



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

Conference Call
October 22, 2019

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Jojo La – Member

Erik Skeie – Alternate

State of Wyoming

Bryan Clerkin – Member

Jeff Cowley – Alternate

State of Nebraska

Jessie Winter – Member

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tom Econopouly – Member

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke – Chair

Jeff Shafer – Member

Brandi Flyr – Member

Tyler Thulin

Nolan Little

Colorado Water Users

Luke Shawcross – Alternate

Jason Marks

Upper Platte Water Users

Environmental Groups

Bill Taddicken – Member

Executive Director's Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Chad Smith, DED

Scott Griebeling

Seth Turner

Kevin Werbylo

Contractors

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

Introductions were made. There were no modifications to the agenda. Revisions to the draft August WAC meeting minutes were noted. Clerkin made a motion to approve, second by Econopouly. Hearing no objections, Steinke declared the minutes unanimously approved.

WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates**Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge:** *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

Werbylo reported that HDR performed a substantial completion inspection last week. There are a couple items for the contractor to finish up, but they should be off the site in a week or so and project completion is expected by the end of the month. The next step will be for the EDO to develop a final plan for project monitoring, operations, and maintenance. It is anticipated that water deliveries to fill the project will be made sometime next summer after vegetation is established on the berms.

Steinke said Anton Hassebrook from CNPPID is working on putting together what is needed to connect the delivery pipeline control valves to existing CNPPID control systems and flow meters. Funding will likely come from existing unused budget from the pipeline construction.

Werbylo said there is one outstanding large dollar claim from Myers Construction, and Clerkin asked about the amount. Werbylo said the initial claim was greater than \$500,000 but that wasn't a real number based on real information and data related to groundwater levels. Myers is working with HDR to get more specific costs for dewatering, and resolution is expected by the end of the year.

Lakeside Gravel Pit: *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

Werbylo reminded the committee that, given less expensive water leasing options, engineering design consultant JEO was given direction by the GC last December to finish the project design and make it shovel-ready but not proceed with construction. This effort was delayed until summer, after the miner moved off site and a final bathymetric survey of the pit could be made. JEO is currently finalizing the design and skeleton bid documents, which will be done within a couple weeks. The budget line item will be closed by the end of the year, and the project will be on hold.

CPNRD Water Leasing: *Brandi Flyr, CPNRD*

Flyr reported that the CPNRD surface water lease was carried out as a pilot exchange project this year, much the same as was done in 2018. A combined total of 28,191 acres from the Thirty Mile, Cozad, and Orchard-Alfalfa Canals participated, resulting in 14,095 AF that is to be credited to the Lake McConaughy EA. CPNRD is waiting on an exchange of letters between CNPPID and Nebraska DNR to confirm the EA credit. La asked how the 2019 numbers compared to last year. Flyr said participation was slightly less this year, with about 200 acres put back into alfalfa production.



85 Farnsworth recommended that CPNRD submit an invoice to the Program as soon as possible.
86 Flyr said this will happen after the letters confirm the EA credit. Steinke said CNPPID will be
87 sending letters to Nebraska DNR later this week.
88

89 La asked about prospects for the surface water lease for next year. Flyr said they are working on
90 a long-term conservation program. Econopouly asked if there would be a pilot exchange again
91 in 2020 if there is not agreement on terms of a long-term conservation program, Flyr said yes,
92 subject to approval from Nebraska DNR. Winter added that Nebraska DNR wants to keep the
93 project going, staff is supportive, and that there would be a pilot exchange next year in the
94 absence of a long-term program.
95

96 Turner asked about fall groundwater recharge. Flyr confirmed that a small amount was
97 recharged via the Orchard-Alfalfa Canal over a week in September.
98

99 ***NPPD Water Leasing: Jeff Shafer, NPPD***

100 Shafer said NPPD's exchange agreement with CNPPID would result in the full proposed amount
101 (3,121 AF) being credited to the Lake McConaughy EA. As with the CPNRD project, NPPD is
102 waiting for letters confirming the EA credit, then will send an invoice to the Program.
103

104 Excess flows were diverted into both the Gothenburg and Dawson County canals for recharge
105 this fall. At this point, Gothenburg has stopped, but Dawson County is still running about 40 cfs.
106

107 ***CNPPID Water Leasing (Phelps, Elwood, Irrigators): Cory Steinke, CNPPID***

108 Steinke reiterated that CNPPID will get the EA credit letters out soon. For the CNPPID irrigator
109 lease, 2,201 AF will be credited to the Lake McConaughy EA based on 2,934 acres enrolled in
110 the project this year. There will also be 314 AF from no-cost NCCW.
111

112 With regard to recharge, there were diversions into Elwood over the summer and in the past
113 month. The reservoir is presently close to full, CNPPID will re-evaluate potential for additional
114 recharge around November 15. Phelps is not recharging because groundwater elevations are at
115 or above threshold levels. Griebeling said current monitoring well elevations are about half a foot
116 over the threshold, and he also reminded the committee why the threshold levels were
117 established.
118

119 ***South Platte Irrigated Acres Update: Jojo La, CWCB***

120 La reported that the memo submitted to the WAC was provided per depletions plan requirement.
121 It includes a new update for 2015 irrigated acres in the South Platte basin, which shows a net
122 decrease of 106,961 irrigated acres relative to 1997 levels. Colorado's next update will take
123 place in 2020, with numbers available in 2021.
124

125 ***2019 Water Action Plan Update: Seth Turner, EDO***

126 Turner said the two memos provided to the committee (WAP Projects Status and Scores Update
127 and Water Milestone Update) are informational and will serve as the bulk of the specific project



updates in the 2019 WAP Update in combination with the accounting memo. Since project updates are provided routinely, the focus of the 2019 WAP Update will be on lessons learned during the First Increment and the path forward to meet Program water goals during the First Increment Extension. The EDO will be soliciting input from WAC members regarding lessons learned, as well as ways in which information provided to the WAC is valuable or could be improved. La asked about the Tamarack III description in the status and scores memo, whether there was additional information to include. Turner said the EDO wasn't aware of new or updated info beyond what was recently confirmed by Jon Altenhofen for the memo update but would check on it.

Econopouly asked when the accounting memo and fact sheets would be updated. Turner said the EDO wouldn't have all the necessary data until sometime after the first of the year, and the EDO also wants to finish developing accounting methods for the NPPD and CPNRD recharge projects before the next update.

Recharge Recapture Wells Project: *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

Werbylo presented an updated concept of the recapture well network in the general area under Elwood Reservoir, Phelps County Canal and Cottonwood Ranch. This concept involves the Program recapturing and re-timing water that it has recharged (or will recharge). To accomplish this, irrigation style wells would be installed at various locations and would pump water from the aquifer and deliver it directly to the Platte River via a pipeline, creek or drain. The EDO has performed preliminary estimates of volumes available to pump and impacts to the river, and has had preliminary permitting discussion with the DNR, Tri-Basin NRD and Central Platte NRD. These agencies have also expressed interest in partnering on these projects. The EDO and the agencies will continue to work on the planning and design of the recapture network and will have another update at the next WAC meeting in February. Werbylo also asked that WAC members call or email him with questions regarding the general concept or the document circulated to the WAC that explains the concept.

There was discussion of the project. Econopouly noted that the project was good news, as diversions for Phelps recharge have exceeded the amount assumed for scoring only once, and this would allow the Program to increase operational yield from the project.

La asked for clarification about the potential for Nebraska DNR and/or NRDs to build the project. Werbylo said the project is attractive, as it allows the Program to capitalize on water that was already purchased and recharged. There are opportunities to partner with Nebraska DNR, and funds may be available; for example, money that was set aside for the J-2 Regulating Reservoirs project could be used for this purpose instead. Per regulations and statutes, it is attractive for Nebraska DNR and/or NRD's to take over design and construction, as they have more flexibility than the Program. Exact details have not yet been worked out, but the EDO is planning discussions with Nebraska DNR next week.



Farnsworth added that part of the yield from the Phelps and Elwood recharge projects already goes to the state. This would follow the original Program water project concept of having a project sponsor (state or NRD), and the Program would pay a unit cost for the water. Flyr (Central Platte NRD), Winter (Nebraska DNR), and Little (Tri-Basin NRD) all concurred with the assessment of the project as described.

FY 2020 Draft Water Work Plan and Budget: *Seth Turner, Kevin Werbylo, and Scott Griebing, EDO*

Turner, Werbylo, and Griebing walked the committee through the line items in the water work plan and budget for 2020. Turner prefaced the discussion by noting that the EDO was in the process of transitioning the format and organization of the budget and work plan for 2020. The start of the First Increment Extension marks a good break point, and this will allow the EDO to eliminate numerous obsolete line items in the water plan budget and to more logically group like items such as multiple canal recharge projects or surface water leases.

Questions were asked about several items:

- Broad-scale recharge: La asked if the Myers claim was included in the budget. Werbylo and Farnsworth clarified that it is hoped the issue will be resolved by the end of the year. If that doesn't appear likely, it will be added to the budget prior to the December GC meeting.
- Recapture Wells: Winter asked whether the proposed \$1.2 million for recapture wells would stay in the budget if Nebraska DNR takes over the design and construction of the project. Werbylo said that is to be determined, but in that case this line item would definitely be a lot less.
- Recapture Wells: La inquired about the cost of a service agreement to pump recapture wells for the Program, if Nebraska DNR built the project. Farnsworth said it would probably be a year or two before that service agreement happens, but the high-end estimate is \$25/AF.
- North Platte Choke Point: Econopouly asked about planning for the choke point test again in 2020. Farnsworth said Justin Brei with the EDO will be getting the planning group going again.
- General: Winter asked about getting detailed line item information. Turner said the work plan documentation is in progress but has not yet been re-organized to correspond to the new budget line items. Farnsworth added that the EDO is soliciting feedback from the committees whether they like the new budget format and that a re-worked version of the work plan will be available within a couple weeks.
- General: Winter asked if there is a specific budget for COHYST score analysis and similar tasks. Griebing said that is just EDO staff time under ED-1. Farnsworth added that the EDO will coordinate with Nebraska DNR on using COHYST for scoring.

Annual Flow Summary Update: *Scott Griebing, EDO*

Griebing noted that there was an annual flow summary report in past years, but the EDO is not preparing that this year as much of the same information was captured in the accounting memo.

This document is a draft based on one person's notes of the meeting. The official meeting minutes may be different if corrections are made by the Water Advisory Committee before approval.



Griebeling gave an overview of the Platte River hydrology focused on the USGS gage at Grand Island. He emphasized the system's variability and wet and dry cycles. He contextualized the hydrology seen during the Program's first increment, noting how wet the past 13 years have been and how a shift to drier conditions is expected at some point during the Program extension. He highlighted the 2018 and 2019 hydrology, specifically pointing out the two large flow events in 2019.

Steinke asked if Program channel work has increased flow at Kearney flood stage, as it used to be only 5,000-8,000 cfs, and there have been some questions whether Kearney is also a choke point. Griebeling stated that Kearney is not choke point 2.0. Farnsworth noted that minor flood stage at Kearney is 7 ft, which currently has a rating of nearly 20,000 cfs.

Steinke commented that February/March low flows seen in the flow summary are influenced by CNPPID operations and ice conditions. It is typically mid-March when ice finally dissipates, and that is a significant constraint on the ability to make EA releases prior to the spring whooping crane migration.

Steinke also said that the NWS is concerned about the potential for spring flooding in the Missouri Basin in 2020; not sure that this directly translates to the Platte, but available information may be of interest to the committee.

Econopouly noted that if releases are not made, but Lake McConaughy EA could be pushing 200,000 AF by May 2020, which means there is a risk of reset to 100,000 AF if the reservoir reaches its effective operating capacity with spring runoff.

Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

The proposed meeting schedule was reviewed. Turner noted that the October meeting was pushed back another week in order to get closer to an equal 3 months between all WAC meetings. Steinke did not anticipate any scheduling conflicts at the Lake McConaughy Visitor Center.

Action Items

General WAC

- None

ED Office

- Distribute detailed work plan to WAC when available.