



1 **PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
2 **Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
3 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission – Lake McConaughy Visitor Center  
4 August 6, 2019  
5

6 **Meeting Attendees**  
7

8 **Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

9 **State of Colorado**

10 Jojo La – Member

11 Erik Skeie – Alternate

12  
13 **State of Wyoming**

14 Bryan Clerkin – Member

15 Jeff Cowley – Alternate

16  
17 **State of Nebraska**

18 Jessie Winter – Member (phone)

19 Jesse Bradley – Alternate

20 Kari Burgert

21  
22 **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

23 Tom Econopouly – Member (on phone)

24  
25 **U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

26 Brock Merrill – Member

27  
28 **Downstream Water Users**

29 Cory Steinke – Chair (phone)

30 Jeff Shafer – Member

31 Brandi Flyr – Member (phone)

32 Mike Drain – Alternate

33 Tyler Thulin

34  
35 **Colorado Water Users**

36 Jon Altenhofen – Member (phone)

37 Luke Shawcross (phone)

38  
39 **Upper Platte Water Users**

40 Dennis Strauch – Member

41  
42 **Environmental Groups**

43 Jacob Fritton – Member

44  
45 **Executive Director’s Office (EDO)**

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Chad Smith, DED (phone)

Scott Griebbling

Seth Turner

Kevin Werbylo

**Contractors**



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

47 Introductions were made. Shafer agreed to serve as acting Chair for the meeting. Turner noted  
48 several non-agenda items to be discussed in the brief project updates. There were no updates or  
49 comments on the May meeting minutes, which Shafer declared approved by consensus.

50  
51 **Nebraska DNR Robust Review:** *Jesse Bradley and Kari Burgert, NDNR*

52 Bradley presented an update on the Nebraska New Depletions Plan (NNDP) and Integrated  
53 Management Plan (IMP) monitoring. The end of the first 10-year IMP increment coincides with  
54 the end of the PRRIP First Increment in 2019. Bradley provided background information  
55 regarding the requirements of the NNDP. For groundwater, the NNDP covers the area in the  
56 watershed of the Platte River upstream of Chapman, NE and within the 28/40 area; for surface  
57 water, the NNDP covers the watershed of the Platte River upstream of the confluence with the  
58 Loup River. The NNDP essentially covers depletions from new water uses between 1997 and  
59 2005. Since 2006, offsets for new depletions have been the responsibility of the permittee.  
60 Bradley reviewed the goals of the Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan (BWP) and the natural  
61 resources districts' IMPs.

62  
63 The purpose of the Robust Review was to update new net depletions due to new or expanded  
64 uses of water subsequent to July 1, 1997. More specifically, the Robust Review sought to assess  
65 what was accomplished during the IMP first increment and establish goals for the IMP second  
66 increment. The Robust Review also serves as a “truing up” of the permitted activities included  
67 in the NNDP annual reports.

68  
69 The Robust Review evaluated water use changes due to unpermitted small reservoirs and sand  
70 pits, as well as rural domestic population and livestock. Other factors include groundwater  
71 irrigated acres, crop-type changes, municipal and industrial (M&I) changes, and depletions-  
72 offsetting management actions such as canal recharge, flow augmentation, groundwater  
73 allocations, and retirements of irrigated acres. The emphasis of the Robust Review was on  
74 groundwater-only uses and depletions, not surface water or comingled acres, as moratoriums  
75 were in place on surface water uses prior to 1997.

76  
77 The Robust Review relied on two groundwater models: the Western Water Use Model  
78 (WWUM) encompassed the North Platte and South Platte NRDs in the Panhandle region, and  
79 the COHYST model was used for those NRDs downstream of Lake McConaughy (e.g., Twin  
80 Platte, Central Platte, and Tri-Basin). The models used a 50-year evaluation period from 2013-  
81 2063. Owing to limitations in data availability, the Robust Review only considered those land  
82 use changes, M&I pumping changes, and management actions implemented through 2013.

83  
84 Although some NRDs (e.g., Twin Platte and Central Platte) have depletive effects heading into  
85 the IMP second increment that are greater than in the first increment, results of the Robust  
86 Review show management actions implemented under the IMPs providing an ever-increasing net  
87 positive effect by 2029. Updates to the Robust Review are scheduled for 2023 and 2027. Later  
88 in the year, Nebraska expects to present these results to the Program's GC for recognition that all



89 tasks required by the NNDP have been completed. The BWP and IMPs for the second increment  
90 are expected to be finalized and adopted in September. Bradley noted that extensive  
91 documentation of the Robust Review can be accessed through the NDNR website.  
92

### 93 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates**

#### 94 ***CPNRD Water Leasing: Brandi Flyr, CPNRD***

95 Flyr said the surface water transfer (aka pilot exchange project) is proceeding along similar lines  
96 to last year. During the irrigation season, water is retained in Lake McConaughy rather than  
97 delivering to the headgates of the CPNRD canals. Enrolled acreage for 2019 is slightly smaller  
98 than in 2018: 12,035.8 acres for Thirty Mile; 13,135.2 acres for Cozad; 3,020.4 acres for  
99 Orchard-Alfalfa; 28,191.4 acres enrolled in total. These acreage numbers represent 80% or more  
100 of all surface acres in the three irrigation districts. Given the similar acreage, a similar volume  
101 (~14,200 AF) is expected to be transferred to the Lake McConaughy EA in October.  
102

103  
104 There were no diversions of excess flows for groundwater recharge in the spring. The Cozad  
105 Canal experienced significant damage from flooding.  
106

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

108 Shafer said the surface water transfer is proceeding as planned, with no news to report. NPPD  
109 will be applying for new temporary permits so that available excess flows can be diverted for  
110 recharge at the Gothenburg and Dawson County canals in the fall.  
111

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

113 Steinke said there was some recharge in Elwood in recent weeks following the big rains, with the  
114 reservoir filled for PRRIP. Actual numbers will be available next week. CNPPID is making  
115 preparations for fall recharge; the current temporary water right is valid through late November.  
116

#### 117 ***Project Scoring: Seth Turner, EDO***

118 Turner provided a brief update on project scoring. The CNPPID irrigator lease score (1,900 AF)  
119 was approved by the GC in June. Following extensive discussions with Nebraska DNR, the  
120 recommended score of 2,800 AF will be presented to the GC in September. It will be regarded  
121 as a “provisional score” subject to future revision if appropriate. The EDO is behind the  
122 anticipated schedule for either the CPNRD or NPPD groundwater recharge score analysis, but it  
123 is still hoped that at least one of them will be ready for the GC in December.  
124

125 Farnsworth added that the EDO has been working with the districts to extend the various  
126 recharge and leasing agreements into or through the First Increment Extension.  
127

#### 128 ***2019 WAP Update Report: Seth Turner, EDO***

129 Turner said the EDO is in the early planning stages for the preparation of a 2019 WAP Update  
130 report. Unlike the 2009 and 2014 updates, this one is not mandated as part of the steps necessary  
131 for the completion of Milestone #4, but it seems appropriate to report on the status of Program



132 water projects at the end of the First Increment. This report will likely eliminate the Tier I, II, II  
133 categorization used in previous versions, as that has not proven particularly useful in prioritizing  
134 what WAP projects to pursue. The report will provide a status update on all WAP projects  
135 considered during the First Increment but will also include a strong emphasis on lessons learned  
136 and plans moving forward to meet the First Increment water objective. Turner invited committee  
137 members to submit any suggestions they have for content to include in the report.

138

139 ***PRRIP Legislation Update (not on agenda): Jason Farnsworth, ED***

140 Farnsworth reported that legislation reauthorizing PRRIP has been introduced in both the House  
141 (by Colorado Rep. Neguse) and the Senate (by Wyoming Sen. Barrasso). Hearings have been  
142 held in subcommittees of both houses of Congress, which went well. Rich Walters testified in  
143 support of PRRIP.

144

145 La added that comments were positive in testimony. The delegations from all three states are on  
146 board, providing bi-partisan support. The House is presently in recess, but it is hoped that the  
147 legislation will get on the suspension calendar in the next couple months. Efforts to understand  
148 the possibility of hotlining the legislation in the Senate are also in progress. The states are  
149 supporting the passage of a bill before the end of the year.

150

151 Farnsworth also provided an update on the choke point indemnity agreement. He has been  
152 working with the Colorado contingent and CNPPID to finalize the agreement, the CNPPID board  
153 recently approved the agreement, and it will be presented to the GC in September. Farnsworth  
154 noted that there may be a test flow release in September and that the NWS is on board.

155

156 ***Colorado South Platte Reservoirs (not on agenda): Jojo La, CWCB and Seth Turner, EDO***

157 Turner noted that there was a story published in the Denver Post in late-June regarding potential  
158 reservoir storage in the South Platte basin, which caught the attention of editorial writers in the  
159 Omaha newspaper and prompted this update. Colorado passed legislation in 2016 authorizing a  
160 feasibility study of South Platte storage opportunities. The study was funded by a CWCB grant  
161 and completed in 2017. La said there is a new grant to fund further investigation. Discussions  
162 are at a stakeholder level right now, identifying potential participants in such a project.

163 Ultimately, these are the starting phases of what would be a very long process to develop new  
164 storage in the South Platte basin. Skeie noted that the 2017 feasibility study specifically  
165 considered compliance with the South Platte Compact, the ESA, and PRRIP. Turner said links  
166 to available documentation, in particular the 2017 South Platte Storage Study and a May 2019  
167 Fact Sheet, would be distributed with the draft meeting minutes.

168

169 ***Fort Laramie Canal tunnel collapse (not on agenda): Dennis Strauch, Pathfinder Irrigation  
170 District, Brock Merrill, USBR, and Jeff Cowley, WY SEO***

171 In the early morning hours of July 17, a tunnel on the Fort Laramie Canal collapsed, backing up  
172 water that was running about 1,400 cfs and blowing out the canal upstream of the tunnel. The  
173 breach eroded as much as 16 feet from the canal bank and floor, and about 62 acres were covered  
174 in sediments from the washout. This cut off irrigation supplies to over 100,000 acres in



175 Wyoming and Nebraska at a critical point during the growing season. Several WAC members  
176 familiar with the situation were asked to provide and update to the committee given the potential  
177 impacts to other water operations in the North Platte and Platte River basins.

178  
179 Strauch reported that Goshen Irrigation District (GID) is working from the top to uncover the  
180 tunnel, and a contractor is working to reinforce the tunnel from the inside. If only the tunnel roof  
181 collapsed, they may be able to put in an open trench framework to let water through. If the  
182 tunnel walls have collapsed as well, they're probably done for the season.

183  
184 Merrill said Reclamation is releasing water as if irrigating at full capacity, but there are no  
185 diversions by GID. Reclamation needs to get North Platte system storage down to about 2.1  
186 MAF by October 1.

187  
188 Thulin said that CNPPID has changed their operations because of the additional water coming  
189 into Lake McConaughy. They are running full power production, filling canals to the extent  
190 possible, and releasing as much as possible out of Lake McConaughy without wasting water.  
191 Lake McConaughy needs to be below elevation 3260 ft on October 1, presently at 3258 ft.

192  
193 Cowley showed photos of the sinkhole above the tunnel, the extent to which the bank and bottom  
194 of the canal were eroded, the channel cut by water flowing out of the canal back to the North  
195 Platte River, the aerial extent of sediment distribution from the washout, and several photos  
196 showing progress on the construction work to rebuild the canal upstream of the tunnel.

197  
198 Farnsworth added that PRRIP needs to make a call whether to accept the additional 4,800 AF  
199 from the Wyoming Municipal Account. Given the levels in Lake McConaughy, it is likely that  
200 additional water will be declined this year.

201  
202 **Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge and Lakeside Slurry Wall Gravel Pit Updates:**  
203 *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

204 Construction work on the Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge project began in October  
205 2018. Werbylo gave an update and showed photos of construction progress since then.  
206 Construction is several months behind schedule due to numerous weather events that have  
207 flooded the construction site on several occasions, including a storm in July that dumped up to 9  
208 inches of rain around Kearney in a single night. Werbylo presented maps that show Cottonwood  
209 Ranch near the epicenter of an area that has received precipitation at 12-15 inches above normal  
210 since February. Substantial completion of construction was originally planned for May 1, then  
211 extended to July 15. Owing to the recent events and resulting delays, it is now anticipated that  
212 completion will be extended to September 15 or October 1. There was a contract amendment  
213 with the engineering and construction administration consultant due to the extended construction  
214 time. The EDO was recently notified by the construction contractor that they will be asking for  
215 "significant amendments," the specific details of which are not yet known.

216



217 For the Lakeside gravel pit project, Werbylo said the miner has moved offsite to an adjacent  
218 property. Design consultant JEO completed a survey of the project site and is in the process of  
219 finalizing the design. Per an earlier decision by the GC, the project will not move forward into  
220 construction at this time.

221

222 **Recharge Recapture Well Network:** *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

223 Werbylo explained that the EDO is developing a preliminary concept for a well field to recapture  
224 groundwater intentionally recharged through the Phelps County Canal, Elwood Reservoir, and  
225 Cottonwood Ranch. At the current conceptual level, the EDO is evaluating three locations of  
226 interest for well installations, including at and east of Cottonwood Ranch, a tract about a mile  
227 west of Cottonwood Ranch, and an area extending west from the Program's Cook property. It is  
228 anticipated that there may be as many as 42 wells, with a combined capacity of up to 65 cfs (129  
229 AF/day). For the most part, the wells would be piped back to the river or a drain in  
230 configurations that avoid Tri-Basin NRD requirements for much larger setbacks from existing  
231 wells if multiple recapture wells were piped in series. Capital costs are estimated to be in the  
232 range of \$4-5M. Refinement of the conceptual design will continue over the coming months.

233

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

235 Griebing presented an overview of the surface water operations model that the EDO is  
236 developing in support of the adaptive management update. He emphasized that the model is still  
237 in progress and is not intended as a replacement for COHYST; the focus of the model is to  
238 simulate Program water project operations and aid in future Program decision making. The  
239 current iteration of the model is developed in Excel and runs a daily timestep for a 13-year  
240 simulation period. Key inputs include flows at Julesburg on the South Platte River and Keystone  
241 on the North Platte River, as well as canal diversions and returns. Reach gains/losses are  
242 estimated using factors from COHYST or the WMC Loss Model. The model domain extends  
243 downstream to Grand Island. Griebing explained the process of routing water through the  
244 model, in particular EA releases. Other Program water projects will also be incorporated into the  
245 model.

246

247 **USGS Plum Creek and North Dry Creek Groundwater Discharge Study:** *Scott Griebing,*  
248 *EDO*

249 Griebing discussed a solicitation from USGS to the Program to contribute funding to a study of  
250 groundwater discharge in the Plum Creek and North Dry Creek areas. The study would use  
251 various imaging techniques to identify when and where water from the groundwater aquifer  
252 would emerge in these surface streams. Farnsworth noted that the funding request was fairly  
253 small. Bradley and others were skeptical that the study would have value in enhancing the  
254 understanding of groundwater discharge into Plum Creek and North Dry Creek and suggested  
255 that if expenditures were to be made that further synoptic streamflow data collection would  
256 likely be more valuable.

257

258

259



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

261 The next WAC meeting is scheduled for October 22. Whether the meeting will be in person or a  
262 conference call will be determined later.

263

264 **Action Items**

265

266 General WAC

267 • None

268

269 ED Office

270 • None