



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams  
May 4, 2021

**Meeting Attendees**

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

**State of Colorado**

Jojo La – Member  
Erik Skeie - Alternate

**State of Wyoming**

Jeff Cowley – Alternate  
Brandon Gebhart

**State of Nebraska**

Jennifer Schellpeper – Member  
Kari Burgert – Alternate 1  
Jesse Bradley – Alternate 2  
Justin Ahern

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

Tom Econopouly – Member  
Matt Rabbe  
Jeff Runge

**U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

Brock Merrill – Member

**Downstream Water Users**

Jeff Shafer – Member  
Brandi Flyr – Member  
Tyler Thulin  
Nolan Little

**Colorado Water Users**

Jon Altenhofen – Member  
Luke Shawcross  
Jason Marks

**Upper Platte Water Users**

Dennis Strauch – Member

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

**Environmental Groups**

Jacob Fritton - Member  
Melissa Mosier - Member  
Rich Walters - Alternate

**Executive Director’s Office (EDO)**

Jason Farnsworth, ED  
Justin Brei  
Julia Grabowski  
Tom Smrdel  
Seth Turner  
Kevin Werbylo

**Contractors**

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48 **Welcome and Administrative:** *Seth Turner, EDO*  
49 WAC Chair Steinke was unable to attend, Turner led meeting. Participants were identified from  
50 Microsoft Teams. There were no modifications to the meeting agenda. There were no edits to  
51 the draft minutes from the February WAC meeting. Merrill made a motion to approve the  
52 February WAC meeting minutes, second by Marks. No objections, minutes were approved.  
53

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

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56 ***Leasing and Recharge Projects: Seth Turner, EDO***  
57 Dawson County Canal net recharge from January 7-15 was 563 AF. Phelps County Canal (1,168  
58 AF) and Elwood Reservoir (2,114 AF) both diverted for Program recharge March 15-24. The  
59 Cook recapture well pumped 67 AF during shortages in February-March and was turned on  
60 again April 20. The Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge project filled with an estimated  
61 100 AF as a result of significant rainfall in mid-March. The Program intends to pursue one-year  
62 surface water lease agreements with CPNRD and NPPD again this year.  
63

64 ***Cottonwood Ranch BSR Project: Kevin Werbylo, EDO***  
65 Werbylo gave an update on the Broad-Scale Recharge project indicating that the project filled  
66 with precipitation and runoff in March. Altenhofen asked whether there was any standing water  
67 in the Cottonwood Ranch recharge cells prior to the March precipitation events and whether the  
68 water that accumulated from rain and runoff has since seeped out. Werbylo said there was a bit  
69 of water in the low-lying areas, and that much of the water from March has indeed seeped into  
70 the aquifer.  
71

72 Werbylo stated the Program's intended operations plan to fill Cottonwood Ranch by diverting  
73 excess flows. The Program is hoping Platte River flows will ramp up and that this will be  
74 possible later in May or in June. Werbylo also noted that an intentional fill hadn't happened yet  
75 this spring because of limited excesses and an ongoing project to reinstall fencing to allow  
76 grazing at Cottonwood Ranch.  
77

78 ***Platte Basin Hydrology Update: Seth Turner, EDO***  
79 Turner reviewed Grand Island flows from January-April 2021. Outside of the precipitation  
80 events in mid-March, streamflows have been tracking generally at or below median flows and  
81 below targets. Compared to 2020, flows are averaging about 1,675 cfs less in 2021. Observed  
82 precipitation from March 14-24 was 4-7" in and around Program project areas in Dawson,  
83 Phelps, and Buffalo counties, and 8-9" around Grand Island. Snowpack in the South Platte Basin  
84 was tracking below average for most of the season but caught up to 100% of average at the end  
85 of April due to several snow and rain events in March and April. Parts of the Platte River Basin  
86 remain in moderate to severe drought, but conditions have improved significantly since early  
87 February, when much of the basin was in extreme drought.  
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90 ***North Platte Chokepoint Update: Seth Turner, EDO***

91 The Chokepoint Planning Workgroup had a virtual meeting on April 13 and reviewed the options  
92 evaluated by the Program to improve capacity and/or bypass flow around the chokepoint since  
93 2005. The EDO is developing a vegetation treatment plan for a reach extending a couple miles  
94 upstream of the Highway 83 bridge and will be coordinating with Rich Walters to get that  
95 implemented.

96  
97 ***Recapture Wells Pilot Project: Kevin Werbylo, EDO***

98 Werbylo gave an update on the recapture wells pilot project to be constructed in the area of  
99 Cottonwood Ranch. The project requires a 404-permit due to its impact on a very small acreage  
100 of wetlands along the pipeline routes and at the discharge structures. The Program's permitting  
101 consultant, HDR, completed the wetland delineation and draft preconstruction notification  
102 (PCN), which is currently being reviewed by the EDO and the Tri-Basin NRD. The goal is to  
103 turn in the PCN within the next few weeks, as to have a permit for construction by late summer  
104 or early fall.

105  
106 **Spring Whooping Crane EA Release: Tom Econopouly, USFWS**

107 The Lake McConaughy EA volume at the end of March was 167,562 AF. The Spring Whooping  
108 Crane Release was made for 15 days from March 30-April 13, with 12,496 AF released. Of that  
109 total, 10,788 AF (86 percent) reached Grand Island. Approximately 12 whooping cranes were  
110 observed on the Central Platte during the release period.

111  
112 The next EA release will be for germination suppression, targeting 2,000 cfs for the entire month  
113 of June. The median release volume is estimated to be about 78,000 AF, with a possible range of  
114 0 to 123,000 AF. If the actual release is at the median level or higher, there will be no additional  
115 EA releases this year. Estimated future EA volumes are 128,000 AF on October 1, 2021 and  
116 169,000 AF on May 1, 2022.

117  
118 **Colorado Depletions Plan Update: Jojo La, CWCB and Jon Altenhofen, Northern Water**

119 La provided Colorado's update on North Platte Basin accounting for 2020. Irrigated acres  
120 totaled 97,689 in 2020, a decline from 112,464 acres in 2019. Population declined slightly, but  
121 by a statistically insignificant amount. There was also a substantial decline in industrial usage,  
122 from 960 AF in 2019 to 70 AF in 2020. There were no additional new piscatorial, wildlife, and  
123 environmental uses in the North Platte Basin, and consumptive use (CU) of this type held steady  
124 at 25 AF. Total CU from all four use types was 81,298 AF, representing an underrun of 30,487  
125 AF relative to the baseline amount.

126  
127 Altenhofen presented an update on Colorado's Tamarack I project. Credits for shortage  
128 reduction at the CO-NE state line totaled 6,452 AF in 2020, and the overall annual average from  
129 2008-2020 is 8,128 AFY. Altenhofen reiterated that this is less than the 10,000 AFY score  
130 credited to the project because excess flows availability in December through March has been  
131 considerably less during the first 14 years of the Program than during the 1947-1994 period used  
132 for scoring. The Program Document recognized this possibility and determined it was



133 acceptable as long as the Tamarack project was constructed and operated as described.  
134 Altenhofen added that pipelines for 6 of the Tamarack wells that had been damaged in flooding  
135 were finally replaced, so the project is now back to pumping 16 wells. Power costs are paid by  
136 SPWRAP.

137  
138 Altenhofen also provided an update on Colorado’s Plan for Future Depletions (CPFD), which  
139 covers the South Platte Basin. As is required every 5 years, a questionnaire was sent to water  
140 providers in 2020 to collect updated data on the mix of water sources. Returned surveys  
141 represented about 75 percent of the South Platte Basin population, and Altenhofen reviewed the  
142 updated assumptions that will be used for CPFD analyses for 2020-2024. Population has  
143 continued to increase about 2.2 percent annually since 1997. Notably, per capita water use  
144 declined from 224 gpcd to 158 gpcd based on the updated survey data. South Platte Basin  
145 population growth results in a net depletion in May-June due to new native South Platte flow  
146 development and reuse. In 2020, the May-June depletion was 2,264 AF which was effectively  
147 offset by managed groundwater accretions of 4,811 AF at the CO-NE state line during the same  
148 period. For 2007-2020, average May-June depletions are 2,261 AFY and average accretions are  
149 5,063 AFY.

150  
151 Bradley asked how it is that the effect of conservation is net zero. Altenhofen said it is assumed  
152 that conservation water savings resulting from efficiency upgrades to old houses is then used in  
153 new houses, resulting in no net effect at the river. This has been the assumption from the start.

154  
155 **Nebraska Depletions Plan Update:** *Kari Burgert, Nebraska DNR*

156 The annual report for the Nebraska New Depletion Plan for calendar year 2019 was submitted at  
157 the end of 2020. Burgert reviewed permits issued by Nebraska DNR and the NRDs in 2019 for  
158 groundwater transfers, groundwater wells, groundwater variances, and surface water permits.  
159 These are also reported as being upstream of or within the Program’s critical habitat reach. The  
160 largest number of groundwater well permits was for replacement wells. Most of the surface  
161 water permits issued were temporary annual permits to divert excess flows for recharge. In  
162 combination with various mitigation measures, the new uses were shown to have a small net  
163 positive effect on the Platte River through 2032.

164  
165 Burgert noted that the 2019 report was the last to fall under the first increment of the Nebraska  
166 DNR and Upper Platte NRDs integrated management plans (IMPs), and that second increment  
167 IMPs became effective in September 2020. Burgert also said there will be robust review updates  
168 in 2023 and 2027, and that both the COHYST and WWUM models are being updated to the  
169 MODFLOW 6 platform.

170  
171 **Wyoming Depletions Plan Update:** *Jeff Cowley, Wyoming SEO*

172 Cowley reported that Wyoming continues to comply with its three baselines. For Baseline No. 1,  
173 irrigated acreage in the sub-basin above Guernsey Reservoir was 199,503 acres, well below the  
174 benchmark of 226,000 acres. Baseline No. 2 accounts for irrigation, municipal, industrial, rural  
175 domestic, retired/mitigation uses, and post-1997 new water uses. Translated to the WY-NE state



176 line, Wyoming has underruns relative to baseline requirements of 48,724.37 AF during the  
177 irrigation season and 4,265.88 AF during the non-irrigation season. Baseline No. 3 applies to  
178 new post-1997, on-channel storage in the South Platte Basin of Wyoming. Cowley noted that  
179 previous years' calculations had included facilities that were either off-channel or existed prior to  
180 1997. For 2020, the reported storage excluded those facilities and was revised to 79.07 AF.  
181 Wyoming also submitted an addendum to their 2013-2019 reports to correct a calculation error  
182 related to water use at the sugar beet processing plant in Torrington.  
183

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

185 Econopouly reported that USFWS completed five tiered consultations relying on ESA coverage  
186 provided by the Program in 2020. Two were in Colorado, one was in Nebraska, and two were in  
187 Wyoming. Three of the projects (one in each state) resulted in new or continued federal  
188 depletions to the Platte River. The individual projects were detailed in tables provided to the  
189 WAC.  
190

191 **Additional Business:** *Seth Turner, EDO*

192 There is a virtual GC meeting on June 9, and the next WAC meeting is scheduled for August 3.  
193

194 Cowley asked a question about how Colorado and Nebraska administer possible depletions from  
195 stream restoration projects. Altenhofen indicated that for Colorado if the Corps determines a  
196 restoration project under their review has depletive effects in the South Platte Basin (this has  
197 probably not yet happened), then the project would have to enroll in SPWRAP.  
198

199 **Action Items**

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201 **General WAC**

- 202 • N/A.

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204 **ED Office**

- 205 • Post PDF of the WAC meeting presentations to the website.