

Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Project

Meeting Minutes

North Platte, NE – Twin Platte NRD Office

February 2, 2010

Call to Order and Attendance – With a quorum present, Chairman Kent Miller called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. CST. Those in attendance were: Jim Schneider, Jennifer Schellpeper, and Doug Hallum (Nebraska Department of Natural Resources), Duane Woodward, Matt Bohnenkamp and Mark Czaplewski (Central Platte NRD), Kent Miller and Ann Dimmitt (Twin Platte NRD), Rod Horn and Kyle Liebig (South Platte NRD), John Thorburn (Tri-Basin NRD), Tina Kurtz and Thad Kuntz (North Platte NRD), Tim McCoy (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) and John Heaston (The Nature Conservancy). Miller reported that the PBHEP abides by the Open Meetings Act in conducting business and noted that a copy of the Act was displayed in the meeting room.

Meeting Notices – Chairman Miller reported that notice of the meeting had been published in the Grand Island, North Platte and Scottsbluff newspapers as required by law.

Agenda Modifications – No changes were made to the agenda distributed prior to the meeting.

Approval of Minutes – Jennifer Schellpeper made two amendments to the draft minutes of the November 13 meeting. Motion by Rod Horn, second by Schellpeper to approve the amended minutes of the November 13, 2009, meeting. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Committee Reports – Czaplewski reported on the activities of the Education and Outreach Committee, noting their work on the brochure and logo. They last met on November 17 and plan to meet next on January 13, 2010. Candidate PBHEP logos are to be addressed later on the agenda. Thorburn reported for the Habitat Management and Monitoring Committee, noting their work drafting a general habitat management plan for conservation easements dealing with the conversion of irrigated cropland to grassland. They last met on November 24.

The Water Tracking and Accounting Committee report was provided by Kyle Liebig. They met on November 18, December 15 and 23, 2009, and next meet on January 11, 2010. Liebig described the Committees work on a variety of recently assigned topics, referenced recently distributed Committee minutes and provided a handout that summarized Committee motions and other items of interest. The Committee continues to work on a draft “straw dog” documenting the Committee’s position regarding model runs to better identify total accretions and estimated depletions to the river. A modeling run of a subset of the PBHEP area (Dawson County) may be conducted to help evaluate modeling methods. The 2010 CALMIT remote sensing data acquisition effort was discussed. Previous CALMIT data acquisition efforts were lead by COHYST project personnel, but the 2010 effort will need more involvement by PBHEP sponsors and the Committee. The administrators asked the Committee to contact CALMIT personnel to begin the process of evaluating options for dealing with ground truthing the 2010 data (field crop types and whether or not its irrigated) and options for fixing the data shift in the previously collected data. Liebig noted the Committee’s split vote on the matter of enrollment criteria. After a lengthy discussion on the matter, motion by Schneider, second by Kurtz to establish the following PBHEP minimum eligibility criteria:

1. NRD certified irrigated acres; and
 - a.) Eligible for any federal program(s); or
 - b.) Groundwater irrigated 2 of last 5 years; or can be determined to be sub-irrigated 2 out of 5 years
2. Surface water appropriations that are active and maintained.

Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Liebig addressed a Committee question regarding rounding issues for water saved to the river, using the example of the Ruzicka tract and the COHYST offset calculator. After considerable discussion, the group agreed to re-address the issue at next month's meeting.

Legislative Special Session on State Budget Shortfall – Miller noted this item was held over for further review after the November meeting. Schellpeper noted that thus far, State of Nebraska budget cuts have not affected DNR cash funds for PBHEP activities.

Federal programs Update – Czaplewski distributed materials provided by NRCS officials. James Huntwork (NRCS-DC, Grand Island) joined the meeting via conference call, provided program updates and answered questions posed by the group. Huntwork pointed out edits made to the draft AWEP application based on an evaluation of the 2009 proposal, attempting to clarify how PBHEP could complement AWEP funding, providing increased details on relationships to area conservation practices, and updating average payments for conversions from irrigated agriculture. Other edits may be needed once the AWEP request for proposals is available from NRCS. Application deadlines and review periods are not known for certain, but concerns are increasing that timelines for application, evaluation and ultimately sign-up will be tight. Schellpeper noted the eventual need for letters of support to be submitted with the AWEP application.

Selection of Logo – Miller and Czaplewski reviewed the candidate logos provided by the Education and Outreach Committee. Motion by Kurtz, second by Schneider to adopt option #4 (as shown on the bottom of page two of the candidate list distributed by Czaplewski on December 21, 2009) as the PBHEP logo, modified to show only the portion of Tri-Basin NRD located in the Platte River basin. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

PBHEP Appraisal Process - Rod Horn noted that a PBHEP priority area within the South Platte NRD, in Deuel County (without established "market areas") exists and plans to use the two appraisals/county approach to determine the value of conservation easements in the area, in accordance with our agreement with the NET. Given time constraints, Horn asked for the administrators to support his proceeding with two appraisals in this area of Deuel County. Motion by Thorburn, second by Schneider, to approve South Platte NRD to use two representative tract appraisals in Deuel County to establish a value for retirement of irrigation for PBHEP purposes. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Review of DNR "Straw Dog" Criteria Regarding Calculations of Water Savings – Given the discussion on this matter during the Water Tracking and Accounting Committee report, the group agreed to lay this agenda item over until the February meeting.

Tri-Basin NRD Request for Funding Assistance for Water Lease – Thorburn reviewed the proposal provided in advance of the meeting, noting a correction in the funding amounts listed which should be: NRD \$78,000 (40%), DNR \$78,000 (40%) and NET \$39,000 (20%). DNR representatives noted that their economists have not yet reviewed the proposal and expressed concerns with language within the Water Resources Cash Fund legislation that specified use of the fund for reducing consumptive use of water which factor into the scrutiny of the expenditure of those funds and their perspective on the amount of water saved and the price for such a savings of water. One concern related to whether or not the surface water involved in the lease would be offset, to some degree, by ground water irrigation on the same lands. After much discussion on the resolution of the amount of water saved and the value of that water, both topics of a workgroup meeting to be held on January 11, 2010, Chairman Miller asked representatives from Tri-Basin NRD and the DNR meet to attempt to resolve the issue and that the agenda item be laid over until next month.

Central Platte NRD Request for Funding for Conservation Easements – Schneider expressed DNR concerns with Central Platte NRD calculations of water savings similar to those related to Tri-Basin NRD’s proposal and, consequently this proposal will also be discussed at the administrators workgroup meeting scheduled for January 11th in Lincoln and laid over until next month. The DNR noted specific questions with regard to the differences in values paid by central Platte NRD for acre/feet of water saved to the river. Bohnenkamp noted that, at least part of the differences involved were a result of minor modifications in acreages of lands involved in the various tracts.

Review of PBHEP Protocol – Czaplewski briefly described changes to the Protocol incorporated from earlier DNR comments and from Central Platte NRD legal counsel. Czaplewski was asked to send out a clean copy of the Protocol and the administrators were asked to provide any comments to Czaplewski no later than January 22, 2010.

Other – Czaplewski reminded the group of the need to submit documentation of in-kind contributions for the previous quarter no later than January 15th.

Next Meetings- The next meetings have already been scheduled for February 2, March 1, April 7, May 5 and June 1, 2010 (all meetings starting at 10:30 a.m. CST at the offices of Twin Platte NRD in North Platte). Miller asked everyone to bring their calendars to the February meeting where meeting dates for the remainder of the year will be scheduled.

Adjourn – The meeting was adjourned at 2:23 p.m.