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PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
Water Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams
May 3, 2022

Meeting Attendees

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

State of Colorado

Kara Scheel – Member

Amy Ostdiek

State of Wyoming

Jeff Cowley – Member

Michelle Gess

State of Nebraska

Jesse Bradley – Alternate

Kari Burgert – Alternate

Justin Ahern

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Mark Porath – Alternate

Matt Rabbe – Alternate

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Brock Merrill – Member

Mahonri Williams - Alternate

Downstream Water Users

Cory Steinke – Chair

Brandi Flyn – Member

Jeff Shafer – Member

Nolan Little

Tyler Thulin

Randy Zach

Colorado Water Users

Jon Altenhofen – Member

Kyle Whitaker – Member

Joe Frank – Alternate

Luke Shawcross – Alternate

Jason Marks

Kevin Urie

Water Advisory Committee (WAC)

Upper Platte Water Users

Dennis Strauch – Member

Environmental Groups

Jacob Fritton – Member

Melissa Mosier – Member

Rich Walters – Alternate

Executive Director’s Office

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Justin Brei

Kristen Cognac

Julia Grabowski

Malinda Henry

Seth Turner

Malia Volke

Ed Weschler

Contractors/Interested Parties

None

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 February meeting minutes were noted. Altenhofen made a motion to
12 approve the minutes, second by Marks. There were no objections, and the February WAC
13 meeting minutes were approved. Altenhofen nominated Steinke as 2022 WAC chair. Merrill
14 made a motion, second by Marks, no objections, Steinke to continue as WAC chair.

15
16 **WAP Projects and Other Brief Water Updates:** *Seth Turner, EDO*

17
18 ***Leasing and Recharge Projects:***

19 Excess flows totaling 856 AF were diverted into Phelps County Canal March 21-23, of which
20 400 AF was recharged through the canal and 456 AF was delivered to the Cottonwood Ranch
21 broad-scale recharge project March 30-April 5. The Cook recapture well pumped about 117 AF
22 to the river between March 1 and April 11. Both the Program Governance Committee (GC) and
23 the Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (TBNRD) board approved an amendment to the Water
24 Augmentation Agreement to incorporate the Cook well into the new recapture network to be
25 operated and maintained by TBNRD. A new pump and flowmeter for the Cook well were
26 installed, and TBNRD assumed operations when the well was restarted on April 19.

27
28 ***Platte Basin Hydrology Update:***

29 Flows at Grand Island have been almost entirely below median and below target flows since
30 January 1. Real-time hydrologic condition was DRY for March, April, and May. Drought
31 conditions continue to persist across most of the Platte Basin, with parts of central Nebraska in
32 extreme drought as of April 26. As of April 30, the Pathfinder Environmental Account
33 contained 8,645 AF and the Pathfinder Municipal Account held 16,044 AF. Snow water
34 equivalent (SWE) in the South Platte basin in Colorado was below median since the beginning of
35 March and peaked lower than recent years. Wyoming SWE was at 90% of median or greater in
36 most of the North Platte Basin and 85% in the Sweetwater Basin that is tributary to Pathfinder
37 Reservoir.

38
39 ***North Platte Chokepoint Update:***

40 The EDO worked with the Rich Walters of the Platte Valley Weed Management Area and the
41 Lincoln County Weed Superintendent to secure landowner permissions to disk areas that were
42 sprayed for all vegetation in fall 2021. This encompassed about 43 acres and 8 landowners.
43 Only 5 landowners responded, limiting feasible disking to only about 15 acres, so the effort was
44 abandoned. Whitaker asked for clarification whether the other landowners said “no” or simply
45 didn’t respond. Turner said they didn’t respond to repeated contact attempts; Walters confirmed
46 this in the meeting chat in Teams. The planned discussion of bypass canal options at the March
47 GC meeting was tabled until June.

48
49 ***Recapture Network Construction:***

50 Installation of pumps in all 7 new recapture wells was completed the week of April 11, and as of
51 the beginning of May, 5 of those wells were fully operational with installation of all surface pipe



52 fittings complete. All pipeline sections were in the ground, and construction of discharge
53 structures, pump outs, and most of the surface fittings was complete. Numerous leaks were
54 detected during pressure testing of the pipeline, and repairs were underway. The final
55 completion of the project may still be a few months away.

56

57 ***June EA Release for Germination Suppression:***

58 Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reported the volume in the Lake
59 McConaughy EA to be 149,110 AF as of March 31. The planned germination suppression
60 release will target 1,500 cfs at Grand Island from June 1-30. Given travel times, the EA release
61 will start on or around May 25. Planning coordination calls involving USFWS, CNPPID, the
62 EDO, and other interested parties will be regularly scheduled during the release period.

63

64 **Federal Depletions Plan Update:** *Matt Rabbe, USFWS*

65 Rabbe reported that USFWS completed 4 consultations relying on coverage provided by the
66 Program in 2021, of which 2 were in Wyoming and 1 each in Nebraska and Colorado. The
67 Nebraska consultation was a federal depletion. The spreadsheet of federal depletions in
68 Colorado was not included in this year's submittal because there were no new additions. Since
69 the Program began in 2007, a total of 217 tiered consultations have been completed for
70 depletions relying on the programmatic biological opinion for the Program. Rabbe noted that
71 USFWS is developing a new website for these tiered consultations, and Altenhofen requested
72 that the new website include a list of all tiered consultations since the start of the Program.
73 Marks asked about the breakdown of consultations in each of the three states. Rabbe said it's
74 about 60-70% in Colorado, and about 15% each in Wyoming and Nebraska.

75

76 **Nebraska Depletions Plan Update:** *Kari Burgert, Nebraska DNR*

77 Burgert presented an update on Nebraska's New Depletion Plan for permitted activities in
78 calendar year 2020. Permits issued by Nebraska DNR and the Natural Resources Districts both
79 within and upstream of the critical habitat reach included 23 groundwater transfers, 33
80 groundwater wells, 11 groundwater variances, and 9 surface water permits. Most of the
81 groundwater well permits (23 of 33) were for replacement wells, with other uses including
82 municipal, industrial, supplemental groundwater, and new wells. All 9 surface water permits
83 issued were temporary permits for recharge. Nebraska DNR analyses show that mitigation of
84 2020 new uses results in a net positive effect to streamflows through 2032. Burgert also reported
85 that the Second Increment Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan and Integrated Management Plans
86 became effective in September 2020. A Robust Review is planned for 2023, with current efforts
87 including updates to the COHYST and WWUM models as well as updates to
88 depletions/accretions analyses.

89

90 **Colorado Depletions Plan Updates:** *Kara Scheel, CWCB and Jon Altenhofen, Northern Water*

91 Scheel presented Colorado's Annual Report for 2021 for the North Platte River Basin, starting
92 with a review of the baseline figures. Colorado reported 89,105 acres irrigated in Jackson
93 County in 2021, and the State Demographer reported a population of 1,360 in the county, a
94 decline of 12 people. Accounting analysis resulted in total 2021 consumptive use (CU) of



95 74,103 AF in the North Platte River Basin of Colorado, an underrun of 37,682 AF relative to the
96 baseline CU.

97
98 Altenhofen provided the annual review of Colorado’s Plan for Future Depletions for 2021,
99 beginning with a review of the assumptions used for the accounting analysis. These were
100 updated based on questionnaire responses from water providers in 2020 and are valid for the 5-
101 year period 2020-2024. The South Platte Basin is divided into North, Central, and South
102 regions, each of which has a unique combination of 6 water sources: transbasin imports,
103 nontributary groundwater, agricultural conversion, new native South Platte flow development,
104 reuse (mainly through exchange), and water conservation. Estimated 2021 population growth in
105 the South Platte Basin was 42,764. Colorado’s water obligations to the Program are funded
106 through the South Platte Water Related Activities Program, which collects assessments on water
107 taps. For 2021, May and June depletions at the CO-NE state line resulting from population
108 growth in the South Platte Basin totaled 2,316 AF, and these depletions were offset by retimed
109 accretions from managed groundwater recharge totaling 5,079 AF. Since 2007, these values
110 have averaged 2,265 AF and 5,064 AF, respectively.

111
112 Altenhofen also provided the annual review for Colorado’s Tamarack 1 Project, the state’s
113 contribution to the initial water projects for the Program. Tamarack 1 employs a combination of
114 dedicated recharge projects and purchases of creditable accretions not used by other recharge
115 projects. Tamarack 1 credits for shortage reduction at the CO-NE state line totaled 10,500 AF in
116 2021, with an annual average of 8,301 AF since the start of the Program. This average is less
117 than the expected amount based on analysis of the 1947-1994 historical period, owing to reduced
118 availability of divertible excess flows during the December-March winter months since 2007.
119 As discussed in previous years, this possibility was recognized in the Program Document.
120 Following repairs that were completed in March 2021, all 16 recharge wells at the Tamarack
121 Wildlife Area were pumped from November 2021 through March 2022, producing a combined
122 flow of 54 cfs. Water rights for the project allow for the installation of one more well.

123
124 **Wyoming Depletions Plan Update:** *Michelle Gess, Wyoming SEO*
125 Gess presented the Wyoming Depletions Report for Water Year 2021, starting with a brief
126 summary of Wyoming’s compliance with each of the three established baselines. For Baseline
127 No. 1, 2021 irrigated acreage above Guernsey (189,764 acres) was well below the benchmark
128 (226,000 acres). Likewise, irrigated acres in the Kendrick Project did not exceed the benchmark.
129 Baseline No. 2 pertains to irrigation and other water uses (municipal, industrial, rural domestic,
130 etc.) across several sub-basins. Translated to the state line, these water uses resulted in
131 underruns (relative to benchmark values) of about 46,278 AF during the irrigation season and
132 4,705 AF during the non-irrigation season. For Baseline No. 3, the reported volume of post-
133 1997 storage in the South Platte Basin of Wyoming was 80.56 AF, which does not affect flows at
134 the WY-CO state line during large runoff events.

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

139 The next WAC meeting is scheduled for August 2. Steinke confirmed that the conference room
140 at the Lake McConaughy Visitor Center is reserved if the meeting is held in person.

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142 **Action Items**

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144 **General WAC**

- 145 • None

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147 **ED Office**

- 148 • None