



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services
Nebraska Field Office
203 West Second Street
Grand Island, Nebraska 68801

April 22, 2010

Jason Farnsworth
Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
4111 4th Avenue, Suite 6
Kearney, NE 68847

RE: Habitat Enhancement Activities for the Elm Creek Complex, Platte River Recovery Implementation Program

Dear Mr. Farnsworth:

This responds to your April 19, 2010, E-mail requesting a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) determination as to whether habitat enhancement activities at the Elm Creek complex could negatively impact the Platte River caddisfly (*Ironoquia plattensis*). The E-mail request specifically references the clearing of woody vegetation on the McCormick Property back to a slough that is occupied by the Platte River caddisfly. In a subsequent telephone conversation, it was identified that the proposed clearing would occur this fall. The Service supports the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program's (Program) effort to clear woody vegetation and provides the following conservation recommendations that would minimize impacts to the Platte River caddisfly:

1. Minimize any heavy equipment traffic within the slough.
2. To reduce mortalities of individuals, it is recommend that clearing activities not occur within 100 feet of the occupied slough until after October 20. October 20 represents a time period when the species is entirely contained within the slough because adults would have deposited eggs by that date.
3. After October 20, it is recommended that woody vegetation clearing occur right up to the north edge of the slough only on the west half of the property, leaving a 100-foot buffer north of the slough's north edge on the east half of the property. The clearing of woody vegetation within this buffer and for remaining areas could be conducted in subsequent years.

Under this proposed phased approach to woody vegetation clearing, existing vegetative cover would continue to provide an undisturbed area for the Platte River caddisfly while allowing for herbaceous growth in the cleared area. The proposed phased approach would also allow for Program and Service staff to compare caddisfly larvae aestivation along the managed and unmanaged banks.

Service and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) staff believe the planned management on the McCormick tract also presents an opportunity to further our understanding of the species response to management actions. Program staff may want to consider extending woody vegetation clearing for the western half of the property to 100 feet south of the slough. Current survey information indicates that the species may use north facing banks more frequently for aestivation. Clearing of woody vegetation along the south bank of the tract's western half would provide four different treatments on the tract in which to study species response (i.e., north facing slope/unmanaged; north facing slope/managed; south facing slope/unmanaged; and south facing slope/managed).

We anticipate that our conservation recommendations can be accommodated as "fine-tuning" within the currently approved management plan for the McCormick tract and thus not represent a change that would need to be approved by LAC and/or the GC. If this is not the case, please contact us so that we can further consider our recommendations. Also, in the next few days we intend to provide more detailed information regarding what is known and suspected about caddisfly life history and habitat requirements. This will be a document jointly prepared by the Service and NGPC.

The Service appreciates the Program's continued efforts to conserve federal trust fish and wildlife resources. Should you have questions regarding these comments or need for further technical assistance, please contact Mr. Jeff Runge within our office at jeff_runge@fws.gov or (308)382-6468, extension 22.

Sincerely,



Greg Wingfield
Acting Nebraska Field Office Supervisor

cc: NGPC; Lincoln, NE (Attn: Mike Fritz)
PRRIP; Kearney, NE (Attn: Jerry Kenny)