



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
Conference Call  
August 8, 2017

**Meeting Attendees**

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

**State of Colorado**

Suzanne Sellers – Member

**State of Wyoming**

Bryan Clerkin – Member

**State of Nebraska**

Jessie Strom – Member

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

Tom Econopouly - Member

**U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

Brock Merrill – Alternate

**Downstream Water Users**

Cory Steinke – Chair

Jeff Shafer – Member

Duane Woodward – Member

Brandi Flyr

Tyler Thulin

Nolan Little

**Colorado Water Users**

Jon Altenhofen – Member

**Upper Platte Water Users**

Dennis Strauch - Member

Elizabeth Miller

Tracy Zayac

**Environmental Groups**

Jacob Fritton – Member

Rich Walters

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

Jerry Kenny, ED

Darren Beck

Courtney Black

Scott Griebeling

Bruce Sackett

Seth Turner

Kevin Werbylo

**Contractors**

Matt McConville - HDR



**Welcome and Administrative:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

Introductions were made. There were no revisions to the April 2017 WAC meeting minutes. Shafer made a motion to approve the April WAC minutes, with a second by Woodward and unanimous approval by the committee.

**WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates**

***Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge: Kevin Werbylo, EDO***

Werbylo reported that the contractor (HDR) is working through preliminary design. Related fieldwork is complete and HDR is expected to finish the geotechnical analysis in about one week. HDR will present preliminary design concepts (roughly 30-40% design) and the recommended path forward to EDO by the end of August, and then to the GC in September. In advance of the GC meeting, there will be a meeting with NPPD and the USFWS to address land/habitat issues related to the CWR complex.

The EDO is working with CNPPID to get a Water Service Agreement (WSA) for a pipeline to deliver water from Phelps County Canal to Cottonwood Ranch. Kenny reported that there were discussions at the June GC meeting regarding a path forward on water deliveries, via the pipeline or a well field; the GC had concerns about the terms of the proposed WSA for the pipeline. After further discussions with CNPPID, a revised WSA is being worked out that addresses the concerns of the GC and should be ready to present to the GC again at the September meeting.

Terms of the revised WSA, which would run through 2038, are as follows: the Program will pay for design and construction of the pipeline up front. Water delivered would be at a cost of \$25/AF, with a 2% annual increase. Water costs will be tracked from the beginning of pipeline operations, but the Program will pay no fees until CNPPID effectively buys back the pipeline, after which CNPPID will continue to own and operate the pipeline. The Program will then begin paying for delivered water at the price of \$25 plus the 2% annual increase over however many years elapse until the buyback is complete.

The economics of the pipeline and WSA are favorable relative to that of a well field. The pipeline also offers the advantage of being able to deliver water to Cottonwood Ranch as well as to the slurry wall project downstream.

***Initial Slurry Wall Project Update and Slurry Wall Sub-Committee Report: Kevin Werbylo, EDO and Jeff Shafer, NPPD***

Werbylo reported that the GC gave direction to the EDO to move forward with full-scale slurry wall project at the March 2017 meeting. In response, the EDO developed an RFP for engineering design and construction administration services for Tract W1606 (Follmer pit), a 60-acre existing gravel pit in the Elm Creek area. Elements of the RFP include design of the slurry wall, infrastructure necessary to deliver water via the Peterson Ditch and a nearby well field, and the infrastructure necessary to deliver water from the pit back to the river. The consultant will oversee a full site and bathymetric survey.



The RFP was released on July 17. A mandatory pre-proposal meeting was held on August 1. Around 12 firms were present at the pre-proposal meeting, some paired in teams. Proposals are due on August 16. The EDO is anticipating submittal of 2-5 proposals, which will be reviewed by a 7-member selection panel. Interviews of short-listed applicants will be held in Kearney on September 11, and the results will be reported at the September 12-13 GC meeting.

In June, the EDO completed a preliminary bathymetric survey of the project site, which covered about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the pit, since it is still being actively mined. They surveyed area was about 25 ft at the deepest, with an estimated storage capacity of about 600 to 700 AF. Once mining is complete and above-grade storage capacity is added, it is anticipated that the site will have a total storage capacity in the range of 1,200-1,500 AF.

The Slurry Wall Sub-Committee was notified of recent project activities in an email from the EDO but did not meet prior to the August WAC meeting.

***Alliance Canal acquire & retire update: Seth Turner, EDO***

Turner reported that the EDO began working with the NPNRD in March 2017 to have a data logger installed in the district's monitoring well 23-H, located on the adjacent property to the west (upgradient) of the Program's Osborne property. Water depths are recorded hourly, and NPNRD provided downloaded data to the EDO in April and July.

In mid-May, the EDO signed a contract with Chuck Henkel, a local farmer and NPNRD board member, for monitoring and management of the Osborne property, including overseeing irrigation, weed spraying, and mending fences. Mr. Henkel installed locks on the gates at the property.

The EDO also continued coordinating as needed with the Alliance Canal ditch rider, Breanne Hopkins. Spring irrigation deliveries began on May 20 and officially continued for 3 days, but some water may have been delivered longer.

Griebeling and Turner from the EDO made a visit to the site to observe conditions following the spring irrigation, and completed installation of staff gages in the ditch to measure flow depth. Fall irrigation is anticipated sometime in September.

In response to Altenhofen questions, Turner said the irrigated acreage was something less than 27 acres. The project objective is to establish a pattern of historical use and a site-specific data record on which to base a consumptive use analysis, given the lack of historical data beyond diversions for the entire ditch. Sellers asked about historical cropping and whether the EDO had considered other data sources. Turner said that the property has most likely always been grass pasture and that the EDO acquired aerial photography and several Western Water Use Model-related datasets from Adaptive Resources, but that the data were generally for parcels larger than the specific Program property.

**CPNRD Water Leasing: Duane Woodward, CPNRD**

Woodward reported that excess flows were diverted for recharge at the Thirty Mile and Cozad canals in the spring (early April and May 11-19, before EA releases began). Recharge totals were 1,200 AF at Thirty Mile and 300 AF at Cozad. Griebeling asked how much recharge volume was precluded by the EA releases. Woodward said there were about 6 days in March during which there was potential to double recharge volumes if not for the EA releases. In May, there likely would have been no difference.

Many of the participating lessors have agreements for only 1 or 2 years. CPNRD has been working on filing for updated transfer rights associated with renewal of these short-term agreements. Participation in the CPNRD surface water leases is as follows:

- Thirty Mile Canal: 10,170 acres participating; 6 new transfers filed for about 1,800 acres.
- Cozad Canal: 13,000 acres participating; 5 new transfers filed for 4,500 acres.
- Orchard-Alfalfa Canal: 3,000 acres participating; 3 new transfers for 575 acres.

CPNRD is awaiting Nebraska DNR approval of the new transfer filings.

Brandi Flyr will be replacing Duane Woodward as CPNRD's representative on the WAC, following Duane's retirement at the end of August 2017.

**NPPD Water Leasing: Jeff Shafer, NPPD**

Shafer reported that NPPD is still waiting for Nebraska DNR to review surface water transfer permit applications for the Dawson County Canal. There was some spring recharge of excess flows diverted through the Dawson County Canal, but the exact volume of AF was unknown. NPPD did not recharge through the Gothenburg Canal, as they were running water to the B-1 Reservoir.

**CNPPID Water Leasing: Jerry Kenny, ED**

Kenny reported that the Program has collaborated with CNPPID for two years on an irrigator water lease pilot program. CNPPID serves as the broker and sets up one-year leases with their irrigators. Participants sign up in the fall, and then must forego irrigation of the designated parcels during the following growing season; the land can be dryland farmed, but not irrigated. At the end of that growing season, leased water stored in Lake McConaughy is "moved" to the Environmental Account (EA), e.g., leased water signed up in the fall of 2016 will be added to the EA at the end of the 2017 growing season. The pilot program has a 2,000-acre cap, and generally involves pivot corners and other odd-shaped parcels. Participation increased slightly from year 1 to year 2 (1,037 acres to 1,275 acres). Terms of the program are that the Program pays \$220/acre (plus a \$10,000 administrative fee to CNPPID) and receives 9" of water during a full-allocation year. This is expensive water, but has storage and a high efficiency in terms of reducing shortages to target flows.



There is now an opportunity to renew the pilot program for a third year. Kenny sees it as worthwhile and important to do this for another year as part of efforts to get irrigators in Nebraska comfortable with water leasing as a means of generating cash. The option for a third year will be discussed with the GC in September.

There was discussion that the pilot program is only operable during full-allocation years in which all irrigators are fully-satisfied and the Program can step in as the only market for water leasing. When there is not full allocation, CNPPID irrigators can trade water amongst themselves. There was discussion of whether such water leasing by the Program could occur during non-full-allocation years. Econopouly expressed concerns of the USFWS. Steinke indicated that the CNPPID Board would most likely prefer to stick with full-allocation years and not interfere with internal water trading between irrigators. Flyer asked how long the water can stay in storage. Kenny said once it is in the EA, it can be carried over from year to year.

***Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease: Jerry Kenny, ED***

Kenny described the Program's agreement with the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) for leasing of surplus water from the Pathfinder Municipal Account. In 2011, the Program made a lump sum payment for 38,400 AF at \$51/AF, which was based on an annual delivery of 4,800 AF for the remaining eight years of the First Increment (2012-2019). In some years, additional water was available, and 9,600 AF was delivered. As a result, the last pre-paid 4,800 AF was scheduled for delivery in 2017, but 9,600 AF was available. The Program and WWDC implemented a clause in the leasing contract to get the additional 4,800 AF of water at \$65/AF. This clause will remain in effect through the end of the First Increment (years 2018 and 2019) rather than trying to figure out a new lump sum payment in advance. The Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease will be re-negotiated for deliveries beyond 2019.

***Lake McConaughy EA Releases: Tom Econopouly, USFWS***

Econopouly reported on releases from the Lake McConaughy EA. USFWS made 3 releases in 2017. This year had the largest annual release since the start of the Program, a total of about 140,000 AF (next largest was just over 78,000 AF in 2012).

- Summer release (July 10-August 8)
  - Initial target flow of 1,200 cfs, then dropped to 800 cfs.
  - Releases made at 250 cfs, total volume about 13,400 AF, roughly 50 percent reached Grand Island.
- Late spring pulse (May 13-June 12)
  - Target flows 3,000 cfs or greater.
  - Approximately 49,000 AF released; 40,000 AF reached Grand Island
- Late winter pulse (February 13-March 17)
  - Target flow 3,350 cfs
  - Total of 76,000 AF released, of which 69,000 AF reached Grand Island



After summer release, EA volume is about 40,000 AF. With Pathfinder deliveries, the EA is expected to increase to 70,000 AF in October, then nearly 110,000 AF in May 2018, following non-irrigation season inflows. No further releases are planned until 2018. Merrill asked if the USFWS made the request to Wyoming for water to be moved from Pathfinder to McConaughy; Kenny and Econopouly agreed that the request was made.

**Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

The next WAC meeting was rescheduled for Tuesday, October 24 at the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center.

**Action Items**

General WAC

- n/a

ED Office

- n/a