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PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams
February 1, 2022

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Michael Hein
Amy Ostdiek
Kelly Romero-Heaney
Brent Schantz

State of Wyoming

Jeff Cowley – Alternate
Michelle Gess

State of Nebraska

Jennifer Schellpeper – Member
Jesse Bradley – Alternate
Kari Burgert – Alternate
Justin Ahern
Jeremy Gehle

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Jeff Runge – Member
Mark Porath – Alternate
Matt Rabbe – Alternate

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Member

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke – Chair
Brandi Flyn – Member
Jeff Shafer – Member
Mike Drain – Alternate
Scott Dicke
John Shadle
Tyler Thulin
Randy Zach

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member
Joe Frank – Alternate
Luke Shawcross – Alternate
Nathan Baker
Jason Marks
John Rusch
Kyle Whitaker

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Environmental Groups

Jacob Fritton – Member
Melissa Mosier – Member
Andrew Caven – Alternate
Rich Walters – Alternate
Michelle Koch

Executive Director’s Office

Jason Farnsworth, ED
Justin Brei
Kristen Cognac
Julia Grabowski
Malinda Henry
Chad Smith
Tim Tunnell
Seth Turner
Ed Weschler

Contractors/Interested Parties

Ryan Donovan
Beth Eckles
Katie Leone
Matt Lindburg
Renata Rimsaite
Kara Sobieski
Julianne Woldridge

8



9 **Welcome and Administrative:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*
10 Meeting attendees were identified from Microsoft Teams. There were no agenda modifications.
11 Minor edits to the draft October meeting minutes were noted. Shafer made a motion to approve
12 the minutes, second by Altenhofen. There were no objections, and the October WAC meeting
13 minutes were approved.
14

15 **Perkins County Canal Project:** *Jesse Bradley, Nebraska DNR*
16 Bradley provided an overview of the 1923 South Platte Compact. This Compact applies
17 downstream of the western boundary of Washington County, CO, where it crosses the South
18 Platte River. In the Compact, this is referred to as the “Lower Section.” In Colorado today, this
19 is administrative Water District 64. The Compact allows Nebraska two water rights: (1) 120 cfs
20 during the irrigation season (from 4/1 to 10/15) with 1897 priority to meet the demands of the
21 Western Canal, which diverts just east of the CO-NE state line, and (2) 500 cfs during the non-
22 irrigation season (10/15-4/1) with a 1921 priority for a proposed Perkins County Canal (aka
23 South Divide Canal) that would divert in Colorado for use in Nebraska. If a call is placed to
24 fulfill either of these rights, it only applies to junior rights in the Lower Section. Some
25 construction of the canal was done prior to World War I (and prior to the South Platte Compact)
26 and some remnants still remain, but the canal was never completed.
27

28 On January 10, the Governor and Attorney General of Nebraska held a press conference
29 announcing the intent to construct the Perkins County Canal. They are working through the
30 Nebraska legislature to secure funding and agency authority to proceed with the project. Bradley
31 noted that this is just step one in a thousand-mile journey. Nebraska is thinking of ways for the
32 project to be supportive of PRRIP goals, not inhibitive. The Nebraska New Depletions Plan
33 (NNDP) limits depletions to 1997 levels, and state law does the same. At this point, no specific
34 technical or legal analyses have been conducted. The project proposal was sparked by concern
35 that Nebraska needs to protect its South Platte rights as Colorado continues to develop water
36 upstream.
37

38 The proposed canal would divert from the South Platte River near Ovid, CO and may convey
39 water to one or two new reservoirs in Nebraska. Nebraska intends to work closely with other
40 water users in the Platte Basin. The project would not be used as a means to expand irrigation
41 but may serve existing irrigation through exchanges; specific details are all still to be determined.
42 The intent would be to preserve and protect operations that are already there.
43

44 Bradley noted that there was a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation study in the early 1980s that
45 provided general cost estimates for a similar project. Altenhofen asked if it was possible to get a
46 copy of that study to post on the website for WAC members, Bradley said he’d check on it.
47 Altenhofen also asked about the timeline for adding more definition, technical information, etc.
48 Bradley said this project will take a long time, several years to more than a decade. The first step
49 is to get the necessary appropriations and authority to move forward, then look at design,
50 permitting, and other aspects. Altenhofen noted that there are some old documents that describe
51 the canal as perhaps supplying the Republican Basin. Bradley reiterated the intent to preserve



52 and protect uses in the Platte Basin, and that the water would be used there (thus the name being
53 used for the canal is a bit of a misnomer, as the canal wouldn't necessarily deliver water to
54 Perkins County, NE).

55
56 Runge noted the potential 7- to 10-year time frame and asked if this would factor into
57 discussions for a potential Second Increment for the Program. Bradley said it's possible the
58 project could move in that direction, it could be implemented in phases with potential elements
59 that could address issues for the Program (such as North Platte chokepoint capacity). It will take
60 a larger institutional push by entities in Nebraska to move this project forward. Runge asked if
61 reservoirs would be integrated from the start or added on later. Bradley said the project would
62 likely include some water storage component, whether than means additional new storage or
63 expansion of existing storage is unknown.

64
65 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates:** *Seth Turner, EDO*

66
67 ***Leasing and Recharge Projects:***

68 Turner noted a few recent project operations numbers: 688 AF was diverted into Phelps County
69 Canal in December. The Cook well pumped about 324 AF from August 25-December 17. Total
70 pumping in 2021 was 541 AF. Enrollment in the CNPPID irrigator lease is 1,157 acres for 2022,
71 up from 1,030 AF in 2021. Runge asked about using EA water versus excess flows for recent
72 recharge. Turner said all recharge diversions into Phelps in December were excess flows;
73 although there was discussion last year of using EA water for recharge at Cottonwood Ranch,
74 this was not done. Farnsworth said there was a preference for not reallocating EA water to other
75 projects. Turner added that EA water would only be used at Cottonwood Ranch if excess flows
76 are not available in the spring and water is needed for infrastructure testing and/or operations
77 training.

78
79 ***Platte Basin Hydrology Update:***

80 Excess flows were available December 6-13. The real-time hydrologic condition for December-
81 February is normal, and target flows increased from 1,000 cfs to 1,800 cfs on February 1. The
82 annual hydrologic condition for 2021 was normal, based on annual flow volume of 813,575 cfs
83 and average flow of 1,124 cfs. Altenhofen asked about the volume of excess flow in 2021,
84 Turner said that could be calculated and provided later.

85
86 Drought conditions across much of the Platte Basin have generally worsened since late October.
87 Storage in Lake McConaughy was at 64.6% of capacity on January 31; present EA volume was
88 unknown, as it has not been formally updated since October. The USFWS finalized the EA
89 Annual Operations Plan for WY2022 in late December. The highest priority release planned for
90 2022 is for germination suppression between June 1 and July 15. Storage in the Pathfinder EA
91 was 3,465 AF on January 29, and the Municipal Account held 13,018 AF. South Platte Basin
92 snowpack in Colorado was tracking at or below median early in the season but increased sharply
93 in late December and early January. North Platte Basin snowpack in Wyoming was at or above



94 median in the upper North Platte and Sweetwater at the end of January, but well below median
95 downstream of Pathfinder Reservoir.

96
97 ***North Platte Chokepoint Update:***

98 The EDO is developing plans for disking the same areas that were sprayed in fall 2021. The
99 includes about 43 acres along riverbanks, island perimeters, and side channels. Landowner
100 permissions for access and disking need to be obtained, and an RFQ will be released to solicit
101 contractors. This work needs to be accomplished before irrigation water deliveries ramp up.
102 The EDO is also conducting preliminary investigations into the bypass canal concept. This
103 includes modeling EA releases with a modified flow routing tool as an input to channel width
104 modeling. More information will be presented at the Science Plan Reporting Session and the
105 March GC meeting. Altenhofen asked about using NPPD's Sutherland system for bypass.
106 Turner said the EDO had a preliminary conversation with NPPD. There is no consistent surplus
107 capacity in the system, and any available capacity depends on the hydrology of a given year. In
108 addition, enlarging or running parallel to the Sutherland Canal to Paxton would be about 20
109 miles, compared to about 5.5 miles for the alternative parallel to PVID/North Platte Canal.

110
111 ***Permitting Services RFP:***

112 An RFP to solicit proposals for 2022-2025 permitting services for the Program was released
113 January 5, and a pre-proposal meeting was held on January 19. Proposals are due to Turner on
114 February 2 at noon central time. The GC appointed a selection panel in December. Contractor
115 selection will be based only on proposals, no interviews, and the selection panel is expected to
116 have a recommendation for approval at the March GC meeting. Altenhofen asked what types of
117 permitting. Turner said federal Section 404, state, and local permits as needed for activities such
118 as construction of Water Action Plan projects, habitat projects, and sediment augmentation.
119 Permitting activities can also include wetland delineations, determining if nationwide permits are
120 applicable, and so forth.

121
122 ***Revised Colorado North Platte Basin Depletions Update:***

123 Colorado submitted a revised North Platte Basin Depletions Update in November. Irrigated
124 acreage in the basin was reduced for 2020, which reduced the irrigation consumptive use (CU)
125 and increased the CU underrun relative to baseline conditions.

126
127 ***CNPPID Elwood Project: Tyler Thulin, CNPPID***

128 Thulin provided an overview of two projects at CNPPID's Elwood Reservoir. Elwood Reservoir
129 was constructed in the mid- to late-1970s to provide supplemental irrigation supply when
130 demands in the E65 system exceed the capacity of upstream siphons. In recent years, the
131 average water surface elevation in Elwood has been at higher levels due to use of the reservoir
132 for recharge. Significant seepage was observed below the Pump Station Dam in 2019.
133 Consultant RJH was hired to investigate and determined that there was potentially unsafe
134 seepage at both the pump station and main dams when the water surface elevation is above 2597
135 ft (10 ft below normal max of 2607 ft). The design of seepage management systems below the
136 dams is 95% completed and was submitted to the state (Nebraska) for review. Construction is



137 estimated to cost \$4.2 million and is expected to be completed in 2022 and 2023. Altenhofen
138 asked what type of repairs will be made. Thulin said wells to lower groundwater levels, toe
139 drains, and weighted filter blankets will be included. Cowley asked what will happen to the
140 collected seepage water from the wells and drains. Thulin said it will go back to Plum Creek.
141 Runge asked if Tri-Basin NRD is using Elwood for recharge. Steinke said 50% goes to the
142 Program and 50% is split between Tri-Basin and the state.
143

144 The other project is a new E65 canal and siphon to convey water into the north end of Elwood
145 Reservoir by gravity rather than pumping. The existing E65 canal has three siphons with 350 cfs
146 capacity, but irrigation demands can sometimes exceed 500 cfs. The siphons include about
147 7,300 ft of 78” to 84” steel pipe that has been in service for over 80 years and is near the end of
148 useful life. The new alignment is approximately 2 miles shorter than the existing, with about
149 5,500 ft of new canal and 5,800 ft of new siphon. The capacity is estimated to be about 450 cfs.
150 With better capacity to meet irrigation demands, more reservoir space will be available for
151 recharge. These system improvements will also allow CNPPID to capture rejected irrigation
152 water that was already diverted from the river but no longer needed for irrigation due to rains. A
153 feasibility study was completed by JEO. Construction is estimated at \$15 million; CNPPID
154 applied for and received a Water Sustainability Fund Grant for \$8.9 million. An RFP for design
155 is expected soon, with construction planned for 2023 and 2024.
156

157 **Wet Meadows Project:** *Kristen Cognac, EDO*

158 Cognac provided an update on the EDO’s work on wet meadow hydrology. Since 2013, the
159 Program has been monitoring and collecting data on both hydrology and climate at two wet
160 meadow sites: the Fox site is restored cropland, and the Shoemaker site is a native wet meadow.
161 Extensive work was completed in 2021, including comprehensive data QC (a significant
162 undertaking given the amount of data collected), development of hydrologic study objectives and
163 methodology and presentation to the GC, testing and calibration of analytical models, and data
164 analysis. Objectives of the study are to (1) quantify relationships between hydrological and
165 meteorological variables and groundwater levels, (2) develop hydrological management targets,
166 and (3) develop a tool to inform management decisions. Cognac presented several illustrative
167 examples of the data analysis and results.
168

169 **Recapture Network Construction:** *Seth Turner and Justin Brei, EDO*

170 Turner provided a status update on construction of the new recapture well network near
171 Cottonwood Ranch. Downey Drilling was awarded the contract for well construction with a bid
172 of \$178,000 (followed by a change order for \$22,000 for stainless steel mesh screen and deeper
173 drilling of some wells). Pipeline construction was awarded to J&G Dirtworks with a bid of
174 \$803,800. Pipeline construction began in mid-November, and all of the pipe was installed by
175 mid-December. Well drilling and testing was completed the week of December 13. Several of
176 the wells have production capacities less than anticipated (for example, well 4 and 5 are at 390
177 gpm and 330 gpm, respectively), but efforts were made to improve production as much as
178 possible. Pump sizing is to be finalized soon so those can be ordered. Several construction



179 items remain to be completed, including discharge structures, pump-outs, installation of pumps
180 and motors, and fittings from the wells to the pipelines. Completion is expected by March 31.

181
182 Turner also discussed the existing Cook recapture well. Persistent surging and/or valve
183 cavitation issues were observed during 2021 operations, and consistent long-term pumping in the
184 630-640 gpm range is less than the design capacity of the current pump. Downey Drilling
185 completed a pump test on January 14 and observed similar flow rates. A new, smaller pump will
186 be installed in the Cook well, and the existing pump will be used in one of the new recapture
187 wells at Cottonwood Ranch. In addition, a SCADA system will be installed on the Cook well,
188 and Tri-Basin NRD will take over operation and maintenance of the well as part of the larger
189 recapture network. This will likely require an amendment to the Well Augmentation Agreement
190 for the recapture network, which will be presented to the GC for approval in March or June.

191
192 **Additional Business:** *Cory Steinke, WAC Chair*

193 Upcoming meetings were noted from the agenda. The next WAC meeting is scheduled for May
194 3, tentatively to be held in person at the Lake McConaughy Visitor Center, subject to covid
195 conditions and enough meeting substance to justify the drive for everyone.

196
197 Runge asked about the timing of the spring EAC/RCC meeting. Turner said usually early
198 March. Steinke said he can coordinate with Mark Porath (USFWS) and maybe have the meeting
199 later in the spring if the primary focus is going to be the June-July germination suppression
200 release.

201
202 **Action Items**

203
204 **General WAC**

- 205 • Provide 1980s USBR canal and reservoir study to post on PRRIP website for WAC
- 206 members (Bradley).
- 207 • Reserve conference room at Lake McConaughy Visitor Center for May 3 WAC meeting
- 208 (Steinke).

209
210 **ED Office**

- 211 • Provide estimate of 2021 excess flow volume (Turner).