PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission – Lake McConaughy Visitors Center
August 12, 2014

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)                                                                 Executive Director’s Office (ED Office)
State of Colorado                                                                 Jerry Kenny, ED
  Suzanne Sellers – Member                                                                  Scott Griebling
State of Wyoming                                                                           Janice Rainwater
  Bryan Clerkin – Alternate                                                                 Sira Sartori
State of Nebraska                                                                         Bill Hahn (ED Office Special Advisor)
  Jesse Bradley – Member                                                                   George Oamek (ED Office Special Advisor)
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service                                                            Downstream Water Users
  Tom Econopouly – Member                                                                  Mike Drain – Alternate
  Duane Woodward – Member                                                                 Jeff Shafer – Member
  Landon Shaw – Member                                                                     Nolan Little
  Tyler Thulin                                                                             Upstream Water Users
  Dennis Strauch – Member                                                                 Jon Altenhofen – Member
Colorado Water Users                                                                    Luke Shawcross
  Jon Altenhofen – Member
  Brock Merrill – Alternate
Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)                                                              Environmental Groups
  Brock Merrill – Alternate
Environmental Groups                                                                      Duane Hovorka – Member
  Duane Hovorka – Member

Welcome and Administrative: Jerry Kenny, ED
Introductions were made. There were no agenda modifications. Kenny reviewed the May 2014
WAC Minutes. Drain suggested edits at lines 87 and 100, which were incorporated into the
minutes. Drain made a motion to approve the modified May 2014 WAC Minutes, which was seconded by Woodward. The May minutes were unanimously approved.

WAP Project Updates

J-2 Regulating Reservoir: Jerry Kenny, ED

Drain reported that the environmental permitting for the J2 Regulating Reservoir is going smoothly. The CNPPID is continuing to work on land acquisition and expect to make initial offers in September to November of this year. The CNPPID is working on some minor design modifications to the reservoir perimeter. Kenny asked about the financial annual and quarterly progress report. Drain responded that the report is complete and will be made available to the Program.

CPNRD Water Leasing: Duane Woodward, CPNRD

Woodward reported that the water rights permit applications for transfers on the Thirty-Mile, Cozad, and Orchard-Alfalfa Canals are still in progress, but are nearing completion. The CPNRD previously submitted the excess flow permits but they are not approved yet. Altenhofen asked if the CPNRD would utilize recharge basins to recharge excess flows and Woodward responded that it is an option but they have not designed basins yet. The CPNRD hopes to have the permits in place and begin operating the surface water transfer in 2015. There will also be recharge accretions for lease in 2015 from excess flows diverted into the canals in 2013.

CNPPID Water Leasing: Jerry Kenny, ED

Kenny summarized three options for the Program leasing CNPPID water. First, a permanent agreement for the Phelps groundwater recharge project needs to be established. The project has operated on annual temporary agreements, but a permit application for permanent recharge has been filed.

Second, a potential lease agreement for storage water in Lake McConaughy would take the place of the Net Controllable Conserved Water (NCCW) the CNPPID offered the Program last year. Leasing storage water has several advantages as it would be immediately available and the releases could be controlled. An initial copy of the agreement has been provided to the WAC. There will be discussions of the leasing possibility at the next Finance Committee (FC) meeting before the Program advances the agreement with the CNPPID.

The third option is that the Program could make short-term lease arrangements with irrigators on the CNPPID system. The CNPPID would manage the process. The Program would make an offer for a certain amount of water then see what irrigators are willing to sell. The offers could be adjusted annually. Theoretically, the Program would lease water from marginal farmland. The CNPPID would like to make sure that farmers do not lease water that they otherwise wouldn’t have used. George Oamek, economics Special Advisor to the Program, will help with auctioning and value strategies.
NPNRD Water Leasing: Jerry Kenny, ED

Kenny explained that there are currently no opportunities on the table for NPNRD leasing. Leasing opportunities would be upstream of Lake McConaughy, so the water could be regulated.

Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease: Jerry Kenny, ED

The Program was offered 9,600 AF of lease water this year, which is double the average annual release of 4,800 AF. The Program agreed to the offer and the lease water will be sent to McConaughy sometime in September following the end of the irrigation season. The Program had paid a lump sum for Pathfinder water, so until the maximum amount is reached, the Program can decide whether to take the water offered. If the maximum is reached before the end of the First Increment, the Program has the option to purchase additional lease water.

Elwood Reservoir Seepage: Sira Sartori, ED Office

Sartori introduced Elwood Reservoir as a potential Water Action Plan (WAP) project. Excess flows could be diverted into Elwood Reservoir with the intention of allowing the water to seep for recharge accretions to the Platte River basin. Based on previous studies, about half of the seepage goes to the Platte and half to the Republican basin. Plum Creek intersects the pathway from the reservoir to the Platte River so recharge accretions may enter Plum Creek. Additional analysis is necessary to see if Elwood Reservoir seepage is a feasible WAP project.

NPPD Water Leasing: Jeff Shafer, NPPD

Shafer explained that the NPPD has submitted a revised application to the NDNR for water leasing. The NPPD changed the way they deal with non-consumptive water in the transfer application. The main concern that the WAC has with the proposed water transfer is the potential for increased groundwater pumping after landowners have voluntarily relinquished surface water rights on comingled acreage. In general, the NPPD wants to transfer the consumptive use relinquished water rights to instream use. Shafer explained that the NPPD wants to protect the transfer amount down the Platte River all the way to the confluence with the Missouri River.

Shafer showed that, were the transfer to occur, there would be a net benefit to the river and the aquifer. He said that the NPPD does not believe that the score for the transfer should be reduced for groundwater pumping because pre-1997 wells were grandfathered into the Program. Shafer also explained that if there is an increase in groundwater depletions, it may fall under the NDNR and NRDs to replace the depletions through Integrated Management Plans and the Nebraska Depletions Plan. The switch from surface water to groundwater use would have already occurred with the relinquishment of the surface rights, regardless of the transfer application to instream use.

There was discussion of whether the Program should score differently for increased groundwater pumping resulting from comingled surface water/groundwater acres changing to exclusively groundwater irrigated acres. Whether the Program should score to the net effect for this particular project was discussed by the group. The possibility of the NPPD and the CNPPID
reaching an agreement to allow the NPPD to lease storage water to the Program was also mentioned.

Sellers requested that the NDNR or the NRD give a presentation overview of how water is accounted for when there is an increase in groundwater-irrigated acres. Bradley agreed that something could be put together. It is anticipated a presentation could be done at the next WAC meeting on October.

Drain asked about whether the Program is asking to protect the transfer water all the way to the Platte’s confluence with the Missouri River. He wondered about the value of adding the protection beyond Kearney Canal or the critical habitat reach. Kenny answered that protecting the transfer water that distance was an appeasement related to pallid sturgeon habitat. He said that, based on permitting, protecting the transfer water to Kearney or Grand Island would be sufficient and would be acceptable. This is only a minor issue.

**E65 Groundwater Recharge:** Sira Sartori, ED Office
Sartori reported that the Program has started to look at groundwater recharge in the E65 Canal as a potential WAP project. It would operate similar to the Phelps County Canal groundwater recharge project. The Program was interested in estimating the groundwater divide in the area of potential recharge in the E65 Canal, between Mile Posts 5.9 and 13.9. Groundwater elevation contours were developed and compared to the 1995 contours from the 2010 COHYST report. Based on the analysis of the divide, a significant portion of the E65 Canal recharge between Mile Posts 5.9 and 13.9 the likely accretes to the Republican Basin and therefore, it does not seem to be a beneficial WAP project. No opposition was expressed toward this conclusion.

**Phelps Groundwater Recharge Well Pumping:** Sira Sartori, ED Office
The Program has looked into whether groundwater pumping under the Phelps County Canal is a feasible WAP project. Water recharged in the Phelps County Canal would be pumped to the river during shortage months for score credit. Based on the preliminary score and cost analysis, groundwater pumping of recharge could be a beneficial WAP project for the Program. It appears to be cost effective and could be done at a faster pace than other WAP projects.

Sartori said that the next steps would be to look more into detailed costs, permitting requirements and follow up with the Scoring Subcommittee. Kenny asked if the WAC believes this project should progress into the next phase of evaluation. Drain agreed that the Program should continue to evaluate this as a potential WAP project. No opposition was expressed toward moving forward with this path forward.

**Wet Meadows Hydrologic Monitoring Project Update:** Scott Griebling, ED Office
Griebling explained that the Program is installing additional soil moisture monitoring equipment at the Fox and Binfield wet meadow sites to obtain spatially averaged soil moisture measurements over areas of approximately 600 m in diameter.
The Program will also install four groundwater monitoring wells at the Morse wet meadow site to aid in the design of check structures to be installed on the Peterson Ditch that drains the site. The groundwater models and soil moisture monitoring plan are ready for work group review.

2013 Short Duration Medium Flow Summary: Scott Griebling, ED Office
Griebling summarized the hydrologic analysis of the 2013 short duration medium flow release. The release experienced relatively lower losses than previous releases. It was successful in testing the use of North Platte canals to route water around the choke point. Similar hydrologic analysis will be conducted on the high flow events from the fall of 2013 and summer of 2014.

2015 Draft Water Plan Budget: Jerry Kenny, ED
Kenny provided a brief summary and explanation of assumptions used to develop the 2015 Water Plan draft budget. He discussed the general budget plans through the end of the First Increment and stated that all numbers are preliminary and subject to revision.

Kenny explained that, due to the need for an individual 404 permit for State Channel modifications, construction will not occur this year, so that money will likely not get obligated and new money may need to be put into that line item for 2015. Additional funds have been set aside for the State Channel in 2016 – 2017 in case the Program needs to buy out properties in the area.

In 2015, the Program plans to spend about the same amount on the J2 Regulating Reservoir as in 2014. There will be discussions at the Governance Committee (GC) and FC level to determine whether the Program should wait to make the 2014 payment until the money is needed by the CNPPID to acquire land and purchase materials.

He asked that WAC members provide input, but also stated that a more refined budget estimate and the associated work plans will be provided at the October WAC meeting with ultimate GC approval required in December.

Additional Business: Jerry Kenny, ED
The 2014 meeting schedule is posted on the WAC website. The October meeting was changed from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The next WAC meeting is scheduled for October 21, 2014, at 9:30 am (Mountain Time) at the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center.

Action Items
General WAC
- No action items
ED Office
- The ED Office will revise the SDMF memorandum to include a comparison of peak flow travel times through the reach with the NDNR estimates.
Additional Items

- The NDNR will provide a presentation to the WAC on how increased groundwater depletions are addressed by the State and NRDs.