



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM  
 Technical Advisory Committee Conference Call Meeting Minutes  
 November 1, 2011**

**Meeting Participants**

**Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)**

**State of Wyoming**

Mike Besson – Member (Chair)

**State of Colorado**

Suzanne Sellers – Member

**State of Nebraska**

Mike Fritz – Member

Doug Hallum – Alternate

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

Matt Rabbe – Alternate (via phone)

**Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)**

Brock Merrill – Member

**Environmental Entities**

Rich Walters – Member

**Upper Platte Water Users**

**Colorado Water Users**

**Downstream Water Users**

Mark Czaplewski – Member

Jim Jenniges – Member

Mark Peyton – Member

**Executive Director’s Office (EDO)**

Chad Smith

Dave Baasch

Jason Farnsworth

Steve Smith

**Other Participants**

Pat Goltl (Nebraska NRD)

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**Welcome and Administrative**

Besson called the conference call meeting to order and C. Smith announced participants on the call. Besson asked if there were any agenda modifications; none offered.

**PRRIP FY 2012 Budget**

C. Smith discussed the AMP portions of the draft 2012 Program Budget and Work Plan.

**PD-13** \$540,888 in budget of which includes ~\$220,000 for the contract team to finish up design, put bid package together, managing the work, data analysis, etc and ~\$300,000 is the anticipated cost for augmenting sediment at Cottonwood Ranch and at the Plum Creek Complex. Farnsworth added the consultant provided the EDO a fairly wide range of costs associated with augmenting sediment and the EDO developed the budget off the lower end of their estimate.

C. Smith informed the group that the consultant, EDO staff, and Tri-basin NRD met with the Corps and discussed the need of conducting a public hearing and that we expect to have a decision soon and that the Nebraska DEQ informed EDO staff that the Program would not have to mitigate sediment augmentation.

Besson asked how much of the \$540,888 (PD-13) would be spent during 2012 and how much would be carried over to 2013. C. Smith stated \$540,888 is the total remaining budget for the 2-year sediment augmentation pilot study to be spent whenever we can augment sediment (spring and/or fall 2012?), but some of the money would likely be carried over to 2013 to finalize sediment augmentation and data analysis if needed; 2013 Line Item Budget will likely be \$0. Merrill asked if money would be carried over from 2011 budget; C. Smith stated some portion of the \$350,000 budgeted during 2011 would be carried over; however, he wasn't sure how much will be carried over at this point. Besson asked if the \$540,888 in the 2012 budget is for new money; C. Smith indicated it was.

**PD-19** \$230,000 in 2012 budget. \$200,000 for engineering and consulting and \$30,000 for channel plug construction. Besson asked if the estimate was based on sand or log plugs; Farnsworth stated it was based on sand plugs at this point. Merrill asked what the \$200,000 for engineering and consulting would be spent on; Farnsworth stated part of the money is for engineering design, permitting, and construction administration for building the plugs and the other part is for implementation design for flow consolidation including modeling anticipated channel response. Merrill and Jenniges said we should include more detail in the Annual Work Plan explaining what the money will be used for. Hallum asked how much of the \$200,000 would be for permitting; Farnsworth stated it is unclear, but \$200,000 is the EDO's best estimate for what this phase of the project will cost. Besson asked if the money for modeling was for InterFluve or if there were more firms involved; Farnsworth said InterFluve and Tetra Tech plan to team up and will use the Program's 2-D model as the platform for their analysis. Jenniges stated we should break out what the \$200,000 for engineering and consulting would be spent on. C. Smith and Farnsworth will include additional detail to the Annual Work Plan.

**PD-20** \$324,000 in 2012 Budget. Line Item includes costs associated with converting the Fox Tract into wet meadow habitat as well as ground water monitoring. Fritz stated the budget description should include the site name (Fox Tract); Smith said he would include 'Fox Tract' in the description.

**LP-2** \$639,130 in 2012 Budget. C. Smith pointed out Shoemaker Island Complex included the Binfield Tract. Jenniges asked what the money earmarked for Cottonwood Ranch would be spent on; Farnsworth stated the money would be spent on tree removal on the Stahl Tract, prescribed fire, and tree clearing between the river and off-channel sand and water. Farnsworth



and C. Smith said we would include additional complex-specific details in the Annual Work Plan.

**G-1 & G-2** Combined as per the RFP and budgeted at \$118,100.

**G-5** \$450,000 in Budget. Besson asked if the budget includes 1 or more years of work; C. Smith stated it was for 1 year of geomorphology/in-channel vegetation monitoring and data analyses.

**H-2** \$40,000 in the Budget. Includes 2 new DNR gages and fees, Verizon phone bill for downloading data, and USGS maintenance costs.

**IMRP-2** \$35,000 in Budget for ‘white-paper’ report on bird cognition; \$30,000 for report and \$5,000 for Atkins to identify an expert. Czaplewski stated we should get more than a ‘white-paper’ report for \$30,000; C. Smith changed the language to state ‘detailed report.’

**IMRP-3** \$140,000 in Budget.

**IMRP-4** \$203,185 in Budget. Updated estimate from Bob Mussetter; money is for monitoring, 2-D modeling, and data analysis.

**IMRP-5** New Line Item – Shoemaker Island FSM Proof of concept – with \$250,000. C. Smith said this complex would serve as a replicate for the Elm Creek Complex and would cover design costs, monitoring, and applying the model from the Elm Creek Complex to this complex. Rabbe asked if 85% of the channel was consolidated in this reach; Farnsworth said it was not, but that consolidating flows would be impossible with the north channel. C. Smith state this is the best site the Program has to replicate efforts at the Elm Creek Complex. Jenniges said we should implement FSM research activities at this complex because it’s the most downstream site the Program has.

**IMRP-6** \$200,000 in the 2012 Budget. New line item that includes tern and plover habitat availability analyses (2007 & 2012; 2008–2011 will be completed under a separate contract) and whooping crane habitat availability analyses (2007-2012). Baasch state ESO staff will meet with Rainwater Basin Joint Venture on November 3 and we will have a better estimate then. Czaplewski and Jenniges stated the GC and FC might have a concern with sole sourcing the work out given it is a \$200,000 item. Baasch said we considered putting together an RFP for the work that includes the 8 analyses, but determined it is highly unlikely a contractor outside the Platte basin would be able to compete given the ground truthing that will likely be required for the off-channel land classification.

**TP-1** \$215,000 in the 2012 Budget. Baasch explained the budget includes funds for Wildlife Service to trap for 6 months at Dyer, Cottonwood Ranch, Broadfoot South, and Newark. \$9,000 is included in the budget to cover costs associated with trapping at Leaman off-channel sand and water, Elm Creek islands, or other sites that are created prior to the 2012 nesting season. Czaplewski asked what the \$40,000 for Program costs associated with implementation was for; Baasch said the money is included to cover potential costs of hiring a technician to assist with monitoring efforts and for other unforeseen costs. Czaplewski asked if USGS and Program staff and technicians would be able to cover additional nesting sites between Alda and Chapman should they arise; Baasch said the budget will cover costs associated with monitoring additional sites.



**WC-1** \$225,091 in 2012 Budget. Budget based on proposal and contract developed fall 2011.

**WC-3** \$167,100 in 2012 Budget. Estimate based on proposed budget for 2012 within the Whooping Crane Tracking Project Agreement.

**PD-3** \$90,000 in the 2012 Budget. Money would cover peer review of the Elm Creek FSM and Bird Response Document, peer review of 3 additional documents, and identifying potential ISAC replacement member(s).

### **General Budget Comments**

Besson asked if we anticipated spending \$26,700,000 during 2012 plus any unobligated funds during 2011. C. Smith stated we anticipate spending ~\$17,600,000 during 2012 and the remaining balance is for money put aside for the reregulating reservoir and other water related items (WP-4) and that the 2011 unliquidated funds is not very much.

### **FWS 2012 Research Suggestions** (blue font)

**Wet Meadow Monitoring** – Currently, there is \$10 K dedicated to monitoring of groundwater levels on Fox Tract. The Service also identifies a need to: 1) assess the groundwater/streamflow interaction on all Program sites containing wet meadows or those targeted for future wet meadow creation/restoration including the Fox Tract, and 2) develop wet meadow vegetation monitoring protocol. Recent meetings at the LAC and TAC identified the planned development or inclusion of wet meadow habitats for the PRRIP on the Binfield, Cottonwood Ranch, Fox, McCormick, and Stall properties. As indicated in the wet meadow information review, multiple studies have linked Platte River stage to groundwater levels. The Program EDO identified the willingness to develop a groundwater/surface water assessment for Fox tract. The Service encourages the Program to initiate a study that could be used to develop tools to monitor and evaluate the groundwater/surface water interaction for all current and future Program properties containing wet meadows. This may require additional budget allocations. Additionally, the October 12, 2011, LAC land management plan development meeting identified potential impacts and/or benefits that could occur to wet meadow habitat conditions as a result of management actions.

The need to assess initial conditions and to evaluate changes in habitat over time could be accomplished by developing a wet meadow vegetation monitoring program. This would allow an adaptive management approach to achieving target wet meadow conditions (i.e. assess change in vegetative community from management action such as burning).

#### *Recommendations:*

- 1) Expand the scope of work for PD-20 to include a process for assessing Platte River effects on wet meadow hydrology for all Program lands with existing or proposed wet meadow habitats. This would include a monitoring protocol that records groundwater levels at wet meadow sites, surface water acres at wet meadow sites, and river stage over time.
- 2) Expand the scope of work for PD-20 to include development of a wet meadow monitoring protocol. This could be combined with the groundwater monitoring study or a stand-alone study. The focus of this protocol would be to monitor changes in vegetation communities over time on wet meadows. This would provide the TAC a tool to evaluate how our management actions affect habitat.



Rabbe lead the discussion and stated the Service felt it would be good for the Program to collect baseline data at wet meadow sites to tract changes associated with land (grazing, prescribed fire, etc) and water management activities. Jenniges said if the Program plans to release water from the EA to meet target flows then the Program should have a monitoring protocol in place to determine if the management actions have the desired result; Besson agreed and said we should consider adjusting the 2012 budget to accommodate this type of research. Farnsworth asked if previous studies could be used to establish baseline information. Czaplewski said a lot of information is out there; however, we probably need more of a system-wide monitoring protocol where wet-meadow response is likely different upstream (ground water gaining reach) than it is downstream (ground water losing reach). Jenniges added if we are using EA water to evaluate wet meadow response we need to continuous recorders to monitor ground water as well as river stage at all Program properties with wet meadow habitat (Cottonwood Ranch, Fox Tract, Binfield, etc). Hallum added we would likely need a climate station at each site to produce good results in a COHYST type of model. Rabbe said a first step would be to set up ground-water monitoring wells at wet meadow sites throughout the Program Associated Area. Peyton said water action committee people would likely be able to provide guidance as to how many climate stations and what level of monitoring we need to capture good data. C. Smith asked if wet meadow monitoring was a Program priority during 2012; Jenniges stated if we release Program water then it should be a priority. Rabbe stated the Service planned to use EA water for target flows during 2012 due to FSM implementation constraints during 2012. Besson asked if the SDHF monitoring could be used for channel monitoring EA use related to target flows. Jenniges stated the monitoring protocols are fairly robust; however, timelier monitoring would likely be needed to determine if the action of using EA water for influencing wet meadow habitat and maintaining channel characteristics has the desired effect. Fritz stated we could use past monitoring as well as methods such as Floristic Quality Indices to monitor the quality of the habitat. Besson and Jenniges stated the group generally seemed to agree monitoring during 2012 would be necessary so the group needed to figure out how to budget for the research ( earmark money in the budget or plan to shift unliquidated money later). Peyton asked how expensive it would be to put ground monitoring wells at each of the sites. Farnsworth stated the Program spent \$35,000-\$40,000 to put 5 monitoring wells in at the Fox Tract. Rabbe asked what additional costs would be associated with monitoring the wells. Farnsworth said it would probably cost \$40,000-\$50,000 to monitor a series of wells on a monthly basis. Jenniges indicated ground water monitoring would probably need to be conducted on a regular basis while water is being released. C. Smith asked what the Program would use the ground well monitoring data for; Jenniges and fritz said it be used to monitor the response of ground water and vegetation to target flow releases. C. Smith asked if the target flow releases would replace flows in the FSM management strategy; Rabbe said the planned releases are a way to use EA water to provide species benefit until channel conveyance is improved so that implementing FSM is possible.

C. Smith stated the Program will need to spend time developing questions and hypotheses related to this monitoring research, if it proceeds, so the GC knows what the data will be used for. Besson said it is unlikely the Program will spend all the money so we could probably plan to move money in the future rather than budgeting additional money for this monitoring. C. Smith and Jenniges stated the Program used to have money budgeted for unidentified directed research



projects; however, based on TAC conversations associated with budget cuts; that money no longer exists. C. Smith said the EDO would come up with an estimate, likely between \$200,000-300,000, to be added to IMRP-2 for this monitoring research.

Water Quality Monitoring – There currently is no description of how collected water quality monitoring parameters will be used to address adaptive management needs (or good neighbor policy needs). However, water quality monitoring is expected to continue to be funded at its current rate throughout the first increment. It would be beneficial for the AMWG to assess the role of water quality data in addressing adaptive management information needs. A similar process could be conducted for good neighbor policy issues to ensure that information collected fully addresses information needs.

*Recommendation:* Fund water quality monitoring at current levels for 2012. An assessment of the role of water quality data will help to determine water quality needs or budgets for subsequent years.

Rabbe asked how the Program plans to use data collected with the water quality monitoring protocol. C. Smith said the water quality monitoring was added at the end of Program negotiations and that the protocol is tailored toward specific projects such as sediment augmentation. C. Smith said we need to have a workshop during 2012 to discuss if the Program should continue water quality monitoring and how the data should be used.

Habitat Complex Workshop – One big question in the synthesis report discusses the relationship between Program habitat complexes and species use. To date, there has not been a formal determination as to the number of habitat complexes currently formed or being formed by Program properties alone or in combination with protected environmental properties. The workshop would also identify habitat types within a bridge segment that would be beneficial to complete a habitat complex as well as identifying where future acquisition of habitat complex should be focused.

*Recommendation:* Schedule a habitat complex workshop either under the AMWG or under PD-4 if there is a need to develop a budget activity.

Rabbe said the TAC needs to discuss the Habitat complexes the Program is developing and how this habitat relates to bird use; C. Smith agreed we should hold a workshop during early 2012.

Hydraulic Segmentation Modeling – The TAC looks to continue efforts toward habitat modeling for target bird species. One suitability criterion for bird suitability is depth of water (or proportionate depth). Currently, channel cross-sections are collected to assess proportionate depths for a given flow, but it is not known to what extent the measured cross-section represents the longitudinal extent of a river channel. A hydraulic segmentation study would delineate longitudinal segments that have hydraulic similarities (e.g., similar wetted area or similar proportionate depths for a given streamflow). Longitudinal segmentation could improve habitat selection analyses because longitudinal segmentation categorizes habitat at a two dimensional scale when compared to cross-sections.

*Recommendation:* Develop new AMWG activity and budget or revise IMRP-2 to include this study.



Rabbe said Jeff Runge (FWS) developed this research project and that Runge wasn't sure if data collected at current cross-sections have enough detail to determine use versus availability; Farnsworth stated in the past this was a concern, but now we collect systematic survey data and annual LiDAR data and he's not sure how we could get any better data. Farnsworth and Runge will discuss this topic and determine how the Program can better use the data we are collecting.

**FWS Water Year 2012 Environmental Account Release Priorities**

Rabbe asked if there was any additional discussion related to EA releases for target flows during 2012. C. Smith said the previous discussion made it clear the Program was not abandoning the FSM management strategy and that the additional planned monitoring will be structured to allow the Program to learn how target flow releases influence wet meadow habitat and channel maintenance. Farnsworth said the Service needs to provide the Program the background and detailed information for the objectives and purposes of the various target flows so we can evaluate the predicted and observed responses of the system; Jenniges and Czaplewski agreed. C. Smith said we will need to have a workshop to develop details related to target flows and habitat and species response.

**Closing Business**

Next TAC meeting scheduled as a joint meeting with the ISAC on 29–30 November, 2011 9:00-5:00MST each day at the Staybridge Suites in Denver.

**Conference Call Meeting adjourned at 11:45am Central time.**

**Summary of Decisions from November 2011 TAC Conference Call Meeting**

- 1) EDO will better explain what the \$200,000 in engineering design for CWR flow consolidation will be used for.
- 2) EDO will include more detail about the LP-2 activities that will take place at each Complex
- 3) C. Smith changed “white paper” to “detailed report” for bird cognition (IMRP-2) and Special Advisors (IMRP-3).
- 4) EDO will add \$200,000 – \$300,000 to IMRP-2 for wet meadow research associated with EA releases for target flows
- 5) EDO will include estimate of unliquidated obligations where applicable
- 6) EDO will update the column for 2011 expenditures
- 7) Workshops to be schedule for 2011 & 2012:
  - a. Water Quality Monitoring (future plans and data uses)
  - b. Habitat Complex (update on progress and future plans)
  - c. Wet Meadow and Channel Monitoring Research (discuss protocol for monitoring EA releases to meet Service target flows)