



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**January 7, 2009**

**Attendees**

Mark Peyton, Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District (Chair)  
Jerry Kenny – Executive Director  
Chad Smith – ED Office  
Jason Farnsworth – ED Office  
Bruce Sackett – ED Office  
Mark Czaplewski – Central Platte Natural Resources District  
Jeff Runge – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Greg Wingfield – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Martha Tacha – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Mike Fritz – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
Jim Jenniges – Nebraska Public Power District  
Felipe Chavez-Ramirez – Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust  
Mike Besson – State of Wyoming  
Ted Kowalski – State of Colorado  
Kevin Urie – Denver Water  
Brock Merrill – Bureau of Reclamation  
Ed Peters – Consultant  
Gary Lingle – AIM Consultants  
Dan Bigbee – EA  
Pat Engelbert – HDR

**Welcome and Administrative**

Chad Smith called the meeting to order in the absence of the Chair and the group proceeded with a roll call. No agenda modifications were suggested.

**Pallid Sturgeon Information Review**

Ed Peters provided a Power Point presentation discussing his final Pallid Sturgeon Information Review report. Mark Czaplewski asked what would be done with the report, the Access database, and the associated PDFs of all documents and literature. Chad Smith said all of those items would be available internally to all Program cooperators, and everything short of the actual copyrighted PDFs will be available on the Program web site. Czaplewski said the Program should consider periodic updates to the database and ensure that new publications, research, and other activities are added as the First Increment progresses. He also said the Program initially agreed to three steps related to pallid sturgeon in the First Increment – 1) existing information review (completed); 2) lower Platte River stage change study (in progress); and 3) water quality monitoring (in progress). Felipe Chavez-Ramirez said the Program should work through issues related to priority hypotheses and direction the Program should take regarding Program activities and potential impacts on pallid sturgeon in the lower Platte. He asked Peters for his thoughts on how the Program should begin to tackle these issues. Peters said a first step would be to look at



what kind of research and investigation is still needed to provide better information on what is happening with pallid sturgeon in the lower Platte. Jeff Runge said sturgeon monitoring (shovelnose) continues on the lower Platte and that information will be helpful. Peters suggested critically reviewing the priority hypotheses related to pallid sturgeon and potentially revising them into a more statistically testable format.

### **Lower Platte Stage Change Study**

Pat Engelbert from HDR discussed the progress of the stage change study in 2008 and plans for 2009. Extremely high flows this year prevented full completion of all data collection efforts at the low, median, and high flow levels. The team was able to gather water surface profile information at very high flows that will be useful for 1-D and 2-D model calibration. High flow data collection is now planned for 2009, as well as additional work on the 1-D and 2-D models. Smith asked if Program participants and staff could preview the 2-D model before it reaches full completion in August. Engelbert said that would work well and that there may be Program participants that want to take part in the high flow data collection effort. Greg Wingfield asked what the HDR Team saw in regard to water temperature and flows during 2008. Engelbert said if high flow data collection occurs in May it will provide a good comparison to data collected in the summer of 2008.

### **High Flow Event Report**

Jason Farnsworth discussed the latest draft of the May 2008 High Flow Event Report and the data, conclusions, and recommendations contained in the report. Farnsworth said that the conclusions related to the magnitude of flows and potential Program pulse flows indicate that the high flow event was at least a fair approximation of the maximum pulse flow available to the Program, and in fact exceeded flood stage at the Overton, Kearney, and Grand Island gages which is something the Program is precluded from doing. Jim Jenniges said one issue is that there is a priority hypothesis (TP4d) that relates specifically to the correlation between river island habitat and flow and that goes to the inclusion of the in-channel bar area to total sand area ratio that is noted in the report. Farnsworth said this will be a constant problem since this will always be flow dependent. Jenniges said we could improve our evaluation of this issue if we could model the flow. Runge discussed the flow-related priority hypotheses and re-iterated the need to look at the reference flow of 1,200 cfs. Wingfield said it would be best to be able to get photography at the right times to allow for comparisons over time. Czaplewski said the Central Platte NRD aerial photography schedule is somewhat flexible. Jenniges said the Program may not only want to get photos in June but needs to be able to get data when flow and other conditions dictate.

Runge asked if any vegetation measurements were taken on the transects. Farnsworth said that was not part of the effort but will begin in 2009 with implementation of the geomorphology/in-channel vegetation monitoring protocol. Runge said some of the earlier Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) transects have vegetation coding (not sure about 2005 transects) that might be useful to go back and compare with the 2008 transects in terms of vegetation impacts of the high flow. Martha Tacha said it would be good to look at impacts where the Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners program has done work over time. Farnsworth said Rich Walters at The Nature



Conservancy who is developing a database of all Partners work and that data will be available for Program use as well. Jenniges also said that we have to be careful with vegetation measurements because the vegetation present one week after the high flow recedes is much different than what is present a month or two later.

**Farnsworth requested any additional comments from the TAC be submitted to him by January 23 to ensure changes could be incorporated into the final report for the February GC meeting.**

#### **Adaptive Management Plan Implementation Activities**

Smith discussed the results of the Adaptive Management Working Group (AMWG) sediment augmentation workshop in December 2008. The results of that workshop have been incorporated into the AMP Strategic Science Plan. **Smith is working on a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for contract expertise to conduct a feasibility analysis of options for the sediment augmentation experiment. That RFQ will be drafted in January and will require TAC review, comment, and approval.** Smith also said is he working on some power analyses for the sediment augmentation experiment to help determine how best to design the experiment and ensure the right data is being collected to detect any changes in river form and the sediment balance during the course of the experiment.

Smith also discussed the December 2008 meeting that focused on defining tern, plover, and whooping crane habitat for measurement and modeling purposes.

#### **Program Monitoring Protocols**

Chavez-Ramirez said the forage fish paper is a good example of how the data we are collecting has some issues and we should reconsider the protocol and refine our effort to ensure our monitoring dataset is useful and applicable to the Program's priority hypotheses. Jenniges said the monitoring protocol is not designed to look at cause-and-effect relationships and we should take at least a few hours to discuss the protocol, how to best get the trend data, and how to get the cause-and-effect data we may need to assess priority hypotheses.

**The TAC agreed to hold day-long session discussing the forage fish monitoring protocol, data needs, and direction for next steps.**

Mark Peyton said the TAC should develop a protocol for publishing data that is generated from the Program. Chavez-Ramirez said there are also data ownership issues and how and who gets access to Program data for analysis and publication. Mike Fritz said the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission retains ownership of data and that publication of data has to be approved, although publication is promoted and encouraged.

Gary Lingle reported a record number of 20 individual whooping cranes were spotted on the river this fall, all of which had a very short duration of stay (one day). No birds were located off-river in fields this fall, which indicates direct migration from the river. Thus, crane use days were not a record even though the number of birds was high. Several fields around the river had



not been harvested which may have had an impact. Jenniges asked if any birds were observed feeding in the river. Lingle said it is hard behavior to determine. Lingle said the addition of rebar and surveying to the protocol did not amount to a substantial addition to the monitoring effort. Tacha asked what percentage of days were flyable during protocol implementation. Lingle said about 70% on the east leg and between 60-70% on the west leg. Mark Czaplewski asked about the status of depth calculations for whooping crane locations on the river. Lingle said there was a database glitch that failed to calculate the depths. Farnsworth said the ED Office is working internally to resolve the issue and those calculations will be completed before the fall 2008 report is finalized.

Dan Bigbee from EA addressed recent questions about how to integrate biocontaminants into the Program's water quality monitoring. Program guidance suggested that the protocol should focus on monitoring, and that the parameters included in the current draft of the protocol are focused on assessing potential impacts from Program activities. Jenniges said he raised the issue because it was noted to him that the Program document states there will be some assessment of biocontaminants in a water quality context. Smith said the issue of biocontaminants was specifically discussed at various times during development of the monitoring protocol and that the general consensus was that the issue may be best addressed through a cause-and-effect research study. Wingfield said one option is to encourage the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality to monitor for *E.coli* and keep track of that relationship versus Program management actions.

#### **Wet Meadows Information Review**

Smith said the ED Office is working on a Scope of Work for a wet meadows information review and some refinement of the existing Program wet meadows Conceptual Ecological Model (CEM) and a new CEM developed by Dr. Enrique Weir at the Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust.

#### **AMP Reporting Session/ISAC Meeting**

Smith mentioned that there will be an Adaptive Management Plan reporting session at the GC meeting in February, likely an hour or two during the actual GC meeting. Topics to be covered will include the Strategic Science Plan, workshops, Rapid Prototype Models, a summary of monitoring results, and an update on ongoing Program projects (including the tern/plover foraging habits study, lower Platte stage change study, and pallid sturgeon information review). **Smith is also developing the agenda for the March 11-12 ISAC meeting and requested TAC members forward him questions to ask the ISAC during the meeting and Program documents that should be sent to the ISAC for review.**

#### **2009 TAC Officer Election**

Mark Peyton asked for nominations for a 2009 TAC Chair. Jenniges nominated Peyton; Chavez-Ramirez seconded. **The TAC agreed unanimously and Mark Peyton was appointed the 2009 Technical Advisory Committee Chair.**



**Closing Business**

The 2009 TAC meeting schedule is:

- February 4 – Ogallala, NE (9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Mountain time; focus on forage fish monitoring/research and Program data ownership/publication)
- April 22 – Denver, CO (9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Mountain time)
- June 17 – Kearney, NE (9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Central time)

Meeting adjourned.

**Summary of Action Items/Decisions from January 2009 TAC meeting**

- 1) The Pallid Sturgeon Information Review, the Access database, and other associated information (but not copyrighted publications) will be made available on the Program web site.
- 2) Jason Farnsworth needs any additional comments on the High Flow Report by January 23.
- 3) Chad Smith will seek TAC review and approval of a RFQ for a sediment augmentation experiment feasibility analysis.
- 4) The TAC agreed to hold a day-long session discussing the current forage fish monitoring protocol, data needs related to forage fish, and how to best ensure the Program is acquiring the right data relative to the priority hypotheses.
- 5) The TAC agreed to discuss data ownership and publication issues related to Program data.
- 6) Chad Smith requested that TAC members submit questions to ask the ISAC at the upcoming March ISAC meeting and also documents that ISAC members should be reviewing.
- 7) The TAC appointed Mark Peyton as 2009 Chair.
- 8) The TAC agreed on a schedule of meetings through June 2009.