PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP or PROGRAM)
Governance Committee (GC) Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 12, 2017 – 2:00 PM – 5:45 PM
Wednesday, September 13, 2017 – 8:00 AM – 11:30 AM
Note: All times Central.

Meeting Location:
PRRIP EDO Conference Center
4111 4th Avenue, Suite 6
Kearney, NE 68845
(308) 237-5728

Governance Committee (GC)

State of Wyoming
Harry LaBonde – Member
Bryan Clerkin – Alternate

State of Colorado
Don Ament – Member
Suzanne Sellers – Alternate

State of Nebraska
Jeff Fassett – Member

Upper Platte Water Users
Dennis Strauch – Member
Bob Mehling – Alternate
George Williams – Alternate
Jeb Steward – Alternate

Downstream Water Users
Lyndon Vogt – Member
Don Kraus – Member
Brian Barels – Member
Kent Miller – Member
Mark Czaplewski – Member

Executive Director’s Office (EDO)
Jerry Kenny, ED
Dave Baasch
Jason Farnsworth
George Oamek
Bruce Sackett
Chad Smith
Tom Smrdel
Kevin Werbylo

Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)
Chris Beardsley – Member (2017 GC Chair)
Brock Merrill – Alternate

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)
Michael Thabault – Member

Environmental Entities
Rich Walters – Member
Bill Taddicken – Member

Colorado Water Users
Alan Berryman – Member
Deb Freeman – Alternate

Audience Members
Jim Jenniges – NPPD
Eliza Hines – Service
Matt Rabbe – Service
Tracy Zayac – North Platte NRD
Lori Potter – Kearney Hub
John Cambridge – HDR
Tom Econopouly – Service
Cory Steinke – CNPPID
Pat Engelbert – HDR
Welcome & Administrative
Beardsley called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM Central Time. The group proceeded with introductions.

GC Decision – Ament moved to approve the June 6-7, 2017 GC Quarterly Meeting minutes and the August 8, 2017 GC Conference Call minutes; LaBonde seconded. Both minutes approved.

Program Committee Updates
Land Advisory Committee (LAC)
Sackett provided an update on the latest LAC activities. The last LAC meeting was May 16, the next meeting will be October 10.

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)
Steinke provided an update on the latest WAC activities. The WAC had a conference call on August 8. Topics included Cottonwood Ranch, slurry walls, irrigation water baselines, Central Platte water leasing, NPPD excess flow water, and the Pathfinder municipal account.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
Sellers provided an update on the latest TAC activities. The TAC voted electronically to support moving ahead with BOR modeling for sediment and vegetation and to support full-scale sediment augmentation. On August 29, the TAC held a conference call and recommended the GC support the two motions on the GC agenda for today related to the Whooping Crane Documents Joint Peer Review. TAC members were invited to give comments on the whooping crane telemetry manuscript drafted by the USGS. The next TAC meeting will be as part of the AMP Reporting Session on October 17.

Finance Committee (FC)
LaBonde provided an update on the latest FC activities. The FC approved the bid package for full-scale sediment augmentation. The FC also approved two other actions via email: HDR contract amendment for permitting slurry walls, and a bid package for Pawnee Complex habitat restoration.

Program Outreach Update
PRESENTATIONS
- The Platte Valley Weed Management Area group (PVWMA) had a field day on June 8, 2017 at the Bartels property. They reviewed the effects of different herbicide treatments used for phragmites control initiated by Working EcoSystems, LLC and the effects of prescribed fire to accretion ground. The group viewed the Elm Creek to Odessa stretch by airboat and observed helicopter spraying.
- Jerry Kenny and Jason Farnsworth presented on the Program to the participants of the 2017 Water & Natural Resources Tour on June 27-29, 2017. The tour was primarily sponsored by the Nebraska Water Center and Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District. The tour stopped at the Cottonwood Ranch complex for the PRRIP presentation.
- Jerry Kenny presented on the Program to stakeholders of the South Platte Master Plan (SPMP) at Morgan Community College in Fort Morgan, Colorado on July 17, 2017. The SPMP is a study of flood mitigation and recovery possibilities along 130 miles of the South Platte River from the Morgan-Weld county line to the Nebraska State Line.
EXHIBITS/SPONSORSHIPS

- The Program sponsored the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Annual Water & Crops Field Day on August 24, 2017 at the West Central Research Extension Center in North Platte, Nebraska. Bruce Sackett and George Oamek attended the event.

UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS/EXHIBITS

- Jerry Kenny and Jesse Bradley from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources will be panelists at the Nebraska College of Law – Nebraska Water Law annual seminar on October 6, 2017 in Lincoln, Nebraska. The title of the panel is Nebraska and the Trump Administration. The focus of Dr. Kenny’s information will be the impact of the administration on the PRRIP and the Program’s First Increment accomplishments.
- The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project will be holding their annual meeting at the Lied Lodge in Nebraska City, Nebraska on October 10 & 11, 2017. Patrick Farrell will be presenting, his session is titled; Sandhill Crane roost locations in relation to flow and channel width along the central Platte River. Dave Baasch will also be presenting, his session is titled; Life History and PRRIP contributions to the continued existence of interior Least Terns and Piping Plovers along the central Platte River.
- Kevin Werbylo will be presenting at the Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference in Avon, Colorado on October 11, 2017. His session is titled; Sharing resources to restore endangered species habitat in the Platte River Basin.
- The Program is exhibiting at Husker Harvest Days in Grand Island on September 12, 13, and 14, 2017 in the Natural Resources Districts building. Husker Harvest Days is recognized as the World’s Largest Totally Irrigated Working Farm Show™ and features the most extensive state-of-the-art information and technology available for today’s agricultural producers.
- The Program will be exhibiting at the South Platte Forum on October 25 & 26, 2017 in Loveland, Colorado.

MEDIA/OTHER

- Lori Potter wrote several articles for the Kearney Hub on the Program, the Platte River, and Nebraska water issues as a result of her participation on the Nebraska Water and Natural Resources tour. The articles were published between July 1 and July 9, 2017.
- The Program contributed outreach funds to a downtown Kearney mural project. The mural is on the side of a downtown building and features cranes flying over the Platte River at sunset. Sponsors names are listed at the bottom of the mural.

PRRIP FY17 Budget Update

Kenny gave an update on the status of the 2017 PRRIP budget and associated land income and taxes. Kenny said it looks like we will end up with expenditures of about $10 million by the end of this year. Stuart asked if money in the budget carries over if you don’t spend it. Kenny said if we don’t spend it, it is available in future years.

PRRIP Funding

Kenny said this item was put on the agenda because of discussion in Washington about a possible government shut down. There is now a Continuing Resolution until December 8. Merrill said we should table this until the December 17 GC meeting. LaBonde said he agreed. Fassett asked if we have done this kind of arrangement on funds before. Kenny and Merrill said yes in 2013.

GC Decision – This item is tabled until the December GC meeting.
J-2 Project Quarterly Report

Kraus discussed the J-2 quarterly report. Second quarter expenses were higher because there was an underestimate of expenses for the unnamed tributary analysis. Kraus said CNPPID may kick in some funds for this because it has value beyond the J-2 project. Fassett asked what is a do-nothing budget and what will costs be in 2018. Kraus said tasks are complete, the only issue is groundwater well recording. Steinke said a house needs to be torn down on one of the properties plus some lot mowing. Ament said we are bothered by ongoing items because we are looking at a large expenditure for water in the Extension so there are questions about these ongoing costs for a project that is not going forward. Strauch asked why we are maintaining and keeping this property, can’t we dispose of it. Steinke said we own two properties, one of which is being taken care of through a lease. Kenny said we are maintaining ownership of the two small properties because the project is now on hold, if you get rid of the properties then you are saying we have given up on the project.

Fassett said maybe we need to convert this agreement to some kind of maintenance approach. Merrill said there are two issues: 1) if you terminate the agreement, Central will close out the account and the money will go back into the account and that will likely have to go back into the federal pot, and 2) there are about $30 million obligated to the J-2 and we would have to find some way to re-obligate these funds which can be difficult. LaBonde said we could leave J-2 on hold until we have better information on other projects and then could re-obligate the money at that time.

PRRIP Publication & Peer Review

Smith discussed the results of peer review of the joint whooping crane documents (WEST report and habitat synthesis chapters).

GC Decision – LaBonde moved and Ament seconded the following motions related to the Joint Whooping Crane Documents Peer Review:

#1 – The Governance Committee (GC) approves the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) recommendation to accept the WEST Report (Correlates of Whooping Crane Habitat Selection and Trends in Use in the Central Platte River) and the PRRIP Whooping Crane Habitat Synthesis Chapters, revised by the Executive Director’s Office in response to peer review comments and TAC comments, as FINAL. These documents are approved by the Governance Committee as final with the understanding they will be used for decision-making purposes, and with the understanding the revised documents and all associated peer review documents will be made available to the public and posted on the Program web site.

#2 – The Governance Committee approves development of publication manuscripts for WC Habitat Synthesis Chapters 2 and 3, subject to TAC and GC review and approval for final publication.

Both motions approved.

Smith provided a brief overview of the status of several Program publications.

CNPPID Water Service Agreements (WSA)

Cottonwood Ranch WSA

Kenny discussed the WSA for the Cottonwood Ranch pipeline related to broad-scale recharge. Beardsley asked if we are really just looking at the wellfield option versus the pipeline reduced/buyback option. Kenny said yes. Kraus said the other issue to discuss is assignment of the project if the Program goes away. Barels said NPPD is working with the Program on an agreement given that this is a new purpose for Cottonwood Ranch that is not covered by the existing agreement with the Program for terrestrial habitat. Ament said the
most important thing is to deliver water where it needs to be so there is an operational concern. How do you determine what is the most certainty in terms of a pipeline or a wellfield? Kraus said for a pipeline, the first rule is the water has to be in excess of target flows. LaBonde asked if Central could deliver excess water during the irrigation season. Kraus said they had not looked at that much and that is not how the project has been modeled at this point. Steinke said if there is excess in the river, this project would be able to take the water.

Strauch asked where the point of diversion is. Kraus said at North Platte, which is 75 miles away. Strauch asked if that would preclude other opportunities for water projects above that point. Kenny said we are trying not to create that problem. Berryman asked if there has been an operational study of what water might be available. Kenny said that is underway. Beardsley asked when we could be operational with the well field. Kenny said sometime after 2018, about 6-12 months later than the pipeline. Barels said Kenny should visit with DNR about well siting because if they are too close to the bank you would need a surface water permit. Kenny said that is what we are going for. Berryman asked Kenny if he had any concern about long-term operation of a wellfield. Kenny said it would be more complex operationally but can be handled, but there are advantages to the simplicity of a pipeline.

Beardsley said he is hearing the pipeline is a good option financially and operationally but there are more questions that should be answered. LaBonde said another issue is to have the site-specific issues tied up at the same time.

**GC Decision – This item is tabled until issues are resolved around certainty, assignment, use of the land, and other items discussed today.**

**Phelps Canal WSA and Elwood WSA**

Kenny discussed the details of both WSAs. Fassett asked how much water we have benefitted from for these projects. For Phelps Canal, a little over 16,000 acre-feet. Beardsley asked why we are moving from one-year agreements to two-year agreements. Kenny said just for ease of use. Thabault asked if we can score the Elwood project. Kenny said that process is tied up with some COHYST issues and other matters.

**GC Decision – Berryman moved to approve the Phelps Canal and Elwood WSAs; Strauch seconded. Kraus abstained. WSA approved.**

**CNPPID Irrigator Water Leasing Agreement (WLA)**

Kenny discussed the Irrigator WLA. It would be the third year of a pilot project. This is establishing a water market in Nebraska and paving the path that there can be a water market in Nebraska – water is a commodity itself. It is now starting to get traction and we can only do this if it is a full allocation year. This is the same agreement we have exercised for the past two years. Beardsley asked if the fee is the same. Kenny said the $10,000 is the same. Stuart asked if Kenny could explain how the Environmental Account (EA) is credited through this agreement. Kenny said the EA was part of the original ante-in to the Program. That is storage volume of 100,000 acre-feet in Lake McConaughy. If space is available, up to 200,000 acre-feet can be used but it is the first to spill in Lake McConaughy fills. This water would be credited on October 1 assuming there is space available in the EA. That is generally never a problem. Once it is in the EA, the EA Manager (Hines) makes the determination as to when releases will be made. Thabault asked about the mid-season change if there is a full allocation to begin with but conditions change. Steinke said such conditions are highly unlikely but Central would have to adjust the amount of water available if an allocation change occurred late in the year. Kenny said if there is an extraordinarily rare event this might happen but it means the Program is treated no differently than the irrigators. Kenny said this is protection for the Program too. We won’t be completely kicked out of the market, instead we will just have a reduced amount.
GC Decision – LaBonde moved to approve the Irrigator WLA; Thabault seconded. Kraus abstained. WLA approved.

PRRIP Economic Impact
Oamek delivered a presentation on the EDO white paper on PRRIP economic impacts. Zayac asked why the impact to groundwater irrigators shows up as being higher with the Program. Oamek said that is attributable to a timing issue related to implementation of LB 962 and a reduction in irrigated acres, but that this was going to be re-examined as the timing had not played out as originally thought. Zayac asked how this is determined. Oamek said three ways: 1) direct impact to irrigators; 2) indirect impacts; and 3) fiscal impacts (money contributed to local government). Thabault asked how we can capture the last slide a little better from a quantitative perspective (recreational access, hunting, tourism, local dollars for habitat restoration work, etc.). Oamek said that is something we will also work on.

WAP Projects Update
Werbylo, Engelbert, and Cambridge provided an update on the broad-scale recharge project at Cottonwood Ranch.

Kenny said there would be a delay in announcing the contractor for the slurry wall project until after Executive Session tomorrow.

Meeting adjourned at 5:35 PM Central Time.
Welcome & Administrative
Beardsley called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM Central Time. The group proceeded with introductions.

PRRIP First Increment Extension
LaBonde discussed the status of the First Increment Extension. The states wrapped up their portion of the Extension at the June 2017 GC meeting and now the federal portion of the process through NEPA is underway. Merrill provided an update on next steps in the NEPA process. Rabbe said the Service will be conducting a formal consultation that will end up with a Final Supplemental Biological Opinion.

PRRIP Web Site & Database
Farnsworth discussed the status of the PRRIP web site and database and next steps. The EDO learned that our current web site is running on very old technology and it can no longer be updated. We now propose to develop a RFP for the GC to review and approve so that we can do a complete refresh on the web site and database. Farnsworth said the GC should think about a selection panel and appoint at least some people with an IT background. At first glance, the cost is looking like it will be between $200,000-$400,000 with potentially lower maintenance costs into the future than we have now. This fits within the budget estimated for this work into the Extension. Rabbe asked if as the web site is being developed, is there any plan to have committee involvement to help map that out. Thabault said it could be something like a User Input Panel. Farnsworth agreed that would be a good step. Merrill said we will have to ensure that the new site will work with federal functionality. Farnsworth said that will happen. Beardsley asked if we have done public outreach on what people would like to see. Farnsworth said no. Beardsley said we might want to consider that as the web site is built.

Public Comment
Beardsley asked for public comment. None offered.

Executive Session
Czaplewski moved to enter Executive Session; Strauch seconded. GC entered Executive Session at 8:20 AM Central Time.

LaBonde moved to end Executive Session; Ament seconded. GC ended Executive Session at 10:21 AM Central Time.

PRRIP Executive Session Motions
GC Decision – Taddicken moved to approve the EDO entering into a management agreement for Tract 1718 to develop a MCA tern/plover island; LaBonde seconded. Motion approved.

Future Meetings & Closing Business
Upcoming GC meetings:
• 2017 AMP Reporting Session – October 17, 2017 @ Omaha, NE
• GC Special Session (FY18 Budget) – November 14, 2017 @ Denver, CO
• GC Quarterly Meeting – December 5-6, 2017 @ Denver, CO

Meeting adjourned at 10:45 AM Central Time.
Summary of Action Items/Decisions from September 12-13, 2017 GC Quarterly Meeting

1) Approved the June 6-7, 2017 GC Quarterly Meeting minutes and the August 8, 2017 GC Conference Call minutes.

2) Tabled discussion of PRRIP Funding related to a potential government shutdown until the December GC meeting.

3) Approved the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) recommendation to accept the WEST Report (Correlates of Whooping Crane Habitat Selection and Trends in Use in the Central Platte River) and the PRRIP Whooping Crane Habitat Synthesis Chapters, revised by the Executive Director’s Office in response to peer review comments and TAC comments, as FINAL. These documents are approved by the Governance Committee as final with the understanding they will be used for decision-making purposes, and with the understanding the revised documents and all associated peer review documents will be made available to the public and posted on the Program web site.

4) Approved development of publication manuscripts for WC Habitat Synthesis Chapters 2 and 3, subject to TAC and GC review and approval for final publication.

5) Tabled further discussion of the Cottonwood Ranch WSA until issues are resolved around certainty, assignment, use of the land, and other items discussed today.

6) Approved the Phelps Canal and Elwood WSAs.

7) Approved the Irrigator WLA.

8) Approved the EDO entering into a management agreement for Tract 1718 to develop a MCA tern/plover island.