PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP or Program)
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Virtual Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 28, 2020

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)
Brock Merrill – Member (2020 TAC Chair)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)
Matt Rabbe – Member
Jeff Runge – Alternate
Tom Econopouly - Alternate

State of Colorado
Jojo La – Member

State of Wyoming
Barry Lawrence – Member
Jeremy Manley – Alternate

State of Nebraska
Carol Flaute – Member

Environmental Entities
Rich Walters – Member
Andrew Pierson – Alternate

Upper Platte Water Users
N/A

Colorado Water Users
N/A

Downstream Water Users
Brandi Flyr – Member
Jim Jenniges – Member
Mike Drain – Alternate

Participants
Elizabeth Esseks – Nebraska DNR
Michelle Koch – NGPC
Melissa Marinovich – NGPC
Joel Jorgensen – NGPC
Andrew Caven – Crane Trust

Executive Director's Office (EDO)
Jason Farnsworth, ED
Justin Brei
Patrick Farrell
Malinda Henry
Mallory Jaymes
Kaley Keldsen
Kari Mohlman
Chad Smith
Tim Tunnell

WELCOME AND ADMINISTRATIVE

Introductions – Merrill called the meeting to order at 12:01 PM Central Time. Smith noted the WebEx participant list would be used to identify meeting attendees. Farnsworth introduced Malinda Henry, Headwaters' new Science Lead who will be working on Program issues as part of the EDO.

Agenda – Smith said Farnsworth would be filling in for Tom Smrdel (EDO) to discuss geomorphology and vegetation monitoring data.

Minutes – TAC MOTION: *Rabbe moved and Walters seconded to approve the April 30, 2020 TAC virtual meeting minutes as amended.* Minutes approved.

April 30, 2020 FINAL PRRIP TAC Virtual Meeting Minutes

PRRIP MANUSCRIPTS & REPORTS

Inside/Outside Tern and Plover Monitoring – Farrell updated the TAC on the status of the inside/outside tern and plover monitoring publication, which has been accepted for publication with revisions in the journal *Waterbirds*. Farrell gave a short summary of the conclusions in the publication.

PRRIP TARGET SPECIES – WHOOPING CRANE

EDO presentation

Spring 2020 Monitoring – Jaymes gave a presentation updating the TAC on the results of Spring 2020 whooping crane monitoring. Rabbe said he was repeating one of his previous comments that for the last two springs the river looks great because of the geomorphology but high flows seem to have prevented maximizing crane use. He said not to be alarmed by the numbers, if we had flows closer to median our use would have been great. Flows of 3,500 cfs seem to be too deep to maximize habitat. Runge said the USGS report saw reduced use at higher flows, but there could be other factors. It would be good to look at the habitat to see if bars are submerged under higher-velocity water to get an understanding. Farnsworth said we have good topography and are working on a 2-D hydrodynamic model and we know that flows of 3,500 cfs keep about 95% of the channel inundated. Rabbe said when you have 3,500 cfs, those areas that are shallow with sand may be pushed against a bank which could alter use. Caven said he urged the Program to look at the work of Frank Moore and his work on stopover habitat and decisions. As your scale gets narrower, habitat is a larger determinant. You cannot consider the Platte in and of itself, we need to look at a landscape level.

Koch asked about high flows and potential impacts on crane use. Will there be any change to flow releases due to crane use, when those flows might be important for other factors? Rabbe said this was not a high flow event, it was sustained moderate flows that were high for the spring period during crane migration. Runge said it is important to understand these trade-offs when making decisions. It is important to consider habitat for whooping cranes but the other implications of water management decisions.

Telemetry Data – Farrell provided an update on acquisition of new telemetry data. Data acquisition has been approved by the Tracking Partnership and the EDO is working with the Partnership to secure proper data. Farnsworth said the 2019 whooping crane population estimate was just released by the Service and the EDO noted it shows a stable, flat population with no growth since 2017. However, the upper and lower

confidence intervals are getting larger each year. He suggested communicating with Aransas about why the confidence of population estimates has been quite wide.

PREDATOR MANAGEMENT

EDO presentation

Additional Predator Management Pilot Project – Farrell gave a background on the development of the project, Mohlman gave a presentation updating the TAC on early implementation. Runge asked about the graph used to show the decline in fledging. Has there been an evaluation that looked at the age of the sandpit, or are they all treated equally? Farrell said all Program pits have aged because we have not added new nesting sites in several years. Farnsworth said it is a good question, we will see over the next couple of years if the addition of the large nesting site by Lexington results in a productivity difference from our older sites. Runge asked about older sites like Blue Hole and Broadfoot. Farnsworth said even an old site like Broadfoot South, even though it is a long-term nesting site, when the Program got involved we had to implement management that essentially re-set conditions to a "new" site.

REMOTE SENSING DATA

EDO presentation

Geomorphology & Vegetation Monitoring – Farnsworth gave a short presentation on the purpose for and history of collecting and analyzing geomorphology and vegetation monitoring data. The Program has moved to using remote sensing tools, e-cognition, and other tools to improve our effectiveness and efficiency collecting this data. The EDO is working through processes to determine how best to operationalize this immense amount of data to make it useful for the Program.

Tools now being used:

1) Esri ArcMap software – overlay annual datasets to understand fine-scale riverbed elevation change with the challenges of identifying beneficial lateral erosion compared to riverbed incision.
2) E-cognition – CIR imagery classification based on field training data to develop habitat classifications by height and density.
3) Machine Learning modelling to gain understanding of flow/channel-width relationships.

NEW LEARNING

Science Policy Brief – Smith discussed the Working Draft EDO Science Policy Brief on the Alexander et al. (2020) article. TAC discussion summary:

- Drain – document is well done, does not challenge the authors' conclusions, need to clean up language in Footnote #2; Farnsworth agreed to edit that language.
- Runge – What is the status of the previous versions of this document? Farnsworth and Smith said those were drafts, the EDO asked for input from the TAC, the Working Draft Science Policy Brief being discussed today is the document that replaces those previous drafts and those previous drafts are no longer relevant. Runge said if the EDO sends the Science Policy Brief to the authors that we need to be prepared for numerous possible responses and we need to narrow the potential focus of those responses.
- Rabbe – if the authors disagree with the brief, they will likely say that.

- Koch – do not ask the authors if the publication supports the decision-making of the Program because so many other factors come into play in that decision-making and the authors do not have a background in that process.
- Farnsworth – unless anyone on the TAC objects, the EDO will send the Brief to the authors, will clarify the context of the Brief and why we are sharing it, and will send any feedback we get to the TAC for review and discussion.
- Rabbe – tell the authors that the TAC felt it was appropriate to share the Brief with them.
- Koch – appreciate the explanation of why the Brief was developed and how to use it. When you finalize this Brief, send it out to the TAC clarifying that it replaces all previous documents written about this issue. Farnsworth and Smith agreed to do that. Koch said this discussion will help to develop a more orderly process for dealing with new learning in the future. One trigger to consider for future Science Policy Briefs might be if the article directly mentions the Program or members of the EDO.
- Caven – it is a good idea to send this to the authors, that will help to make sure the Program is doing things correctly and it would be helpful to hear any feedback the authors might have.
- Jorgensen – asked Farnsworth if he still has concerns about the Alexander et al. article. Farnsworth said no, agreed the Alexander et al. model is an improvement over the model used by the EDO and that the Science Policy Brief was just intended to acknowledge that. Jorgensen asked if Farnsworth agreed with the statement that the Alexander et al. regression model was better that the model used by the EDO. Farnsworth said yes.
- Drain – the Science Policy Brief was not intended to take issue with Alexander et al., it just speaks to potential implications of that article on Program decision-making (if any). Drain said the Brief does that well.

May 28 2020 Final Working Draft Science Policy Brief on Alexander et al. (2020)

TAC MEETING REVIEW & WRAP-UP

Merrill asked about future TAC meetings. Smith said the EDO would discuss items for a future TAC meeting internally and when enough items accumulate for a meeting the EDO will send a Doodle poll to set the meeting date and time. Smith asked for feedback about the new version of the TAC agenda, none offered.

TAC MEETING END

Meeting adjourned at 2:14 PM Central Time.

Summary of Decisions from the May 28, 2020 TAC Virtual Meeting

1) Approved the amended April 30, 2020 TAC Meeting minutes.
2) Provided guidance on next steps with the Working Draft Science Policy Brief on Alexander et al. (2020).