

WORKING DRAFT
August 24, 2016

Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
First Increment Extension Proposal

I. PREAMBLE

The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (Program; PRRIP) became effective January 1, 2007 following signatures by the Governors of Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. PRRIP provides Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance for water related activities within the three states and Federal Government while working to provide recovery benefits for four endangered and threatened species.

The First Increment of the Program began in 2007 and extends through 2019. The Program's long-term goal is to improve and maintain the associated habitats of the target species. This includes: (1) improving and maintaining migrational habitat for whooping cranes and reproductive habitat for least terns and piping plovers; (2) reducing the likelihood of future listing of other species found in this area; and (3) testing the assumption that managing flow in the central Platte River also improves the pallid sturgeon's lower Platte River habitat.

The Program signatories committed to achieving the following objectives by the end of the First Increment of the Program:

- (1) providing water capable of improving the occurrence of Platte River flows in the central Platte River associated habitats relative to the present occurrence of species and annual pulse target flows by an average of 130,000 to 150,000 acre-feet per year at Grand Island, through reregulation and water conservation/supply projects. Department of the Interior (DOI) and the states agree that United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) target flows will be examined through the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) and peer review and may be modified by FWS accordingly. DOI and the states have agreed, however, that during the First Increment, species and annual pulse target flows serve as an initial reference point for determining periods of excess and shortage in the operation of Program reregulation and water conservation/supply projects.
- (2) protecting, restoring where appropriate, and maintaining at least 10,000 acres of habitat in the central Platte River area between Lexington and Chapman, Nebraska.

During the First Increment ESA compliance is measured through progress in achieving ten Program Milestones that are related to the First Increment Objectives. Milestones and current Program status are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Platte River Recovery Implementation Program ESA Compliance Milestones (Final Program Document, Attachment 2, Pages 1-2).

Milestone	Program Status (as of August 2016)
1. The Pathfinder Modification Project will be operational and physically and legally capable of providing water to the Program by no later than the end of Year 4 of the First Increment.	Achieved
2. Colorado will complete construction of the Tamarack I and commence full operations by the end of Year 4 of the First Increment.	Achieved
3. CNPPID and NPPD will implement an Environmental Account for Storage Reservoirs on the Platte System in Nebraska as provided in FERC licenses 1417 and 1835.	Achieved
4. The Reconnaissance-Level Water Action Plan, as may be amended by the Governance Committee, will be implemented and capable of providing at least an average of 50,000 acre-feet per year of shortage reduction to target flows, or for other Program purposes, by no later than the end of the First Increment.	Not Achievable by end of 2019
5. The Land Plan, as may be amended by the Governance Committee, will be implemented to protect and, where appropriate, restore 10,000 acres of habitat by no later than the end of the First Increment.	Achieved
6. The Integrated Monitoring and Research Plan, as may be amended by the Governance Committee, will be implemented beginning Year 1 of the Program.	Achieved
7. The Wyoming Depletions Plan, as may be amended with the approval of the Governance Committee, will be operated during the First Increment of the Program.	Achieved
8. The Colorado Depletions Plan, as may be amended with the approval of the Governance Committee, will be operated during the First Increment of the Program.	Achieved
9. The Nebraska Depletions Plan, as may be amended with the approval of the December 7, 2005 Milestones Document 2 Governance Committee, will be operated during the First Increment of the Program.	Not Achievable by end of 2019
10. The Federal Depletions Plan, as may be amended with the approval of the Governance Committee, will be operated during the First Increment of the Program.	Achieved

The First Increment land objective and associated milestone has been achieved. The Program currently protects in excess of 12,000 acres in the Associated Habitat Reach (AHR). The First Increment water objective (Milestone #4) is not achievable, and due to reliance on water projects being developed by the Governance Committee (GC), the Nebraska Depletions Plan is also not achievable by 2019, and the Nebraska Depletions Plan (Milestone #9) have not been achieved. All State water projects and the Colorado, Wyoming, and Federal depletions plans are operational. The Program currently provides approximately 90,000 acre-feet towards the First Increment objective of 130,000 to 150,000 acre-feet. Additional water projects in the planning and/or design phase are expected to provide an additional 40,000 acre-feet of water. However, they will not be operational prior to the end of the First Increment in 2019 and may require more funding than what is currently available during the First Increment. As such, Milestone 4 will not be achieved.

Implementation of the AMP, including Integrated Monitoring and Research Plan (IMRP) activities, is ongoing and has focused on testing of the flow-sediment-mechanical (FSM) and mechanical creation and maintenance (MCM) management strategies. Accordingly, the Program's IMRP milestone has been achieved. However, the objective of examining FWS target flows through the AMP has not yet been achieved. Design, implementation, and assessment of target flow-related management actions will not be possible prior to the end of 2019.

Commented [CS1]: Language change suggested by the State of Nebraska.

62 Section II.D of the 2006 Final Program Agreement makes provision for the Agreement to be extended or
63 amended by the written agreement of all signatories. This proposal presents a 13-year Extension (2020-
64 2032) of the First Increment. The Extension would not change First Increment objectives, milestones, or
65 the implementation framework. It would provide additional time to complete and operate Program water
66 projects and to conduct the monitoring and research necessary to determine the best use of Program water
67 to benefit the target species. This knowledge is necessary to provide a sound base upon which to structure
68 a Second Increment.

69 **II. PROPOSED FIRST INCREMENT EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

70 Proposed Extension activities are organized according to the existing Program land, water, and adaptive
71 management plan structure.
72

73 **A. Land Plan**

74 The First Increment milestone of protecting 10,000 acres has been achieved. Restoration and management
75 of habitat lands is ongoing. Extension Land Plan activities will proceed under the same principles that have
76 guided land acquisition and management since Program initiation. Land acquisition will proceed under a
77 willing buyer/willing seller approach and all management activities will be conducted in accordance with
78 the Program's Good Neighbor Policy.
79

80 Land Acquisition

- 81 • Review and renew (as appropriate) existing leases and management agreements.¹
- 82 • At the request of owners, evaluate existing conservation lands for inclusion in the Program under
83 management or sponsorship agreements.²
- 84 • Acquire up to an additional 1,500 acres of complex habitat lands.
85

86 Land Management

- 87 • Manage lands acquired by PRRIP for the benefit of the target species and species of concern when
88 not in conflict with the target species.
- 89 • Conduct land management actions within the framework of the Land Plan and the AMP.
90

91 **B. Water Plan**

92 The First Increment milestone of providing an average of 50,000 – 70,000 acre-feet of water in addition to
93 state water projects has not been achieved.³ Water conservation and supply projects are ongoing and the
94 Program has developed an implementation path to achieve this milestone in approximately 2022. Extension
95 Water Plan activities will proceed under the same principles that have guided water supply and management
96 since Program initiation. Water acquisition will proceed under a willing buyer/willing seller approach and
97 all water management activities will be conducted in accordance with the Program's Good Neighbor Policy.

98 Water Conservation and Supply

- 99 • Revise state and federal depletions plans to remain consistent with operational or statutory
100 requirements.⁴
- 101 • Renew water project agreements as deemed necessary to achieve water milestone.

¹ Renew Cottonwood Ranch sponsorship agreement (2,650 acres, Broadfoot South lease (15 acres), and complex management agreements (1,140 acres).

² This includes evaluation of the Central Nebraska Public Power District Jeffery Island property (4,100 acres).

³ Approximately 10,000 acre-feet have been provided to date.

⁴ The Program will cooperate with Nebraska as it finalizes its depletion plan.

- Design, construct, and implement Water Action Plan (WAP) projects to achieve at least 130,000-150,000 acre-feet of annual reductions to target flow shortages in time to enable scientific evaluation prior to the end of the Extension term.⁵

Program Water Management

- Aggressively continue to implement channel conveyance improvements at North Platte choke point through efforts directed toward achieving and maintaining 3,000 cfs conveyance capacity while remaining below flood stage.
- Implement water releases including short-duration high flows (SDHF) and target flows once Program water projects are operational and choke point conveyance issues are resolved.
- The Program will continue to evaluate the efficacy of available Program water and choke point capacity through time to ensure Program water meets its intended purposes.

C. Adaptive Management Plan

The First Increment milestone of implementation of the PRRIP Integrated Research and Monitoring Plan (IMRP) has been achieved. During the Extension, AMP implementation will facilitate evaluation of FWS target flows in addition to current Program management actions.

Management Objectives

- Existing target species and non-listed species management objectives will be retained.
- The least tern management objective and associated Program activities will continue if the species is delisted.

Management Actions

- Continued implementation of existing management actions specified in the AMP including SDHF, sediment augmentation, and creation and maintenance of on- and off-channel least tern, piping plover, and whooping crane habitats.
- Contribute to reach-scale phragmites and invasive species control efforts.
- Utilization of Program water assets to implement and evaluate flow-related management actions including SDHF and species-related target flows.

Integrated Monitoring and Research

- The IMRP will continue to provide the framework for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of Program management actions during the Extension.
- Least tern, piping plover, and whooping crane research effort will be scaled back as uncertainties are addressed.
- Pallid sturgeon research will be initiated as noted in the AMP, including micro- and macro-habitat use/selection by adult and juvenile pallid sturgeon and remote sensing and modeling related to quantification of pallid sturgeon habitat in the lower Platte River.

Independent Science Review

- Retain a six-member Independent Scientific Advisory Committee.
- Continue peer review and publication of key Program science products relevant to decision making.

⁵ The Program will make its best effort to achieve 130,000 acre-feet by 2025.

140 **III. FIRST INCREMENT EXTENSION FUNDING**

141 Federal and State contributions will continue throughout the Extension using the existing 50/50 cost share
142 with credits for in-kind contributions from the States. Key budget items and projected costs for the First
143 Increment Extension are contained in **Attachment A**.

144 **IV. FIRST INCREMENT EXTENSION ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

145 First Increment governance and organizational structure will be retained throughout the Extension.

146
147

ATTACHMENT A
Proposed First Increment Extension Timeline and Budget