



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**Ogallala Visitor Center**  
 May 11, 2015

**Meeting Participants**

**Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Table**

**State of Colorado**

Suzanne Sellers – (Chair)

**State of Wyoming**

Barry Lawrence – Member

Jeff Geyer – Alternate

**State of Nebraska**

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

Matt Rabbe – Member

**Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)**

Brock Merrill – Member

**Environmental Entities**

Rich Walters – Member (phone)

**Upper Platte Water Users**

**Colorado Water Users**

Kevin Urie – Member (phone)

**Downstream Water Users**

Mark Czaplewski – Member

Jim Jenniges – Member

Mark Peyton – Member (phone)

**Executive Director's Office (EDO)**

Jerry Kenny (ED)

Chad Smith

Jason Farnsworth

Dave Baasch

Scott Griebeling

**Other Participants**

Mike Fritz (phone)



### **Welcome and Administrative**

Sellers and Smith called the meeting to order and asked for agenda modifications; Baasch suggested the TAC discuss a GC member's suggestion the TAC discuss the Program acquiring additional off-channel tern and plover nesting habitat in lieu of pursuing additional wetlands for whooping cranes.

### **TAC Minutes**

Sellers asked the group if there were any suggested changes for the February 24, 2015 TAC Minutes. **Czaplewski moved to approve the February 24, 2015 TAC minutes; Merrill seconded the motion; all supported the motion.**

### **PRRIP Peer Review and Publication**

#### *Tern and Plover Breeding Pair Manuscript*

Baasch briefly discussed the Breeding Pair manuscript and informed the TAC the manuscript wasn't a foundational document that would be used for decision making and thus that is why we are considering taking the manuscript directly to publication rather than through the Program's peer review process.

**Rabbe moved to recommend the GC approve publishing the tern and plover breeding pair manuscript rather than having the document peer reviewed through the Program process; Jenniges seconded the motion; all supported the motion.**

#### *Forage Fish Synthesis Document*

Baasch led the discussion and asked the TAC to recommend the GC have the Forage Fish Synthesis Document peer reviewed through the Program's process given it ultimately would be cited and used in the Program decision making process for BQ 8. Jenniges asked if the energetic calculations were based only on the availability of red shiners or if all species of forage fish were treated as if they were all red shiners; Baasch said all fish were treated as if they were red shiners and that he would clarify the report.

Smith stated the EDO would move the Forage Fish Synthesis document peer review recommendation on for GC approval in June and, in the meantime, would develop a scope of work for the peer review and would have Louis Berger start identifying candidates to review the document.

**Czaplewski moved to recommend the GC approve submitting the Forage Fish Synthesis document to the Program's peer reviewed process once the clarification Jenniges suggested was made; Merrill seconded the motion; all supported the motion.**

#### *UNL Graduate Student ET Manuscript*

Smith led the discussion and informed the TAC some students at the University of Nebraska Lincoln analyzed Program wet meadow monitoring data to develop a manuscript they would like to have published. Another potential issue or reason the Program might be interested in the manuscript is that Dr. Chen is a coauthor and is also on the peer review panel for the Program's wet meadow hydrologic study. Smith asked if the TAC if there were any concerns with letting the publication move forward; no one expressed any concern.

*UNL Graduate Student ET Manuscript*

Farnsworth informed the TAC that he had been in contact with the Editor of Geomorphology who originally told him the article and any commentary on the article would be peer reviewed and published together. However, the manuscript and author's reply to the Program commentary is published on line and yet our commentary has not yet been published. Farnsworth asked the editor if the author's response our commentary was peer reviewed and the editor declined to answer that question.

**Whooping Crane Topics***Telemetry Study Data Requests*

Baasch informed the TAC the EDO had submitted a data use proposal to analyze data collected at riverine stopover locations between the Red River and Canada. Metrics included in the analysis were channel width unobstructed by dense vegetation (i.e., unobstructed channel width) and distance from the bank line to the nearest wooded area. These metrics were evaluated because they were the 2 covariates that were found to be important in the management model for the analysis of Program monitoring data. Baasch asked the TAC if there were other metrics that could be collected remotely that they would like to see tested in the analysis; none offered. Rabbe asked if a whooping crane stopped a location for 4 days and we collected 16 locations if all of the locations were included in the analysis; Baasch said they wouldn't because were evaluated data at the scale of a stopover site. Fritz asked which location we used if a group spent 1 night at one location and moved 2 miles and spent 3 nights; Baasch said we included the first location at each stopover for the analyses as that represented the original selection. Fritz said potential implications of only using the first location should be included in the discussion section of the chapter.

Baasch informed the TAC the EDO is in the process of putting together a several chapter document that could include a chapter covering whooping crane life history and historic use of the Platte River, a chapter discussing results from analyses of Program monitoring data, a chapter discussing results from the analysis of whooping crane selection of riverine stopover habitat from Canada to the Red River, and additional geomorphology/hydrology chapter.

Baasch provided an update on the recent data use proposals USGS has submitted recently. The original Migration Ecology Proposal included plans to use the FWS observational data in North and South Dakota to develop a habitat selection model and then use telemetry data to validate the model. There was a meeting at the Crane Trust where the group discussed extending the study area to include Nebraska and Kansas. The group was interested in doing so and Baasch expressed interest in assisting with the development of the manuscript and for being a coauthor. We haven't heard any more about the study since that meeting. Walters added the group is attempting to remove the bias in the FWS data and is using telemetry data to assess if the bias was accounted for or not.

Baasch said he received a draft manuscript for the Intensity of Use study and summarized the analyses that were conducted and briefly discussed findings of the study. Baasch said he hadn't fully reviewed the most recent draft manuscript, but that he would post it to the TAC site in the next couple of days for TAC review. Early results appear to indicate the Platte River received higher intensity of use than average unless length of stay was included in the assessment and then it may be lower than average intensity of use. Smith asked what it meant for a stopover location that had 7 days of use versus 1; Baasch said it generally meant they tended to be in a staging mode in South



Dakota, North Dakota, and especially Saskatchewan. Rabbe said he felt including staging areas in the analysis would seem to really drive the results; Baasch agreed and said he brought the issue up to the group and they decided to continue including staging areas. Baasch said the current plan is to publish the report as a USGS open file report that will be updated once additional telemetry data comes in. Baasch said he believed the results of the study would be used as information for the wind energy HCP.

Baasch informed the TAC USGS received a data use request from Megan Fitzpatrick (University of Wisconsin PhD student) asking for spring and fall departure and arrival dates at Wood Buffalo National Park and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

#### *Monitoring Protocol*

Baasch informed the TAC the only modification made to the whooping crane monitoring protocol was to remove ground crew monitoring. Baasch said the primary reasons for dropping the ground monitoring component would be to reduce budget and because there are serious concerns with being able to analyze the continuous use monitoring data and come to any conclusions about whooping crane selection of off-channel habitat. Most whooping cranes are confirmed from the air, but the monitoring contractor would be required to have someone on the ground each day to confirm any groups that couldn't be confirmed from the air. Rabbe said we definitely would want to continue flights to locate whooping cranes given management activities are ongoing and substantial changes will likely be made to a few complexes in the upcoming years. Jenniges stated we should make modifications, but save the document as a new protocol; Baasch said every time a modification has been made to the protocol it has been renamed and changes have been tracked in a separate document.

Jenniges and Czaplewski pointed out Clayton Derby's (WEST) concerns about air crew safety during the early part of the survey period due to the numbers of snow geese in the valley. Baasch said flights have been conducted at 2,000 feet where it generally is safer, but there still is a concern. Czaplewski suggested we include a provision in the protocol indicating the contractor can suspend flights in the event water fowl make flying unnecessarily risky.

**Czaplewski moved to recommend the GC approve modifications discussed and previously made to the whooping crane monitoring protocol; Rabbe seconded the motion; all supported the motion.**

#### *Whooping Crane Monitoring Protocol RFP*

**Selection panel:** Smith, Rabbe, Jenniges, and Walters.

**Jenniges moved to recommend the GC approve the Fall 2015 – Fall 2019 whooping crane monitoring RFP and selection panel; Rabbe seconded the motion; all supported the motion.**

*WEST In-channel Habitat Selection Analysis Report*

Baasch led the discussion and said he and Farnsworth had briefly reviewed the in-channel habitat selection report and felt the content and lay out generally looked good. Baasch informed the TAC he felt the portion of the report they had would be the most useful part of the final report as far as decision making goes. The main body of the report will include analyses of systematic–unique observations of whooping cranes and additional analyses that don't account for detection bias and correlation issues will be included as appendices. Rabbe said a 1,000 foot unforested width is similar to what he had in mind for suitable roosting habitat. Jenniges said a 1,000 foot unforested width is much different than the 1,150 foot unobstructed channel width described in Table 1 of the Land Plan. Jenniges said the appendices indicate final results are heavily influenced by which observations are included or excluded in the analysis; Baasch agreed.

Jenniges asked if a similar analysis has been conducted for the telemetry stopover data yet. Baasch said the analysis has been run and whooping crane use was optimized at an unobstructed channel width of ~950 feet, but that he felt the results were largely driven by observations on the Missouri River. We plan to remove the Missouri River observations and re-run the analyses to see what influence those observations have on the final results, but the final results will include all locations and the discussion will contain a description of what happened when those observations were removed. Baasch said distance to nearest forest from the bank line was optimized at ~220 feet which is similar to results of Platte River monitoring data.

Czaplewski suggested the report include a map of the study area including a distribution of use locations. Jenniges said the captions of figures all seem to be backwards (i.e., captions for unobstructed width and nearest forest width plots are backwards). Jenniges suggested WEST include an Executive Summary that summarizes everything included in the main report.

Jenniges asked if the WEST analysis would be included in the whooping crane Chapter; Baasch said they would.

**Tern and Plover Demography Report**

Baasch led the discussion and stated he generally was comfortable with the content and layout of the report, but was hopeful the data would be more conclusive and useful for decision making. Baasch said he planned to request the report remain an Open File Report until 2019 when all the banding data was collected. Rabbe mentioned the report indicates 5-15% of the banded population of piping plovers outside of the central Platte River were banded on the central Platte River (Section 6.6).

Baasch asked the TAC if they agreed Newark and Broadfoot Kearney South should be included as 'New Sites' given they were heavily vegetated and unused when the Program acquired them; no one disagreed. Jenniges – Results Section 5.1b paragraph 1 starts out 'We estimate chick survival to fledging age for 499 least tern chicks..... (...total marked was 523).' What happened to the other 24? Same thing for the piping plover paragraph. Czaplewski suggested they include a study area map showing the distribution of sites as well as an Executive Summary.

Baasch informed the TAC that once the Program approves the report as final, USGS would receive final payment for the previous PRRIP-USGS Agreement.



**The TAC recommended the Program accept the Tern and Plover Demography Report as final once TAC and EDO edits are incorporated, the EDO is comfortable with the report, and USGS provides an internal peer review of the Open File Report; no one objected.**

### **2014 State of the Platte Report**

Smith discussed the revised draft of the 2014 State of the Platte Report. Smith stated the EDO plans to change Assessments for Big Questions 1 and 9 to '2 thumbs' based on support from peer reviewed documents. Smith asked the TAC if they felt it was appropriate for the EDO to include possible adaptation options or not. Jenniges said it's a slippery slope where some of the BQ1 adaptations are outside the bounds of the AMP. Rabbe said it probably doesn't hurt to include those potential adaptations, but realize those adaptations will likely never occur given potential adverse impacts such as flooding. Rabbe said he disagreed with the statement '...use and productivity on constructed in-channel habitat have been limited to date.' He questioned the accuracy of the statement because in 2007-2010 the Partner's constructed islands were used. Rabbe added that a lot of the islands have been constructed in channels that were nowhere near 1,000 feet wide. Jenniges said testing success of islands placed in 1,000 foot channels would be a different hypothesis. Farnsworth said he would remove the final sentence(s) in each potential adaptation statement.

Jenniges said some tough decisions such as establishing species target objectives may need to be developed by the TAC so the GC can decide if the objectives are reasonable or not when negotiating a budget for a potential second increment.

Smith said he changed the assessment for BQ9 to 2 thumbs up based on the peer reviewed results of the Stage Change Study. Czaplewski encouraged the 'EDO to be bold and include a 2-thumb assessment for BQ9 and let the GC wrestle with the policy implications. Rabbe asked if the TAC was supposed to provide comments on the State of the Platte Report or not; Smith said we will incorporate TAC, ISAC and all other comments into an appendix attached to the final report. Smith said the current plan is to discuss the draft State of the Platte Report with the GC in June, have the TAC and ISAC discuss it in July and then finalize the report at the September GC meeting. Smith asked the TAC if they felt the Report should be considered the 2014 or 2015 State of the Platte Report; the TAC generally agreed it should be the 2014 Report.

### **Whooping Crane Habitat Rehabilitation Objectives**

Farnsworth showed the EDO's current thinking and recommendation for management actions to perform in the Pawnee Complex and the Shoemaker Island Complex. The restorations would result in 600 foot unobstructed channels and unforested widths of 1,000 feet. He informed the TAC the recommended restoration targets were based on results of recent whooping crane habitat selection analyses.

Farnsworth showed similar figures for the Fort Kearny Complex and Jenniges expressed concern with clearing islands and trees under the high-voltage power line and suggested the Program not clear any islands within ¼ mile of the power line. Farnsworth agreed to change the plans



accordingly. Farnsworth stated obtaining management in the Fort Kearny Complex would likely be more difficult than the Pawnee Complex.

### **Shoemaker Island Ice Jam Overview**

Farnsworth showed several photos and discussed the neighbor concerns associated with the recent ice jam that occurred near the Binfield tract the first week of February, 2015. Farnsworth informed the TAC the neighbors expressed their erroneous concerns with the media and Hall County Board of Supervisors. In response, the EDO went before the Board at the subsequent meeting and provided information refuting the claims and received a mixed response. The landowners also expressed their concerns to a sub-committee of the Central Platte NRD. Kenny said the sub-committee suggested discuss the situation with the Program's GC.

Farnsworth said the biggest difference going forward is Hall County will require the Program to obtain a flood plain permit in order to work in the channel in Hall County. Kenny added it didn't seem as though any actions were impending, but Hall County officials are highly sensitized to work being conducted in the channel.

### **Acquisition of Additional Tern and Plover Off-channel Nesting Habitat**

Smith stated a GC member expressed interest in acquiring additional non-complex acres in lieu of acquiring wetlands for whooping cranes. Rabbe said one concern would be spending resources allocated for whooping cranes on 2 species that are trending towards recovery and the whooping crane is still highly imperiled. A concern raised by the land committee was that wetlands aren't readily available and creating them would cost a substantial input to create a functioning palustrine wetland. Rabbe said the first question that needs to be addressed is whether or not the Program has an interest in spending the resources to create wetland habitat.

Jenniges said questions regarding terns and plovers the Program needs to address are whether or not we continue to build in-channel islands and how many does the central Platte River need to support. Baasch and Farnsworth said the EDO has tried to establish population objectives in the past and the TAC said they wouldn't go down that road. Jenniges said it may be time to develop population targets for negotiations of a second increment.

**The TAC suggested the EDO continue searching for areas with wetland soils to acquire and develop and at the same time see what's available for off-channel tern and plover habitat, especially near the east end of the Program Associated Habitat Area.**

### **Closing Business**

### **Upcoming 2014 TAC Meeting Schedule**

The next meeting will be an ISAC/TAC meeting scheduled for July 14-15, 2015 in Kearney

### **Summary of Decisions from the August 2014 TAC Meeting**

1. Next TAC meeting will be a joint ISAC/TAC meeting on July 14-15, 2015 in Kearney
2. The TAC accepted the February 24, 2015 TAC minutes as final



3. The TAC recommended the GC approve publishing the tern and plover breeding pair manuscript rather than having the document peer reviewed through the Program process.
4. The TAC recommended the GC approve submitting the Forage Fish Synthesis document to the Program's peer reviewed process once the clarification Jenniges suggested was made.
5. The TAC recommended the GC approve modifications discussed and previously made to the whooping crane monitoring protocol.
6. The TAC recommended the GC approve the Fall 2015 – Fall 2019 whooping crane monitoring RFP and selection panel consisting of Smith, Rabbe, Jenniges, and Walters.
7. The TAC recommended the Program accept the Tern and Plover Demography Report as final once TAC and EDO edits are incorporated, the EDO is comfortable with the report, and USGS provides an internal peer review of the Open File Report.
8. The TAC suggested the EDO continue to pursue lands with wetland soils to be developed into palustrine wetlands and at the same time look into acquiring additional tern and plover off-channel nesting habitat, especially towards the east end of the Associated Habitat Reach.