



- 1 **PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP -or- Program)**
- 2 **Land Advisory Committee (LAC) Virtual Meeting**
- 3 Wednesday, February 12, 2025; 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM CST
- 4 *Meeting held virtually*
- 5
- 6 **Land Advisory Committee (LAC)**
- 7 **State of Wyoming** **Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)**
- 8 Michelle Hubbard – Member (online) Brock Merrill – Member (online)
- 9 Bill Brewer – Alternate (online)
- 10
- 11 **State of Colorado** **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)**
- 12 Kara Scheel – Member (online) Matt Rabbe – Member (online)
- 13
- 14 **State of Nebraska** **Environmental Entities**
- 15 Ted LaGrange – Member (online) Cody Wagner – Vice-Chair (online)
- 16 Caitlin Kingsley – Alternate (online) Tim Smith – Member (online)
- 17
- 18 **Power Districts**
- 19 Dave Zorn – Chair (online)
- 20 Jim Jenniges – Member (online)
- 21
- 22 **Local Nebraska Rep. – Central Platte Natural Resources District (CPNRD)**
- 23 Dave Carr – Member (online)
- 24
- 25 **Local Nebraska Rep. – Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (TBNRD)**
- 26 John Thorburn – Member (online)
- 27
- 28 **Local Nebraska Rep. – Joint CPNRD/TBNRD**
- 29 None
- 30
- 31 **Executive Director’s Office (EDO)** **Other Participants**
- 32 Jason Farnsworth, ED (online) Melissa Mosier – Audubon (online)
- 33 Tim Tunnell (online) Cody Miller – TNC (online)
- 34 Steven Labay – Service (online)
- 35 Tyler Martin – State of Nebraska (online)
- 36
- 37



38 **WELCOME & ADMINISTRATIVE**

39 Chairman Zorn called the meeting to order at 9:00 am Central Time. Due to inclement weather, it was  
40 decided out of precaution that this meeting would be hosted online only. The EDO acknowledged all  
41 members attending virtually. Zorn asked for agenda modifications. None offered. Zorn asked for the  
42 LAC’s recommendation on the minutes of the October 2024, LAC meeting.

43 **LAC MOTION:** *Merrill moved, and Wagner seconded to approve the October 2024, LAC Meeting minutes.*  
44 Minutes approved.

45  
46 **GENERAL UPDATE AND OTHER COMMITTEE COORDINATION**

47 Rabbe gave an update of TAC activities. The TAC reviewed target species monitoring reports from 2024  
48 which included both tern/plover, and whooping crane and received an update on pallid sturgeon  
49 monitoring. The TAC discussed the potential for reduced riverine survey efforts going forward. Updates  
50 were provided regarding whooping crane stopover/flyover progress and riverine roost site selection as  
51 well as a recap of previous research on peak flow importance to channel conditions. Germination  
52 suppression evaluation and success was discussed again, and the EDO presented a plan and options for  
53 evaluating it going forward. The TAC discussed wet meadows and future efforts to publish science  
54 related to them. The Grassland Management working group presented early efforts and the TAC  
55 approved a recommendation to conduct grassland vegetation monitoring in 2025.

56  
57 Farnsworth updated the group on WAC and GC.

58 The WAC is focused on recharge. The biggest project that's ongoing right now is looking at adding an  
59 outlet to Elwood Reservoir to utilize roughly 15,000-acre feet a year of leased storage water. Right now,  
60 that water's recharged into the aquifer and slowly comes back to the river. The outlet from the reservoir  
61 would be to Plum Creek, which would let us get something like 100 CFS maximum back to the river as  
62 surface water instead of groundwater accretion. A consulting group is working on designing the outlet  
63 and working with the landowner. There is a need to score some groundwater projects (CWR Recharge  
64 Project) that have been sort of sitting on the books for quite a while. CNPPID will take on a larger role in  
65 managing Cottonwood Ranch broad scale recharge project. They have delivered water to the property  
66 line historically and we were responsible for operations and maintenance of that water infrastructure.  
67 So, they're going to take care of basic maintenance on the structures and integrate it into their SCADA  
68 system for more efficient operation of that project.

69  
70 Governance committee met in December, approved the 2025 budget. The biggest land issue is the  
71 counting of conservation lands during a second increment and what that might mean. Governance  
72 committee approved two management plans from last year as well. GC will meet on March 25 & 26 in  
73 Kearney.

74  
75 Tunnell updated the group that the only change to the Land Objective milestone summary is the newest  
76 acquisition of the Broadfoot South property, which added 300 or so acres. There was a question about  
77 the Leach agreement of 56 acres. Tunnell answered that is a private landowner management agreement  
78 that we have with the landowner in the Minden to Gibbon reach, mainly for disking. Farnsworth added  
79 that it doesn’t count toward the extension plus up, it just accrues to the first increment land objective.  
80 Tunnell update group on a few land management items including the moving of the lodge and Quonset  
81 off the Dyer tract, progress report of tree clearing project on the Lindstrom tract, and status of the Rx  
82 fire cooperative project with RWBJV, NGPC, CPNRD, and FWS.



84 **FY 2024 LAND WORK REPORT**

85 Tunnell went through the expenditures for land work line items for 2024.

86 **LAC MOTION:** *Wagner moved, and Rabbe seconded to approve the FY 2024 Land Work Report and move*  
87 *it to the GC. FY 2024 Land Work Report approved.*

88  
89 **SECOND INCREMENT COUNTING OF CONSERVATION LANDS**

90  
91 Farnsworth provided a brief history regarding the counting of conservation lands. In the early 1990s  
92 when Fish and Wildlife Service was establishing conservation needs or targets for the central Platte for  
93 endangered species as part of the joint study, they came up with a total habitat restoration goal or land  
94 goal of 29,000 acres. To contribute to recovery of these target species, we needed to have 29,000 acres  
95 of conservation protected habitat from basically Lexington to Chapman. As governors and secretary of  
96 interior got together to negotiate the first increment of the program, it was decided to take an  
97 incremental approach and set the first increment land milestone at 10,000 acres. Additionally, there  
98 were some rules about how it was supposed to be new conservation land rather than existing  
99 conservation land. Anything protected or managed prior to July 1st, 1997 couldn't count, and the intent  
100 was an incremental increase in conservation ownership. At the very beginning of the Program document  
101 is some language that says, during a second increment of the Program, existing conservation lands, land  
102 holdings by the Crane Trust, TNC, Audubon, power districts, etc. that doesn't currently count could be  
103 counted towards the 29,000 during second increment with approval of the Governance Committee or  
104 with approval of conservation organizations. Farnsworth stated, "What does that mean for it to count?"  
105 and that from his research, the Platte Program is different than many other conservation, or many other  
106 ESA or ecosystem restoration or recovery programs in that conservation organizations have a full seat at  
107 the governance committee table, including votes. Conservation organizations have sort of the same  
108 voting level of authority as water users and folks like that. The only people that have a higher level are  
109 the states and the federal government. They have a single veto vote. Additionally, going back in history,  
110 was the good work that conservation organizations had already done to restore land in the Central  
111 Platte, and then the statement that they could count during the second increment. We're now seven or  
112 eight years out from the end of the first increment extension needing to roll over into a second  
113 increment and have had conversations with the Governance Committee over the last couple of years.  
114 They directed us this year to start that process of having the conversations about what would it mean  
115 for existing conservation lands to count during a second increment. They very explicitly don't want the  
116 LAC to be the place where the policy conversation happens but what they have asked from this body or  
117 this committee specifically is that we undertake a essentially an audit or an assessment of what are the  
118 existing conservation lands in the associated habitat reach right now, when were those lands purchased,  
119 and essentially baseline information for when they would go into a negotiation. The intent is for  
120 conservation organizations and districts to provide to the EDO the most up-to-date land holding GIS  
121 information, shapefiles or geodatabases, whatever's out there, so that it can be compiled with  
122 ownership dates due to the pre-'97 versus post-'97 split for the Program. The TAC also is needing some  
123 of that information for looking at sort of when conservation lands were started to be managed and how  
124 habitats changed on those lands through time. Some parsing of habitat value will likely need to be done  
125 before we provide things to the GC. For example, NGPC has Bassway Strip, which is a bunch of land, but  
126 it's on the North Channel and it's not managed for cranes. So that is conservation land in the reach and  
127 it's a fairly large number of acres, but not actively managed for the things that we care about. Rabbe  
128 suggested using sideboards, one being just specifically lands that are managed for the target species  
129 that would at least check the box from the land side of things on true habitat and another would be land



130 that is owned vs leased vs conservation easement, etc. Rabbe continued discussions of prior to the  
131 extension, when we were kind of going into negotiations for that, one of the things I was tasked with  
132 was evaluating the current state of our land holdings at that time. Weighing that against the other  
133 program milestones and objectives for the extension. He and Czaplewski did an exercise similar to what  
134 the LAC has been tasked with where they went through every land that was owned that could be even  
135 construed as potentially counting towards program land objectives. At that time, going through that  
136 exercise and depending on how you unravel things, there's a lot of devils in the details type of things,  
137 like, for instance, with Central and Jeffrey Island, there is specific FERC language in some of their license  
138 articles that specify whether it could or could not be counted towards the program, things like that. At  
139 that time, we were roughly 1,500 acres down from 29,000 ac goal and is likely where the concept of  
140 adding an additional 1,500 acres for the extension. Rabbe was going to look back for that information  
141 and if available, provide as a starting point for this exercise. LaGrange commented that NGPC has an up-  
142 to-date GIS database that includes date of purchase, but the more challenging part would be  
143 deciphering the target species habitat value from each parcel. Additionally, Department of  
144 Transportation has some properties, that also need to be evaluated for habitat value. Labay asked about  
145 that original exercise and those landowners that were potentially identified. Did we have people as part  
146 of this group reach out to them with, you know, the potential conservation incentive programs that  
147 were available at the time And what kind of incentives were available that would be proposed to a  
148 landowner? Rabbe pointed out that Ducks Unlimited acquires a property, restores it, and then puts an  
149 easement on it, usually a Fish and Wildlife Service easement, and then sell it back privately. Partners for  
150 Fish and Wildlife Service have gone and contracted with a variety of private landowners to do wetland  
151 restoration work that may or may not have any permanent types of protections on them. LaGrange  
152 reiterated that NGPC also works with the partners program on 10-year agreements, and he would not  
153 look at those as long-term conservation, because the landowner at the end of that 10-year agreement  
154 can quit managing the trees that were cleared or whatever. It's not an easement or a long-term  
155 protection mechanism on those properties that we work through in our private land. LaGrange added  
156 that like what was mentioned, Ducks Unlimited does have some easement options along with USDA  
157 NRCS that are mostly perpetual easements. USDA has the rights on those properties and in perpetuity  
158 for the perpetual ones. Those could potentially count as protected. Farnsworth agreed that those are all  
159 good things, and he thinks we should do what we can to sort of figure out how to accommodate those in  
160 this exercise. However, the Program document, for what we need to do for the Governance Committee,  
161 is very specific about who the folks that are on the GC, so the Crane Trust, Audubon, Nature  
162 Conservancy, Power Districts counted if or to the extent that they're managed for an endangered  
163 species habitat specifically. Rabbe asked is it GC specific or just program stakeholders? Because he  
164 thinks DU is on some, or at least an alternate with one of the committees. Jenniges agreed with  
165 Farnsworth it was very specific to Audubon, Crane Trust, Nature Conservancy, and Power Districts  
166 because if you don't bring those lands in for the second increment you can't get to 29,000 acres without  
167 buying them out. The question is "do conservation landowners get Program help to maintain them or do  
168 they count "as is" regardless of habitat quality?" That is the policy question in front of the GC which is a  
169 question that was agreed to way back in the day that says they will count towards the objective if the GC  
170 agrees to it. The intent of putting the land plan together and getting 10,000 acres was to not be  
171 purchasing lands already protected.

172  
173 Homework for each of the conservation organizations listed in the Program documents is to provide the  
174 EDO with the most up-to-date parcel information (including purchase date) and use to compare to the  
175 originally exercises that Rabbe mentioned he and Czaplewski completed at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> increment.



176 After the next LAC meeting, a smaller subgroup will be assigned to kind of tackle some of the  
177 categorization of some of those lands and come up with maybe some sort of an accounting system for  
178 what category each falls into and put together something that could then be brought back to the LAC  
179 and then get some sort of an agreement or consensus before we take those numbers to the GC.

180

181 **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

182 No items requiring executive session

183

184 **PUBLIC FORUM**

185 Chairman Zorn asked for public comments, none were offered.

186 **LAC MOTION:**

- 187 • October 18, 2024, LAC Meeting minutes approved.  
188 • 2024 Land Work Report approved.

189 *Future calendar events:*

190 May 14, 2025 - 9:00- 11:00 CDT [2nd Quarter LAC meeting](#), Kearney, NE

191 August 13, 2024 - 9:00- 11:00 CDT 3rd [Quarter LAC meeting](#), Kearney, NE

192 October 15, 2024 - 9:00- 11:00 CDT [4<sup>th</sup> Quarter LAC meeting](#), Kearney, NE

193

194 **LAC MEETING END**

195 The LAC meeting adjourned at 10:07 AM Central Time.