

**1      PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP -or- Program)****2      Land Advisory Committee (LAC) Virtual Meeting**

3      Wednesday, May 14, 2025; 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM CST

**5      Land Advisory Committee (LAC)****6      State of Wyoming**

7      Michelle Hubbard – Member (online)

8      Bill Brewer – Alternate (online)

**Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)**

Brock Merrill – Member (online)

**10     State of Colorado**

11     Kara Scheel – Member (online)

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

Matt Rabbe – Member

**13     State of Nebraska**

14     Ted LaGrange – Member (online)

15     Caitlin Kingsley – Alternate (online)

**Environmental Entities****17     Power Districts**

18     Dave Zorn – Chair

19     Jim Jenniges – Member (online)

**21     Local Nebraska Rep. – Central Platte Natural Resources District (CPNRD)**

22     Dave Carr – Member

**24     Local Nebraska Rep. – Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (TBNRD)**

25     John Thorburn – Member (online)

**27     Local Nebraska Rep. – Joint CPNRD/TBNRD**

28     None

**30     Executive Director's Office (EDO)**

31     Jason Farnsworth, ED

32     Tim Tunnell

**Other Participants**

Steve Labay - Service

Josh Wiese – Crane Trust (online)

Tyler Martin – State of Nebraska (online)

39 **WELCOME & ADMINISTRATIVE**

40 The meeting of the Land Advisory Committee (LAC) was called to order by Chairman Zorn. The minutes  
41 from the February 12, 2025, meeting were approved without amendment. Upcoming LAC meetings  
42 were scheduled for May 14, August 13, and October 15, 2025, all to be held in Kearney, Nebraska.

43 **GENERAL UPDATE AND OTHER COMMITTEE COORDINATION**

44 Rabbe provided an update from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which met in April. The TAC  
45 reviewed the 2024 fall whooping crane monitoring report but deferred approval pending updates to  
46 reflect a new population estimate from Aransas, expected in June. Additional updates were provided on  
47 the Program's bat monitoring efforts for northern long-eared and tricolored bats, data analysis around  
48 whooping crane stopovers and flyovers, sediment augmentation planning, and the lower Platte River  
49 hydrodynamic model. A significant discussion focused on the publication strategy for western whooping  
50 crane Ecotope data—whether to frame it primarily as research or also include implications for policy.  
51 The group agreed that the EDO should develop a draft to give TAC members something concrete to  
52 respond to.

53  
54 Farnsworth updated the group on Water Advisory Committee (WAC) and Governance Committee (GC)  
55 activities. The main WAC issue involves assessing the feasibility of constructing an outlet from Elwood  
56 Reservoir to Plum Creek, which could allow the Program to reserve up to 15,000 acre-feet of excess  
57 flows per year. Currently, water stored in Elwood infiltrates and returns as groundwater far from the  
58 river. The proposed outlet would improve delivery efficiency. A preferred pipeline alignment has been  
59 identified, but securing landowner easements is still a key hurdle. A decision is expected by August.  
60 Additionally, a germination suppression flow release aiming for 1,500 CFS will begin soon under the  
61 driest conditions experienced during such efforts to date.

62  
63 The GC held a virtual meeting in March and will meet in person June 17–18 in Cheyenne, Wyoming,  
64 major focus will include discussion of water contracts.

65  
66 Tunnell reported on the Program's prescribed fire work, noting that they partnered with the Rainwater  
67 Basin Joint Venture, Nebraska Game & Parks, and Central Platte NRD to consolidate burn units into one  
68 bid package. Two contractors were hired, but only three burns covering 650 acres were completed  
69 before a statewide burn ban was implemented. If moisture improves and the ban is lifted, additional  
70 burns may proceed. No major construction projects are planned for spring, although in-channel disking  
71 and OCSW rehabilitation projects are expected later in the year.

72  
73 The lack of funding from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture has affected riparian vegetation  
74 control. PVWMA faces a reduced budget and will rely on airboats for spring vegetation treatment, with  
75 fall helicopter spraying planned if funds allow. A drone contractor was hired to treat areas within 300  
76 feet of bridges from Columbus to McConaughy—challenging zones due to visibility and accessibility. The  
77 Nebraska Invasive Species Council also noted funding cuts, with NEDAG grant availability reduced to  
78 \$350,000 statewide. PVWMA will be submitting a grant application.

79  
80 Discussion on fire management revealed ongoing challenges. Farnsworth and others noted that early  
81 spring burning may not align well with objectives for warm-season grass management, while contractor  
82 availability remains an issue. There was general agreement that integrating fire into management plans  
83 must be more strategic and adaptable. Weise described an alternative approach using rotational grazing

85 to simulate fire's structural effects, though it lacks the nutrient release benefits of burning. This led to  
86 conversation about backup strategies such as patch haying followed by targeted grazing. These methods  
87 can approximate fire's effects depending on grassland composition and treatment timing.

88

#### 89 **PLATTE RIVER RECREATION ACCESS PROGRAM – PUBLIC USE REVIEW**

90 The Public Recreation and Access Subcommittee met on March 31 to review the past year's  
91 implementation and propose updates. Rabbe presented the subcommittee's minutes and walked  
92 through proposed changes. The LAC approved the FY 2024 Public Use Review Report and recommended  
93 outreach coordination with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Education Division. LaGrange  
94 abstained from the vote.

95

#### 96 **GRASSLAND WORKING GROUP**

97 The Grassland Working Group has met to revise management plans for Shoemaker Island and  
98 Cottonwood Ranch. Their approach centers on implementing rotational grazing, haying, and rest  
99 strategies, while acknowledging that prescribed fire has yet to be fully integrated into plans. Rabbe  
100 emphasized that fire planning needs to be flexible and potentially independent of grazing schedules to  
101 avoid being derailed by unpredictable conditions. Zorn and Carr emphasized the need for contingency  
102 planning and prioritization to improve the likelihood of successfully implementing prescribed fire. Weise  
103 highlighted fire's unique role in controlling woody encroachment and proposed targeting fire in the  
104 most at-risk areas.

105

106 Shoemaker Island was identified as a priority site for testing new strategies to preserve grassland  
107 diversity. Monitoring has indicated a slight downward trend in diversity, with cool-season grasses and  
108 exotic species increasing. The new plan calls for splitting management units into subunits on a three-  
109 year cycle that includes rest, early grazing, and late grazing. Hay meadows will follow a two-part rotation  
110 with one half hayed and the other rested each year. Unit 4, adjacent to the river and important for  
111 whooping crane habitat, will continue to be grazed intensively to maintain open viewsheds and prevent  
112 woody encroachment.

113

114 Tunnell reported that GEI was selected as the contractor for vegetation monitoring. Their proposal was  
115 mid-range in cost but ranked highest overall, offering a good balance of value and expertise. A draft  
116 contract is under review and will soon be finalized.

117

#### 118 **SECOND INCREMENT COUNTING OF CONSERVATION LANDS**

119 The LAC also reviewed conservation land accounting for the Second Increment. Tunnell presented GIS  
120 data and landownership details for AHR conservation lands. Farnsworth asked members to verify the  
121 accuracy of acreage and dates and to identify any useful contextual distinctions (e.g., habitat buffers,  
122 land type). The LAC's role is to compile and validate the data, while decisions on what counts toward the  
123 Program's conservation targets are left to the Governance Committee. Historical nuances, such as  
124 treatment of pre-1997 tracts and different ownership entities (e.g., Crane Trust, TNC, Audubon, NGPC),  
125 were acknowledged. The goal is to present a finalized dataset to the GC in June, supported by maps and  
126 summary tools.

127

128 Rabbe suggested using a similar approach to how land tracts are evaluated for acquisition—based on  
129 habitat value—without diving into policy decisions about crediting. Farnsworth emphasized that the  
130 goal is not to debate what should count, but to ensure that data are accurate and useful to decision-



131 makers. Zorn asked all parties to submit corrections by the end of the month to ensure the package is  
132 ready in time for the June 17 GC meeting.

133

134 **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

135 There were no items requiring executive session.

136

137 **PUBLIC FORUM**

138 Chairman Zorn invited public comments; none were offered.

139

140 **LAC MOTIONS**

141 Two motions were formally approved:

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143 Approval of the February 12, 2025, LAC Meeting Minutes.

144

145 Approval of the FY 2024 Public Use Review Report (LaGrange abstained).

146

147 *Future calendar events:*

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

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

150

151 **LAC MEETING END**

152 The meeting adjourned at 10:48 AM Central Time.

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