



**PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**  
**Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams  
August 3, 2021

**Meeting Attendees**

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

**State of Colorado**

Jojo La – Member

Erik Skeie - Alternate

**State of Wyoming**

Jeff Cowley – Alternate

**State of Nebraska**

Kari Burgert – Alternate 1

Jesse Bradley – Alternate 2

Justin Ahern

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

Tom Econopouly – Member

Matt Rabbe

**U.S. Bureau of Reclamation**

Brock Merrill – Member

Mahonri Williams – Alternate

**Downstream Water Users**

Cory Steinke - Chair

Jeff Shafer – Member

Brandi Flyr – Member

Nolan Little

Randy Zach

**Colorado Water Users**

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Luke Shawcross – Alternate

**Upper Platte Water Users**

Dennis Strauch – Member

**Water Advisory Committee (WAC)**

**Environmental Groups**

Josh Wiese – Member

Bill Taddicken

**Executive Director’s Office (EDO)**

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Justin Brei

Kristen Cognac

Julia Grabowski

Seth Turner

Kevin Werbylo

**Contractors**



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

50 Meeting attendees were identified from Microsoft Teams. There were no agenda modifications.  
51 A few edits to the draft May meeting minutes were noted. Strauch made a motion to approve the  
52 minutes, second by Cowley. There were no objections, and the May WAC meeting minutes  
53 were approved.  
54

55 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates:** *Seth Turner, EDO*

56  
57 ***Leasing and Recharge Projects:***

58 The Program signed one-year agreements to lease surface water from CPNRD and NPPD at  
59 \$90/AF, which will be credited (exact volumes TBD) to the Lake McConaughy EA in October.  
60 Diversions into Elwood Reservoir for recharge from May 19-30 totaled about 1,650 AF. The  
61 Cook recapture well pumped 140.5 AF between April 20 and June 21. Since then, the EDO has  
62 been working with Bill Hahn (Special Advisor for Hydrogeology) and Downey Drilling to  
63 resolve issues with surging and cavitation.  
64

65 Per a May 19 letter from the Wyoming Water Development Office (confirmed again by email in  
66 July), there will be no water available for the Program to lease from the Pathfinder Municipal  
67 Account this year. As of July 31, the volume in the account was 11,429 AF. Also as of July 31,  
68 the volume in the Pathfinder EA was 9,931 AF. This is far less than any previous year, with the  
69 previous low volume being 14,471 AF. From 2012-2020, releases from the Pathfinder EA for  
70 the Program averaged 27,982 AF.  
71

72 Turner also provided an update on the proposed lease of Glendo water from the Enterprise  
73 Irrigation District (EID) that was discussed earlier in the year. In April, EID sent draft terms of a  
74 potential agreement to the EDO, but also noted that there were unresolved issues related to other  
75 Glendo contractors. There have been no further discussions since then. Progress on the  
76 Nebraska Grand Water Bargain has slowed due to COVID and other factors. PRRIP is waiting  
77 for an update from the parties involved in those negotiations.  
78

79 ***Platte Basin Hydrology Update:***

80 Excess flows were available to divert for recharge in late May (diversions were only made to  
81 Elwood Reservoir). An EA release for germination suppression was made on May 24 and in  
82 June. Real-time hydrologic condition was DRY in May, NORMAL in June (due to higher flows  
83 at Grand Island in late May), the DRY again in July and August-September. Target flows are to  
84 be 800 cfs through September 15, then drop to 600 cfs for September 16-30.  
85

86 For the Platte River near Grand Island, the 2021 daily peak flow was 5,560 cfs on March 15.  
87 The instantaneous peak was 6,440 cfs on the same day. Cumulative flow volume at Grand Island  
88 through July 31 is about 604,250 AF, which is roughly half the flow volume through the same  
89 day in 2020. Of that flow at Grand Island, about 53,460 AF was EA water released from Lake  
90 McConaughy.  
91



92 Drought conditions in the Platte Basin have improved since April, with the July 27 U.S. Drought  
93 Monitor showing nearly the entirety of eastern Colorado no longer experiencing any level of  
94 drought. However, much of the North Platte Basin in Wyoming and the Nebraska Panhandle  
95 remain abnormally dry or in moderate drought, with areas of severe drought near Glendo and  
96 Casper, WY.

97

98 ***North Platte Chokepoint Update:***

99 The EDO is coordinating with Rich Walters and the Platte Valley Weed Management  
100 Association (PVWMA) to plan for vegetation treatment at the North Platte chokepoint this fall  
101 (September-October). The plan is based on recommendations from Anderson Consulting several  
102 years ago and focuses on the reach upstream of the Highway 83. There is a stretch of single-  
103 thread channel that is believed to be a significant source of sediment that deposits at and below  
104 the bridge. The plan calls for spraying a 50-ft strip along the river banks in an attempt to begin  
105 widening that channel as well as several dry, overgrown channels on the north side. Most of the  
106 targeted areas are upstream of residential properties at the chokepoint. Walters is working with  
107 Lincoln County to get permissions from landowners, and there will be written agreements  
108 between PVWMA and those landowners. Taddicken asked about disking the treated areas.  
109 Turner said that could likely be planned to follow next year.

110

111 **Recapture Wells Pilot Project:** *Kevin Werbylo, EDO*

112 Recapture well network specifications have been turned over to the Tri-Basin NRD and the  
113 project is out for bid. From this point on, Tri-Basin will manage the bidding, construction, and  
114 operation of the project. Bids are due to the NRD on September 7 and the hope is to begin  
115 construction early this fall. The NRD and their consultant will be working with Program Special  
116 Advisor Bill Hahn during construction. Bill Hahn and the NRD have received reports of low  
117 materials availability and higher costs due to supply chain issues. Final construction schedule is  
118 dependent on materials availability and issuance of a Section 404 permit (permit application was  
119 turned into the USACE a few months ago).

120

121 The network will be operated and maintained by the NRD, and Program involvement will be via  
122 an executed water service agreement. Operations should begin right when construction is  
123 complete, hopefully this fall. An update on contractor selection and construction will be provided  
124 at the next WAC meeting.

125

126 Altenhofen asked if all 7 wells in this network are new, Werbylo said yes. Werbylo noted that  
127 there are also two existing wells that the Program owns in Sections 15-16 of the Cottonwood  
128 Ranch property that could potentially be tied into the recapture well network in the future, but  
129 that isn't being discussed or seriously considered at the moment.

130

131 **June Germination Suppression EA Release:** *Tom Econopouly, USFWS*

132 The spring whooping crane release totaled 12,496 AF from March 30-April 13, of which 10,788  
133 AF (86 percent) reached Grand Island. The intent of the germination suppression release is to  
134 target 2,000 cfs at Grand Island from June 1 through mid-July. About 57,000 AF was released



135 from June 2-July 2, and about 42,000 AF reached Grand Island. The experience of germination  
136 suppression releases in 2020 and 2021 has identified several challenges, including the  
137 approximate 7-day travel time from Lake McConaughy to Grand Island, channel capacity at the  
138 North Platte chokepoint, timing of releases that coincides with near peak climatological  
139 thunderstorm activities, ramp up rates for releases, hydrocycling, and desired carryover storage  
140 to ensure adequate supply for future releases.

141  
142 USFWS is using multiple tools to help guide EA release decisions, but these are not foolproof.  
143 For example, the germination suppression release was initially started on May 24 but cut off after  
144 the 5-day forecast showed expectations of 2-3 inches of rainfall across central Nebraska.  
145 Unfortunately, this rainfall did not materialize, flows at Grand Island dropped well below 2,000  
146 cfs, and given the river travel time, it was hard to catch back up. Precipitation that did occur at  
147 the end of May was then followed by about 21 days with no rain. There was also some  
148 discussion of the behavior of the river between Kearney and Grand Island with regard to gains  
149 and losses.

150  
151 CNPPID's hydrocycling operations raised an interesting question (and potential benefit) to be  
152 considered for future releases: given daily swings in flow of several hundred cfs or more, is it  
153 more important to focus on daily peak flows (which may approach or exceed the 2,000 cfs  
154 target) rather than daily average flows? Other lessons for future EA releases include hedging  
155 risk (knowing that plans and forecasts are never 100 percent correct), stepping up ramp rates,  
156 using both the North Platte River and NPPD's Sutherland system to carry water if practicable,  
157 and knowing what to prioritize (such as peak vs mean daily flows).

158  
159 Projected future volumes in the Lake McConaughy EA are around 126,000 AF on October 1,  
160 2021 and 166,000 AF by May 1, 2022.

161  
162 **Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

163 The next quarterly GC meeting is scheduled to be held in person in Kearney on September 14-  
164 15, subject to changing COVID conditions. The next WAC meeting is scheduled for October 26.

165  
166 **Action Items**

167  
168 **General WAC**

- 169 • N/A

170  
171 **ED Office**

- 172 • N/A