



1 **PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**
2 **Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**
3 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission – Lake McConaughy Visitors Center
4 May 12, 2015
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6

7 **Meeting Attendees**
8

9 **Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

10 **State of Colorado**

11 Suzanne Sellers – Member
12

13 **State of Wyoming**

14 Bryan Clerkin – Member
15 Philip Stuckert – Alternate
16 Lee Arrington – Alternate
17 Matt Hoobler
18

19 **State of Nebraska**

20 Jessie Weitjes
21 Seth Chambers
22 Zablon Adane
23

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

25 Tom Econopouly – Member
26 Matt Rabbe
27

28 **U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

29 Brock Merrill – Alternate
30

31 **Downstream Water Users**

32 Cory Steinke – Chair
33 Duane Woodward – Member
34 Jeff Shafer – Member
35 Landon Shaw – Member
36 Nolan Little
37 Tyler Thulin
38

39 **Colorado Water Users**

40 Jon Altenhofen – Member
41 Luke Shawcross
42

43 **Upper Platte Water Users**

44 Dennis Strauch – Member
45

46 **Environmental Groups**

47 Duane Hovorka – Member

Executive Director’s Office (ED Office)

Jerry Kenny, ED
Scott Griebing
Sira Sartori
Seth Turner
Chad Smith
Darren Beck

Contractors

Matt McConville – HDR



48 **Welcome and Administrative:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

49 Introductions were made. There were no agenda modifications. Kenny reviewed the February
50 2015 WAC Minutes and there was a modification made prior to the meeting. Shafer made a
51 motion to approve the February 2015 WAC Minutes, which was seconded by Woodward. **The**
52 **February minutes were unanimously approved.**

53

54 Econopouly thanked Steinke and CNPPID for help with USFWS whooping crane releases from
55 the EA in Lake McConaughy between March 23 and May 7. A desirable average flow was
56 attained at the Grand Island Gage.

57

58 **WAP Project Updates**

59 ***J-2 Regulating Reservoirs: Cory Steinke, CNPPID***

60 Steinke advised that any information regarding land negotiations is confidential. The CNPPID is
61 working on study plans to take to agencies: wetlands, cultural resources, etc. The CNPPID
62 provided the office of Senator Deb Fischer with requested information, particularly regarding
63 eminent domain. The CNPPID would prefer to reach agreements with all landowners.

64

65 The CNPPID received extension on access from landowners to do wetland delineation this
66 summer. Altenhofen asked about timeline for this work. Steinke said no specific timeline, but
67 having access helps. The CNPPID is trying to put as much information as possible on their
68 website (operations/J-2 Regulating Reservoirs).

69

70 ***Phelps Groundwater Recharge: Cory Steinke, CNPPID & Sira Sartori, ED Office***

71 Sartori reported that excess flows were diverted into the Phelps County Canal between
72 November 26, 2014 and February 15, 2015. Half of the measured amount at the flume was
73 allocated to the Program. Sartori also provided graphs showing the groundwater levels in MW-1
74 and MW-2 and stated that the levels did not reach the operational thresholds during the recharge
75 season.

76

77 ***Phelps Groundwater Recharge Pumping: Sira Sartori, ED Office***

78 Sartori reported on a proposed pilot project to pump recharged groundwater under the Phelps
79 County Canal to a nearby drain for score credit during USFWS target flow shortages. The pilot
80 project would include one well with a proposed capacity of 1,000 gallons per minute (gpm) or
81 less on Program land (Cook property). Two monitoring wells would also be installed in the
82 vicinity of the pumping well and drain. It is hoped that the pumping well would be installed at
83 least 300 feet from the drain. It is assumed that the drain is plugged with fine sediments, but
84 nonetheless the Program does not want to dewater the drain as a result of groundwater pumping.
85 The monitoring wells would help to assess baseline water levels in the drain.

86

87 A score from the recharge pumping has been estimated using OPSTUDY hydrology, and varies
88 depending on the location of the pumping well. Estimated costs for the project are about
89 \$63,000 for drilling and equipment, plus about \$6,000 per year for operations and maintenance.

90



91 Kenny reported on plans to present this project proposal to the GC in June. Altenhofen offered
92 praise for the project concept and recommended future expansion. There was a motion from
93 Altenhofen to support the project and the motion was seconded. There were no objections.
94 Kenny stated that the GC would be notified of the WAC’s support for the project.
95

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

97 Woodward started by saying that the CPNRD has been busy this spring getting landowners
98 signed up so that the district can file for surface water transfers. One application was filed three
99 weeks prior for over 3,000 acres under the Orchard Alfalfa system, to transfer surface water back
100 to instream use. Agreements with landowners have variable time periods (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 7, 29
101 years, etc.). Accretions back to the river in July-August account for surface water returned to the
102 river minus depletions due to groundwater pumping in lieu of surface water for irrigation.
103

104 One week prior to the WAC meeting, an application was filed for transfer of surface water from
105 more than 9,000 irrigated acres under the Thirty Mile Canal. The application involves two
106 different water rights and agreements with landowners for varying lengths of time. The supply
107 to Thirty Mile is about 70 percent natural flow, so the lease is assumed to cover about 70 percent
108 of the consumptive use. Approximately 45 cfs will be returned to the river, with a lesser net
109 benefit to the Program due to groundwater depletions.
110

111 Agreements with landowners and transfer applications for the Cozad Ditch are in progress,
112 involving about 12,000 irrigated acres under the system. Combined yield from leasing under the
113 three ditch systems anticipated to be on the order of 14,000 AF, most of which will be credited to
114 the Program.
115

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

117 Kenny reported that there has not been a lot of progress on short-term leasing; however, there are
118 some proposals being discussed internally at the CNPPID, and the Program is awaiting feedback
119 from the CNPPID.
120

121 The Program and the CNPPID were recently able to quickly put together an agreement to capture
122 some of the excess flows in the Platte River to put into Elwood Reservoir for recharge. Elwood
123 Reservoir is very leaky, and thus much better for recharge than storage. Plum Creek runs
124 adjacent to Elwood Reservoir, and likely intercepts recharge accretions and delivers the water to
125 the Platte River.
126

127 The agreement with the CNPPID is a temporary permit that expires in June 2015, with the
128 Program paying \$42.60 per acre-foot for this recharge water. Volume of water for 2015 depends
129 on how long Platte River flows stay high, as well as target flows, which were low in early May,
130 but scheduled to increase on May 19. It is expected that as much as 2,000 acre-feet could be
131 purchased for recharge in 2015. This agreement is being treated as a pilot project to determine if
132 such arrangements should be continued in the future.
133



134 ***2014 Water Action Plan Update: Sira Sartori, ED Office***

135 Sartori reported that the EDO received many comments from WAC members, most of which
136 were requests for clarification and revisions to wording. In addition, the 314 acre-feet per year
137 NCCW (no cost) project was isolated from purchased NCCW as a separate, active WAP project.
138 Several figures were also updated for clarity.

139

140 Redlines are posted on the WAC website for review. Sartori requested that WAC members
141 submit any final comments by Tuesday, May 19. The document will then be finalized and
142 presented to the GC for approval in June.

143

144 ***Other Water Updates: Scott Griebing, ED Office***

145 Griebing reported that work on the COHYST model continues, with a graphic user interface
146 (GUI) in development and model time period extension underway. The ED office has completed
147 its modeling to include the J2 and Phelps Groundwater recharge projects into the COHYST
148 model.

149

150 Griebing explained that the wet meadows hydrologic monitoring approach peer review is
151 underway. Results are expected in the next month and the ED office response to any peer review
152 comments will be presented to the WAC and the wet meadow hydrologic monitoring working
153 group. The ED office hopes to present the results to the GC in September for final approval.

154

155 Griebing also reviewed the methodology used for the temporary hydrologic condition and
156 indicated the June and July conditions will test the approach.

157

158 **NPPD Water Leasing: Jerry Kenny, ED**

159 Sartori presented on estimated depletions associated with a potential surface water leasing
160 project with NPPD canal (Dawson County Canal). Similar to leasing from the CPNRD, surface
161 water otherwise used for irrigation would be relinquished and returned to the river after passing
162 through the diversion headgate(s). Irrigators could then turn to groundwater to replace this
163 surface water. For the depletions analyses, it is assumed that consumptive use is the same
164 regardless of surface water or groundwater source, and that the volume of water available to the
165 Program is split equally between July and August.

166

167 **Excess Flow Determination Methods: Scott Griebing, ED Office**

168 Griebing presented an overview of the possible approaches used to determine excess flows in
169 the associated habitat reach. The goal of establishing an agreed upon method is to ensure
170 consistent communication between water users when excesses are available. The ED office will
171 present whatever method the WAC decides upon to the Nebraska DNR as guidance. The ED
172 office will revise the memo distributed to the WAC in February to incorporate a hybrid seasonal
173 determination method and will poll the WAC to see which method it recommends.

174

175

176



177 **North Platte Choke Point Update:** *Jerry Kenny, ED*

178 Brad Anderson gave a presentation on the choke point reach at the February 2015 WAC meeting.
179 Kenny summarized potential structural remedies, including a series of channel modifications
180 identified by Anderson Consulting Engineers which would achieve a flow of 3,000 cfs at a stage
181 of 6.0 feet. These constructed improvements include dredging and channel widening upstream of
182 the Hwy 83 bridge, installation of jetties and bendway weirs and lowering of the thalweg in the
183 channel downstream of the bridge. Present cost estimates for these improvements are about
184 \$3.3M, with \$30,000 for annual operations and maintenance. Permitting is anticipated to take
185 about 2-3 years.

186
187 As an alternative, the Program is meeting with the National Weather Service on June 11 to
188 pursue revision of flood stage designations. Specifically, the Program would like to see the flood
189 stage raised to 6.5 feet so that a flow of about 2,500 cfs could be passed without triggering flood
190 warnings from the NWS. Analyses show that such a revision would affect 87 acres along the
191 choke point reach, excluding an area of marshy meadowlands on the north bank. Cost for flood
192 easements on the affected acres would be about \$373,000, assuming \$1,200 per acre, plus 40
193 percent of assessed value for two outbuildings that would be impacted. Next steps beyond the
194 meeting with NWS include reviewing costs, initiating discussions with landowners, and
195 revisiting a couple houses that are borderline relative to the boundaries of the inundation zone.

196
197 In addition, the Program received strong recommendation from nearby landowners to do some
198 vegetation control in the river channel, including tree removal and disking to remove vegetation.
199 The riparian tree clearing would cover an area of 60 acres at a cost of about \$120,000. This
200 would expose flow paths and make it easier to accomplish future vegetation maintenance. The
201 disking would cover 88 acres at a cost of \$17,600; such work would mobilize islands, banks, and
202 vegetated side channels. For a total of about \$140,000 to \$150,000, the Program could
203 accomplish this task in Fall 2015. It provides good PR for the Program, and may enhance the
204 case with NWS for the proposed flood stage revision. None of this vegetation control work
205 would require permits from the Corps of Engineers.

206
207 Altenhofen motioned in favor of pursuing vegetation work, Econopouly seconded, WAC
208 approved motion.

209
210 **Federal Depletions Plan Update:** *Matt Rabbe, USFWS*

211 Rabbe report that there were nine federal depletions plan consultations in 2014, all in Colorado.
212 This number was well below average of preceding years (usually around 20). In total, there have
213 been 153 federal depletions consultations over the 7 year duration of the Program so far.

214
215 **Nebraska Depletions Plan Update:** *Jessie (Winter) Wietjes, NDNR*

216 Wietjes presented regarding the number of surface and groundwater permits issued in 2013. Net
217 effects of new permits are positive, as accretions from mitigation offset new depletions. Wietjes
218 provided a presentation summarizing the Nebraska New Depletions Plan updates.

219



220 **Wyoming Depletions Plan Update:** *Matt Hoobler, WY SEO*

221 Hoobler summarized the Wyoming Depletions Plan updates including the existing water rights
222 activities baselines and new water related activities. He also discussed Governor Mead’s
223 Wyoming Water Strategy document, which includes information related to depletions and water
224 development opportunities. The Water Strategy document is available online.

225
226 **Colorado Depletions Plan Update:** *Jon Altenhofen, Northern CO Water Conservancy District
227 & Suzanne Sellers, CO Water Conservation Board*

228 Sellers reported on the portion of the North Platte Basin that resides in Colorado. There are
229 approximately 113,000 irrigated acres, using about 93,650 acre-feet annually. The population of
230 1,361 results in depletions of about 120 acre-feet per year. New post-1997 industrial uses have
231 resulted in depletions of about 100 acre-feet per year.

232
233 Altenhofen reported for the South Platte Basin in Colorado. He stated that the future depletions
234 plan is “broad-brush,” and driven by population growth as reported by the State Demographer’s
235 Office. Growth has been about 2 percent per year since 1997.

236
237 The South Platte Basin in Colorado has a depletions hole in May and June, which is made up
238 through retimed water. Last year (2014) was very good for recharge, with only 10 days of South
239 Platte Compact call, Colorado could’ve theoretically recharged almost the entire year. In
240 addition, 2014 was the first year that Colorado exceeded 10,000 acre-feet of retimed flows at
241 times of shortage; the average had been about 7,500 acre-feet per year. Based on Altenhofen’s
242 analysis, water available for recharge in November-January during the First Increment has been
243 only about 33 percent of the historical average.

244
245 Colorado more than doubled its capacity for pumping recharge water in the Tamarack Project
246 reach by installing an additional six wells. There are now 16 wells at the Tamarack site, and they
247 try to pump throughout November, December, and January. Additional project expansion is
248 planned for 2016.

249
250 **Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

251 The 2015 schedule is posted on the WAC website. **The next WAC meeting is scheduled for**
252 **August 11, 2015, at 9:30 am (Mountain Time) at the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center.**
253 Following the May WAC meeting, the Platte Basin tour commenced.

254
255 Kenny reported that a letter was received from Harry LaBonde of the Wyoming Water
256 Development Commission, and the Program will receive 4,800 AF from Pathfinder Municipal
257 Account lease in 2015.

258
259



260 **Action Items**

261 **General WAC**

- 262 • Provide comments to the ED Office on the 2014 WAP Update redlines by May 19.

263 **ED Office**

- 264 • Finalize 2014 WAP Update.
- 265 • Update and distribute the excess flow determination method memo and request feedback
- 266 from the WAC.
- 267 • Provide the WAC’s recommendations to the GC at the June meeting.