



TO: PRRIP WATER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FROM: PRRIP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
SUBJECT: PRRIP WATER MILESTONE UPDATE
DATE: OCTOBER 4, 2019

I. STATUS OF WATER MILESTONE

This memorandum provides an overview of the progress made by the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program to achieve the Water Milestone (Milestone #4). Milestone #4 is specifically related to the Water Action Plan (WAP) and is stated as follows, per the Program Milestones Document¹:

“The [2000] Reconnaissance-Level Water Action Plan, as may be amended by the Governance Committee, will be implemented and capable of providing at least an average of 50,000 acre-feet per year of shortage reduction to target flows, or for other Program purposes, by no later than the end of the First Increment.”

The Explanatory Material and Schedules section of the Milestones Document identifies seven steps that “are necessary to implement the [Program] Water Plan and are needed to successfully complete Milestone 4.” While these steps provide guidance, they are not to be considered as individual milestones for purposes of Endangered Species Act compliance. The steps are listed below, along with their respective status updates as of late 2019.

Milestone Step 4.1: Ongoing

“The Governance Committee is responsible for allocating funds necessary to implement the [2000] Reconnaissance-Level Water Action Plan in accordance with the Program budget, as approved by the signatories and may be revised by the Governance Committee.”

Milestone Step 4.2: Ongoing

“The Governance Committee is responsible for acquiring the necessary permits for individual water related activities and for insuring compliance with all relevant local, state and federal laws and regulations.”

Milestone Step 4.3: Ongoing

“The Governance Committee will determine which projects in the [2000] Reconnaissance-Level Water Action Plan are retained through the reconnaissance, feasibility, and implementation level. Water related activities implemented in accordance

¹ Program Document, Attachment 2



with the Water Plan will be credited to the Program’s long-term objective as set forth in the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, Section III.A.3.a.(1) and the objective for the First Increment of the Program. As appropriate, the Governance Committee will develop and use protocols to determine what quantities of water will be credited to the individual projects.”

The Program operated in compliance with these three steps during the First Increment from 2007 to the present. Funding and permitting requirements were satisfied as needed by the Governance Committee (GC). Many projects were evaluated through the feasibility level, and several were carried forth to the implementation level. In addition, the GC accepted a set of general assumptions to estimate the quantity of water credited to the Program’s milestone from an implemented WAP project, which is referred to as the project score. **Appendix A** provides the generally accepted methodology used to score WAP projects and the assigned project scores as of October 2019.

Milestone Step 4.4: Completed

“Recognizing that the initial [2000] Reconnaissance –Level Water Action Plan (Attachment 5, Section 6 [of the Program Document]), is based on reconnaissance level project evaluations, the Governance Committee will complete feasibility studies on proposed projects and develop a Water Action Plan, if necessary, by the end of Year 3 of the First Increment [2009].”

The Program completed several feasibility studies to advance projects, such as the J-2 Regulating Reservoirs, Elm Creek Reregulating Reservoir and the Phelps County Canal Groundwater Recharge project. The Program also completed a 2009 WAP Update, in compliance with the specification that this be done by the end of Year 3 of the First Increment. A 2014 WAP Update provided further progress updates related to the 2000 Reconnaissance-Level WAP projects and new projects under consideration.

Milestone Step 4.5: Ongoing

“This Water Action Plan, as may be amended by the Governance Committee, will be capable of providing at least an average of 25,000 acre-feet per year of shortage reduction to target flows, or for other Program purposes, by the end of Year 8 of the First Increment [2014].”

Scored WAP Projects 2007 through 2014 (First Increment Year 1 to Year 8)

The Program successfully achieved this goal by implementing or initiating negotiations for implementation for the following projects by the end of Year 8: J-2 Regulating Reservoirs², Phelps County Canal Groundwater Recharge³, and the Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease⁴.

² EDO 2012

³ EDO 2013

⁴ EDO 2014



The GC originally accepted scores for these three projects totaling 36,400 acre-feet per year (AFY) of deficit reduction relative to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) target flows. Scored WAP Projects 2015 through 2019 (First Increment Year 9 to Year 13) Unanticipated and significant increases in the costs for materials and construction of the J-2 Regulating Reservoirs project were presented to the GC in September 2015. Following more than a year of unsuccessful attempts to develop a workable reduced-capacity version of the project, the previously accepted score of 30,600 AFY was retracted pending resolution of a hold placed on the project by the GC in November 2016. New and updated WAP project scores accepted by the GC since 2016 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. WAP Project Scores Accepted 2016-2019

Project	Score [AFY]	Date Accepted
No-Cost Net Controllable Conserved Water (NCCW) ⁵	260	March 2016
Phelps County Canal Groundwater Recharge + Cook Recapture Well ⁶	2,860	September 2016
Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease ⁷	6,350	September 2018
CNPPID Irrigator Lease ⁸	1,900	June 2019
Elwood Reservoir Groundwater Recharge ⁹	2,800	September 2019
TOTAL	14,170	

The Program's share of the Phelps County Canal Groundwater Recharge project was increased from 50 percent (1,800 AFY) to 75 percent (2,700 AFY) when the GC approved a Water Service Agreement (WSA) reflecting the modified allocation and in conjunction with the score analysis for the Cook Recapture Well. The score analysis for the Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease was updated to better reflect actual operational yields, and the GC accepted a revised score of 6,350 AFY, an increase of 2,350 AFY over the original 4,000 AFY score. The combined total of active project scores accepted by the GC was 14,170 AFY as of October 2019 (Year 13 of the First Increment).

Unscored WAP Projects in Various Stages of Development or Implementation

Since the start of Year 9 of the First Increment, the Program entered into WSAs to continue or initiate the leasing of surface water from several stakeholder districts or the diversion of excess flows for groundwater recharge. Active projects that have not been scored yet, but provide an annual yield for the Program include the following:

- Central Platte Natural Resources District (CPNRD) WSA for diversion of excess flows for groundwater recharge during the non-irrigation season, ongoing since 2013, and the leasing of surface water from the Thirty Mile, Cozad, and Orchard-Alfalfa canals. From 2015-2017, leased surface water was measured and returned to the river at the canal

⁵ EDO 2016a

⁶ EDO 2016b

⁷ EDO 2018a

⁸ EDO 2019a

⁹ EDO 2019b



headgates during the irrigation season. These were normal to wet years with fewer days of shortage, which significantly limited the operational yield (i.e., actual shortage reduction at Grand Island) of the project compared to the large volumes of water leased. In 2018, a pilot exchange project was initiated to instead credit that surface water to the Lake McConaughy EA following the end of the irrigation season. This retooled approach to the surface water lease was continued in 2019.

- Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) WSA for excess flow deliveries into the Gothenburg and Dawson County canals for recharge operations, ongoing since 2015.
- NPPD WSA for a surface water exchange from the Gothenburg and Dawson County canals to be credited to the Lake McConaughy EA following the irrigation season, initiated in 2019.

Since September 2015, the EDO has actively pursued the development and implementation of new project concepts, initially to supplement a reduced-capacity J-2 Regulating Reservoirs project and eventually to replace that project entirely. These new projects, including broad-scale recharge, slurry wall gravel pits, and the acquisition and retirement of irrigated farmland (“acquire & retire”) were not included in any of the previous Water Action Plan documents.

The new project concepts were critical components of the Water Plan A and B options presented to the GC in July 2016. These revised water plans demonstrated that the shortage reduction goal of Milestone #4 (50,000 AFY) could still be successfully achieved with smaller or no J-2 Regulating Reservoirs. The EDO presented a further-refined Water Projects Work Plan to the GC in March 2017, which showed that projects with combined scores exceeding 40,000 AFY could be developed by 2025 (Year 6 of a proposed First Increment Extension). The 40,000 AFY is consistent with current plans to achieve 120,000 AFY of target flow deficit reductions as quickly as possible during the First Increment Extension.

In March 2017, a contractor was selected for engineering design and construction administration of the first broad-scale recharge project, to be developed at the Program’s Cottonwood Ranch complex. A pipeline will deliver divertible excess flow water from the Phelps County Canal to Cottonwood Ranch. Construction of the project began in October 2018 and is expected to conclude in October 2019. Recharge operations will commence in 2020, once vegetation is established on the berms that retain water to create the recharge ponds.

Following a recommendation from the GC to pursue development of a full-scale storage facility, the Lakeside gravel pit located southwest of Elm Creek and adjacent to other Program properties was selected for the initial slurry wall storage project and acquired by the Program in 2017. Engineering design of the slurry wall and other facilities was completed in 2019. Given the high construction cost estimates, a comparatively small anticipated project score, and lower-cost alternatives with higher expected yields, the GC decided not to proceed with permitting and construction of the project until such time that the project is deemed necessary to meet the First Increment Water Objective.

The Program’s first acquire & retire transaction was completed for a property under the Alliance Irrigation District near Bayard, Nebraska in September 2016. Preliminary efforts to quantify the



volume of transferable consumptive use water were made, but the GC gave direction for the property to be sold in 2018, and the sale was completed in 2019. The acquire & retire concept was abandoned as a source of water for the WAP in favor of additional water leasing pursuits that could contribute to the Lake McConaughy EA.

Estimated scores for the five projects that are currently active, but for which score analyses have not yet been completed as of September 2019 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Estimated scores for other active WAP projects

Project	Estimated Score [AFY]
CPNRD groundwater recharge (Thirty Mile, Cozad, Orchard-Alfalfa canals)	600
CPNRD surface water lease	10,800
NPPD groundwater recharge (Gothenburg and Dawson County canals)	1,800
NPPD surface water lease	2,750
Cottonwood Ranch broad-scale recharge	4,000
TOTAL	19,950

The combined estimated score for all active WAP projects is 34,120 AFY. At this time, it is anticipated that the remaining water required to meet Milestone #4 will come from some combination of (1) a well field to recapture groundwater intentionally recharged through the Phelps County Canal and Elwood Reservoir; (2) leases of surface water from Nebraska irrigators or irrigation districts along the North Platte River upstream of Lake McConaughy; and/or (3) leasing of conserved water stored in Lake McConaughy from the CNPPID.

Milestone Step 4.6: Ongoing

“The Governance Committee will ensure that projects implemented under this Water Action Plan are operated in accordance with approved operating plans and that they are having the intended effects on Program purposes.”

Milestone Step 4.7: Ongoing

“The Governance Committee will ensure that water produced by projects implemented under this Water Action Plan is included in approved tracking and accounting procedures and that these projects are coordinated with other Program activities including other water projects and with the management of the Environmental Account.”

The Program actively operated and managed WAP projects in compliance with the specifications of these milestone steps through 2019. Annual reports for the Phelps County Canal Groundwater Recharge Project were prepared for the 2012-2013 through 2016-2017 recharge seasons. Accounting procedures for other WAP projects were developed and refined between 2017 and 2019. The 2018 PRRIP Water Projects Accounting memo¹⁰ documented project operations and

¹⁰ EDO 2019c



accounting through the end of that calendar year, including comparison of operational yields versus approved scores.

II. FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND EVALUATIONS

The following project feasibility studies and other evaluations have been completed to further WAP projects and Milestone #4:

- Water Management Study Phases I and II: Evaluation of Pulse Flows for the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (2008)¹¹
- Platte River Recovery Implementation Program 2009 Water Action Plan Update (2010)¹²
- Nebraska Ground Water Recharge Pre-Feasibility Study (2010)¹³
- CNPPID Reregulating Reservoir: Elwood and J-2 Alternatives Analysis Project Report (2010)¹⁴
- Canal Winter Operations Feasibility Study (2011)¹⁵
- Feasibility Study – Elm Creek Regulatory Reservoir (2011)¹⁶
- CNPPID J-2 Reregulating Reservoir Feasibility Report (2012)¹⁷
- Pilot-Scale Recharge Report for Nebraska Groundwater Recharge Feasibility Study (2012)¹⁸
- Conceptual Design Report: J-2 Regulating Reservoir Project (2013)¹⁹
- Platte River Recovery Implementation Program 2014 Water Action Plan Update (2015)²⁰
- Funk Lagoon Feasibility Study (2015)²¹
- Water Leasing White Paper (2015)²²
- Broad-Scale Recharge Summary of Concept, Work Completed, and 2016 Work Plan (2016)²³
- Broad-Scale Recharge Status Update (2016)^{24,25}
- Conceptual Example of Slurry Wall Gravel Pits for PRRIP (2016)²⁶
- Update on Slurry Wall Gravel Pits for PRRIP (2016)²⁷

¹¹ Boyle Engineering Corporation et al. 2008a,b

¹² EDO and WAC 2010

¹³ EDO et al. 2010

¹⁴ Olsson Associates and Black & Veatch 2010

¹⁵ Applegate Group, Inc. 2011

¹⁶ Olsson Associates 2011

¹⁷ Olsson Associates and Black & Veatch 2012

¹⁸ EA Engineering, Science, and Technology, Inc., and Daniel B. Stephens and Associates, Inc. 2012

¹⁹ RJH Consultants, Inc. 2013

²⁰ EDO and WAC 2015

²¹ EDO 2015a

²² EDO 2015b

²³ EDO 2016c

²⁴ EDO 2016d

²⁵ EDO 2016e

²⁶ EDO 2016f

²⁷ EDO 2016g



- Program Water Plan – Plan A and Plan B (2016)²⁸
- Osborne Property Status and Work Plan (2016)²⁹
- Water Action Plan Project Status and Scores (2017)³⁰
- Water Action Plan Projects Update (2017)³¹
- Water Action Plan Project Status and Scores (2018)³²
- Water Action Plan Projects Status and Scores (2019)³³

Projects that were not recommended to move forward into implementation include the Elm Creek Reregulating Reservoir, the For-Purchase NCCW project, the Glendo Reservoir storage project, and the Funk Lagoon as a Nebraska Groundwater Management project, as discussed below:

- Elm Creek Reregulating Reservoir: The GC agreed not to move forward with the Elm Creek Reregulating Reservoir at the June 2011 meeting, as the J-2 Regulating Reservoir was the preferred reservoir site.
- For-Purchase NCCW: Consistent with its FERC license obligation, the CNPPID made an initial offer to the Program on March 4, 2013 with subsequent offers made on September 5, 2013 and December 2, 2013 (final offer) for the For-Purchase NCCW. The GC did not accept the terms of the final offer at the December 2013 meeting due to the high unit cost and the required upfront payment for the total volume of water purchased through 2038. However, as discussed in the 2014 WAP Update, “conserved water retained in the CNPPID’s account in Lake McConaughy could be a source of water for a storage lease with the CNPPID.”
- Glendo Reservoir storage: Wyoming’s allocation of Glendo storage water is needed to meet all or a portion of the replacement water obligations described below; therefore, Wyoming’s allocation of Glendo storage water is no longer directly available for Program uses. The Final 2001 Settlement Stipulation for the Nebraska v. Wyoming lawsuit modified the original 1945 North Platte Decree (as amended in the 1953 Modified Decree), and the provisions in the stipulation (Exhibits 10 and 11) required Wyoming to provide replacement water for depletions to the North Platte River from wells and tributaries from the Whalen Diversion Dam to the state line reach.
- Funk Lagoon: The EDO completed a feasibility of the site as a WAP project and presented the results to the WAC at the October 2015 meeting. The WAC recommended the Program not pursue the project and the GC was updated on the feasibility study results at the December 2015 meeting.

These projects are regarded as inactive for the remainder of the First Increment for budgetary or other reasons but could be reevaluated if conditions change.

²⁸ Kenny and EDO 2016

²⁹ EDO 2016h

³⁰ EDO 2017a

³¹ EDO 2017b

³² EDO 2018b

³³ EDO 2019d



III. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A: ACCEPTED ASSUMPTIONS AND SCORES

The GC approved a set of scoring assumptions recommended by the Scoring Subcommittee in 2010. The methodology was used to score the J-2 Regulating Reservoir (two-cell concept), the Phelps County Canal Groundwater Recharge project, the Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease, the No-Cost Net Controllable Conserved Water project and the Cook Tract Recapture project. The key assumptions are listed in **Table A-1**. **Table A-2** provides a list of projects scored to-date, as recommended by the Scoring Subcommittee and assigned by the GC.

Table A-1. Key scoring assumptions for WAP projects, accepted by the GC.

Component	Data
Hydrology	OpStudy Adjusted Present Condition with Three State Projects (without pulse flows)
Analysis Period	1947-1994
Analysis Time Step (A)	Daily or Monthly
Excesses/Shortages Calculation	Calculated at Grand Island
Target Flows	Appendix A-5, Column 4 or 8 in the Water Plan Reference Materials of the Program Document
Routing (B)	WMC Loss Model

Notes:

- (A) The scoring of project yields against USFWS shortages is completed on a monthly basis for most projects; however, the J-2 Regulating Reservoir project was completed on a daily time step.
- (B) The WMC Loss Model was updated in the Water Management Study Phase I (2008) by Boyle Engineering Corporation. It was originally developed by the Program's Water Management Committee, as required by milestone W14-1 of the Cooperative Agreement.



Table A-2. Project scores assigned by the GC.

WAP Project	Program Score (AFY)	Approval Date	Notes
J-2 Regulating Reservoir	30,600	Mar-2012; RETRACTED Nov-16	The GC approved a score of 30,600 AFY at the March 2012 GC meeting for an assumed 75% of the project (assuming the NDNR would receive 25%). The score is based on a two-cell reservoir concept with a capacity of 13,959 AF, with "Area 2" unavailable for Program uses during the irrigation season due to the CNPPID's hydrocycling mitigation activities. This project was placed on hold by the GC in November 2016. The assigned score was retracted, pending resolution of the hold.
Phelps County Canal Groundwater Recharge	2,700	Dec-13; Sep-16	The GC approved a score of 1,800 AFY at the December 2013 meeting for an assumed 50% of the project (assuming the NDNR would receive 50%). The Phelps recharge score was increased from 1,800 AFY to 2,700 AFY to represent the draft permanent agreement with the CNPPID of 75% of deliveries to the Program (25% to the NDNR). The GC approved the score update in September 2016 in conjunction with the Cook recapture well score.
Cook Tract Recapture Project	160	Sep-16	A recapture well was constructed on the Cook tract to route recharged water (from the Phelps County Canal) to the river more quickly during USFWS target flow shortages. A score of 160 AFY was approved by the GC in September 2016.
Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease	6,350	Mar-14; Sep-18	The GC approved a score of 4,000 AFY at the March 2014 meeting , based on 4,800 AF available in Pathfinder Reservoir each year (the total volume is 38,400 AF per the agreement with the Wyoming Water Development Commission). The GC approved an updated score of 6,350 AFY in September 2018 based on analyses revised to better reflect actual operations and the regular availability of additional water from the Pathfinder Municipal Account.
No-Cost Net Controllable Conserved Water (NCCW)	260	Mar-16	Each year 314 AF are added to the Lake McConaughy Environmental Account at no cost to the Program. The GC approved a score of 260 AFY at the March 2016 meeting.
CNPPID Irrigator Lease	1,900	Jun-19	The GC approved a score of 1,900 AFY at the June 2019 meeting , based roughly on 2019 project enrollment of 2,948 acres (out of max 3,000 acres) and yield of 9 inches per acre (0.75 AF/acre).
Elwood Reservoir Groundwater Recharge	2,800	Sep-19	The GC approved a score of 2,800 AFY at the September 2019 meeting , based on maximum annual recharge of 30,000 AF, a 5,600 AFY total score, and 50% allocation to the Program.
TOTAL PROGRAM SCORE FOR ACTIVE PROJECTS	14,170		Total scored projects yielding water; does not include J-2 Regulating Reservoir