



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
Conference Call and WebEx Meeting  
February 2, 2016

**Meeting Attendees**

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

**State of Colorado**

Suzanne Sellers – Member

**State of Wyoming**

Bryan Clerkin – Member

Philip Stuckert - Alternate

**State of Nebraska**

Jessie Winter – Alternate

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

Tom Econopouly – Member

Jeff Runge – Alternate

**U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

Mahonri Williams – Member

**Downstream Water Users**

Cory Steinke – Chair

Duane Woodward – Member

Jeff Shafer – Member

Landon Shaw – Member

Mike Drain – Alternate

Nolan Little

**Colorado Water Users**

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Luke Shawcross

**Upper Platte Water Users**

n/a

**Environmental Groups**

Jacob Fritton – Member

Rich Walters

**Executive Director’s Office (ED Office)**

Jerry Kenny, ED

Scott Griebing

Sira Sartori

Kevin Werbylo

Seth Turner

**Contractors**

Matt McConville – HDR



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

49 Introductions were made. Kenny made an agenda modification to move the wet meadows peer  
50 review to the first topic of the meeting. Sartori reported no changes to the October 2015 WAC  
51 meeting minutes. Motion to approve meeting minutes was made by Woodward, seconded by  
52 Econopouly, unanimously approved. Altenhofen nominated Steinke as 2016 WAC Chair. There  
53 were no other nominations. Woodward seconded. Unanimously approved and Steinke accepted  
54 the role.

55

56 **Wet Meadows Peer Review & Monitoring:** *Scott Griebeling, ED Office*

57 Griebeling provided a brief review of the peer review process and recent changes to the peer  
58 review packet for the wet meadows hydrologic monitoring approach. There were no questions or  
59 comments on the approach or peer review packet. Woodward motioned to recommend the peer  
60 review packet to the GC. Clerkin seconded. There was no additional discussion; unanimous  
61 agreement.

62

63 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates**

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

65 The CNPPID is working on amending the Three-Party Agreement with sponsors. RJH is drilling  
66 holes on the county right-of-way and the CNPPID's property to determine if there is a  
67 continuous layer of low seepage sediment. If so, a cut off wall down to this layer may be a cost-  
68 effective approach, in lieu of a clay liner. Woodward asked if the same number of landowners  
69 would be affected by the change in size of the J-2 Regulating Reservoirs. Steinke said the  
70 removal of a second reservoir, Area 2, reduced the number of landowners.

71

72 ***Phelps Groundwater Recharge and Recapture: Sira Sartori, ED Office***

73 Sartori gave a brief presentation on the Phelps Groundwater Recharge project and the Phelps  
74 Groundwater Recapture project. Deliveries into the canal for recharge began 11/23/15 and will  
75 continue through likely mid-February. Deliveries were also made on behalf of the Program into  
76 Elwood Reservoir in November/December of 2015 for recharge purposes.

77

78 The ED Office checks water level elevations in monitoring wells near the canal, MW-1 and  
79 MW-2, throughout the recharge season. Both wells have 'operational' water levels that when  
80 reached, require discussion on whether continued operations are recommended. The operational  
81 levels are based on the Feasibility Study, and in place to avoid impacting other landowners.  
82 Water levels have remained within the 'operational' level during the 2015-2016 recharge season.

83

84 Sartori discussed the groundwater recapture project on the Cook tract: 2 monitoring wells were  
85 drilled, 1 production well was drilled, Tri-Basin NRD approved the permit for operations, well  
86 testing is delayed due to weather, the project is anticipated to be operational in 2016.

87

88 ***General Water Leasing: Sira Sartori, ED Office***

89 Sartori talked briefly about the water leasing white paper provided to the WAC. It is meant to be  
90 an overview document of the water leases available to the Program and outline of potential



91 discussion items that may arise with the various types of leases. The biggest questions are related  
92 to surface water leasing and the potential increased groundwater pumping that may occur on  
93 those lands. Sartori requested the group provide thoughts or comments on the white paper. There  
94 were no questions or comments at the time.

95

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

97 Woodward said the CPNRD is preparing agreements for transferred surface water rights again  
98 for those with 1- or 2-year signups. Recharge operations using excesses to target flows are  
99 anticipated in March.

100

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

102 The NPPD is still waiting for the surface water transfer application to be approved by the  
103 NDNR. Shafer said the NPPD met with the NDNR but no resolution has been reached. The  
104 NDNR has not issued an order yet.

105

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

107 The leasing arrangement with irrigators under the CNPPID was discussed. The Program put a  
108 cap of 2,000 acres to lease. The total signups were a total of 1,037 acres. This is successful for  
109 the first go at this project, but not as much as was hoped for by the Program. It is thought that the  
110 dry-up requirement may be a dis-incentive for some people. Irrigators may also be conservative  
111 and not want to be the first ones to try the program. Kenny said that Dave Ford at the CNPPID  
112 thought some irrigators may also be hesitant to sign up because they don't want to suggest there  
113 is more water available than needed.

114

115 Altenhofen asked about the asking price of the water. Kenny said he thought the price offered by  
116 the Program was reasonable, and probably generous at \$220/acre. The water associated with the  
117 land is about 9 inches/acre, then there are routing losses to Grand Island. The water is available  
118 in Lake McConaughy.

119

120 The Program may be in the position of a similar arrangement next year if there is full allocation.  
121 The CNPPID's board is reluctant to let the Program or others into the water leasing arena if there  
122 is not a full allocation year; if less than full allocation, farmer-to-farmer leases are allowed.

123 Kenny is hopeful more irrigators will sign up in the future after seeing the success this year.

124 Altenhofen asked how many irrigators signed up this year. Kenny thought in the ballpark of 20-  
125 30 landowners. A lot of the lands are pivot corners or hard to irrigate areas, but geographically, it  
126 seemed like a broad distribution. The water will be transferred to the EA on October 1, 2016.

127

128 Runge commented that leasing in the future may require more discussion about the CNPPID's  
129 non-irrigation releases under their license, specifically in years when the allocation is short and a  
130 waiver of non-irrigation releases is expected.

131

132 ***Funk Lagoon: Jerry Kenny, ED***

133 There were no items to discuss as this project is not moving forward as a WAP project.



134 **COHYST Update:** *Scott Griebing, ED Office*

135 The graphical user interface (GUI) is operational but continues to be developed further. A  
136 workshop is scheduled later in February to teach the GUI to users. Documentation on the model  
137 is moving slowly. Land use from 2006-2010 is being integrated in the model.

138

139 **Broad-Scale Recharge Update:** *Kevin Werbylo, ED Office*

140 Werbylo gave a presentation on the broad-scale recharge project anticipated at the Cottonwood  
141 Ranch complex. He discussed the conceptual design, the current work plan and path forward.  
142 The next phase is a feasibility study for the site, including an infiltration pit, field data collection  
143 and validation of other assumptions used in the conceptual design, preliminary cost and draft  
144 score analyses. The focus in 2016 is recharge on the Morse tract.

145

146 Altenhofen asked about the depth to groundwater at the site and at the estimated acreage of  
147 recharge ponds. Werbylo said he thought between 3-8 feet, depending on the time of year and if  
148 water is applied to the land. The acreage at build-out would be about 725 acres, but will depend  
149 on the infiltration rate for design parameters. The infiltration pit will be similar to the study  
150 conducted during the Feasibility Study for the Phelps County Canal recharge project.

151

152 Altenhofen requested the map of conceptual design include the bermed wet meadows areas and  
153 the river. There was also some discussion among the WAC members on the location of the  
154 berms, the source of water for wet meadows at the site and the soil type and layers on the  
155 property. Cores taken on the property show mainly sandy soils in the area. Runge asked about  
156 whether the project would require U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permitting given the  
157 installation of the berms. Kenny said he didn't think any Corps permits would be required and  
158 also thought the berms were low enough to avoid permitting related to dam safety. The  
159 permitting process still needs to be investigated.

160

161 Altenhofen stated the feasibility study is going to be important due to the high groundwater in  
162 the area. Kenny agreed and said there is still a lot of work to be done. The amount of recharge  
163 discussed could bring the water level to the surface or create a mound that does not allow for  
164 additional infiltration. He suggested detailed groundwater modeling by Bill Hahn, ED Office  
165 Special Advisor. Griebing said the Peterson Ditch also goes through the property. Altenhofen  
166 commented that this may also create an issue if there is less lagged effect. He expressed his  
167 concern with how close the property is to the river and stressed the need for more investigative  
168 work of recharge operations on the site. Little mentioned some of the TBNRD monitoring wells  
169 in the area show rain events that brought groundwater to the surface.

170

171 Altenhofen suggested working with landowners between the canal and the river to recharge in  
172 pivot corners or on lands used for water leasing. These lands would be further from the river for  
173 a more lagged effect. Kenny said no discussions have been initiated. Steinke did not think  
174 landowners would be very interested due to crop prices. In his opinion, he thinks recharge will  
175 work at the site, but maybe not at the scale proposed at full build-out. The big question may be  
176 how much recharge can occur at the site.



177 **Trans-Basin Diversions Statutes:** *Jessie Winter, NDNR*

178 Winter provided a presentation on the 2 main sections regarding interbasin transfers: § 46-288  
179 and § 46-289 in the Nebraska Revised Statutes. She defined the terms in the statutes as well as  
180 the application and order process. The factors considered include the benefits of proposed  
181 transfers, adverse impacts and alternatives. Projects are deemed in the public interest if benefits  
182 are greater than adverse impacts, in which case, the NDNR would then grant the order. The ED  
183 Office then explained there is a proposed transbasin diversion to take excess from the Platte  
184 River and deliver it to the Republican Basin.

185  
186 Kenny asked if a public hearing is required in the application process and the answer is no.  
187 Kenny asked if it is allowable and Winters said yes, if the NDNR thinks it is necessary. There is  
188 public notice. The WAC discussed the need for excesses in Program projects, especially as the  
189 basin is over-appropriated. Altenhofen asked if the permit could be granted as conditional, to  
190 allow for Program projects to divert excess flows for use in the basin first. Winters said yes and  
191 that there would be a condition that the proposed transfer would be junior to current and future  
192 uses in the Platte Basin. WAC members expressed concerns about the project. Little said the Tri-  
193 Basin NRD, who would be a user of the interbasin transfer, is in the process of working with  
194 landowners in the Republican Basin now, but have not estimated potential yields from the  
195 project. He described how the water would be moved through the CNPPID system to Turkey  
196 Creek and piped to the Republican headwaters. The use would be to meet compact compliance  
197 with Kansas. The WAC asked to stay current on the proposed application.

198  
199 **Draft Annual Flow Report Summary:** *Scott Griebeling, ED Office*

200 The draft 2015 annual flow summary was presented to the WAC. Graphs of streamflow at  
201 various gages, Lake McConaughy EA content and USFWS target flows for the year were  
202 depicted in various graphs and discussed by Griebeling. The 2015 annual data was compared to  
203 data from 2007 through 2014 during the Program's First Increment, as well as historical data  
204 beginning in the 1940s. The 2015 annual hydrologic condition is considered wet, based on the  
205 hydrologic condition thresholds. A few WAC members commented the report summary was  
206 very useful and well-done.

207  
208 Runge asked if the annual flow summary tracks Tamarack water to Grand Island, since  
209 Pathfinder EA and Lake McConaughy EA waters are tracked through the system. Altenhofen  
210 said he reports the monthly volume of Tamarack water at the state line to the WAC annually. He  
211 said if there is a Tamarack III as a Water Action Plan project, the yield would likely be tracked to  
212 Grand Island for scoring purposes. Runge clarified earlier statement in that the suggested  
213 evaluation would not represent an effort to score projects. Rather, the suggested evaluation  
214 would be used to assess combined Program effect to Platte River hydrology. Runge thought that  
215 tracking Tamarack water to the state line is reasonable, and Tamarack III could provide an  
216 opportunity to evaluate contributions to associated habitat area.

217  
218  
219



220 **Excess Flow Analysis:** *Scott Griebing, ED Office*

221 The purpose of the analysis was to evaluate trends in annual excesses and monthly excess  
222 distribution. A previous analysis by the ED Office was completed on this topic already; however,  
223 this is an extension of that analysis. Griebing went over various graphs of annual excesses over  
224 time, including historical trends in excesses. Historical data from the Grand Island gage from  
225 1947 through 2015 was used. Box plots of monthly excesses were shown to illustrate the spread  
226 of the data. Large flow events in short periods of time tend to skew the annual averages upwards.  
227 There are also months in the analysis when there are no excesses. This makes it important to  
228 capitalize on large flow events and evaluate excess availability using medians and distributions  
229 in addition to averages.

230  
231 Altenhofen requested the graphs in the presentation include clear titles. He noted there appear to  
232 be less winter excesses, which would limit potential diversions for projects such as Tamarack.  
233 Even though there may be an upward trend in excesses over time, it is deceiving as it may not be  
234 during times when projects divert. Altenhofen suggested showing the 2007 - 2015 period to see  
235 how this relates to Program operations. Griebing said he could make additional box plots for the  
236 first 9 years of the Program. Econopouly agreed this would be a good idea. After some  
237 discussion, the ED Office said the excess flow analyses will be organized into a comprehensive  
238 white paper, which will be provided to the WAC for the next meeting.

239  
240 **Hydroclimatic Indices Update:** *Jerry Kenny, ED*

241 The Water Year (WY) 2016 forecast for the North Platte is the high average category for the  
242 volume of streamflow at Lewellen from May through July. This means predicted flows of  
243 average to above average inflows into Lake McConaughy. The South Platte forecast for WY  
244 2016 is average for the Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) and in the high average category for the  
245 volume of streamflow from May through July at Julesburg. The ED Office will distribute the  
246 reports soon. Dewberry, the contractor for the hydroclimatic indices work, has also been asked to  
247 attend the May WAC meeting to provide information to the group.

248  
249 **Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

250 Steinke presented the upcoming meeting schedule. Next WAC meeting is May 3, 2016.

251  
252 Econopouly informed the WAC there may be an EA release mid-February to mid-March, if the  
253 ice in the river does not pose an issue.

254  
255 **Action Items**

256  
257 **General WAC**

258 n/a

259  
260 **ED Office**

- 261
- Compile the excess flow analyses into a comprehensive white paper.