



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission – Lake McConaughy Visitors Center, NE

November 9, 2010

Attendance

Cory Steinke – WAC Chair, CNPPID
Jerry Kenny – Executive Director PRRIP, Headwaters Corp
Beorn Courtney – ED Office/Headwaters Corp
Steve Smith – ED Office/Headwaters Corp
Sira Sartori – ED Office/Headwaters Corp
Doug Hallum – NDNR
Dennis Strauch – Pathfinder Irrigation District
Jeff Shafer - NPPD
Jon Altenhofen – Northern Colorado WCD
Mike Drain – CNPPID
Rich Holloway – Tri-Bain NRD
Pat Goltl – NDNR
Brock Merrill – Bureau of Reclamation
Jeff Runge – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Greg Wingfield - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mahonri Williams – Bureau of Reclamation
Kent Miller – Twin Platte NRD
Suzanne Sellers – Colorado Water Conservation Board
Tom Econopouly – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Duane Woodward, CPRND
Matt Hoobler-Wyoming SEO
Duane Hovorka-NE Wildlife Federation
Mike George – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Matt McConville – HDR (by phone)
Mike Besson – Wyoming Water Development Office (by phone)
Bill Taddiken – Environmental Groups/Rowe Sanctuary (by phone)

Welcome and Administrative: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

Introductions were made. There were no agenda modifications. **The redlined August WAC Minutes were approved with no modifications.**

Channel Improvements: *Rich Walters, Platte Valley Weed Management Area Project Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy*

Walters gave an update on the Platte Valley Weed Management Area (WMA)'s activities in the Platte River corridor. The objective is to stop invasive and noxious weeds, and WMA has primarily focused on phragmites. WMA is removing phragmites for conveyance efficiency, to conserve water use and increase habitat. WMA has multiple matching grants to complete weed control for a total of \$3.1 million allocated as of this year, including \$480,000 from the Program. About 90% of funding has gone to herbicide applications and mechanical removal to date. The North Platte channel from Lake McConaughy to the confluence with the South Platte was sprayed in 2008, 2009 and 2010. Work on the North Platte is

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largely complete, and unfortunately has not resulted in increased channel capacity (current flood capacity is between 1,600 and 1,700 cfs at the Cody Park Bridge).

In total, WMA has sprayed approximately 336 miles of the Platte from Lake McConaughy to Columbus, including 18,300 acres with herbicide and removed biomass from 1,750 acres.

WMA uses an Integrated Management approach to control invasive and noxious weeds. The best method is an integrated approach using an herbicide method (spraying of Imazapyr) followed by biomass removal (e.g., discing, shredding, or burning). WMA found that using “biomass removal only” is a short-term fix that allows other invasive species to replace phragmites (“discing only” results in purple loosestrife emerging the same season, and “shredding only” results in phragmites emerging the same season). Herbicide application is done by aerial and ground applications. Typically, ground applications are done in sensitive areas. The best time to spray for effective phragmites mortality is June through the occurrence of freezing temperatures, based on rhizome testing. Local County Weed Districts also help in notifying individual landowners of invasive species on private land. WMA sprays vegetation in the first year and in the second year completes discing, shredding or mowing to remove the biomass. Burning, grazing and flooding are other methods of biomass removal. High flows are effective in removing biomass in the second year after spraying when phragmites stems are weak; otherwise high flows do not produce enough force to remove phragmites. The 2-year waiting period was demonstrated well with spraying that occurred in 2008, where 2010 high flows were successful in knocking down dead and weakened phragmites. Another potential management strategy could be to keep flows high enough through seedling germination season (e.g., through July) to inundate seedling vegetation and prevent germination.

WMA is research testing the best long term options and management using test plots. WMA uses color infrared mapping to detect phragmites outside channels to prevent future encroachment. Some off-channel management has been done to control the source of phragmites regrowth. WMA also completed a short water quality test and determined the background herbicide levels after spraying are less than 60 ppb, which is well below the threshold for affecting invertebrates (100,000 ppb).

Walters will be working on a Best Management Guide for free to landowners in the area. There is also a website outlet for public outreach at Plattevalleywma.org. The 2010-2011 focus will be to: 1.) Touch up channels where phragmites remain through aerial applications and follow up ground applications and start biomass removal from North Platte to Grand Island and 2.) Monitor and maintain (WMA has 2 years of grant money to continue spot vegetation removal with aerial monitoring and will begin lining up funding for 3 years out). Public outreach will include informing private landowners on how to control regrowth. The long-term maintenance will be done by individual landowners for sustainable control.

2011 SDHF Planning: *Greg Wingfield, USFWS*

Wingfield reviewed the 2009 flow routing test highlights and described the 2011 scheduled SDHF. In 2009, the Program conducted a release of EA from McConaughy around April 8th. Approximately 23,000 acre-feet were released from EA over 8 days. The peak at Overton was approximately 3,600 cfs. A total of 12,000 acre-feet passed CNPPID’s diversion and 5,500 acre-feet was intentionally bypassed with district compensation (combined power bypass payment to NPPD and CNPPID was approximately \$70,000). In the 2009 flow routing test report, a goal was set to increase the flow above 4,000 cfs in the Central Platte by: 1.) Improving conveyance at the Choke Point and 2.) Removing Phragmites above North Platte to allow water to move faster through the system. These items have not been fully addressed



for the 2011 SDHF but there has been spraying and removal of biomass to address some of the flow capacity issues. The choke point flood capacity remains around 1,600 cfs at the Cody Park Bridge in North Platte.

The 2011 SDHF is tentatively scheduled sometime mid-February to mid-March in 2011 (most likely mid-March). In 2011, the planning committee will identify clear objectives for the SDHF event. This year will probably be another learning event, with one of the primary objectives being to learn how weed management has influenced capacity on the river outside of the North Platte choke point. One of the goals previously identified for 2011 was to test the effects of sediment augmentation at Overton, but delays in the sediment augmentation feasibility study will prevent the ability to test sediment augmentation during the 2011 SDHF. Effects of the SDHF will be monitored at the Elm Creek FSM proof of concept site. Wingfield is hopeful there will be additional sediment movement in comparison to the 2009 event. There may not be higher flows this year unless natural flow is greater. The EA balance going into 2011 is about 120,000 acre-feet with anticipated storable natural inflows of 55,000 acre-feet. Evaporation and storage losses are anticipated to be lower than in previous years. Wingfield suggests proactively using the EA because it could be maxed this year. Although it is not the ideal time for a SDHF, the Program has the water and can learn from another test.

The EA priorities for this year are releases in the summer for terns and plovers (30k AF), SDHF (30k AF), and spring migration. Carryover is a lesser priority than in previous years. EA balance is anticipated to be approximately 100,000 acre-feet at the end of 2011. Also, there is budget this year for power bypass (approximately \$75,000), similar to last year. More monitoring has been completed since 2009 in terms of flow monitoring using LiDAR. Districts will be coordinating operations outside of drought mode. A few differences from last year will be the water supply (districts will be operating differently this time around-2009 was an optimal situation) and there may not be as much bypass as in the 2009 event. Hovorka mentioned Walter's WMA presentation to keep water in the river through July to help prevent phragmites germination. Wingfield noted this comment.

WAP Project Updates: *Jerry Kenny & Beorn Courtney, ED Office*

The ED Office has been focusing on the 2009 WAP Tier I projects in the past year. Two priorities are retiming excess target flows and providing storage closer to the associated habitat. Storage projects have been the focus including surface water storage reservoirs and storage through groundwater recharge. The groundwater recharge pre-feasibility was completed.

Elm Creek Reservoir – Reservoir for flood control, recreation and Program storage to satisfy target flows and supplement SDHF flows. Currently the contractor draft report is being reviewed by EDO staff and CPNRD staff. There are water supply issues to the reservoir: the capacity of the Dawson County Canal may limit deliveries to Elm Creek Reservoir during irrigation season and winter operations.

J2 Rereg Reservoir – The contractor is finishing the geotech investigations report and modeling the Phelps County Canal capacity. The first task of the feasibility study is to consider the potential for joint operations to serve Program purposes and to mitigate CNPPID hydrocycling. The contractor has not provided a clear answer as to whether this can work. Kenny is not feeling confident about the contractor's conclusions and is currently working with the contractor to resolve this. Some issues brought up by Kenny, Courtney and Steinke include: challenges with hourly data management, alternatives to other gate design, use of cells within reservoir to keep higher head. The ED Office is continuing to work with the contractor to adequately address this phase of the feasibility study.



Phase I was completed satisfactorily by the contractor. The contractor should complete Phase II (Feasibility) in early 2011 but is not guaranteed for Phase III (Design). A question was raised regarding the ED Office and special advisors reviewing the data to complete this task directly. Kenny noted it is difficult to determine how long this would take. The operations are critical and are a large portion of budget and score.

Groundwater recharge – Courtney stated the Selection Committee chose EA Engineering, Science & Technology in Lincoln and Daniel B. Stephens and Associates in Albuquerque. **The ED Office is working with EA to finalize scope, budget and contract for approval by the Finance Committee.** A kickoff and scoping meeting with the Groundwater Recharge Work Group and contractors will be held this afternoon, following by field visit tomorrow at the potential Gothenburg and Phelps recharge sites.

NCCW – Oamek is special advisor to ED Office and has been working with Marcia Trompke at CNPPID to understand and interpret cost and yields.

NE Leasing Update: *Beorn Courtney, ED Office*

Courtney described the WAP Nebraska Water Leasing projects. Dawson County Canal has approached the Program regarding leasing opportunities. The WAC requested information on existing methods to complete transfers. This information will aid the WAC in reviewing a lease proposal if the Program were to move forward. Courtney discussed the CNPPID temporary lease to Tri-Basin, CPNRD's water bank and NPPD's potential lease to the Program. Courtney's discussion items included the quantification of yield, net impacts to the river, permitting considerations and the value of water. Altenhofen asked about offsets from increased groundwater pumping when surface water is transferred. As Drain understands it, when surface water is removed and groundwater pumping increases, the associated NRD will be required to address this.

Courtney suggested starting a work group for NE Water Leasing - Shafer, Steinke, Drain, Altenhofen, Woodward, Hoobler, Hallum, Sellers and Econopouly volunteered. Altenhofen suggested the workgroup develop a matrix to review differences of each method. The ED Office will set up a NE Water Leasing workgroup area on the PRRIP website. The next step is for the workgroup is to review and recommend the methodology for the Program to use. Hovorka suggested using a consistent methodology (not necessarily identical) to help the GC with scoring. Kenny noted the Program will look at leasing from irrigation districts before individual users because they encompass larger areas and have staff to help in the transfer. Drain added that the districts can serve as the administrative contacts for required paperwork for water leasing.

Drain stated CNPPID submitted their temporary transfer application to NDNR last week. NDNR does not have a specific time period to respond but CNPPID is hopeful it will not be too long since the transfer is temporary. It was noted the leases will probably become longer once implications are realized. CNPPID would like to have a process to allow individual irrigators to choose who they complete transfer to in the future and CNPPID can assist with the paperwork.

2011 Water Plan Budget: *Jerry Kenny, ED*

Kenny described budget changes. The two items that have been changed are the 1.) Water Acquisition from \$500,000 to \$200,000, and 2.) Miscellaneous Water Resources Studies from \$200,000 to \$100,000. Total reductions of \$400k so Water Budget decreased from \$7,250,000 to \$6,850,000.

**Nebraska Depletions Plan Update:** *Doug Hallum, NDNR*

Hallum gave a brief overview of the NDNR depletions work with 5 of the NRDs. NDNR staff is on-schedule and currently assembling data and providing QA/QC of datasets. A template report will be tentatively completed and provided to the GC in December and presented to the WAC at the February meeting. The Integrated Management Plans (IMP) were adopted in 2009 and implementation is ongoing. The IMP process includes annual reports, annual basin-wide meetings and monitoring plans. NDNR and the NRDs formed the Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Program (PBHEP) institutional funding mechanism and the NE Environmental Trust (NET) supplemental funding to leverage the federal acreage retirement programs. The four Management Options Plans are: 1. Recharge recovery, 2. Surface water demand management (rotations, fallowing, dryup, leases), 3. Groundwater demand management (crop rotations, fallowing, dry-up, leases), and 4. Conjunctive management. The NDNR is also working on refinement of COHYST to improve groundwater analysis, add surface water conjunctively, and certify acreage. Another objective of the COHYST 2010 project is to include the ability to route depletions and offsets through the system.

Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

The next WAC meeting was scheduled for February 1, 2010, from 9:30 am – 3 pm (mountain time) at the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center.

There was no additional business.

Action Items**General WAC**

- WAC workgroup formed for NE Water Leasing: Shafer, Steinke, Drain, Altenhofen, Woodward, Hoobler, Hallum, Sellers, and Econopouly.

ED Office

- The ED Office will set up a NE Water Leasing workgroup area on PRRIP website and develop a matrix to review differences in methods
- The ED Office will work with EA to finalize scope, budget, and contract for the groundwater recharge feasibility study for approval by the Finance Committee.