PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Conference Call and Webinar
February 4, 2020

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado
Jojo La – Member

State of Wyoming
Bryan Clerkin – Member
Jeff Cowley - Alternate

State of Nebraska
Jessie Winter – Member

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Tom Econopouly – Member
Jeff Runge – Alternate

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Brock Merrill – Member

Downstream Water Users
Jeff Shafer – Member
Tyler Thulin
Nolan Little

Colorado Water Users
Jon Altenhofen – Member
Luke Shawcross – Alternate
Jason Marks

Upper Platte Water Users
Dennis Strauch - Member
John Berge

Environmental Groups
Jacob Fritton – Member
Bill Taddicken – Member
Rich Walters

Executive Director's Office (EDO)
Jason Farnsworth, ED
Justin Brei
Scott Griebling
Tom Smrdel
Seth Turner
Kevin Werbylo

Contractors

Welcome and Administrative: *Seth Turner, EDO*
Introductions were made. Turner noted minor revisions to the original distributed draft of the October 2019 WAC minutes. Clerkin moved to approve the October minutes, second by La. October 2019 WAC minutes approved without further comment.

Altenhofen nominated Steinke to be 2020 WAC Chair, second by Shafer after Thulin confirmed the absent Steinke's continued willingness to serve in the position. Steinke confirmed as 2020 WAC Chair without additional comment or objection.

WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates

Leasing and Recharge Projects: *Seth Turner, EDO*
Turner introduced the new WAP Leasing and Recharge Project Updates memo that was circulated in advance of the meeting. The memo was developed based on a recommendation from WAC member interviews that were conducted as part of the 2019 WAP Update process, and it provides written summary of fall 2019 activities for the CPNRD, NPPD, and CNPPID groundwater recharge and surface water leasing projects. The Pathfinder EA and Municipal Account Lease water that was credited to the Lake McConaughy EA in October was also included. Turner said the idea was to streamline the project updates part of WAC meetings and noted that projects included in the memo may change as needed. La said having project numbers in writing in advance was appreciated.

La asked if there were any more recent updates to the surface water leasing projects. Shafer said NPPD is working with Nebraska DNR and CNPPID in pursuit of a 5-year lease arrangement, but if that is not achieved by spring then there would be another 1-year pilot exchange project for 2020. Turner said that Brandi Flyr provided similar information regarding the CPNRD surface water lease in a call a couple weeks earlier, i.e., if a long-term agreement wasn't reached before the irrigation season, then there would most likely be another pilot exchange project in 2020.

Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge: *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*
Werbylo reported that construction of the Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge Project is complete, but the EDO has been dealing with a claim issue from contractor Myers Construction related to groundwater levels at the project site during construction and costs incurred to pump out groundwater. Engineering design and construction administration consultant HDR was tasked with evaluating the claim. HDR recommended the claim be rejected on the basis that contract-stipulated procedures were not followed by Myers when filing the claim, making technical evaluations difficult.

Recognizing that 2019 turned out to be a difficult year to build the project due to unexpected and repeated severe weather conditions, the EDO discussed the claim with the GC, Nebraska Community Foundation and Signatories and have now entered settlement negotiations with Myers. Once a value is agreed upon, the settlement will go back to the GC and Signatories for

approval. In response to Clerkin, Werbylo said the original Myers contract was for just under $4.3 million.

Altenhofen asked if construction of the pipeline from Phelps County Canal to Cottonwood Ranch was complete. Werbylo said yes, construction is done, and the pipeline was winterized. CNPPID is hooking the pipeline up to their SCADA system, and an electrician will need to do some valve calibration before operations begin.

Werbylo went on to explain that next steps for the project include developing a monitoring plan, accounting tools, and groundwater level thresholds analogous to those used for Phelps. More information will be available at the May WAC meeting. Altenhofen asked about monitoring wells. Werbylo said there are already four onsite, that Tri-Basin NRD has several in the surrounding area, and more can be installed this year.

The current plan is to leave the project unfilled for most of the growing season, while vegetation establishes on the berms. Initial fill will occur in late summer possibly using water from the Lake McConaughy EA in conjunction with the planned test of the North Platte choke point. EA water was previously used for Phelps recharge during the 2012-2013 season, and the EDO is already talking with Nebraska DNR and CNPPID to start the process to get the necessary permit.

Referencing the Water Objective Summary document, Altenhofen asked when the project would be scored. EDO staff said 4,000 AFY is the current best estimate based on a preliminary score model, but the plan is to wait until we have some actual operations data to inform input parameters for the score model, particularly infiltration rates.

Lakeside Gravel Pit and Edlund Mitigation: *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*
Werbylo said the project design and bid package were completed by JEO. The project is now shovel-ready, but on the shelf per direction of the GC given the high cost of the project for a relatively low anticipated score.

The miner has moved off of the Lakeside pit and is now beginning to mine the Edlund property directly to the north. As part of prior arrangements associated with the land swap, the EDO helped with 404 permitting necessary for the mine site due to wetlands. Mitigation wetlands on nearby Program property are currently under construction. Proof of construction must be provided to the Corps by May 1.

Recapture Wells Project*: Kevin Werbylo, EDO*
Werbylo provided an update on the recapture wells project, which would provide the Program, the State of Nebraska, and NRDs a way to better take advantage of previously recharged water that otherwise returns to the river during periods of excess flows. The Program has the existing Cook tract well, which was developed a few years ago to recapture water recharged through the Phelps County Canal and deliver it to the Platte River through a nearby drain. The proposed

project is much more expansive, involving installation of a network of irrigation-style wells that could augment river flows when there are shortages.

To test the concept of a recapture well network, the Program is looking at developing a pilot project with 3-10 wells installed in the area of Cottonwood Ranch. The Program is working through details with Nebraska DNR, Central Platte NRD, and Tri-Basin NRD; the project could potentially be built as early as this summer. There was discussion of potential project score, shown as 8,000 AF in the Water Objective Summary table, as well as cost. Werbylo said that number is based on a much larger network than the pilot-scale project with 3-10 wells and that the Program budgeted for the pilot project in 2020 and would most likely pay for it.

Many details of the project remain to be worked out. The project may ultimately be taken over by Nebraska DNR and/or the NRDs, which are better suited to develop a project of this magnitude, and the Program would lease recaptured water as a project partner. Farnsworth noted that the state and NRDs are working on financial aspects of the project. More information will be available at the May WAC meeting.

***Enterprise Irrigation District Lease Project**: Seth Turner, EDO*

Turner explained that there is 25,000 AF of irrigation water in Glendo Reservoir allocated to Nebraska users, and Enterprise Irrigation District has a contract with Reclamation for 3,000 AF of that water. The EDO has been having occasional discussions with Enterprise for well over a year, trying to find a mutually beneficial way for the Program to lease some of that water, which goes unused by Enterprise in most years. As part of this effort, Special Advisor Anderson Consulting Engineers conducted a field survey and preliminary cost assessment to identify critical repair or replacement needs for Enterprise infrastructure. Documentation of that work is not yet available, but preliminary findings indicate that costs are at a level that warrants continued discussion of the project. More information will be provided to the WAC when it is available.

WAP Project Scoring Update: *Seth Turner, EDO*

Turner reviewed the Water Objective Summary document, which was prepared for the December 2019 GC meeting. The existing water projects for which scores have been approved total 14,170 AF. Another five existing projects have estimated scores adding up to about 20,000 AF. Total combined score of the three initial state projects, existing projects with approved scores, and existing projects with estimated scores is around 114,000 AF. The balance required to achieve the First Increment Water objective of 120,000 AF is expected to come from some combination of the tabulated future water projects. Altenhofen noted that adding unit costs to the table would be helpful, and there was discussion of the identical cost projections for the CPNRD and NPPD recharge projects.

Turner reported that the EDO has been working on simultaneous score analyses for the CPNRD recharge project (Thirty Mile, Cozad, and Orchard-Alfalfa canals) and the NPPD recharge project (Gothenburg and Dawson County canals). The EDO developed new unit response

functions for each canal and used existing operations data to develop preliminary estimates of score model input parameters including diversion/infiltration rates and timing of recharge diversions. The EDO is now iteratively reviewing the model assumptions with the districts. Once agreement is reached, the score analysis and documentation will be sent to the Scoring Subcommittee for review. The EDO anticipates this will happen within the next month, and project score recommendations will hopefully be ready for the GC in June.

For the remaining three existing projects not yet scored, score analysis for the Cottonwood Ranch BSR project is not anticipated until after operations data is available in 2021 or 2022. The EDO is also waiting for long-term agreements to guarantee a degree of project longevity before scoring the CPNRD and NPPD surface water lease projects.

Lake McConaughy EA: *Tom Econopouly, USFWS and Justin Brei, EDO*
Econopouly said the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) for the Lake McConaughy EA was submitted to FERC this month then proceed to provide a general update on the account, which is flush with water at this time. If conditions preclude releases in the coming months, the account could contain about 190,000 AF by the end of September, just shy of the 200,000 AF maximum capacity. This would complicate the potential for an estimated 50,000 AF to be credited to the account around that same time in September-October. However, such a scenario would be avoided (or at least minimized) if releases can be made, including an estimated 60,000 AF to 70,000 AF for a North Platte choke point test. As discussed previously, some of that water may also be used for the initial fill of Cottonwood Ranch. In the near term, there will be a week to week decision on whether late winter pulse releases can be made. That release would be 3,350 cfs when possible between February 15 and March 15.

Brei added that the target date for a choke point test would be around August 1, as was intended last year. Several test scenarios are possible given the abundant supply of EA water. The subgroup will be reconvened soon to move forward with the test planning. One outstanding issue is that CNPPID is awaiting response from FERC on a requested waiver to make EA releases above flood stage. More information will be available before the May WAC meeting.

WAC Charter: *Seth Turner and Scott Griebling, EDO*
Turner said that, as we are now officially in the First Increment Extension, it is a good time to revisit some of the foundational Program documents including the WAC Charter from 2005. Turner asked if any committee members had questions or comments about the Charter and noted that overall, the WAC seems to be in compliance with the requirements specified in the document. Two items under Section III. Committee Purposes were notably in progress, including reviewing and commenting on annual operating plans and Program water tracking and accounting. The former was addressed in part by Econopouly's EA review but will become a more important WAC focus as the Program transitions more to water project operations than development and acquisitions. The WAP Projects Accounting Memo introduced in 2019 and reviewed by the WAC is a good start on the water tracking and accounting. Econopouly said it would be good to get a better understanding of Nebraska DNR's tracking of releases from the

Lake McConaughy EA, including their PWAP model. Winter recommended contacting Jeremy Gehle and Jim Ostdiek to discuss.

Turner also discussed feedback from WAC members that was gathered through interviews (mostly in December 2019) as part of the 2019 WAP Update process. Critical factors for the WAC to address during the Extension include the following:

- Resiliency and long-term sustainability of Program water projects, including better understanding of hydrologic variability between the 1947-1994 OPSTUDY period and the most recent 30 years as well as the potential impacts of climate change.
- Target flows, which are being looked at as part of the Adaptive Management Plan update. How would changes affect Program water projects, including score analyses and operations based on excess flow availability determined by target flows.
- Use and reporting on EA water, emphasizing species benefits in addition to quantified shortage reductions.
- Annual depletions reporting, particularly the need to step back and revisit the purpose, context, and importance of the individual state and federal depletions plans.

Turner then reviewed suggestions for specific new documentation or presentations the EDO could develop that would be of benefit to the WAC

- Streamline "brief project updates" at WAC meetings by providing that information in writing in advance.
- Develop an annual cost summary memo in part to look at annual water purchases and costs, and how those figures compare to budget estimates a year earlier.
- Fact sheet on choke point issues as well as remaining WAP projects such as CPNRD and NPPD recharge.
- A periodic hydrology update to move away from just an annual summary towards emphasis on recent target flows, real-time flows, reservoir levels, groundwater levels, etc. to contextualize recent and ongoing project operations.

Interviewed WAC members were nearly all in agreement on the benefit of continuing quarterly meetings in the near term while the Program is still pursuing the First Increment Water Objective. As the Program moves more into water project operations and testing, more engagement with the TAC might be necessary as well.

Sediment Augmentation Project: *Tom Smrdel, EDO*

Smrdel discussed changes to the plan form of the south channel of the Platte River downstream of the J-2 Return at several intervals between 1938 and 2009. What was once a wide braided channel became deeply incised and was severely eroding land along its banks due to a sediment deficit estimated at about 100,000 tons/year (with a range of 25,000 to 250,000 tons/year). In 2016, the Program got approval to begin full-scale sediment augmentation on the order of 60,000

to 80,000 tons/year. The initial sediment augmentation project was designed in 2016 and implemented in 2017, including a point bar cutoff not far downstream from the J-2 Return. Smrdel showed designs and photos of each successive year's project, with each one being a bit farther downstream. Much of the work involves bulldozers pushing sand into the active river channel, which both slows down the flow and disperses the sediment. There was discussion of the accuracy of the LiDAR data used to analyze the sediment augmentation work. The sediment augmentation project will continue to progress downstream in 2020.

Additional Business: *Seth Turner, EDO*

The next WAC meeting will be May 5 at the Lake McConaughy Visitor Center. The EDO will coordinate with the state and federal representatives on a more expansive discussion of the depletions plans than has been done in recent years. The intent will be to provide more background context for the results that are summarized annually.

Action Items

General WAC

ED Office