



1 **PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**
2 **Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**
3 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission – Lake McConaughy Visitor Center
4 May 1, 2018
5

6 **Meeting Attendees**
7

8 **Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

9 **State of Colorado**

10 Jojo La – Member

11 Erik Skeie

12
13 **State of Wyoming**

14 Bryan Clerkin – Member

15 Jeff Cowley - Alternate

16
17 **State of Nebraska**

18 Jessie Strom – Member

19 Kari Burgert

20 Brian Harmon

21 Margeaux Carter

22
23 **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

24 Tom Econopouly - Member

25 Jeff Runge – Alternate (on phone)

26
27 **U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

28 Brock Merrill – Alternate

29
30 **Downstream Water Users**

31 Cory Steinke – Chair

32 Jeff Shafer – Member (on phone)

33 Brandi Flyr - Member

34 Tyler Thulin

35 Nolan Little

36
37 **Colorado Water Users**

38 Jon Altenhofen – Member

39 Luke Shawcross (on phone)

40 Jason Marks

41
42 **Upper Platte Water Users**

43 Dennis Strauch - Member

44
45 **Environmental Groups**
46
47

Executive Director’s Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth - ED

Scott Griebbling

Seth Turner

Kevin Werbylo

Courtney Black

Contractors



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

49 Introductions were made, including new WAC representatives for the State of Colorado. There
50 were no edits to the February WAC meeting minutes; Strauch made a motion to approve, second
51 by Altenhofen, unanimous approval.

52

53 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates**

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

55 Werbylo reported that the project is estimated to recharge 9,000 to 10,000 acre-feet per year
56 (AFY), about 4,000 AFY of which will go towards deficit reductions. Current tasks are focused
57 on permitting aspects. EDO is waiting on a 404 permit from the Corps. Once that is completed,
58 will be able to bid project and start construction, hopefully in June or July. EDO is also
59 coordinating with Nebraska DNR on state permits. The first year of project operations will be
60 covered under a temporary recharge permit, eventually permit as aquifer storage and recovery
61 (ASR) so that recharged water can be recovered using recapture wells. There are no plans at
62 present to pump surface water from recharge ponds to river, as that could potentially change the
63 permit structure. However, such pumping or direct releases back to the river through the
64 Peterson Drain during times of shortages could be considered in the future in a revised permit if
65 the habitat benefit of the developed wetlands would not be negatively impacted.

66

67 CNPPID is working on the pipeline design to deliver water from Phelps Canal to Cottonwood
68 Ranch (CWR). The pipeline will be 42" diameter; approximately 8,000 to 9,000 ft long to the
69 southwest corner of CWR. PRRIP will add the extra half mile along the west side of CWR. The
70 county gave approvals to install the pipeline in ditch rights-of-way. EDO is working on the bid
71 specs and waiting for approval of the Water Service Agreement (WSA) with the Program.
72 Farnsworth reported that the WSA is close. It is anticipated to be submitted to the GC for
73 approval in June, along with the NPPD land agreement. CNPPID would like to bid the pipeline
74 project with other projects this summer to capitalize on mobilization fees, install the pipeline
75 during the summer, and then make connections to begin operations after the irrigation season.
76 Werbylo reported that the current estimate is \$3M to \$3.4M for construction, including the
77 pipeline on the CWR property. An additional \$1M will be paid to CNPPID to design and
78 construct the pipeline in the ditch rights-of-way, but the pipeline will be bought back by CNPPID
79 through no-cost water deliveries to CWR.

80

81 ***Lakeside Gravel Pit: Kevin Werbylo, EDO***

82 Werbylo reported on the progress of the Lakeside slurry wall gravel pit. The project was
83 initiated a year ago at an existing gravel pit mine based on the GC's recommendation of doing a
84 full-scale initial slurry wall project. A contract for design work was signed in 2017. Design is
85 underway and full operation is targeted for late 2019 or early 2020. The EDO is working with
86 the design consultant to confirm storage numbers, which are presently estimated at 800 to 1,200
87 AF. An impermeable layer was confirmed at a depth of about 40 ft, and the design consultant
88 would like to key the slurry wall into this layer by about 5 to 8 ft. Water supply for the project
89 can be delivered through the Peterson Drain by gravity and from an on-channel wellfield, and
90 then pumped out for delivery to the river. Overall, the project is presently indicated to have less



91 storage capacity than anticipated at a greater cost (\$8.5M to \$9M). Special Advisor Applegate is
92 reviewing the current cost figures, which will be available to the GC in June.

93

94 ***Alliance Canal project update: Seth Turner, EDO***

95 Turner reported on activities related to the Program's Osborne property near Bayard. This will
96 be the second season of irrigation under the Program's ownership. A concrete check structure
97 was constructed at the east end of the lateral crossing the property in March/April at an estimated
98 cost of \$1,500 to the Program. Two days of irrigation were scheduled for the spring, the first to
99 have been April 13, but the lateral is not yet running water due to lack of flow in the source
100 creek. There was discussion of plans for the property and potential water yield. In March, the
101 GC gave direction to the EDO to have the property appraised, which is in progress.

102

103 ***CPNRD Water Leasing: Brandi Flyr, CPNRD***

104

105 No report.

106

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

108 Shafer reported that there was no recharge through the Gothenburg and Dawson County canals in
109 the spring due to inadequate river flows. Those canals have now switched over to normal
110 operations. NPPD will divert water for recharge in the fall if excess flows are available.
111 Discussions are underway between NPPD, CNPPID, and NDNR about possible exchanges
112 involving leased water, but there is still a lot of progress that needs to be made.

113

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

115 Steinke reported that deliveries since January 1 for recharge were 800 to 1,000 AF into Phelps
116 and 3,850 AF into Elwood Reservoir. Storage space available in Elwood was maximized, and
117 the pumps were recently shut off.

118

119 The irrigator lease is becoming more popular due to a combination of good feedback from
120 customers and low commodity prices. For 2018, a total of 2,055 acres were enrolled, exceeding
121 the original cap of 2,000 acres; an amendment to the leasing agreement increased the cap to
122 2,100 acres. The Program pays \$220/acre and receives 9" per acre added to the Lake
123 McConaughy EA at the end of the irrigation season for an effective cost of \$293/AF.

124 Farnsworth reported that the PRRIP has started conversations with Don Kraus about expanding
125 and making the irrigator leasing program permanent. If the PRRIP can't get more acres enrolled,
126 there may be an opportunity to increase the amount of water per acre (up to 18").

127

128 ***Data Reporting Guidelines for PRRIP water leasing projects: Seth Turner, EDO***

129 Turner gave an overview of draft data reporting guidelines that the EDO is developing for
130 leasing and recharge projects. The objective is to ensure that the EDO is getting all the
131 information needed for accounting and scoring analyses, as well as verifying invoice amounts.
132 La asked about current practices, and Turner replied that it was ad hoc and varies by district and
133 project, which is why the EDO wants to make a more standardized approach. The handout



134 provided to the WAC included generic guidelines to serve as a conversation starter. The EDO
135 will have conversations with CNPPID, NPPD, and CPNRD to better understand what data is
136 available and in what formats so that reporting guidelines can be tailored to specific projects.
137 Strom said that this is something DNR is considering as well and would be willing to coordinate.
138

139 ***Phelps County Canal Groundwater Recharge Report: Seth Turner, EDO***

140 Turner reported on Phelps County Canal recharge during the non-irrigation season that extended
141 from September 15, 2016 to February 14, 2017. The project was operated under CNPPID's
142 temporary recharge permit from Nebraska DNR and the WSA between CNPPID and the
143 Program. The canal is checked at Mile Post (MP) 13.3, and deliveries are measured in the flume
144 at MP 1.6. Measured diversions totaled 5,676 AF, of which 75% was allocated to the PRRIP
145 (4,257 AF) and the remaining balance to DNR. The average delivery rate of 19 cfs, after the
146 canal was full, was approximately equal to the recharge rate. Groundwater levels are extensively
147 monitored using wells owned by the Program (8 wells), Tri-Basin NRD (9 wells), and CNPPID
148 (8 wells), as well as in three drains, so that recharge operations can be terminated if needed to
149 prevent waterlogged fields. After deducting evaporation and adding additional recharge between
150 the headgate and the flume at MP 1.6, the total recharge credited to the Program for the 2016-
151 2017 season was 4,784 AF.

152

153 ***WAP Project Fact Sheets: Courtney Black, EDO***

154 Black showed an example fact sheet for Phelps County Canal recharge operations. The EDO will
155 be developing these for all major Water Action Plan (WAP) projects to provide brief project
156 descriptions and summaries of operations. The fact sheets will eventually be available on the
157 Program website as downloadable handouts. Black asked for committee members to provide any
158 questions or comments within two weeks (by May 15).

159

160 ***COHYST Update: Scott Griebeling, EDO***

161 Griebeling reported that documentation of the COHYST models is done and waiting to be
162 officially approved. Nebraska DNR and the NRDs are using various applications of the models
163 and the Program is also interested in using the model. The COHYST sponsors are considering
164 next steps. Griebeling is talking to Brandi Flyr (CPNRD) and Hayden Strickland (ERC) about
165 creating an ongoing COHYST users group.

166

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

168 La presented the Colorado depletions plan update for the North Platte Basin. In 2017, there was
169 a reduction in post-1997 industrial use and a slight increase in irrigated acres, well within limits.
170 Specific numbers are included in the report. Overall, Colorado continues to have a consumptive
171 use (CU) underrun in the North Platte Basin exceeding 19,000 AF.

172

173 Altenhofen provided Colorado's reports on the South Platte Basin and the Tamarack I project. In
174 the South Platte, depletions are associated with population increases. Irrigated acres continue to
175 be under limits owing to early 2000s court decisions during drought periods and the resulting
176 losses of irrigation wells.



177
178 Colorado is successfully meeting its obligations to the Program through the South Platte Water
179 Related Activities Program (SPWRAP), which includes the Tamarack I project. SPWRAP
180 collects about \$1M in assessments annually, which are used mainly for Operations and
181 Maintenance of the various recharge projects, with Denver Water being the largest contributor.
182 The main recharge project at the Tamarack State Wildlife Area includes 16 wells drilled along
183 the South Platte River, which deliver water to recharge basins. The 2013 floods took out four of
184 the wells, which may be rebuilt this year. A jack-and-bore under I-76 was completed in 2017 to
185 allow deliveries to a recharge pond south of the interstate (and thus, farther from the river).
186 Shortage reductions from Tamarack are averaging 8,022 AFY. This is less than the 10,000 AF
187 score credit, but hydrology has not been the same as during the study period (1947-1994). There
188 has been less water availability during winter months: in the model period, about 59% of winter
189 months had divertible flows. First Increment hydrology has only had divertible flows in about
190 40% of winter months. Overall, managed groundwater accretions are successfully meeting
191 Colorado's depletion requirements, with a good safety margin.

192
193 **Nebraska Depletions Plan Update:** *Jessie Strom, NDNR*
194 Strom reported on 2016 permitted water uses, including breakouts for those uses upstream of and
195 within the Critical Habitat Reach (CHR). In total, there were 52 groundwater transfers, 45
196 groundwater wells, three groundwater variances, and five surface water permits. The
197 groundwater transfers represent a change in location of irrigated acres, but no change in actual
198 water use. Four of the five surface water permits were for temporary groundwater recharge, all
199 upstream of the CHR. Nebraska DNR calculated a positive net effect of new permitted water
200 uses and mitigation results from 2016 through the end of the First Increment in 2019.

201
202 Nebraska DNR is also engaged in a robust review analysis, which began in early 2017 and is
203 anticipated to be completed in 2018. The analysis uses the WWUM and COHYST2010 models
204 to evaluate consistency with the requirements of the Nebraska New Depletions Plan (NNDP):
205 post-1997 depletions, changes in irrigated acres, municipal and industrial uses, and mitigation
206 activities through 2013.

207
208 Other basin-wide activities include stakeholder meetings for the Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan
209 (BWP) 2nd Increment, which is to be in place by January 1, 2019. Stakeholder meetings will
210 begin this summer for the 2nd increment of the upper Platte NRDs' individual Integrated
211 Management Plans (IMPs), which are expected to be in place by summer 2019. The BWP and
212 IMPs goals and objectives will ensure that Nebraska continues to comply with the NNDP.

213
214 Farnsworth noted that, based on updated modeling, there will be increases in depletions for the
215 NRDs, meaning more competition for the Program for a finite volume of water to operate
216 projects. The NRDs are generally proposing conjunctive management, which generally includes
217 retiming of excess flows through groundwater recharge, as a tool to mitigate. As a result of these
218 changes, the Program could end up with less water than planned to operate WAP projects.

219
220



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

222 Cowley reported that Wyoming continues to be in compliance with the three baseline
223 requirements. For Baseline No. 1, Wyoming had 206,314 acres irrigated in Water Year (WY)
224 2017, a new record but still well under the 226,000-acre cap. As of WY 2017, Wyoming's total
225 uses are less than Baseline No. 2. Translated to the state line, Wyoming has an irrigation season
226 underrun of 39,188 AF and a non-irrigation season underrun of 4,778 AF. For Baseline No. 3,
227 there was an increase in South Platte Basin storage of 11.70 AF, bringing the total post-1997
228 storage increase to 90.02 AF. All these storage facilities are small ponds for stock, wildlife, fish,
229 or environmental purposes. Wyoming also recently updated the Acreage Inspector Rugged
230 Tablets and sensors on the four Weather Stations, both of which are part of the Modified Decree.

231

232 **Federal Depletions Plan Update:** *Tom Econopouly, USFWS*

233 Econopouly reported on Federal Depletions and Tiered Consultations. As part of the
234 Cooperative Agreement, federal agencies can deplete 350 AFY in each state for a "national
235 purpose." There have been no federal depletions in Wyoming and Nebraska. In Colorado, the
236 allowance was split to 175 AFY, then to 87.5 AFY each in the North Platte and South Platte
237 basins. Current federal depletions in Colorado are only about 26 AFY, well below the limit.

238

239 The Program provides for streamlined biological opinion consultations with the U.S. Fish and
240 Wildlife Service. In total, there have been 188 of these tiered consultations under Program since
241 start of First Increment, mostly in Colorado. In 2016, there were 17 in Colorado and one each in
242 Wyoming and Nebraska. In 2017, there were 8 total tiered consultations: six in Colorado and
243 one each in Wyoming and Nebraska.

244

245 **Draft Annual Flow Summary Report:** *Scott Griebing, EDO*

246 Griebing presented an overview of Platte River flow conditions during calendar year 2017, with
247 an emphasis on conditions at Grand Island and the Lake McConaughy EA. Overall, 2017 was a
248 wetter year, with a drier summer but wetter spring. Through the 11 years of the First Increment,
249 there have been five years with annual hydrologic condition "wet" and six "normal" years. The
250 annual hydrologic condition is calculated retroactively. Griebing explained that the method for
251 calculating annual hydrologic condition is such that it can be altered by EA releases. Extensive
252 discussion ensued, focused on this issue of the hydrologic condition being affected by Program
253 operations and the implications for project yields and scoring. All agreed that the issue is
254 important and that the discussion should continue in the future.

255

256 **Preview PRRIP Water Projects Tour:** *Seth Turner, EDO*

257 Turner gave a brief overview of the stops on the PRRIP water projects tour, which departed after
258 lunch and included Lake McConaughy and the State Channel Project in North Platte on Tuesday.
259 Stops scheduled for Wednesday included Elwood Reservoir, the Jeffrey Island Sediment
260 Augmentation Project, Cook/Dyer sand pits, Cottonwood Ranch, and the Lakeside gravel pit.
261 Printed copies of the itinerary, maps, and driving directions were available.

262

263



264 **Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

265 The next WAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 7 at the Lake McConaughy Visitor
266 Center. Merrill suggested that there may be reason to reschedule the October 2 WAC meeting;
267 this will be discussed further in August.

268

269 **Action Items**

270

271 **General WAC**

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- 273 • Provide feedback to the EDO on the draft fact sheets for Phelps County Canal
274 Groundwater Recharge and the Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease by May 15.
- 275 • Revisit scheduling of October 2 meeting.

276

277 **ED Office**

278

- 279 • EDO to set up calls with CNPPID, NPPD, CPNRD to discuss data availability and
280 reporting for leasing and recharge projects.