balanced against the feasibility or acceptability of securing additional water contributions and the benefits and costs of using water versus mechanical and/or chemical approaches (where possible) to create and/or maintain species habitat.

1.2 Defined Contributions – Role of Target Flows

The GC determined that the Second Increment Water Milestone and Program water operations will NOT be based on a requirement to offset remaining deficits to existing or revised target flows. Consequently, there is not a need to peer review target flows or modify them through the Extension Science Plan. Existing target flows will remain as a water administration tool, used to determine the timing and magnitude of excess flow availability for recharge and/or retiming. During the Extension, the Program may test flow management actions that exceed or deviate from target flows during certain times of the year. Protection of Program releases that exceed target flows is a key consideration for the Second Increment.

Key policy question:

- *What regulatory tools could provide protection for flow releases that exceed target flows?*

1.3 Defined Contributions – Land

The Second Increment Land Milestone will comprise contributions expected to come primarily in the form of counting previously uncredited habitat land owned by environmental entities within the Associated Habitat Reach. The extent of current non-PRRIP conservation ownership, benefits to Program target species and/or species of concern, and the need for additional land to achieve management objectives are currently unknown.

Key policy questions:

- *Is there a need for crediting existing conservation lands and/or acquiring additional target species habitat in the Second Increment, based on the expected benefits and status relative to target species management objectives?*
- *What conditions must be met for conservation lands to be credited towards a Second Increment Land Milestone?*

Extension Science Framework

Program science during the Extension will be guided by a Science Plan that includes adaptive management (AM) as a component where applicable. Some Program science activities in the Extension will focus more on refining incremental benefits of management and will entail more typical and



consistent monitoring activities. Other Program science activities in the Extension will have direct linkages to Program decision-making and communication of outcomes from those activities could serve as a useful input to making those decisions. In those cases, the Program will develop and implement a robust AM approach utilizing the six-step process of AM (Assess, Design, Implement, Monitor, Evaluate, Adjust) and components familiar to Program entities including conceptual models, hypotheses, experimental design, synthesis, and Structured Decision-Making (SDM).

Key science questions:

Management objectives:

- *How should we identify and communicate target species outcomes as well as our ability to influence those outcomes?*
- *In what specific ways will the continuation of Program management actions in a Second Increment contribute to Management Objective #4 (non-target species)?*

Management actions:

- *How does current chokepoint capacity constrain ability to implement flow management actions and what are the incremental and relative benefits of increasing capacity?*
- *What are the incremental and relative benefits and costs of using water versus mechanical/chemical means to create and/or maintain suitable in-channel species habitat?*
- *What are the incremental and relative benefits to target species (or target species habitat) of other potential flow actions?*

Land in the Second Increment:

- *How much of the 19,000 acres of pre-1997 conservation land remains under conservation ownership and how many acres have been acquired (non-PRRIP) since 1997?*
- *What proportion of existing non-PRRIP conservation lands benefit target species or species of concern as defined by the Program?*
- *Are existing PRRIP and non-PRRIP conservation lands sufficient to meet the target species management objectives as detailed in the Extension Science Plan?*