

## ISAC Comments on 2012 State of the Platte Report Executive Summary

The ISAC was asked four questions about the document. The questions are listed in bold, followed by our replies in boxes.

**Are the Big Questions reasonable and do they adequately encompass the intention/meaning of the Broad Hypotheses and associated Tier 1 Priority Hypotheses as noted in the Big Question table on Pages 4-5?**

Generally yes. The Big Questions (BQs) are reasonable and that they are a very good strategy for collapsing complex hypotheses, issues and a large amount of data into a manageable and effective synthesis. The ISAC has some suggested tweaks to BQ 3, and BQ 7, which are provided in our detailed comments to the EDO. There are challenges in answering these questions due to confounding factors, variability, etc. and those challenges should be made clear. It is important to give the GC (and others) some guidance on what it will take to answer those questions that are still uncertain, and whether that's achievable within the First Increment. Possible replies:

- a) **Feasible to answer in First Increment:**
- b) **Unlikely; requires significant changes in river conditions to be answerable during First Increment** (e.g., more river nesting sites to answer BQ7). Indicate what *can* be answered at the end of First Increment.
- c) **Not feasible to answer in First Increment** given year to year variability in river conditions, the time lags involved in establishing habitat, the variability in bird response to habitat, and the need for multiple years of observations to draw reliable conclusions. Indicate what *can* be answered at the end of First Increment.
- d) **Question can probably never be answered as stated and needs to be rephrased.** Due to unanticipated complexities in the system, unexpected and unavoidable confounding by other factors (e.g., effects of spraying on channel width under Q2), or lack of suitable data for a retrospective analysis, we simply will never be able to answer this question as stated, and should either rephrase it or abandon it.
- e) **Question has been answered.**

**Are the assessments consistent with what you have learned during your involvement with the Program (AMP Reporting Sessions, other ISAC meetings, reviewing documents, etc.) and logical based on your understanding of Program data?**

Generally yes. The ISAC was impressed at the synthesis that has been done, and the hierarchical approach to the organization of the report, with details in endnotes. It's a big step forward.

There are some tweaks required to either: 1) clarify the relevance of certain assessments to the questions (gets too weedy at times for a GC audience and much could be moved to endnotes); 2) specify the relative amount of weight that should be applied to different lines of evidence; and/or 3) remove a few lines of evidence that are weak or not relevant.

For 10 of the 11 big questions, the ISAC felt that the conclusions (i.e., thumbs up or down, uncertain) were reasonable. The one exception was Q6 ("Does availability of suitable nesting habitat limit tern and plover use and reproductive success on the central Platte River?"). For this question, the ISAC believes that the Program needs more time and more data points. The existing positive slopes to the relationships are driven by just 2 data points, and have weak fits statistically. The statistics should be calculated and stated. It's premature to give one thumb up. Still a "?".

## **Are the assessments technically adequate?**

This summary condenses an incredible amount of information into a straight-forward, well-focused, easy to understand format. Program participants should feel very proud for what they've accomplished. The assessments are thorough and technically adequate for the most part, though there are some suggested changes in wording, presentation and form of conclusions. It is very important to be clear on what one can legitimately conclude or cannot conclude from the available data.

A key issue under Big Question 5 is to re-evaluate the target unconfined channel width for whooping cranes, using roosting site data from both the Platte River and all other rivers where such data exist. There is clearly a large difference between the channel widths that whooping cranes use in the Platte and the channel widths that they are believed to require. The ISAC has indicated in earlier reviews that the Program needs to re-evaluate habitat criteria, and this habitat criterion seems like an excellent focus for such a re-evaluation.

Big Question 1 (the SDHF evaluation) uses a "peak flow and whole cross-section" perspective. Anecdotal information suggests a finer scale of evaluation (e.g., form of the rising limb of the hydrograph and within cross section spatial complexity) could also be important components to this question.

## **Is the presentation of each assessment clear and understandable?**

The audience is the GC. The ISAC really liked the boxes "What does the Science Say?" and the closing sections with questions for the GC. It's important to write this document so that all GC members (not just TAC and ISAC members) can follow the logic of the results and explain it to someone else (i.e., the constituency of each GC member). The ISAC has various suggestions on this issue:

- include a 2-3 page strategic level summary up front for those executives who won't read 30 pages and are mainly concerned about overall program direction and decisions
- move a lot of the technical material into endnotes;
- add maps that show Program actions and habitat complexes
- improve the writing: shorter sentences, less jargon, clear topic and closing sentences to each paragraph
- keep text directly focused on the big question (why it matters, main achievements & what we've learned, next steps, ability to answer in First Increment, GC decisions)
- work towards developing a document (perhaps next year) that would be appropriate for not only the GC, but also the general public, visitors from the Department of Interior, etc. The current document is still largely for those inside the Program who are intimately familiar with all of its details.

### **ISAC Members:**

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