



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

7 **Meeting Attendees**

9 **Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

10 **State of Colorado**

11 Suzanne Sellers – Member

13 **State of Wyoming**

14 Bryan Clerkin – Alternate

16 **State of Nebraska**

17 Jesse Bradley – Member

19 **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

20 Tom Econopouly – Member

22 **Downstream Water Users**

23 Mike Drain – Alternate

24 Duane Woodward – Member

25 Jeff Shafer – Member

26 Landon Shaw – Member

27 Nolan Little

28 Tyler Thulin

30 **Upstream Water Users**

31 Dennis Strauch – Member

33 **Colorado Water Users**

34 Jon Altenhofen – Member

35 Luke Shawcross

37 **Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)**

38 Brock Merrill – Alternate

40 **Environmental Groups**

41 Duane Hovorka – Member

43 **Welcome and Administrative:** *Jerry Kenny, ED*

44 Introductions were made. There were no agenda modifications. Kenny reviewed the May 2014
45 WAC Minutes. Drain suggested edits at lines 87 and 100, which were incorporated into the



46 minutes. Drain made a motion to approve the modified May 2014 WAC Minutes, which was
47 seconded by Woodward. **The May minutes were unanimously approved.**
48

49 **WAP Project Updates**

50 ***J-2 Regulating Reservoir: Jerry Kenny, ED***

51 Drain reported that the environmental permitting for the J2 Regulating Reservoir is going
52 smoothly. The CNPPID is continuing to work on land acquisition and expect to make initial
53 offers in September to November of this year. The CNPPID is working on some minor design
54 modifications to the reservoir perimeter. Kenny asked about the financial annual and quarterly
55 progress report. Drain responded that the report is complete and will be made available to the
56 Program.
57

58 ***CPNRD Water Leasing: Duane Woodward, CPNRD***

59 Woodward reported that the water rights permit applications for transfers on the Thirty-Mile,
60 Cozad, and Orchard-Alfalfa Canals are still in progress, but are nearing completion. The
61 CPNRD previously submitted the excess flow permits but they are not approved yet. Altenhofen
62 asked if the CPNRD would utilize recharge basins to recharge excess flows and Woodward
63 responded that it is an option but they have not designed basins yet. The CPNRD hopes to have
64 the permits in place and begin operating the surface water transfer in 2015. There will also be
65 recharge accretions for lease in 2015 from excess flows diverted into the canals in 2013.
66

67 ***CNPPID Water Leasing: Jerry Kenny, ED***

68 Kenny summarized three options for the Program leasing CNPPID water. First, a permanent
69 agreement for the Phelps groundwater recharge project needs to be established. The project has
70 operated on annual temporary agreements, but a permit application for permanent recharge has
71 been filed.
72

73 Second, a potential lease agreement for storage water in Lake McConaughy would take the place
74 of the Net Controllable Conserved Water (NCCW) the CNPPID offered the Program last year.
75 Leasing storage water has several advantages as it would be immediately available and the
76 releases could be controlled. An initial copy of the agreement has been provided to the WAC.
77 There will be discussions of the leasing possibility at the next Finance Committee (FC) meeting
78 before the Program advances the agreement with the CNPPID.
79

80 The third option is that the Program could make short-term lease arrangements with irrigators on
81 the CNPPID system. The CNPPID would manage the process. The Program would make an
82 offer for a certain amount of water then see what irrigators are willing to sell. The offers could
83 be adjusted annually. Theoretically, the Program would lease water from marginal farmland.
84 The CNPPID would like to make sure that farmers do not lease water that they otherwise
85 wouldn't have used. George Oamek, economics Special Advisor to the Program, will help with
86 auctioning and value strategies.
87
88



89 ***NPNRD Water Leasing: Jerry Kenny, ED***

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

92
93 ***Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease: Jerry Kenny, ED***

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

100

101 ***Elwood Reservoir Seepage: Sira Sartori, ED Office***

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

108

109 ***NPPD Water Leasing: Jeff Shafer, NPPD***

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

118

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

127

128 There was discussion of whether the Program should score differently for increased groundwater
129 pumping resulting from comingled surface water/groundwater acres changing to exclusively
130 groundwater irrigated acres. Whether the Program should score to the net effect for this
131 particular project was discussed by the group. The possibility of the NPPD and the CNPPID



132 reaching an agreement to allow the NPPD to lease storage water to the Program was also
133 mentioned.

134
135 Sellers requested that the NDNR or the NRD give a presentation overview of how water is
136 accounted for when there is an increase in groundwater-irrigated acres. Bradley agreed that
137 something could be put together. It is anticipated a presentation could be done at the next WAC
138 meeting on October.

139
140 Drain asked about whether the Program is asking to protect the transfer water all the way to the
141 Platte's confluence with the Missouri River. He wondered about the value of adding the
142 protection beyond Kearney Canal or the critical habitat reach. Kenny answered that protecting
143 the transfer water that distance was an appeasement related to pallid sturgeon habitat. He said
144 that, based on permitting, protecting the transfer water to Kearney or Grand Island would be
145 sufficient and would be acceptable. This is only a minor issue.

146
147 **E65 Groundwater Recharge:** *Sira Sartori, ED Office*
148 Sartori reported that the Program has started to look at groundwater recharge in the E65 Canal as
149 a potential WAP project. It would operate similar to the Phelps County Canal groundwater
150 recharge project. The Program was interested in estimating the groundwater divide in the area of
151 potential recharge in the E65 Canal, between Mile Posts 5.9 and 13.9. Groundwater elevation
152 contours were developed and compared to the 1995 contours from the 2010 COHYST report.
153 Based on the analysis of the divide, a significant portion of the E65 Canal recharge between Mile
154 Posts 5.9 and 13.9 the likely accretes to the Republican Basin and therefore, it does not seem to
155 be a beneficial WAP project. No opposition was expressed toward this conclusion.

156
157 **Phelps Groundwater Recharge Well Pumping:** *Sira Sartori, ED Office*
158 The Program has looked into whether groundwater pumping under the Phelps County Canal is a
159 feasible WAP project. Water recharged in the Phelps County Canal would be pumped to the
160 river during shortage months for score credit. Based on the preliminary score and cost analysis,
161 groundwater pumping of recharge could be a beneficial WAP project for the Program. It appears
162 to be cost effective and could be done at a faster pace than other WAP projects.

163
164 Sartori said that the next steps would be to look more into detailed costs, permitting requirements
165 and follow up with the Scoring Subcommittee. Kenny asked if the WAC believes this project
166 should progress into the next phase of evaluation. Drain agreed that the Program should continue
167 to evaluate this as a potential WAP project. No opposition was expressed toward moving
168 forward with this path forward.

169
170 **Wet Meadows Hydrologic Monitoring Project Update:** *Scott Griebeling, ED Office*
171 Griebeling explained that the Program is installing additional soil moisture monitoring equipment
172 at the Fox and Binfield wet meadow sites to obtain spatially averaged soil moisture
173 measurements over areas of approximately 600 m in diameter.

174



175 The Program will also install four groundwater monitoring wells at the Morse wet meadow site
176 to aid in the design of check structures to be installed on the Peterson Ditch that drains the site.
177 The groundwater models and soil moisture monitoring plan are ready for work group review.
178

179 **2013 Short Duration Medium Flow Summary:** *Scott Griebling, ED Office*

180 Griebling summarized the hydrologic analysis of the 2013 short duration medium flow release.
181 The release experienced relatively lower losses than previous releases. It was successful in
182 testing the use of North Platte canals to route water around the choke point. Similar hydrologic
183 analysis will be conducted on the high flow events from the fall of 2013 and summer of 2014.
184

185 **2015 Draft Water Plan Budget:** *Jerry Kenny, ED*

186 Kenny provided a brief summary and explanation of assumptions used to develop the 2015
187 Water Plan draft budget. He discussed the general budget plans through the end of the First
188 Increment and stated that all numbers are preliminary and subject to revision.
189

190 Kenny explained that, due to the need for an individual 404 permit for State Channel
191 modifications, construction will not occur this year, so that money will likely not get obligated
192 and new money may need to be put into that line item for 2015. Additional funds have been set
193 aside for the State Channel in 2016 – 2017 in case the Program needs to buy out properties in the
194 area.
195

196 In 2015, the Program plans to spend about the same amount on the J2 Regulating Reservoir as in
197 2014. There will be discussions at the Governance Committee (GC) and FC level to determine
198 whether the Program should wait to make the 2014 payment until the money is needed by the
199 CNPPID to acquire land and purchase materials.
200

201 He asked that WAC members provide input, but also stated that a more refined budget estimate
202 and the associated work plans will be provided at the October WAC meeting with ultimate GC
203 approval required in December.
204

205 **Additional Business:** *Jerry Kenny, ED*

206 The 2014 meeting schedule is posted on the WAC website. The October meeting was changed
207 from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. **The next WAC meeting is scheduled for October 21, 2014, at**
208 **9:30 am (Mountain Time) at the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center.**
209

210 **Action Items**

211 **General WAC**

- 212 • No action items

213 **ED Office**

- 214 • The ED Office will revise the SDMF memorandum to include a comparison of peak flow
215 travel times through the reach with the NDNR estimates.
216
217



218 Additional Items

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