



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
Executive Director’s Office Conference Room – Kearney, NE  
June 26, 2013

**Meeting Participants**

**Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Table**

**State of Wyoming**

Mike Besson – Member (Chair)  
Barry Lawrence – Alternate

**State of Colorado**

Suzanne Sellers – Member

**State of Nebraska**

Brandi Flyr – Alternate

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

Matt Rabbe – Member

**Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)**

Brock Merrill – Member

**Environmental Entities**

Rich Walters – Member  
Mary Harner – Alternate

**Upper Platte Water Users**

**Colorado Water Users**

Kevin Urie – Member (WebEx)

**Downstream Water Users**

Mark Czaplewski – Member  
Jim Jenniges – Member  
Mark Peyton – Member

**Executive Director’s Office (EDO)**

Chad Smith  
Jason Farnsworth  
Dave Baasch  
Kara Sheel  
Justin Brei

**Other Participants**

Pat Engelbert (HDR)  
Tom Riley (Flatwater)  
Tom Econopouly (FWS)



### **Welcome and Administrative**

Besson and Smith called the meeting to order and asked for agenda modifications; none offered.

### **TAC and WMWG Minutes**

Smith asked the group if there were any changes to the January 14, 2013 TAC minutes, January 24, 2013 TAC minutes or the March 27-28, 2013 WMWG minutes. **Jenniges moved to approve all 3 sets of minutes as final; Merrill seconded the motion; all supported the motion.**

### **PRRIP Data Requests**

None available

### **Scientific Articles**

None available; Smith informed the TAC that he was developing a Program list of potential publications that could be published in a Special Edition of a Journal.

### **ISAC Membership**

Smith lead the discussion stated the EDO was concerned that the learning curve is too high to rotate 2 ISAC members in and out annually as currently scheduled. Smith also said he needed to inform Atkins whether they need to start identifying replacements for the ISAC panel or not. Harner asked how other entities scheduled replacing advisory committees; Smith stated the EDO evaluated how other organizations handled the rotation schedule and found there was a wide range and we couldn't identify benefits or down-sides to how others were operating. Jenniges said the learning curve may not be as steep if the ISAC were used to review the science, but to date they have been asked to help guide Program decision making and he wasn't sure that was the original purpose of the ISAC. Rabbe asked what information new ISAC members were provided; Smith stated the original members were given the key Program Documents and new members have been mentored by ISAC members that were rotating off the panel. Urie agreed the learning curve was steep and stated keeping some continuity may be beneficial so we should consider the possibility of rotating ISAC members off on a case-by-case basis. Peyton expressed concern with having ISAC members serving on the panel for extended periods; Urie agreed that having ISAC members for extended periods could be problematic but stated that the Program should be flexible and not have a stringent policy on length of time an ISAC member is allowed on the panel. Jenniges suggested we include ISAC members that are rotating off the panel on the list of new candidates to consider for the next term; the TAC supported the idea.

### **Sediment Augmentation Pilot-scale Management Action**

Smith stated Tom Riley (Flatwater) and Pat Engelbert (HDR) presented information contained in the report at the AMP Reporting Session and asked the TAC if they had any edits to the format or content of the report beyond what Sellers sent him in an email; none offered. Rabbe said he expected to see sediment gradation to get finer with augmentation, but the results didn't appear to show it; Engelbert agreed and stated they still had a few months of data to collect. Smith stated the pilot-scale study was designed to learn and improve methods for full-scale implementation and the Program has accomplished that. Jenniges stated it seemed it would make more sense to him to augment all the mined material rather than just the fine gradation. Smith said once all the data has



been collected and the final results and conclusions are available the TAC would make a recommendation to the GC about if and how to proceed with full-scale implementation.

### **BOR Sediment Load Proposal**

Smith informed the TAC that Merrill had received a proposal from the Bureau to use the Platte River to develop methods for calculating sediment load. The Program was asked to provide in-kind or a small monetary contribution. Merrill stated neither he nor Gary Campbell were sponsors of the proposal. Jenniges asked who submitted the proposal; Merrill said the Sediment and Hydraulics group within the Bureau. Farnsworth indicated that the proposal seems to be another way to develop a rating curve for calculating sediment transport, but the Program has moved beyond this to developing methods to actually measure it directly in the field. The TAC didn't support providing funding, but weren't opposed to discussing the project and allowing access to Program lands.

### **Elm Creek Complex FSM**

Farnsworth informed the TAC that implementation of the in-channel geomorphology and vegetation monitoring at the Elm Creek FSM site was modified to have the contractor collect data before and just after the spring 2013 flow release. Bob Mussetter of Tetra Tech recommends the Program implement the in-channel geomorphology and vegetation monitoring during August 2013 so we have a dataset that is comparable to data that was collected in August the past 2 years. Farnsworth stated the additional data collection effort would cost about \$50,000 and the money would be taken from the Program budget line item IMRP-2. Czapski supported collecting the data, but stated water would likely make up a large portion of the Program's budget in future years so opportunities such as this probably wouldn't exist. Jenniges stated that he reaffirms the importance of collecting the data and getting this project completed correctly. **Jenniges moved to support implementing the in-channel geomorphology and vegetation monitoring protocol in August, 2013; Rabbe seconded the motion; no one objected.**

### **Whooping Crane Data Analysis Plan and Data QA/QC**

Baasch informed the TAC that QA/QC of the whooping crane database is being completed under the current contract (fall 2011 – spring 2015), but it has not been completed for 2001 – spring 2011 so we are trying to identify someone to perform that work. Sellers asked if QA/QC has been part of past contracts; Baasch stated it has been included in every Program contract. Sellers asked if we could expect the contractor to perform QA/QC at their own expense where it wasn't completed; Baasch said it would seem reasonable to have the contractor perform the QA/QC process, but had the contractor performed QA/QC they would have billed us more at that time so it may not be possible to get them to do it. Czapski asked if Baasch had an estimate of how long it may take and how much the QA/QC process would cost; Baasch estimates it will take 200-250 hours and cost between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Jenniges asked if identifying systematic and opportunistic sightings would be part of the QA/QC process; Baasch stated it would. Czapski asked if the QA/QC would be completed in the future; Baasch said it would be and stated we now require contractors to confirm they QA/QC'd the database in the migration season reports. **Sellers moved to support hiring a contractor to QA/QC the 2001 – spring 2011 whooping crane database; Peyton seconded the motion; all supported the motion.**



Farnsworth presented EDO concerns with data we planned to use to measure flow dependent variables in the WC habitat selection analysis. Farnsworth explained how similar metrics calculated at ‘available’ locations and several of the use locations using HEC-RAS model and LiDAR were different. Farnsworth proposed we use HEC-RAS model and LiDAR data and evaluate metrics such as total channel width, wetted width, proportion wetted, proportion sand, mean depth, width-depth ratio, unit discharge, etc. in the whooping crane habitat selection analysis. Rabbe asked if we planned to include metrics such as unobstructed channel width in the analysis and whether this would affect how/what is reported for that metric; Baasch and Farnsworth stated we would also include unobstructed channel width and several other non-flow related metrics in the analysis but that they would not be affected by this change. Walters asked if we would be able to calculate the metrics using HEC-RAS and LiDAR data at use and available locations for all years; Farnsworth said we could calculate the metrics he discussed, but not the fine scale metrics that we can’t manage such as percent suitable depth, etc. Jenniges asked if unobstructed view widths and other metrics were measured off aerial photography in the 2001-2006 analysis; Baasch and Farnsworth said the measures collected at available points were profiles that were collected at whooping crane decoys and other profiles that were collected for other studies. Jenniges stated we need to have similar data at used and available points to have a meaningful analysis; Farnsworth and Baasch agreed. Farnsworth also suggested we include metrics such as channel width unobstructed by dense vegetation (maximum, total, etc.), river corridor unobstructed by riparian forest, and metrics we always talk about and can manage. Rabbe asked if the metrics would capture areas that had large stands of phragmites and other vegetation; Farnsworth state those metrics would be evaluated with the unvegetated channel width metrics which would continue to be collected. Rabbe stated we needed to be clear about what constitutes a riparian forest; Farnsworth stated these areas could be identified by tree height or something consistent. Rabbe stated he would like to have the results of both methodologies reported/analyzed to compare and contrast their differences. Harner mentioned we planned to discuss modifications to data collection efforts for the stopover study in August and would like to collect similar metrics for that study as well.

Baasch stated the data analysis plan includes the entire Program area as available habitat for the system scale habitat selection analysis when in reality this area should probably be much smaller. EDO staff flew north to south over the channel at an elevation of 3,000 feet in a couple different areas and determined we could make out channel features for a distance of about 8-10 miles and beyond that couldn’t discern much of anything other than trees along the channel. As a whooping crane that lands at Cottonwood Ranch likely has no idea what habitat conditions near Chapman are like, we propose limiting the system-scale choice set to 10 miles upstream and downstream of use locations. Jenniges asked if the telemetry data indicates if whooping cranes fly up and down the channel or not; Baasch said telemetry data is only collected every 6 hours so we can’t assess this.

Baasch and Farnsworth stated the EDO recommends the Program develop *a priori* models that include combinations of flow dependent and non-flow dependent variables, assess correlation between variables and not include correlated variables in the same model, focus models on variables the Program can manage, but include variables we can’t manage when other metrics aren’t highly correlated. Walters asked if we would use AIC to select the final models; Baasch stated we would. EDO staff will develop the initial working set of models to test in the analysis and will have the TAC refine the working set of models to include additional models they would like to test.



Farnsworth and Baasch have been digging into the 2008 West Report and comparing numbers in our database to those reported and things weren't making sense. We had Shay Howlin (West) send us the data used to produce the numbers in the report and notice results of the detection model was applied to the flow dependent variables to increase sample size, but they forgot to scale the metrics by the increased sample size which, on average resulted in a 38% increase in the metrics for the systematic sample of data. For example, if a location had a probability of detection of 0.5, the channel metrics were doubled (metric/0.5) and they calculated a mean of the increased metrics, but forgot to scale the numbers back to account for the increase in sample size. Peyton asked Baasch how West derived the detection model; Baasch said variables such as contractor, altitude and transect were included in the detection model and the model didn't incorporate channel metrics such as widths, flow, etc. yet it was used to adjust those metrics. Baasch stated he felt the detection model they developed only seems valid for estimating numbers of whooping cranes that used the Platte River.

Smith asked Baasch if Howlin was aware of the issue; Baasch said he discussed this with her and she agreed there were errors in how numbers were calculated in the tables, but she wasn't sure if the errors were perpetuated in the habitat selection analyses. Rabbe asked Baasch and Farnsworth if we suspect the errors were included in the use/availability analysis or not and they said they suspect the errors were included in all analyses that incorporated detection probabilities. Baasch stated we haven't received the data used in the habitat selection analysis yet so we aren't positive if similar errors were incorporated in that analysis or not. We plan to look into this to ensure it didn't happen, but if so we would need to figure out if we have West re-write the entire report, just add a memo to the front of that report or in the new report explaining the errors, or simply pull it from the Program site and not refer to it in the future. Jenniges stated he suspects the errors were included in the habitat selection analysis and he and Felipe Chavez Ramirez of the Crane Trust at the time discussed this with Howlin in 2008 because metrics measured at use and available points were very similar, but the probability curves indicate high selection for increased wetted widths, wider channels, etc. Rabbe stated at a minimum West needed to include an addendum to the report because as it stands the Service still uses the report to make decisions. Baasch asked if it should be an addendum to the new report or the 2008 report. Jenniges stated West would likely want to correct the report and suggested we ask them to re-write it. Baasch said it might cost the Program a lot of money to redo the previous report which may not be worth it given we are going through the process of re-analyzing all the data. Jenniges suggested West re-write the 2008 report or include a section at the front of the new report explaining the errors and clarifying the 2008 report was invalid if that is the case. Harner agreed with including a statement in the new report so those that have a copy of the 2008 report are aware of any errors in the 2008 report when they read the new report. Farnsworth agreed with including a section at the front of the new report and suggested we include the 2008 report as an attachment to the new report so it is clear which report is being referenced in the new report. Rabbe agreed and suggested the Program peer review the new report; all agreed.

Smith asked Rabbe to discuss with other Service personnel how they would like to address errors in the 2008 report where the Service was the organization that has used the report in the past. Rabbe asked the EDO to send the Service and TAC an email explaining exactly what the errors were and what parts of the report the errors affected; Baasch said he would put together a detailed memo as



soon as we get the data and are able to re-run the analyses to figure it all out. There was no formal motion, but no TAC member disagreed with any of the above discussions or plans moving forward.

### **2012 Habitat Complex Delineations**

Baasch discussed how he delineated the original Habitat Complex areas. The group began discussing the various areas and quickly determined only Rowe Sanctuary and recently maybe Binfield complex truly meet guidelines laid out in the Program's Land Plan Table 1. There was a lot of discussion of how Table 1 was developed and what the requirements would be for determining where we delineate complex habitat areas. Rabbe and others agreed areas like Cottonwood Ranch and other conservation and Program areas better approximate Table 1 in 2012 than they did in the late 1990's. The group decided delineating areas may not be as important for assessing habitat complexes in the habitat selection analysis as other approaches. Jenniges stated the original WC-1 hypothesis was intended to evaluate whether or not whooping crane use increased with an increase in the number of habitat complexes; Baasch agreed, but said he wasn't sure how we would incorporate habitat complexes into the habitat selection analysis without defining them. Peyton and Jenniges suggested we evaluate characteristics and proportions of landcover classes within a complex-size (2 miles) buffer area to determine if they are selecting for the characteristics of Table 1 or not.

The group decided that fully evaluating whooping crane selection of complex habitat may be difficult at this point, but that it may be beneficial to explore using proportions of landcover within a 2-mile buffer to see if anything appears to be useful and we would continue to think of ways to fully evaluate this hypothesis in the future.

### **Whooping Crane Monitoring Reports**

Baasch asked the group if they had any more edits to the fall 2012 whooping crane monitoring report. The TAC discussed if/where telemetry and opportunistic observations should be included in the reports so that they were documented and agreed undetected radio-marked birds should not be included in the trend analyses as that information was not available in the past and would not be in the future. No changes were made to the report as the tables included the appropriate information. **Jenniges moved to accept the fall 2012 whooping crane monitoring report as final; Rabbe seconded the motion; all approved.**

Baasch asked the group if they had any edits to the winter 2013 whooping crane monitoring report. Rabbe suggested we identify locations that occurred within Program defined whooping crane wet meadow habitat and include information in the report stating the radio-marked bird was in the channel and cornfield during the day it was monitored on the Binfield wet meadow area; Baasch said he would make the edits. Baasch stated the telemetry bird that was monitored during November of 2012 shouldn't have been monitored as per the protocol because the bird hadn't been detected by the public or our monitoring crew. Rabbe asked why we wouldn't monitor telemetry birds if we know they are in the area; Baasch said the TAC decided not to monitor undetected telemetry birds because we would be treating marked birds differently than unmarked birds and our monitoring efforts may influence habitat use and bias the telemetry data. **Peyton moved to accept the winter 2013 whooping crane monitoring report as final with the edits discussed during the meeting; Rabbe seconded the motion; all approved.**



Baasch discussed guidelines being used to classify systematic and opportunistic sightings.

Systematic Observations:

- Aerial observations made during scheduled, spring or fall systematic flights
- Ground observations that are the result of a systematic aerial flight observation.
- Do not include winter observations unless a monitoring season is extended (e.g., 2012FA extension) as winter observations generally are the result of a public report or telemetry data.

Opportunistic Observations:

- Aerial observations not made during scheduled, spring or fall systematic flights
- Ground observations that are not the result of a systematic aerial flight observation.
- Do not include winter observations unless a monitoring season is extended (e.g., 2012FA extension) as winter observations generally are the result of a public report or telemetry data
- Observation made as a result of public, telemetry, ground crew, etc. information including
  - Undetected telemetry bird
  - Aerial observation off the scheduled flight transects
  - Most winter/summer observations

Jenniges asked if an opportunistic observation can ever become a systematic observation; Baasch said all observations are opportunistic until the bird is observed during a systematic aerial flight, but once this occurs observations after the systematic aerial observation are classified as systematic. Jenniges questioned if this was the way observations were handled in the past; Baasch said it may not matter because we plan to review the 2001-2013 database, reports, and raw data and will classify observations as systematic and opportunistic. Harner asked if we should include a third category to include instances when Gary Lingle (AIM) is made aware of the presence of birds in the area that are later detected during a systematic aerial survey. Baasch said we don't know when this has occurred, but it occurs frequently and Lingle informs the air crew which likely affects detectability. **The group decided the contractor should include a note in the database to document when they are made aware of whooping cranes in the area prior to being detected from the plane and when flight crews are notified of a bird in the area.** Jenniges stated we should clearly define 'systematic' in the monitoring protocol so it is clear the main river channel is targeted during river surveys and the entire study area is not surveyed equally.

The group discussed including opportunistic observations in trend analyses and Baasch said most opportunistic sightings are included in our database, but observations not reported to Lingle generally are not. Walters asked if opportunistic sightings are included in the calculation of whooping crane use of the central Platte River; Baasch said most, but not all as there are additional observations in the Service database that aren't in the Program database and vice versa.

Baasch informed the group that during a spring 2013 aerial survey a decoy that was placed on the east leg was detected by the west leg crew and not by the east leg crew and asked if the observation should be included in the database as a systematic or opportunistic observation where the flight time had stopped at the Minden bridge prior to the decoy being observed. The group discussed different



scenarios (What if it was a WC? etc.) and decided the observation should be included in the database as an opportunistic sighting and the circumstances should be noted in the database.

Baasch presented a summary of the numbers of telemetry, winter, undetected (by our monitoring crew) whooping crane use of the central Platte River from 2010-2013 and informed the group the tables were compiled in a short amount of time and likely do not represent all observations of winter and undetected use of the Platte River. Rabbe said he was surprised 12 telemetry birds have used the central Platte River and only 4 were detected by Program monitoring efforts; Baasch stated several of the birds used the Platte River when our crew wasn't flying. Rabbe said that may represent another (timing) problem.

**Whooping Crane Monitoring Protocol Discussions**

Baasch asked the group if they saw a need to continue to collect profile data if it isn't comparable to HEC-RAS model results at available points. Rabbe and Jenniges suggested the Program continue to collect profile data until the end of the current contract with West (spring 2015). Baasch stated profile data would be collected at all use locations in the future unless the locations are in the same type of channel or the same location; Clayton Derby (West) and Baasch will make decisions on where profiles are collected and what use sites are lumped with a single profile.

Baasch asked the TAC for guidance on what data should be used to assess the current schedule of the Program's monitoring seasons. Baasch also stated the telemetry data may not be the best source of data given drought conditions throughout the migration corridor when a large portion of the telemetry data was collected. Peyton suggested we evaluate the past 30 years of data; Baasch asked if we see a shift has occurred, do we shift the entire monitoring season or maintain the current season and add days to the front- or back-end of the current survey dates? Jenniges and Peyton said we should continue to capture the fifth and ninety-fifth percentile of the initial dates of whooping crane observations in Nebraska; Rabbe and others agreed. Rabbe questioned whether 30 years was too long of a timeframe to assess the current monitoring season dates as an increasingly larger number of birds have used the Platte River the past couple years between the fall and spring migration seasons. Rabbe suggested using 15 years to better capture the more recent local climate change that may be occurring and would otherwise be watered down by historic data. Baasch said the EDO could evaluate a range of timeframes and datasets (Platte River only, state-wide, and telemetry), would put the results in a memo, and the TAC could make a decision at that time.

Baasch stated the Program needed to update definitions in the whooping crane monitoring protocol because some definitions aren't used when data is collected (e.g., obstruction), terminology used today is different than what was used in the past, etc. This would occur when we make other updates in the protocol prior to the fall 2013 monitoring season.

Baasch asked the group if the Program should continue the 7 return transects or if we should target wetlands during return transects by including 1 or 2 wetland targeted return transects as outlined in the meeting packet. Jenniges said the targeted wetland return transects would not truly be a systematic survey; Baasch agreed and stated return transect(s) would be a targeted systematic survey of wetlands within the Program Associated Habitat Area. Walters asked if we could differentiate between whooping cranes observed along the primary and secondary return transects





as proposed in the single transect survey document; Baasch said we could. Peyton asked if there were differences in the time it would require to complete single transect versus 2 return transects; Baasch said the single transect may require a couple minutes longer to complete than the 2 return—transect option because the transect would have a slightly longer flight path. The group opted to survey ‘primary’ and managed wetlands on a daily basis; all agreed.

Baasch asked the TAC if they were still OK with having the contractor deviate from the return transect to re-locate birds; the group decided to have the contractor continue as they have in the past (i.e., deviate from return transects when directed to do so by the ground crews).

Baasch informed the TAC that the past several migration seasons the EDO has been providing oversight for the subcontractor and have had several concerns that have been discussed with the contractor and subcontractor. We (West and EDO) have come to a decision West will provide an increased level of oversight of their subcontractor in the future and if the issues persist the Program will make a decision on whether to move forward with a new contractor or not at that point. Peyton stated we have had this discussion in the past and asked if nothing has changed; Baasch stated he has these discussions every migration season and not much seems to be changing.

Baasch asked the TAC to consider publishing analyzed data with the report in case the databases are changed and so anyone can re-run the analyses and get the same results or can look at different analysis methods and models if they choose to do so in the future. Rabbe asked if Baasch had discussed publishing the Services database or not; Baasch said he hadn’t, but planned to do so soon and would decide what data could be published and what couldn’t. Rabbe requested the EDO discuss with Martha Tacha (Service) to request her input before making any decisions. He stated the Services database contains sensitive information that has inherent limitations. Jenniges asked if journals would take the data or not; Baasch said a lot of journals are moving towards wanting the dataset or at least would be willing to house the data if offered to them. Jenniges said it seems important to identify the data that was analyzed because long-term datasets can evolve over time. Harner said we could target ecological journals that offered open access to the reports; Baasch agreed and said those are the types of journals Trevor Hefley (UNL-IGERT student analyzing the Service database the Program has) has targeted for his publications. Harner asked if landowners would be identified in Hefley’s database; Baasch said landowners would not be identified, but there could be ways for people to use the data and Plat maps to identify who they are. No one objected with publishing Program data, (and Service data if the Service ultimately agreed to release its contributed data) with Program reports so Baasch stated we would plan to do so in the future (pending discussions with the Service).

Baasch asked the TAC if they were aware of any additional ‘whooping crane experts’ that Hefley should contact; Jenniges said Mike Fritz (NGPC) should be added to the list.

### **Proposed Shoemaker Island Complex Work**

Farnsworth discussed the proposed tree clearing work along the caddisfly slough on the south Binfield tract. Farnsworth presented data showing unforested widths at whooping crane use locations versus Binfield and stated Binfield seems to have a similar distribution as whooping crane use sites. Baasch stated the primary benefits of removing trees would be an increase in the amount of exposed water area on the tract for whooping cranes and would increase the number of “Gold



Standard” whooping crane wet meadow habitat acres. Rabbe suggested that the Program could leave the trees along the caddisfly slough on eastern side of the property as a buffer to the road, but consider removing trees within the meadow portion of the tract identified as ‘Service proposed tree removal area for whooping cranes’ in the Attachment 1. Harner expressed concern with removing trees from the Binfield tract because of fragmenting the habitat and it has a mosaic of habitats that has been working for whooping cranes and a variety of other species including caddisfly. Jenniges agreed and asked why we would want to change the landscape given the number of whooping cranes that have been observed on the tract recently. Rabbe estimated the Mormon Island wet meadow area has had 10-15 documented whooping crane use locations and Binfield only has had a few and he feels the whooping cranes are keying on the wet areas that removing the trees would provide. Harner said we would not be able to provide as much wet area on Binfield as exists on Mormon Island. Rabbe stated Binfield is one of the best wet meadow sites along the Platte River and increasing the wet portion of the tract would probably increase use by whooping cranes. Jenniges and Peyton agreed Binfield was one of the best wet meadow sites and that removing the trees would expose the water area, but didn’t feel removing the trees for probable use by whooping cranes was worth the costs because it would destroy a habitat condition used by hundreds of other species. Rabbe stated how we are constantly reminded that the Program is an endangered species Program not an ecosystem recovery Program and our primary focus should be at providing benefits to the target species. Smith suggested opposing views be written and submitted to the GC to make a decision on whether to remove trees to benefit whooping cranes or not during the September GC meeting. Jenniges asked if the opposing views should be presented to the LAC or GC; Smith said the LAC moved and the GC approved the land management plan/annual work plans and the tree removal is an adaptive management action directed at target species so the opposing views should be submitted to the GC for a decision on how to proceed.

Farnsworth asked if there was consensus on removing trees along the channel to meet the Program’s tern and plover minimum habitat criteria where the tern and plover nesting islands would be built. Peyton and Jenniges opposed removing 200 foot of trees along the bank line where the tern and plover nesting islands would be built. Farnsworth expressed concern that the Program would prioritize riparian forest over target species’ habitat as that was not done at sites like Cottonwood Ranch and Elm Creek Complex in the past. Jenniges asked if we’ve observed nesting on the existing islands; Baasch said we have not and that the existing islands have a lot of organic matter as all we had done to date was removed the willows and vegetation from the islands. Jenniges suggested we push the island south so it was 200 feet from the trees. Baasch stated the Program was fairly limited as to where we could build nesting islands as to date, some of the neighboring land owners have refused to allow the Program to work in the channel on their property. Peyton asked how wide the channel was between the island and trees; Baasch said the channel was ~75 foot wide. Peyton suggested the Program remove 125 feet of trees along the bank line (200’ from the edge of the existing island). **Sellers moved to remove ~125 feet of trees along the bank line near the area where the tern and plover nesting islands would be built (see attachment 1); Rabbe seconded the motion; no one opposed; Jenniges, Peyton, Walters Flyr, and Harner abstained.**

Farnsworth discussed the potential to build water structures to hold a little water in the meadow area. Jenniges said the tract was purchased because it was one of the best wet meadow areas along the Platte River and didn’t feel the Program should try to change the property. **Rabbe suggested**



**the program construct a water control structure along the ditch that appears to be functioning as a drain; no one opposed.** Walters stated potential impacts of the structure should be evaluated and landowners below the proposed water control structure along the county road should be notified. Farnsworth said we would look at placing a water control structure along the ditch and would not put any other water control structures on the Binfield property.

**Morse Tract Wetland Modifications**

Farnsworth discussed issues with the Ducks Unlimited wetland enhancement project that was in the process of being constructed when the Program purchased the Morse tract and stated the elevation of one of the Water Control Structures was built 6 inches lower than designed. Farnsworth and Brei discussed a couple of options to increase the wetland area on the property by raising the water control structure 6 inches or 12 inches and extending the berm to increase the wetland area. **The group supported raising the water control structure 12 inches and increasing the berm as needed; no one opposed.**

**Geomorphology and Vegetation Monitoring Protocol Modifications**

Farnsworth discussed Tetra Tech’s data analysis and proposed protocol modification to reduce the number of vegetation monitoring transects collected at each anchor point from 7 to 5 to allow vegetation and geomorphology data collection to be completed on the same day. Tetra Tech’s analysis indicated there was no statistical difference or loss of statistical power between collecting data at 5 transects versus 7 transects. Rabbe asked why Tetra Tech analyzed frequency of occurrence and percent canopy cover when unvegetated widths and unobstructed widths were what the Program was most interested in; Farnsworth and Smith stated those metrics were collected by the geomorphology monitoring crew and that protocol wouldn’t change. Jenniges asked what the benefits of collecting species specific data were and how the Program would use the information; Farnsworth said the Program could use the information to learn how phragmites control was working system wide, to determine how various species respond to hydrologic conditions, etc. Once the final report was completed the Program could determine if we want to continue implementing the current protocol or not and if we wanted to modify the protocol. **The group supported modifying the in-channel vegetation monitoring protocol to collect data at 5 transects rather than 7; no one opposed.**

**Closing Business**

The next TAC meeting was scheduled for August 28 in Kearney. Items mentioned to be discussed at the next TAC meeting included: responses to the 2013 State of the Platte Report, revisions to the Program’s whooping crane monitoring protocol, stopover study update, link between Big Questions and Program Hypotheses, develop an *a priori* set of modes to test in the 2013 WC data analysis, etc. Walters asked if the Program collected spring 2013 aerial imagery; Farnsworth said we did, but the contractor had issues with equipment and imagery was collected on a couple of different days so it may not be very useful for the Program.

**Meeting adjourned at 2:00pm Central time.**



### **Summary of Decisions from June 2013 TAC Meeting**

1. The TAC approved the January 14, 2013 TAC minutes, January 24, 2013 TAC minutes and the March 27-28, 2013 WMWG minutes.
2. The TAC supported the idea of including ISAC members that are rotating off the panel in the list of new candidates for the Program to consider as ‘replacement’ candidates.
3. The TAC didn’t support providing funding for the BOR Sediment Transport, but weren’t opposed to discussing the project and allowing the project team access to Program lands.
4. The TAC supported implementing the in-channel geomorphology and vegetation monitoring protocol in August, 2013.
5. The TAC supported hiring a contractor to QA/QC the 2001 – spring 2011 whooping crane database.
6. The TAC accepted the Fall 2012 and Winter 2013 Whooping Crane Monitoring Reports as final with edits discussed during the meeting.
7. The TAC supported publishing Program Data with published reports when possible (i.e., publishing Service Data would require Service approval).
8. The TAC suggested Hefley add Mike Fritz to the list of whooping crane experts in his analysis.
9. The TAC supported using HEC-RAS and LiDAR data, including several additional metrics (e.g., unforested channel width, unvegetated channel width, etc.), defining the available set as a 20 mile stretch of river centered on the use location, and developing an *a priori* set of models to include in the 2013 whooping crane data analysis plan.
10. The TAC supported modifying the Program’s Whooping Crane Monitoring protocol to update definitions and terminology, to include a single targeted wetland return transect, to re-evaluate the monitoring season dates, etc.
11. The TAC Supported removing ~125 feet of trees along the bank line near the area where the tern and plover nesting islands would be built and constructing a water control structure along the ditch that currently acts as a drain on the Binfield Property.
12. TAC members will develop documents regarding the opposing views of removing trees along the caddisfly slough on the Binfield property for whooping cranes.
13. The TAC supported raising the water control structure on the Morse tract 12 inches and increasing the berm as needed.
14. The TAC supported modifying the in-channel vegetation monitoring protocol to collect data at 5 transects rather than 7 transects.
15. Next TAC meeting was scheduled for August 28, 2013 in Kearney.



**Attachment 1.** Binfield tree-removal map

