



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Technical Advisory Committee
Whooping Crane Workshop Notes
ED Office Conference Room
February 19, 2014

Attendees

Suzanne Sellers – Colorado Water Users (Chair)
Jerry Kenny – Executive Director
Chad Smith – ED Office
Dave Baasch – ED Office
Jason Farnsworth – ED Office
Dave Zorn – ED Office
Mike Besson – State of Wyoming
Barry Lawrence – State of Wyoming
Mark Peyton – Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District
Jim Jenniges – Nebraska Public Power District
Mark Czaplewski – Central Platte Natural Resource District
Matt Rabbe – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mike Fritz – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Jesse Bradley – State of Nebraska
Rich Walters – Nature Conservancy
Brock Merrill – Bureau of Reclamation
Gary Lingle – AIM
Shay Howlin – Western EcoSystems Technology (WebEx)
Trevor Hefley – University of Nebraska Lincoln (WebEx)

Introductions

Sellers called the workshop to order, the group proceeded with a roll call, and Sellers asked for modifications to the agenda; none offer.

Peer Review and Publication

Smith informed the group minutes from the January 22, 2014 TAC meeting were posted on the TAC site and would be approved at the next TAC meeting. Smith informed the group the RFP to select a new contractor to identify independent science review panels was on the street now. Smith presented an updated list of potential documents to be Peer Reviewed and Published during 2014 and asked for TAC member feedback and suggestions.

- Rabbe asked if the GC had voted on the list of documents yet or not; Smith stated the GC would review and make a decision on the list during the March 2014 GC meeting.
- Sellers asked a procedural question regarding the roll of the TAC when it comes to publishing Program data analyses, results, and conclusions. Smith said there was not a formal process in place for publishing like there is for peer review, but that he planned to discuss the process with the GC in March. Jenniges stated the biggest issue with publications generally is the discussion section and suggested the TAC provide their recommendation to the GC as to whether or not various documents should be published. Smith said he liked the



notion of having the TAC review and provide feedback on manuscripts intended for publication, but expressed concern with having the TAC vote on publication based on whether they agree with the results because he felt that should be a GC decision.

- Sellers stated the GC seemed to be seeking TAC input on the list of potential publications. Smith said he felt documents being used to assess Program Big Questions should be peer reviewed or published or else the TAC needs to agree that certain documents didn't need published or reviewed in order to be used to make decisions. Jenniges said the Flow Consolidation Report may be an example of such a document given it isn't practical to consolidate flow in much of the central Platte River. Baasch and Farnsworth said it is one thing for the TAC to agree it isn't practical to consolidate flow, but another thing if it has implications for the FSM management strategy. Rabbe said flow consolidation is one piece of the FSM management strategy, but that people may agree flow consolidation isn't practical and given the limited benefits it would provide at the Cottonwood Ranch Complex it isn't necessary to implement in order to proceed with the FSM management strategy.
- Besson suggested the EDO produce a manuscript or two for publication as test examples and have the TAC review the manuscripts and provide a recommendation to help develop the process. Jenniges and others agreed and suggested the EDO use the Forage Fish Study as the example.
- Smith discussed the feasibility of peer reviewing the Program's minimum habitat criteria and asked the TAC for their thoughts on publishing the criteria, methods, and results in 1 manuscript. Jenniges agreed peer reviewing the minimum habitat criteria would likely result in differing opinions and the Program would have to decide on whose opinion we wanted to use (Program participants or others). Kenny suggested we could re-run the assessments at varying levels (5%, 10%, 15%, etc.) to test the sensitivity of the results to various levels. Jenniges suggested conducting a sensitivity analysis as suggested by Kenny and determine whether or not bird response supports the criteria. Rabbe said given the novelty of what the Program was doing he supported publishing the Program's process for establishing the minimum habitat criteria and the methods used to assess habitat availability so others looking to do the same were aware of the Program's approach for delineating habitat. Baasch asked the TAC if they would be comfortable with moving the minimum habitat criteria documents to the potential publication list; no one objected.
- Smith said the EDO will have the 2012 Forage Fish Report prepared into a manuscript to be reviewed by the TAC for publication. Smith and Farnsworth said another example publication that could be produced in early 2014 would be the results of the Vegetation Scour and Lateral Erosion study. Sellers asked if Natasha Bankhead would be hired to produce the manuscript; Smith said it would cost the Program money to have Natasha produce the manuscript. The TAC supported the development of the Forage Fish and Vegetation Scour and Lateral Erosion manuscripts; no one objected.

Whooping Crane Telemetry Study Proposal

Baasch presented information contained in the Whooping Crane Telemetry Study Proposal. Baasch informed the TAC they were being asked to consider the proposal because of discussions during the December budget meeting where the GC suggested the Program attempt to find ways



to reduce the tern and plover, geomorphology and vegetation, and whooping crane monitoring budgets in the future. Baasch said if the TAC supported Program participation for continuing the telemetry study that would mean Program monitoring would likely have to be reduced to make funding available in 2014 to contribute to the study.

- Smith stated there was a pressing timing issue given trapping for the current telemetry study was completed and the next potential trapping event could occur in the fall or winter of 2014-2015. Smith also reiterated the fact the GC requested the EDO look at ways to reduce monitoring costs.
- Jenniges questioned whether or not the Program would be able to continue to collect trend data that was comparable to data that has been collected in the past. Baasch said so long as we mark a random sample of the population then the trend data would be equivalent to what has been collected in the past.
- Rabbe asked if another 10-15 years of data collection as has been done in the past would change the results of Program analyses; i.e., does the Program have a large bank of data that is representative of the population. Baasch said the Program has approximately 100 unique crane group stopovers and may expect to observe another 50 or so unique groups during the next 5 years. Rabbe stated it would likely take quite some time to answer Program questions regarding off-channel use along the Platte River; Baasch agreed.
- Fritz questioned if we would be marking the various age groups of birds as they are represented in the population; Baasch said we have marked as many juveniles to date as we have adult plumage birds which is not a good representation of the population, but that most deaths observed to date have been juveniles so over half of our telemetry data is probably on older birds. As the study progresses, the intention would be to remark older birds which would be a better representation of the population.
- Lingle asked Baasch how the proportion of marked birds that used the Platte River in the past compares to the estimates that have been reported in the monitoring reports. Baasch said he had not looked at that yet, but would put together a table for the TAC following the meeting that illustrates how the estimates compare.
- Farnsworth stated it seemed there were a lot of visions in the room that hadn't been discussed ranging from no Program monitoring data to all Program monitoring data and there likely was some middle ground that likely would be best for the Program. Farnsworth said the middle ground may be to reduce or eliminate data collection that is not being used to answer Program questions such as time budget or profile collection. Jenniges agreed and said his biggest concern was the certainty of collecting data that could continue to be used to address Program hypotheses.
- Peyton stated the proposal seemed like it was more of a recovery team type of proposal rather than a Program proposal given most of the information does not apply to the Platte River. Peyton expressed concern with having the Program contribute \$500,000 to the study. Baasch said the \$500,000 was a hypothetical example of how the Program would save \$1,000,000 over the next 5 years on monitoring if it decided to contribute that amount to the telemetry study and discontinue monitoring, but the amount was only hypothetical and was in no way a commitment to the project.



- Peyton asked if the TAC was being asked if they support the Program's participation in the telemetry project in the future. Smith said no, the TAC was not only being asked if they support continuing to contribute to the telemetry project going forward, but also to decide what modifications would be needed and acceptable to the current monitoring protocol to free up money for the Program to continue to participate in the telemetry project.
- Rabbe said there seemed to be a lot of reservation on changing the monitoring protocol because the TAC hasn't seen the results from the analysis of Program data and secondly because there hasn't been a comparison of how the proportions compare; Jenniges agreed. Besson suggested the TAC consider the proposal during 2015 after the TAC has a chance to see the results of WEST's analyses.
- Peyton suggested we remove the Program's contribution from the budget before presenting the proposal to the recovery team to see how interested others were in continuing to fund the telemetry project; Baasch said he would do that.
- Jenniges questioned whether or not the Program needed to continue to collect profile data given the Program collects LiDAR and aerial imagery annually. Lingle said he thought the Program could easily cut \$30,000 to \$50,000 dollars from the monitoring budget pretty easily by eliminating collection of profile data, etc. Baasch said \$40,000 to \$50,000 would be enough funds to purchase transmitters to recapture 10 birds in Texas during the winter of 2014-2015 if other organizations were willing to contribute employee time and travel costs to capture birds.
- Baasch showed the TAC telemetry bird use of the Platte River by migration season through spring 2013.
- Howlin asked if the Program was most interested in the actual number of birds using the Platte River or the trend in use over time; Baasch said we were interested in both, but were most interested in the trend in use over time. Hefley said we could use the data collected to date to do a power analysis to determine the most efficient way to estimate whooping crane use of the Platte River.
- Besson asked what motion the TAC was being asked to support; Smith and Baasch stated the intent of a motion would be to support Program interest in continuing to contribute to the telemetry study. Baasch added the proposal would change as other organizations reviewed and made edits to the study plan.
- Jenniges suggested the group discuss the proposal further at the end of the workshop once the group figured out where money could be saved from the Program budget that could be used to contribute to the telemetry project; the group agreed.

Whooping Crane Habitat Availability Assessment Results

Baasch presented results from the 2007-2012 Habitat Availability Assessments and informed the group the results wouldn't change unless the Program changed the minimum habitat criteria.

- Jenniges asked if the differences in starting acreages in filter 1 were related to timing of imagery collection or changes in the channel. Farnsworth said 2007 was just after the drought and the channel was full of phragmites which likely resulted in less suitable habitat,



but following the flood in 2008 more of the channel was bare sand and shallow water. Farnsworth said we could look at how imagery classification of vegetation versus bare sand and shallow water change through time as well.

- Jenniges asked if we had compared whooping crane use areas with suitable habitat areas. Baasch said we planned to do that in the habitat selection analysis and that he felt suitable habitat areas would likely be a better predictor of whooping crane selection than the other metrics that would be tested.
- Baasch said he would post the final Shapefiles on the TAC website for the TAC to have if they want to use them for anything.

2008 Whooping Crane Habitat Selection Analysis Report

Baasch discussed the EDO white-paper, WEST responses to the EDO document, and the Service's response to both documents. Baasch said the EDO was comfortable with the Service's recommendation of not citing or using the 2008 Report for Program management decisions once the 2014 Report is available. Baasch said the dataset and R-code used in the analyses in the 2014 Report will be available to the Program folks. Baasch asked the TAC if they would be comfortable with noting there may be potential issues with the 2008 Report in the 2014 Report and not using the 2008 Report once the new report was available; no one objected to this approach.

Whooping Crane Data Analysis Plan and A Priori Models

Baasch informed the TAC WEST provided the EDO an updated version of the Data Analysis Plan a few days prior to the workshop, however, the TAC was not provided the updated Plan because some of the metrics included in the Plan were out dated as things have changed. Farnsworth stated the original list of models primarily contained metrics the Program could manage for. The TAC discussed the list of in-channel *a priori* models that was distributed to the group and added the following metrics and models to the list:

- Jenniges suggested we test distance to nearest vegetated island or bankline; Baasch said that metric would be added and the model set would be expanded to include distance to nearest vegetated island or bankline everywhere unvegetated channel width was included in the current set of models.
- Jenniges suggested we test distance to nearest wooded area; Baasch said that metric would be added and the model set would be expanded to include distance to nearest wooded area everywhere unforested width was included in the current set of models.
- Rabbe and Jenniges suggested we test proportion of grassland (including wet meadow areas) within a 1 mile buffer of roost locations; Baasch said that metric would be added and the model set would be expanded to include proportion of grassland everywhere proportion of whooping crane wet meadow was included in the current set of models.
- The group discussed including 'management' or 'channel disking' in the analyses, but decided the information was only available back to 2004 so it couldn't be included.



- Farnsworth and Howlin explained that we currently plan to evaluate flow by comparing flow levels during days whooping cranes were observed on the central Platte River to flows that were available throughout the various migration seasons.
- Baasch informed the TAC that off-channel *a priori* models would include combinations of metrics such as distance to obstruction, distance to disturbance, and landcover class. Lingle suggested we consider including distance to nearest wetland. Baasch said we could calculate distance from off-channel use locations to wetlands that were identified when we developed the targeted wetland return transects.

Whooping Crane Telemetry Study Proposal (continued)

The TAC briefly discussed the telemetry study proposal further.

- Jenniges stated he felt the Program would be interested in continuing to be a partner in the telemetry project, but likely wouldn't want to be the primary funding source and wouldn't take the lead in the project.
- Baasch said he would remove the Program's contribution from the budget and send the proposal on to other investigators to review and provide feedback.

Closing Business

Smith reminded the group an ISAC meeting was scheduled for April 22-24 in Omaha to look at the lower Platte River. Smith said the EDO would coordinate with NPPD and the Service to see if additional airboats could be made available. Smith also informed the group that the CamNet trip to the Trinity River in October may not happen because funding may not be available; Smith will provide an update as soon as he can. Smith also informed the group the AMP Reporting Session is scheduled for October 14-15. An additional TAC meeting or workshop may be scheduled prior to the April ISAC meeting, but that will be scheduled via Doodle Poll.

Workshop ended at 1:30pm