PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission – Lake McConaughy Visitors Center
October 21, 2014

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado
Suzanne Sellers – Member

State of Wyoming
Bryan Clerkin – Member
Lee Arrington – Alternate
Philip Stuckert – Alternate

State of Nebraska
Jesse Bradley – Member

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Tom Econopouly – Member

Downstream Water Users
Mike Drain – Alternate
Cory Steinke – WAC Chair
Duane Woodward – Member
Jeff Shafer – Member
Landon Shaw
Nolan Little
Tyler Thulin

Colorado Water Users
Jon Altenhofen – Member

Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)
Brock Merrill – Alternate

Environmental Groups
Duane Hovorka – Member
Jacob Fritton

Executive Director's Office (ED Office)
Jerry Kenny, ED
Scott Griebling
Sira Sartori

Contractors
Matt McConville, HDR

Other
Doug Hallum (UNL, Conservation & Survey)

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Welcome and Administrative: *Cory Steinke, CNPPID*
Introductions were made. There were no agenda modifications. Steinke reviewed the August 2014 WAC Minutes. Woodward made a motion to approve the modified August 2014 WAC Minutes, which was seconded by Shafer. **The August minutes were unanimously approved.**

WAP Project Updates

J-2 Regulating Reservoir: *Cory Steinke, CNPPID*
Steinke provided an update on the status of the J2 regulating reservoir project. Initial offers have been made to land owners, public hearings are scheduled in November, and negotiations will begin in early December. Geotechnical and environmental studies are underway and will inform the permitting process and engineering design.

Phelps Groundwater Recharge: *Cory Steinke, CNPPID*
Steinke informed the WAC that long term agreements for the groundwater recharge on the Phelps canal have not moved forward as the permanent water right for the project has not been awarded. The Phelps canal is ready to recharge excess water in this current season under the temporary agreements used in previous years, but no water has been recharged at this point.

Phelps Groundwater Recharge Pumping: *Sira Sartori, ED Office*
Sartori presented an overview of the project which involves installing wells between the Phelps canal and the Platte River to pump water recharged into the canal in order to increase the score efficiency. The Program is considering installing wells in two locations in 2015, one on the Cook property and another further to the east on private land. The two wells would likely pump at a rate of 1,000 gallons per minute (gpm) and provide a score increase of approximately 500 acre feet (AF) for the Phelps groundwater recharge project, based on preliminary estimates. The Program is discussing well installation with private land owners and has not yet developed the final cost or design details.

Elwood Reservoir Seepage: *Sira Sartori, ED Office*
Sartori provided a brief overview of the project which seeks to recharge water in Elwood Reservoir. The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is also looking at using Elwood Reservoir as a recharge location and the Program intends to coordinate its efforts with the DNR. The Program has included money in the 2015 budget for recharging water in Elwood Reservoir. Steinke informed the WAC that the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) plans to use Elwood Reservoir for irrigation deliveries in 2015 which may limit the space available in the reservoir for recharge water. He also identified the need for proper accounting if water is recharged in Elwood when irrigation water is also present in the reservoir The CNPPID intends to begin filling Elwood Reservoir in April of 2015.

CPNRD Water Leasing: *Duane Woodward, CPNRD*
Woodward presented an update on the lease agreement between the Program and the Central Plate Natural Resources District (CPNRD) for surface water and recharged groundwater. Construction and rehabilitation of three canal systems used by the CPRND for surface water

leasing and groundwater recharge has been completed, although high flows in June of this year resulted in minor damages to some of the canal return structures. Woodward presented the tracking and accounting spreadsheets used to determine what excesses are available for diversion. Flow conditions in September allowed for diversions of excesses into the Cozad canal. Woodward indicated that 9,890 acres of surface water irrigated lands have signed up for the lease program and the surface water portion of the lease agreement has the potential to provide 7,000 AF to the Program.

Woodward explained that there was uncertainty regarding the availability of excess flows during the first part of October. The October hydrologic condition designation is typically not available until the 15th of the month and dictates the target flows for the month. There was discussion about the methodology used to determine excess flows and potential ways to provide earlier hydrologic condition designations. **The ED Office will review the methodologies used to determine excess flows and alternative hydrologic condition designation approaches and provide suggestions at the next WAC meeting.**

CNPPID Water Leasing: *Jerry Kenny, ED*
Kenny presented the two lease concepts being discussed with the CNPPID and explained that one involves transferring storage water in McConaughy from the CNPPID's account into the environmental account (EA) and the other involves developing lease agreements directly with irrigators in the CNPPID system. The CNPPID would act as the broker between the Program and the CNPPID for the second leasing concept. Further discussions between the Program and the CNPPID are expected to occur in the coming months. The question of how to deal with depletions associated with increased groundwater use resulting in surface water leased by the Program has not been addressed at this time.

NPNRD Water Leasing: *Jerry Kenny, ED*
Kenny summarized a potential water lease in the North Platte Natural Resources District (NPNRD) on a Ducks Unlimited (DU) property. The project is in preliminary investigations and involves changing the groundwater pumping scheme to increase river flows.

Republican Basin Supreme Court Case: *Jessy Bradley, DNR*
Bradley described the Supreme Court Case and explained there is not a significant impact of the Republican River Basin Supreme Court case on the Platte River or the Program. If the case isn't resolved it may impact accounting procedures for projects that impact the Republican basin, such as the Elwood Reservoir seepage project.

Surface & Groundwater Interaction in the South Platte Basin: *Doug Hallum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*
Hallum presented initial results of a groundwater and surface water monitoring project along the lower portion of the South Platte River in Nebraska. The project seeks to better identify which reaches of the river are gaining or losing on both a temporal and spatial basis. The monitoring effort used existing river gages at Julesburg, Roscoe, and North Platte, and added surface water

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stage gages near Big Springs, Brule, Ogallala, Roscoe, Paxton, and Hershey. Existing shallow and deep groundwater wells were equipped with data loggers near the river stage gages.

Permitting Processes for Changes in Surface Water, Groundwater & Comingled Lands: *Jesse Bradley, NDNR*

Bradley provided an overview of the permitting process and depletion mitigation associated with a variety of transfer scenarios between surface water, groundwater, and comingled irrigated lands. Permitting does not capture all potential sources of new depletions and the DNR uses a "Robust Review" process to account for all new depletions in conjunction with the integrated management plan (IMP) process. Robust Reviews are intended to occur every five years and consider irrigated acres, consumptive use, operational changes, Natural Resources District (NRD) actions, and other factors to determine current depletions and compare them to 1997 depletions. The COHYST or Western Water Use (WWU) models are used in the Robust review. Increases in depletions above the 1997 level require mitigation by either the DNR or the NRDs.

Bradley fielded several questions relating to depletions associated with Program leases. He indicated that new mitigations will be the NRD's responsibility and the DNR can only protect transferred surface water reflecting the net effect of the transfer after depletions have been taken into account. Bradley suggested that depletions mitigation be included in Program lease agreements unless an alternative approach could be approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Econopouly indicated the FWS would not be likely to overlook monthly depletions in light of an annual benefit. Kenny indicated the Program will work with the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) and the CPNRD on a depletions analysis on the NPPD lease.

2015 Draft Water Plan Budget: *Jerry Kenny, ED, Sira Sartori, ED Office, and Scott Griebling, ED Office*

Kenny, Sartori, and Griebling presented the 2015 draft water plan work plan and budget. Expected activities, budget details, and various assumptions were presented for each budget line item. Comments and input were invited, and the process for budget approval moving forward was explained.

Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, ED*

The 2015 meeting schedule was presented and no objections to the proposed dates were raised. The 2015 schedule is posted on the WAC website. **The next WAC meeting is scheduled for February 3, 2015, at 9:30 am (Mountain Time) at the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center**.

Action Items

ED Office

- The ED Office will review the methodologies used to determine excess flows and alternative hydrologic condition designation approaches and provide suggestions at the next WAC meeting.

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