



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
 ED Office Conference Room – Kearney, NE
 May 11, 2011

Attendees

- Mike Besson – State of Wyoming (Chair)
- Jerry Kenny – ED
- Chad Smith – ED Office
- Dave Baasch – ED Office
- Jason Farnsworth – ED Office
- Steve Smith – ED Office
- Mark Peyton – Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District
- Jim Jenniges – Nebraska Public Power District
- Mark Czaplewski – Central Platte Natural Resource District
- Jeff Runge – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Matt Rabbe – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Doug Hallum – Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
- Mike Fritz – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- Suzanne Sellers – Colorado Water Conservation Board
- Rich Walters – Nature Conservancy
- Mark Sherfy – USGS – Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center (teleconference)
- Mary Harner –Trust
- Walter Wehtje –Trust

Welcome and Administrative

Besson called the meeting to order and the group proceeded with a roll call. C. Smith indicated he had an agenda modification and wanted to discuss the proposed peer review panel for the Stage Change Study.

Stage Change Study Peer Review

C. Smith discussed the list of panel members for the Stage Change Study peer review team that Atkins (PBS&J) had compiled and indicated the Program’s selection team would narrow the list to 5 people for the GC to approve.

Kenny pointed out he was made aware of a potential perception issue with Lee Wilson (Program manager of Cohyst). C. Smith indicated he would see if Atkins could find an additional hydrologist to add to the list in case the selection panel has a perception of conflict issue with Wilson then there would be another option to consider.

Minutes

Runge pointed out a few edits in the December TAC minutes. Baasch made the changes. Rabbe had a few edits in the November TAC minutes that Baasch made. Besson asked for a motion to approve the November TAC Minutes (with revisions discussed), December TAC Minutes (with revisions discussed), January Sediment Augmentation Workshop Minutes, January MCM



Workshop Minutes, and the February Wet Meadows Workshop Minutes. Peyton moved to approve all minutes; Czaplewski seconded the motion; all minutes approved.

Tern and Plover Monitoring and Research

Baasch presented information on the proposed Plover Metapopulation Study for 2012 and the benefits of participating in the study and continuing to band on the central Platte. Baasch asked the group if there was any reason not to participate in the Metapopulation study. Besson asked how participating in the study would change what we would do. Baasch and C. Smith stated that depending upon what level we participated, participating in the study as recommended by the EDO would mean that we would band plovers on the central Platte. Rabbe mentioned that different organizations that participate in the study would be asked to band and resight plovers and others would only be resighting plovers and that the study is not guaranteed to be funded. Besson asked Rabbe why the Service would be comfortable with banding on the central Platte if we were asked to band, but yet we can't band otherwise. Rabbe stated the metapopulation study is a defined study with specific goals and objectives. Rabbe expressed concerns the Service (Martha Tacha) had with banding during 2011 even though banding would be covered under the USGS foraging habits study permit. Rabbe indicated the Service needs to know what would be learned from future banding and how that information would help guide management decisions. Farnsworth stated the Program document lays out all the management objectives, hypotheses, and goals for the Program and that banding is an integral part of the adaptive management plan. Farnsworth stated everyone involved in the Program, except the Service, supports banding and understands that many of the hypotheses and big questions cannot be addressed without banding. Runge stated the Program documents don't discuss how banding is integrated into making management decisions. Farnsworth stated the Service has sat through all the discussions and has to know that banding is an integral part of the Program. Runge said that a research proposal needs to be packaged and explained so that the Service can review it. Peyton asked why banding is allowed everywhere except the central Platte and why the central Platte is so special. Runge said he didn't know. Peyton said he has observed hundreds of plovers at McConaughy over the years and has never observed a banded plover and now that there is no habitat there he wished they would have been banding all along so they could learn where the plovers go and if they come back when there is habitat again. Rabbe indicated the Service is not comfortable with banding at this point because we do not know if the benefits outweigh the risks involved. Baasch asked what the risks were (injury, disturbance, etc) and pointed out that 1 bird was injured in 2 years of banding and that if disturbance was the concern that the site that has had the most disturbances the past 2 years has the most nests again this year. Czaplewski stated we need to figure out how to get past the unresolved issues and how to engage the decision makers so we could move forward. Rabbe read a paragraph from a memo provided by Martha Tacha that stated we need to develop a study plan with specific questions that can be answered with the current sample size and that we would use to guide management. Czaplewski asked if other areas had such a document. Sherfy stated that most areas have such a study design that include banding and like us after a few years they realize the value of banding and simply continue banding into the future (e.g., Missouri River). C. Smith said we would take the current draft of the Synthesis Report and the information Martha sent with Rabbe and would put together a document to hand to the Service for a final decision. Runge said the document should be sent to



Martha Tacha, Carol Aaron, and Mike George then we should set up a meeting to discuss it. Fritz said the metapopulation study plan was still unclear as to what organizations would be observing and banding and that there are a lot of details that need to be worked out prior to 2012. Peyton asked if we needed a vote of TAC support for banding and participation in the metapopulation study. Jenniges said regardless of whether we participate in the metapopulation study the TAC needs to decide if there is merit to continuing banding on the central Platte. Runge said we should contact Carol Aaron to get documentation other organizations use to band on other systems and build on that information to band on the central Platte.

Peyton made a motion to support banding on the central Platte during 2011 based on the Services decision after reviewing documentation the EDO will provide in the upcoming weeks; Czaplowski seconded the motion; all approved.

2010 PRRIP Monitoring and Research Reports

C. Smith stated the 2010 monitoring reports (Tern and Plover Monitoring/Research, Fall Whooping Crane Report, Geomorphology/Vegetation Report, and Wet Meadows Information Review) were all in and in final format. Czaplowski asked if there was money in the budget for a peer review of the Wet Meadow Information Review. Farnsworth and others said the Wet Meadows Literature Review wasn't really a study that was reviewable and that there wasn't as much analysis in that report as originally thought so we probably wouldn't peer review that. The group agreed. C. Smith said he sent out a draft of the Directed Vegetation Research and that several had provided comments, but that if others had any comments they need to send them to him by 13 May. Peyton asked what the next steps were once research projects were completed and reports are accepted. C. Smith indicated the next step was to include information in the Synthesis Report and use it to guide management actions and manage expectations in the future.

Runge asked if the vegetation research looked at mature plants also or just seedlings. Farnsworth said they looked at emergent shoots to fully mature plants. Rabbe asked what they considered 1-year seedlings. Farnsworth said they were directed to consider plants that germinated, survived winter and were on river islands the following spring because cottonwoods establish in June and we likely wouldn't implement SDHF during the nesting season to remove these plants.

BREAK

Whooping Crane Telemetry Project

C. Smith led discussion and pointed out that the Whooping Crane Telemetry Project coordinators asked the Program for additional funding to continue the project through 2015. Wehtje stated the Trust and other organizations needed funding for 2011 to capture and band 22 whooping cranes and for monitoring. Besson asked if they were requesting \$125,000 for 2011 and Wehtje said that is what they originally requested, but that they obtained permission to band additional whooping cranes this year so they would need an additional \$17,000 for telemetry equipment as well as an additional \$25,000 to cover the increase in the cost of helicopter capture in Canada; \$167,000 total for 2011. The group all agreed the project was worth funding, but Jenniges asked if we should sole-source the work to the Trust with their financial uncertainties or if the Program could hire staff, consider funneling the money through the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory or if we



should put the work out for competitive bid. Besson asked if funding would be required annually. Wehtje said they would need funding through 2015, but the amount was unknown. Besson asked if the Finance Committee would need to approve funding the project; Kenny said they would. Besson asked if the decision to provide additional funding for the project through 2015 needed to be made during this meeting and asked Wehtje if he could put together a more complete proposal with projected budget through 2015. The group agreed that funding for 2011 needed to be decided at this meeting, but that funding for 2012-2015 could be determined at a later date when a comprehensive study plan was developed. Baasch expressed concern with the willingness of project coordinators to share all the data with the Program when requested and stated it needed to be understood that the Program would have full access to the data where we are a major funding source. Wehtje agreed and said members of the project board (USFWS, USGS, Trust, and Canadian Wildlife Service) would have to agree on including language in the agreement that the Program will have full access to the telemetry data. Peyton said the Program should have representation on the board rather than being represented through the Trust and most everyone agreed. Peyton moved to support providing funding for the Whooping Crane Telemetry Project during 2011 contingent upon the understanding that the Program would have full access to the data, would be named as a partner organization along with the other 4 organizations, and would have representation on the Project board for making decisions. Wehtje and other project partners will develop a study plan with a detailed budget for 2012-2015 to be considered at a later TAC meeting.

Harner asked what data and types of analysis would be most beneficial to the Program. C. Smith stated analyses that result in reducing Program specific uncertainties would be most beneficial. Jenniges added that it would be important to include analyses that helps determine why whooping cranes may or may not stop on the central Platte River (started 20 or 200 miles away, etc). Runge stated it will also be important to determine the time of day when cranes reach the central Platte and decide to stop or not. Wehtje indicated they were collecting that information.

Vegetation Research

Farnsworth discussed findings from the Directed Vegetation Research and the Lateral Erosion Investigation Proposal the research team provided to the Program. Besson asked how important lateral erosion research is to the Program and how soon a decision had to be made. Farnsworth said it is an important river process for removing mature vegetation on the river and that if approved the research would begin mid-summer 2011. Besson mentioned the potential for concern with sole sourcing this work out. Kenny stated the group did compete for the first directed vegetation research project and based on their work we could write up a sole source justification for the GC to consider. The group discussed the value of lateral erosion research and how it would impact management decisions. Farnsworth said this information could be used to determine how much water to use and when to use water, but that some of this information could be obtained through other means. C. Smith suggested discussing the lateral erosion research proposal when we're in the field with the ISAC during the July Workshop.

Whooping Crane Monitoring Protocol and RFP

Jenniges expressed concern with entering a 5-year contract and had to leave the meeting for the day. C. Smith introduced changes that he made to the introduction section of the Whooping



Crane Monitoring Protocol (i.e., added priority hypotheses, big questions, management objectives, and indicators). Baasch elaborated on the changes C. Smith made to the protocol and covered the ‘major’ changes he had made to the Monitoring protocol including:

- Added information on additional data availability such as telemetry, 2005 land cover/use, LiDAR, and annual habitat suitability analysis data
- Moved Protocol history to file titled ‘WC Monitoring Changes Through Time 2001-2011’
- Specified camera requirements to be used by air and ground crews
- Removed collecting video at use sites (never been collected)
- Removed collecting river profile data at random/decoy locations (changed during 2010)
- Included additional aerial surveys and ability to relocate cranes via telemetry project lost during the day (changed during 2010)
- Replaced stadia transit and rod method of collecting river profile data and replaced it with the use of GPS equipment with elevation accuracies $\leq \pm 6$ inches
- Added Active Channel Width as a parameter to be measured
- Added ‘proportion of population using the central Platte River’ as an indicator
- Added information explaining how the contractor could complete river transects
- Moved full definition of ‘Visual Obstruction’ to the definition section in the methods
- Contractor will conduct basic analyses as requested by the Program including analyses related to use of complex, suitable, and unsuitable habitat
- Contractor will produce migration-period summaries and 1 annual report where data is analyzed, presented, and summarized
- Specified that InfoPath is needed to upload data to the Program’s database

Additional changes made at the meeting:

- Decoys placed on private lands as well as NGO, governmental, and Program lands.
- Program staff or partners will place decoys

Rabbe stated Baasch needs to clarify terminology in protocol so it is clear telemetry data will only be used to relocate cranes that were already observed by the monitoring crew.

Czaplewski pointed out an improper use of ‘non-complex habitat’ as it has a specific meaning to the Program; Baasch agreed to change the terminology. Czaplewski mentioned we need to be careful not to change the protocol so much that the data is not comparable to past data (i.e., definition of visual obstruction). Baasch clarified that the definition of visual obstruction was not changed; the full definition present in the previous protocol was simply added to the definition section of the protocol.

Rabbe began to discuss several additional changes the Service compiled; for the sake of meeting time, the group decided those suggestions could be sent to Baasch to make the changes.

WC Monitoring Protocol RFP

The group discussed the duration of the contract and decided to change the contract period to 4 years rather than 5 years. Rabbe asked Baasch to change terminology in the RFP so it was clear that telemetry project data would only be used to relocate crane groups that were already observed by the WC Monitoring Protocol contractor. Farnsworth pointed out the Contractor



selection will be based on quality and not just budget. All supported the Whooping Crane Monitoring Protocol RFP with revisions suggested at the meeting.

PRRIP Monitoring Protocols (2011 and beyond)

Geomorphology/Vegetation Monitoring Protocol

C. Smith said a new RFP would be presented to the TAC in the fall.

LiDAR Aerial Photography Monitoring Protocol

C. Smith said a new RFP would be presented to the TAC in the fall. Besson asked how valuable the LiDAR data has been to us and Farnsworth indicated it is incredibly valuable for many aspects of the Program. Harner asked if there was a possibility of collecting LiDAR data more than once/year. Farnsworth said that hasn't been considered, but there is a possibility of partnering with someone to collect LiDAR more times per year.

Water Quality Monitoring Protocol

C. Smith pointed out the EDO would like to extend EA's contract because they are in the process of modifying the protocol (scaling it back), they are involved in the monitoring the Kearney Canal, and they are a very good contractor.

Czaplewski asked if Karine Gil-Weir was recently contracted to do work for the Program and Baasch and Farnsworth indicated Karine was contracted as a special adviser to compile all historic whooping crane data (1940-2011) into a database for the Program, but that no data analysis would be conducted. Czaplewski stated contracts such as this should be brought to the TAC's attention.

Sediment Augmentation Pilot Scale Management Action

C. Smith indicated the Sediment Augmentation team is in the process of implementing a pilot scale study where 100,000 tons of sediment will be placed in the river annually at the Plum Creek Complex (50,000 tons; via sand pump) and Cottonwood Ranch (50,000 tons; via channel widening).

AMP Documents

C. Smith sent an updated version of the Synthesis Report out to the TAC on 9 May, 2011. We will discuss the Synthesis Report further at the July Workshop with the ISAC and plan to submit a 'Final Version' to the TAC in August and the GC in September. We are planning on having Darcy Pickard and Carl Schwartz assist us with writing the Data Analysis Plan.

Upcoming meetings:

Wet meadow definition/design Workshop – 20-21 June, 2011

ISAC Workshop – 12-14 July, 2011

TAC Meeting – 10 August, 2011

TAC Meeting – 5 October, 2011

**Summary of Action Items/Decisions from 15 February, 2011 Workshop**

- 1) The TAC approved the November TAC Minutes (with revisions discussed), December TAC Minutes (with revisions discussed), January Sediment Augmentation Workshop Minutes, January MCM Workshop Minutes, and the February Wet Meadows Workshop Minutes.
- 2) The TAC voted to support participation in the 2012 Piping Plover Metapopulation Study and, with approval from the Service in the upcoming weeks, to continue banding tern and plover chicks during 2011. The EDO will submit a detailed study plan with justification for continuing to band terns and plovers on the central Platte to Martha Tacha, Carol Aaron, and Mike George of the Service for a decision.
- 3) The TAC supported funding the Whooping Crane Telemetry Project during 2011 contingent upon the understanding that the Program would have full access to the data, would be named as a partner organization along with the other 4 organizations (Trust, FWS, USGS, and CWS), and would have representation on the Project board for making decisions. Jenniges noted that the only option for participating in the Project presented to the TAC was a proposal to fund a Project Coordinator position through the Crane Trust.
- 4) The TAC decided to wait until the July ISAC Workshop to decide whether or not to support the additional Vegetation Research (lateral erosion).
- 5) After making changes suggested at the TAC meeting and incorporating additional Service comments (to be sent), Baasch will send a 'Final Version' of the Whooping Crane Monitoring Protocol to the TAC for an E-mail vote of approval.
- 6) All supported the Whooping Crane Monitoring Protocol RFP with revisions suggested at the meeting (i.e., 4-year contract period rather than 5 years and change terminology in the RFP so it was clear that telemetry project data was only to be used to relocate cranes already observed by the Monitoring crew).
- 7) Scheduled 2 TAC meetings: 10 August, 2011 and 5 October, 2011.