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PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams
October 25, 2022

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Kara Scheel – Member

Don Baggus

State of Wyoming

Michelle Gess

State of Nebraska

Jennifer Schellpeper – Member

Kari Burgert – Alternate

Justin Ahern

Caitlin Kingsley

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Jeff Runge – Member

Mark Porath – Alternate

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Member

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke – Chair

Brandi Flyn – Member

Jeff Shafer – Member

Nolan Little

Scott Shaneman

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Kyle Whitaker – Member

Joe Frank – Alternate

Jason Marks

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Environmental Groups

Jacob Fritton – Member

Josh Wiese – Alternate

Bill Taddicken

Executive Director’s Office

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Justin Brei

Libby Casavant

Seth Turner

Ed Weschler

Contractors/Interested Parties

None

8



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

10 Meeting attendees were identified from Microsoft Teams. There were no agenda modifications.
11 Revisions to the original draft August WAC meeting minutes were noted. Altenhofen made a
12 motion to approve the minutes, second by Strauch, no objections, approved.
13

14 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates:** *Seth Turner and Ed Weschler, EDO*

15
16 ***Leasing and Recharge Projects:***

17 Turner reported that there have been no excess flow diversions for recharge, and there have been
18 only 2 days above target flows at Grand Island since the end of the EA release at the beginning
19 of July. With perpetual shortages, the 8 recapture wells have pumped a cumulative volume of
20 nearly 2,200 AF this year. Six of the recapture wells are presently shut off for construction work
21 on the pipelines.
22

23 Altenhofen asked about the depletive effects of the well pumping. Turner said that will
24 eventually be factored into the operations accounting, but we do not yet have unit response
25 functions for the 7 new wells and there is no specific timeline for developing them.

26 Runge asked if the pumped water gets diverted by the Kearney Canal and therefore misses
27 sections of the associated habitat reach, and if the project accounting will differentiate between
28 water in the river and the canal. Turner said that is not likely to be trackable given the EDO's
29 current operations accounting methods, which focus on the amount of water at the point of return
30 to the river channel and an estimation of how much reaches Grand Island based on standard loss
31 factors from the WMC Loss Model. Altenhofen asked to clarify whether there are canals
32 diverting at the same time as the recapture pumping. Turner said yes, that has been the case this
33 summer and into the early fall. The pumped water from the recapture network enters the river
34 upstream of the Kearney Canal diversion, but there is no provision to protect that pumped water
35 in the channel.
36

37 Turner said 27,280 AF was released from the Pathfinder accounts (9,600 AF from Municipal
38 Account, 17,680 AF from Pathfinder EA), mostly in mid-August. After subsequent release from
39 Guernsey Reservoir in September, about 21,281 AF (78.4%) reached Lake McConaughy. The
40 transit losses were high but not unexpected given the dry conditions.
41

42 Surface water leasing credits to the Lake McConaughy EA in October included 14,395 AF from
43 CPNRD, 3,306 AF from NPPD, 868 AF from the CNPPID irrigator lease, and 314 AF from no-
44 cost NCCW.
45

46 ***Recapture Network Construction:***

47 Turner reported that while all of the new recapture wells are operational, work to repair leaks in
48 the pipelines is still ongoing. A plan is finally in place, with the contractor set to attempt repairs
49 to the pipeline between wells 2 and 3. The 16" pipelines from well 3 to the river discharge and
50 from well 5 to the river discharge will be removed and replaced entirely with 15" gasketed PVC
51 pipe. Work is to be completed by December 31, 2022.



52 ***Platte Basin Hydrology:***

53 Weschler reported that Platte River flows near Grand Island continue to be well below median
54 and target flows. There was a period of about 45 days in August-September during which the
55 flow was below 10 cfs; 29 days had zero flow. The real-time hydrologic condition continues to
56 be dry, and the USFWS target flow is 1300 cfs through November 15. Drought conditions
57 continue to persist across most of the Platte Basin, with southwestern Nebraska and far
58 northeastern Colorado in extreme or exceptional drought. Snowpack in the South Platte Basin as
59 of October 24 was 41% of normal. Runge requested a link to Colorado snowpack data, which
60 Scheel provided in the meeting chat.¹

61
62 Taddicken noted the continued low river flows, in particular a dry channel at Audubon’s Rowe
63 Sanctuary, and asked if there is any consideration of EA releases during the fall whooping crane
64 migration. Farnsworth said there generally hasn’t been a fall release because there are typically
65 maintenance outages in the NPPD and CNPPID systems that affect the ability to deliver water to
66 the habitat reach in October. Outages this year are scheduled until around November 15.
67 Farnsworth also noted that there is erosion on the Program’s Wyoming property, so that water is
68 flowing into the north channel instead of the south, and the split appears to be getting worse.
69 This will be a priority investigation for the Program in 2023. Runge asked if clearwater returns
70 from the Kearney Canal were contributing to the problem. Farnsworth said no, Kearney Canal
71 return is well below the Wyoming Property. The issue was more likely that the side channel is
72 lower than the main channel, which occurs regularly in the Associated Habitat Reach. There was
73 additional discussion of NPPD’s Kearney Canal operations during the fall as well as CNPPID’s
74 hydrocycling. Steinke said there simply isn’t enough water to reach the “high” step of the cycle;
75 while there is some water going down the river, it’s not enough to get into the south channel near
76 Rowe.

77
78 Marks inquired about the extent of the reach that was dry in August-September. Farnsworth said
79 flows were very low at Wood River, dry at Grand Island, and given the lack of tributary inflows,
80 dry most of the way to the Loup River confluence at Columbus, about 70-80 miles. Shafer noted
81 that Nebraska DNR’s Platte River DSS provides flows at key gages down to the mouth of the
82 river. Schellpeper provided a link in the meeting chat.²

83
84 ***Sediment Augmentation Project:***

85 Weschler provided an overview of this year’s full-scale sediment augmentation project. This
86 was the Program’s 6th year of the project, and the site was just downstream of the original 2017
87 project site, about 1.1 miles downstream of the J-2 Return. Work was completed by Meyer
88 Construction in September and early October, with about 43,700 cubic yards (65,550 tons) of
89 materials being pushed into the river channel from an adjacent terrace on the north bank. The
90 contractor was successful at hitting the design elevations. The EDO is starting a comprehensive
91 analysis to assess what the project has accomplished to date.

¹ https://www.weather.gov/bou/co_snowpack

² <https://gis.ne.gov/portal/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=f26a3b4a2fd1446f9ce0ce2bf0754b14>



92 **2023 Water Plan Budget/Work Plan:** *Seth Turner, EDO and Jason Farnsworth, ED*
93 Turner and Farnsworth discussed an agreement the Program is working on with CNPPID to fund
94 the Phelps and Elwood recharge projects through the end of the First Increment Extension in
95 2032. In September, the GC approved an amendment withdrawing the Program from the water
96 service agreement with CNPPID and the State of Nebraska for the J-2 Regulating Reservoirs
97 Project. This will make about \$11.2 million of First Increment Funds available. About \$9.2
98 million will be allocated for 10 years of excess flow diversions for the Phelps and Elwood
99 projects.

100
101 The remaining \$2 million will be the Program’s contribution towards the construction of a
102 seepage control system at Elwood Reservoir. Seepage issues were identified below the dam near
103 the pump station in late 2019, and CNPPID has been working with a consultant to diagnose the
104 problem and design a solution. Because of this issue, Elwood Reservoir has been operating at a
105 reduced capacity about 10 ft below full pool (full pool = 37,800 AF, with 25,700 AF of live
106 storage). Construction of the seepage control system in 2023 will allow full recharge operations
107 to resume for the remainder of the Extension. The new agreement is expected to be presented to
108 the GC for approval in December 2022.

109
110 Turner reviewed the individual line items in the water plan budget for 2023. With the
111 anticipated approval of the agreement discussed above, no additional funding is proposed for the
112 Phelps and Elwood recharge projects under WPRT-1 and WPRT-2. The single largest item in
113 the budget is for leasing surface/storage water under WPST-1. The EDO is negotiating 10-year
114 lease agreements with CPNRD (about 14,250 AF/yr), NPPD (3,306 AF/yr), and CNPPID
115 (10,000 AF/yr), all at \$90/AF, and it is hoped that the terms will be settled by the time of the
116 June 2023 GC meeting. Total budget for these leases is about \$24.8 million.

117
118 The budget also includes \$325,000 for groundwater recapture under WPRT-4. This includes
119 \$125,000 for the recapture agreement with Tri-Basin NRD. The Program will reimburse Tri-
120 Basin for all associated expenses. Seven new recapture wells were constructed in 2022, and the
121 existing Cook well was incorporated into this line item. Some of the annual costs are now
122 known, but electricity costs for well pumping remain highly uncertain. The other \$200,000 is for
123 a consultant study of expanding recapture to include additional wells and/or a gravity outlet from
124 Elwood Reservoir to Plum Creek. The EDO, in consultation with advisory committees, will
125 develop an RFP for this study in the first half of 2023.

126
127 Other line items cover water-related items including CPNRD and NPPD canal recharge;
128 maintenance for the Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge project; the Pathfinder Municipal
129 Account and CNPPID irrigator leases; maintenance and taxes for land-for-water properties;
130 surface water, groundwater, and weather monitoring; maintenance of the State Channel Berm at
131 the North Platte chokepoint; and Special Advisors for hydrogeology and civil infrastructure. The
132 total water plan budget proposed for 2023 is \$26,484,000.

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134



135 **Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*
136 2023 WAC Meeting Schedule: February 7, May 2, August 1, October 24. Whether the meetings
137 will be virtual or in-person will be determined later.
138

139 **Action Items**

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141 **General WAC**

- 142 • N/A

143
144 **ED Office**

- 145 • Send placeholder invites for 2023 WAC meetings.