



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission – Lake McConaughy Visitor Center
May 7, 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 Strom – Member (phone)
Jennifer Schellpeper – Alternate
Margeaux Carter
Michelle Koch (phone)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tom Econopouly - Member

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Member

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke – Chair
Jeff Shafer – Member
Brandi Flyr – Member (phone)
Tyler Thulin
Nolan Little

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member
Luke Shawcross – Alternate (phone)
Jason Marks

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch - Member

Environmental Groups

Jacob Fritton – Member (phone)

Executive Director's Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth, ED
Courtney Black
Scott Griebeling
Seth Turner
Kevin Werbylo

Contractors

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

Introductions were made. A request was made to add a choke point update to the agenda. February 2019 WAC minutes were approved with minor edits. Merrill nominated Steinke to continue as WAC chair, second by Shafer. Unanimous approval.

WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates**North Platte Choke Point:** *Jason Farnsworth, ED*

Farnsworth confirmed that there will not be an intentional release from the Lake McConaughy EA to test the choke point capacity and flood stage this year. There have been discussions with the NWS about proceeding to monitor natural event(s) of similar magnitude if they occur. Discussions with CNPPID and others regarding an indemnity agreement related to the choke point test are still ongoing.

Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge: *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

Werbylo reported that construction is progressing, but there were significant delays due to winter weather conditions. The substantial completion date was extended by 75 days to July 15, with final completion by August 15. There have been a few minor change orders, but the delays have not resulted in changes in cost, except possibly a bit for additional construction management work. Much of the concrete and riprap work is done. The CNPPID section of the pipeline from Phelps County Canal is complete, with Program sections at Cottonwood Ranch to be started soon. Initial fill of the project may not be until next year.

Lakeside Gravel Pit: *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

Werbylo reported that the GC gave the direction in March to finalize the design and have it bid ready but shelve the project until it is clear that the 3,000-AF yield is necessary at the \$10 million cost. EDO staff Werbylo and Smrdel will conduct a final bathymetric survey of the pit.

CPNRD Water Leasing: *Brandi Flyr, CPNRD*

Flyr reported that a continuation of the pilot exchange project is planned for this year. CPNRD has an MOU with the CNPPID to store unused irrigation water in Lake McConaughy, then move that water to the EA at the end of the irrigation season. About 200 fewer acres are participating this year, but the total for the three canals still exceeds 28,000 acres.

NPPD Water Leasing: *Jeff Shafer, NPPD*

Shafer reported that NPPD is pursuing a similar water exchange project in which lands are not irrigated with surface water and that water is moved to the Lake McConaughy EA. There are 6,243 acres enrolled in the project, which would generate a maximum yield of 3,121 AF, subject to finalizing calculations. Agreements with CNPPID have been approved. Farnsworth added that the EDO is working with NPPD on a leasing agreement, hopefully to be ready for the June GC meeting.



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

92 Steinke reported that there were no changes since the last WAC meeting. Winter recharge was
93 maximized, with Phelps operating until the groundwater threshold levels were approached.
94 Diversions into Elwood for recharge continued up to the point that CNPPID needed to reserve
95 the remaining storage capacity for irrigation supplies.
96

97 Farnsworth asked Steinke if the first half payments had been made to those participating in the
98 CNPPID irrigator lease project. Steinke said he would look into it. There was also discussion of
99 possible miscommunications regarding the availability of excess flows in CNPPID's system.
100 Steinke said that CNPPID is meeting with NDNr on Thursday (5/9), with the goal of resolving
101 the issue so that CNPPID can divert excess flows when target flows are met.
102

103 ***Project Scoring: Seth Turner, EDO***

104 Turner reported that the EDO has been working through the score analysis for the CNPPID
105 irrigator lease project. The analysis materials were distributed to the Scoring Subcommittee last
106 week (5/3) for review, and it is anticipated that a conference call with the Scoring Subcommittee
107 will be held in the next two weeks. The intention is to have a recommended score for
108 presentation to the GC in June. After that, the EDO will work with CPNRD and NPPD to
109 develop agreed-upon response functions to use in score analyses for those recharge projects, with
110 the goal of having one analysis complete for the GC in September and the other in December.
111

112 **Colorado Depletions Plan Update: Jojo La, CWCB and Jon Altenhofen, NCWCD**

113 La reported on 2018 water use in the North Platte Basin of Colorado. Two changes to the form
114 were noted: the addition of a new surface water right for wildlife propagation and a spreadsheet
115 correction that resulted in a small change to the baseline consumptive use (CU). Total CU in
116 2018 remained well below the baseline, for an underrun of 23,610 AF.
117

118 Reporting on Colorado's depletion plan for the South Platte Basin, Altenhofen showed that
119 depletions associated with population growth were 2,983 AF at the Colorado-Nebraska state line
120 in May-June 2018. Retimed accretions from managed groundwater recharge were 6,802 AF for
121 the same months. Over the period 2007-2012, average May-June accretions of 5,023 AF exceed
122 depletions of 2,191 AF. Shafer had questions about Colorado's annual increases in transbasin
123 imports since 2009 and requested to see the spreadsheet Colorado uses for the analysis.
124 Altenhofen also reported that the Tamarack I project was credited with 11,512 AF of shortage
125 reduction at the state line in 2018.
126

127 **Nebraska Depletions Plan Update: Jessie Strom, NDNR**

128 Strom presented on 2017 activities under Nebraska's New Depletion Plan, including
129 groundwater transfers, groundwater well permits, groundwater variance permits, and surface
130 water permits both upstream and within the Critical Habitat Reach (CHR). All 19 surface water
131 permits were temporary permits for groundwater recharge upstream of the CHR. The net effects
132 of new depletions and mitigation measures were projected from 2017-2029, with a combined net



effect of +97.14 AF upstream and within the CHR. The net effect was also positive for 2006-2017 permitted activities projected through the end of 2019.

Strom also reported that the NDNR's Robust Review using the WWUM and COHYST2010 models is complete and will be presented to the WAC in August. Development of the second increment Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan and IMPs will be completed by September.

Farnsworth noted that two goals that have not been met going into the First Increment Extension are Program water and Nebraska water. He asked whether there will be a new Nebraska depletions document that, for example, eliminates mitigation benefits from the now on-hold J-2 Regulating Reservoirs project. Schellpeper said this information will be included as part of the Robust Review presentation in August.

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

Cowley presented the Wyoming depletions report for water year 2018. Wyoming continues to comply with all three baselines. In January 2019, Wyoming reported 178,890 acres irrigated above Guernsey Reservoir during the 2018 irrigation season, in compliance with the Modified North Platte Decree and well below the 226,000-acre cap for Baseline No. 1. Wyoming's total water uses continue to be less than the benchmarks established for Baseline No. 2, with underruns (translated to the state line) of 67,917.37 AF for the irrigation season and 4,808.65 AF for the non-irrigation season. Relative to Baseline No. 3, storage in the South Platte Basin of Wyoming increased by 89.30 AF to a total of 179.32 AF since 1997. Most of these storage facilities are for stock, wildlife, fish, or environmental purposes.

Federal Depletions Plan Update: *Tom Econopouly, USFWS*

Econopouly reported that there were eight consultations relying on the PRRIP for ESA compliance in 2018, of which four were in Colorado, one in Nebraska, and three in Wyoming. In addition, four of the eight consultations were for Federal depletions, including for missile access road improvements.

Draft 2018 Water Projects Accounting Memo: *Seth Turner, EDO*

Turner presented highlights from the draft accounting memo, which was made available to the WAC for review prior to the meeting. This document is the first attempt by the EDO to document both single-year project operations for all Program water projects and comprehensive accounting since operations began. Differences between project scores and operational yields were emphasized, with time and reduced excess flow availability during the First Increment compared to historical periods being identified as key factors. Turner showed that Program water projects operating in 2018 included the three initial state projects as well as eight Water Action Plan projects. These projects are split between groundwater recharge and contributions to the Lake McConaughy EA. It was noted that the appendices to the accounting memo compile in one place all of the NDNR diversion permits, water service and water leasing agreements, invoice, and other documentation relevant to the operations of Program water projects. Comments on the accounting memo were requested by May 14.



La asked if one objective of the memo was to evaluate project effectiveness, and Turner responded in the affirmative. Farnsworth added that it will also help evaluate potential flow management actions. A discussion ensued about why operations numbers might differ from project scores. Shafer suggested that project benefits should be measured not only against target flows but also with the benefit of the species in mind. Altenhofen agreed and stated that for now target flows are how the Program quantifies species benefit. Farnsworth and Griebbling stated that evaluating species benefits will be a major focus of the upcoming adaptive management plan update. Steinke said that he feels the Program is doing all it can to acquire and provide water, given cost and other constraints.

Water Operations Model and Adaptive Management Update: *Scott Griebbling, EDO*

Griebbling provided an overview of the April 30 Adaptive Management Working Group workshop, including next steps for the AMP update process and the development of critical tools such as a surface water operations model. La provided additional detail from the discussions during the workshop.

Glendo Reservoir Full Utilization Study: *Bryan Clerkin, WWDO*

In response to a request from Shafer last fall, Clerkin provided a summary of the Glendo study, which was completed and presented to the WWDO in March. The concept behind the study was identified in Gov. Mead's 2015 water strategy document, and \$300,000 was allocated to conduct the study. Consultant Riverside (RTi) in Fort Collins was awarded the project, which involved cooperation from the Bureau of Reclamation, the Corps of Engineers, and other agencies.

A Glendo Reservoir model was developed, and a base scenario was calibrated using 11 historical flood events. The model was limited in scope and did not encompass the full North Platte system, which prompted concern from NPPD. Scenarios were modeled to re-time (not re-allocate) releases from the Glendo flood pool while minimizing impacts to recreation resources at the reservoir. This was essentially a reconnaissance-level study, and the recommendation was to do another study, with a more in-depth look at hydrology and hydraulics.

Lake McConaughy EA Releases Update: *Tom Econopouly, USFWS*

Econopouly provided an update on Lake McConaughy EA releases for 2019. In response to the downstream flooding in eastern Nebraska in March, the planned choke point test in May and June was postponed. Planned releases in February through May for channel maintenance, wet meadow recharge, and whooping cranes were also canceled. USFWS would still like to release 60,000-80,000 AF this year, with releases still possible between May 11 and September 15 for terns and plovers, as well as May 20 to June 20 for channel maintenance and possibly during the fall whooping crane migration. Econopouly said there remains a 25% chance of not making EA releases this year, in which case the EA volume would be pushing 180,000 AF by May 1, 2020. There was discussion of the potential to evacuate some water from the EA and re-divert it into Program recharge projects. Steinke confirmed the potential to make EA releases into the irrigation season.



The suggestion was made to consider a summer vegetation inundation release to put some of EA water to use this summer. Econopouly was open to this idea.

Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

The next WAC meeting is scheduled for August 6.

Action Items

General WAC

- Provide comments on the draft accounting memo to Turner by May 14.

ED Office

- None.