



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams  
October 26, 2021

**Meeting Attendees**

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

**State of Colorado**

Jojo La – Member  
Erik Skeie - Alternate

**State of Wyoming**

Jeff Cowley – Alternate  
Michelle Gess

**State of Nebraska**

Kari Burgert – Alternate 1  
Jesse Bradley – Alternate 2  
Justin Ahern

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

Tom Econopouly – Member  
Jeff Runge – Alternate  
Matt Rabbe

**U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

Brock Merrill – Member

**Downstream Water Users**

Cory Steinke - Chair  
Jeff Shafer – Member  
Brandi Flyr – Member  
Nolan Little  
Randy Zach  
Scott Shaneman

**Colorado Water Users**

Jon Altenhofen – Member  
Luke Shawcross – Alternate  
Jason Marks  
Kyle Whitaker

**Upper Platte Water Users**

Dennis Strauch – Member

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

**Environmental Groups**

Jacob Fritton – Member  
Melissa Mosier – Member  
Josh Wiese – Member

**Executive Director’s Office (EDO)**

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

**Contractors**

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49 **Welcome and Administrative:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*  
50 Meeting attendees were identified from Microsoft Teams. Turner introduced Ed Weschler, a  
51 new junior engineer in the Headwaters Lakewood office and also noted that this was Kevin  
52 Werbylo’s last day with Headwaters. There were no agenda modifications. A minor edit to the  
53 draft August meeting minutes was noted. Cowley made a motion to approve the minutes, second  
54 by Bradley. There were no objections, and the August WAC meeting minutes were approved.  
55

56 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates:**

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58 ***Leasing and Recharge Projects: Seth Turner, EDO***

59 There have been no excess flows since late May, and therefore no recent recharge operations.  
60 Credits to the Lake McConaughy EA in October from the CPNRD and NPPD surface water  
61 leases, CNPPID irrigator lease, and No-Cost NCCW totaled about 18,600 acre-feet (AF). With  
62 flows at Grand Island below targets, the Cook well has been pumping to the river continuously  
63 since August 25. When the meter was last checked in late September, about 99 AF had been  
64 pumped, and another 80 AF is estimated since then. Total pumping for the year is approaching  
65 400 AF, and the EDO expects the well to remain on for at least another few weeks. Total release  
66 from the Pathfinder EA was 9,863 AF, of which 7,789 AF eventually reached the Lake  
67 McConaughy EA.  
68

69 ***Platte Basin Hydrology Update: Seth Turner, EDO***

70 Except for two short precipitation-driven spikes in flow, the Platte River near Grand Island has  
71 been consistently below target flows since late July. Still, the real-time hydrologic condition  
72 designation for both the August-September and October-November periods was normal. Target  
73 flows are presently 1,800 cfs through November 15, then drop to 1,000 cfs until November 30.  
74 The October 19 US Drought Monitor map shows that drought conditions have worsened cross  
75 most of the Platte Basin compared to late July. With the inclusion of the Pathfinder EA transfer,  
76 the September end-of-month storage in the Lake McConaughy EA was about 103,600 AF. With  
77 additional credits in October, the volume will end the month around 122,000 AF.  
78

79 ***North Platte Chokepoint Update: Seth Turner, EDO***

80 After meeting with the chokepoint planning workgroup in April, the EDO developed a  
81 vegetation treatment plan for the reach upstream of the Hwy 83 bridge. This required  
82 coordination with PVWMA and the Lincoln County Weed Superintendent to get landowner  
83 permissions; a number of landowners declined or did not respond, and the areas targeted for  
84 spraying had to be adjusted accordingly. Focusing on riverbanks and dry, overgrown side  
85 channels, about 43 acres were sprayed during the week of October 4. All vegetation in those  
86 areas was sprayed, not just phragmites.  
87

88 The workgroup met again on October 19. The plan for 2022 includes budget for disking in the  
89 same areas sprayed in 2021 as well as funds for as-needed maintenance of the State Channel  
90 berm. The EDO will also take another look at bypass canal concepts to present to the GC in  
91 March 2022. Mosier asked about funding, and Turner said this initial investigation would just



92 involve EDO staff time. Altenhofen inquired about the need for eminent domain to construct  
93 such a project, would this just put us back in the same situation that was faced for the J2  
94 Reservoirs project? Farnsworth confirmed that the Program does not have the authority to  
95 condemn land, so a canal project would need to involve a project sponsor who can do that if  
96 necessary. Steinke asked about sediment transport modeling, and Turner said it was included in  
97 several of the past studies, both upstream and downstream of the Hwy 83 bridge.

98

99 ***Recapture Wells Network:*** Kevin Werbylo, EDO

100 Werbylo gave an update on the recapture network project, which is a series of 7 groundwater  
101 wells and pipelines that will be constructed, owned, and operated by the Tri-Basin NRD. The  
102 NRD will operate the project to reduce deficits for the Program via an executed water service  
103 agreement. The project has been a long time in the making and construction is finally  
104 commencing, as the NRD recently received a 404 permit for construction of the pipelines. The  
105 construction work was advertised as two separate bids, one bid for drilling and install of the  
106 groundwater wells and one bid for install of the pipelines and associated discharge structures.  
107 The original bids were due in September and opened at an NRD Board meeting. The bids for  
108 well installs were straightforward, and the winning bid from Downey Drilling was \$178,000.  
109 Altenhofen asked if this price includes all 7 wells and pumps, which it does. The bids for the  
110 pipelines did not meet specifications and were consequently all rejected by the NRD Board. The  
111 consensus was that supply chain issues are resulting in high costs and limited material  
112 availability. As a result, the NRD extended the completion date of the work, added clarifications  
113 to the bid, and rebid the pipeline work. Bids will be opened publicly at the NRD Board meeting  
114 tonight (Tuesday, 10/26). Right now, the wells are scheduled to be drilled in the next few weeks  
115 and construction of the pipeline is scheduled to be completed by spring 2022.

116

117 ***Cottonwood Ranch BSR Project:*** Kevin Werbylo, EDO

118 Werbylo gave an update on the Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge project. There have  
119 been no diversions of excesses this year, but the project partially filled from rainfall and runoff a  
120 couple times. Altenhofen asked about the surface storage capacity of the project, and Werbylo  
121 said about 460 AF. It is likely that deliveries will be ceased until the spring (even if there are  
122 excesses this winter) as more fillings are desired before winter deliveries are tested. Steinke  
123 noted that there is ongoing maintenance of Phelps County Canal that would prevent diversions  
124 for the next few weeks anyway. A fence project was completed in the spring and the site will be  
125 put back into the grazing rotation starting in 2022.

126

127 At the request of the EDO, CNPPID submitted an application to Nebraska DNR to use EA water  
128 at Cottonwood Ranch. The EDO spoke with the TAC about potentially filling the project with  
129 EA water in dry times during the migration seasons to ensure that water would be present for  
130 whooping cranes. The TAC was against giving a general recommendation to use EA water to fill  
131 the recharge project for habitat. Farnsworth clarified that this was likely a result of other TAC  
132 discussions regarding the limited use of palustrine wetlands by whooping cranes and  
133 prioritization of EA water for in-channel uses. Turner noted that EA water could be used to test  
134 the gates and an unresolved cavitation issue in the pipeline, particularly with new staff involved



135 in project operations. There were no objections to using EA water for these limited purposes.  
136 Ideally, the project will be filled using excess flows in the spring, but a few hundred AF of EA  
137 water could be available for infrastructure testing and staff training if excesses do not  
138 materialize.

139  
140 **Water Projects Accounting:** *Seth Turner, EDO*

141 Turner presented an overview of the water projects accounting updates, which included a  
142 thorough review of data sources and calculations in the previous analysis (through 2018) plus the  
143 inclusion of operations data from 2019 and 2020. Turner first described the hydrologic context  
144 for project operations in 2019 and 2020. There were excesses in the first half of January 2019  
145 and shortages in February 2019, followed by a bitter cold snap and then flooding downstream on  
146 the Platte and elsewhere in Nebraska. Flows at Grand Island were above targets for most of the  
147 time from mid-March 2019 into June 2020, after which conditions quickly turned much drier.  
148 Flows were mostly below targets from August through the end of 2020. Turner then walked  
149 through accounting highlights for each of the Program’s water projects.

150  
151 Overall Program water acquisitions from 2007-2020 include about 868,000 AF from in-  
152 kind/unpaid sources (e.g., Storable Natural Inflows in Lake McConaughy, Pathfinder EA  
153 releases, No-Cost NCCW) and more than 300,000 AF from paid sources, including all other  
154 recharge and leasing projects except Tamarack. Lake McConaughy EA releases represent by far  
155 the Program’s largest contribution to river flows. In total, more than a million AF have been  
156 added to the North Platte, South Platte, and Platte rivers from Program projects, of which nearly  
157 812,000 AF reached Grand Island, and about 526,000 AF reduced target flow deficits.  
158 Individual project contributions vary, but the overall deficit reductions represent about 65% of all  
159 Program water reaching Grand Island and 51% of all Program water added to the river system.

160  
161 Runge noted the importance of being able to characterize species benefits, not just reductions to  
162 target flow deficits. Turner said that’s why the accounting analysis results include both total  
163 volumes reaching Grand Island and the deficit reductions. The estimated deficit reductions are  
164 directly related to the Program’s water objectives, but total water reaching Grand Island indicates  
165 other species benefits through the habitat reach.

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167 Turner requested that any comments on the Draft Water Projects Accounting Update memo be  
168 submitted by Tuesday, November 16.

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170 **2022 Water Plan Budget:** *Seth Turner and Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

171 Turner and Werbylo reviewed the proposed water plan budget for 2022, most of which consists  
172 of leasing and recharge costs associated with Water Action Plan projects. Unit costs for recharge  
173 projects increase 3% annually; lease terms are generally unchanged. Budget for the Phelps  
174 County Canal recharge project also includes about \$11,000 for electrical power, general O&M,  
175 and a SCADA system for the Cook well. There are no new construction costs. Budget for the  
176 Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge includes costs for maintenance of the Rubicon gates  
177 and controls, site monitoring and maintenance, and electrical power. Per agreement with



178 CNPPID, there will be no water delivery costs until the construction cost of the pipeline is  
179 exceeded. The budget for the recapture wells project covers admin and electricity/pumping  
180 costs, per agreement with Tri-Basin NRD. Other budget items include maintenance and taxes for  
181 properties acquired for future water projects; water monitoring, including stream gage cost-  
182 shares and weather stations; diking and maintenance at the North Platte chokepoint, and Special  
183 Advisors for hydrogeology and civil infrastructure. Total proposed water plan budget is  
184 \$4,222,850.

185

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

187 The GC Special Session to review the 2022 budget will be a virtual meeting on November 10.

188 The next quarterly GC meeting is scheduled to be held in person in Denver on December 7-8.

189 The schedule for 2022 WAC meetings is as follows: February 1 (virtual), May 3 (in person),

190 August 2 (virtual), October 25 (in person).

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192 **Action Items**

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194 **General WAC**

- 195 • Submit comments on draft accounting update memo by Tuesday, November 16.

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197 **ED Office**

- 198 • N/A