



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

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Suzanne Sellers – Member

State of Wyoming

Bryan Clerkin – Member

Philip Stuckert – Alternate

Lee Arrington – Alternate

Matt Hoobler

State of Nebraska

Jessie Weitjes

Seth Chambers

Zablon Adane

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tom Econopouly – Member

Matt Rabbe

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Alternate

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke – Chair

Duane Woodward – Member

Jeff Shafer – Member

Landon Shaw – Member

Nolan Little

Tyler Thulin

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Luke Shawcross

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Environmental Groups

Duane Hovorka – Member

Executive Director's Office (ED Office)

Jerry Kenny, ED

Scott Griebeling

Sira Sartori

Seth Turner

Chad Smith

Darren Beck

Contractors

Matt McConville – HDR



Welcome and Administrative: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

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

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

WAP Project Updates

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

CPNRD Water Leasing: Duane Woodward, CPNRD

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

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

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

CNPPID Water Leasing: Jerry Kenny, ED

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

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

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



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

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

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

Other Water Updates: *Scott Griebing, ED Office*

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

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

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

NPPD Water Leasing: *Jerry Kenny, ED*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Federal Depletions Plan Update: *Matt Rabbe, USFWS*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Additional Business: *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

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

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

Action Items**General WAC**

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

ED Office



- 263
- 264
- 265
- 266
- Finalize 2014 WAP Update.
 - Update and distribute the excess flow determination method memo and request feedback from the WAC.
 - Provide the WAC's recommendations to the GC at the June meeting.

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