

# **Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Project**

Meeting Minutes

Grand Island, NE - Central Platte NRD Office

March 6, 2009

**Call to Order and Attendance** – PBHEP Coordinator, Mark Czaplewski called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Those in attendance were: Jennifer Schellpeper and Steve Gaul (Nebraska Department of Natural Resources), Ron Bishop, Mark Czaplewski and Marcia Lee (Central Platte NRD), Tim McCoy and Kristal Stoner (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission), Kent Miller (Twin Platte NRD), Rod Horn (South Platte NRD), John Thorburn (Tri-Basin NRD), James Huntwork (NRCS), John Martin (NE Farm Bureau), and John Heaston (The Nature Conservancy).

**Election of Interim Chair** - Given that Project sponsors have not yet formally organized, it was agreed to select an interim Project Chairperson to conduct meetings. Motion by John Thorburn, second by Rod Horn to name Ron Bishop as Interim Chairperson. Motion approved. Ron Bishop accepted, noting that it was his preference not to be Chair once sponsors formally signed on to the Project, given that Central Platte NRD will be acting as contract administrator of any Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) funds received.

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

**Status of NET Grant Application** – Ron Bishop noted the NET has preliminarily recommended the Project for funding at one-half the \$6 million amount requested in our application. The NET recommendation proposes first year funding of \$1,275,000, second year funding of \$725,000 and third year funding of \$1,000,000. The NET will make their final approvals when they meet on April 2, 2009. Mark Czaplewski is completing various documents requested by NET for submittal by their March 20 deadline. The paperwork includes documentation and explanation of any budget modifications. The group discussed possible budget changes but agreed to leave current budget amounts as is. NET information received to date does not address the matter of real estate appraisals for each conservation easement acquired by the Project. The NET grant application proposed an approach that would only provide the NET with two appraisals for each county where easements are acquired rather than one for each easement as has been general NET policy. John Heaston noted the possible use of restricted use appraisals rather than full appraisals, once two full appraisals were acquired in each affected county, which would help bracket market values. He also suggested the possible use of a retainer for an appraiser, in an effort to expedite the numerous appraisals that could be needed across the Project area. Estimates of full appraisal costs could easily reach \$5000 each and take several weeks to complete.

**Interlocal Cooperation Agreement** – The draft PBHEP Agreement drafted by DNR and modified and distributed by Central Platte NRD on March 3, 2009 was discussed and several changes were recommended. Using the March 3<sup>rd</sup> draft as a base document to work from, sponsors and partners are asked to provide Mark Czaplewski with any additional comments to the Agreement no later than April 1, 2009. DNR and Central Platte NRD legal counsel will review all changes and distribute a final draft Agreement in advance of the next PBHEP meeting.

**Financial Matters** – The group discussed the process for funding and distributing Project monies. The NRD’s will front the costs of easement acquisitions and document and track their own costs. The NRD’s will provide monthly accountings to the Project Coordinator for summarization and quarterly submittal to NET for partial reimbursement. Tim McCoy noted that the NET has made monthly, rather than quarterly disbursements on larger projects in special cases. The details of reporting to and monetary distributions from the DNR will be developed by the DNR and included in the revised PBHEP Agreement. All Project sponsors and partners need to track and report their in-kind contributions to the Coordinator for inclusion with NET reporting. As noted in the NET application and draft Agreement, the NRD’s will set aside 10% of the acquisition cost of easements in a separate reserve fund to assure performance and defense of easements. These funds could be used for acquisition of remote sensing imagery (e.g., color infrared photography and staff time) for annual easement compliance monitoring.

The NRDs expressed the need to be able to utilize the 3 cent groundwater management tax levy beyond the current 2012 sunset date.

John Heaston asked the group to consider establishing an option for landowners to donate water rights to the Project rather than receiving full cash payment in order to get federal and potentially state tax benefits.

**Water Tracking and Accounting** – Each NRD will be responsible for their own calculation, tracking and accounting of Project water savings. Jennifer Schellpeper noted the need for a uniform method of calculating and tracking water savings based on the latest version of the COHYST model or other appropriate and agreed upon modeling. Conservation easement payments will be based on acre/feet of water saved to the river. A uniform protocol will be established to calculate, track and report these figures. It was generally agreed to use Central Platte NRD methods and protocols as a basis for overall Project use. It was recommended that Central Platte NRD provide training on current approaches. The group agreed to utilize Central Platte NRD’s current conservation easement document as a standard for overall Project use. Jennifer Schellpeper and Rod Horn discussed DNR’s application to the Bureau of Reclamation for a *Water 2025* grant for “Implementation of Coordinated Water Banking and Marketing Program’s in Portions of Nebraska’s Platte River Basin” and it’s potential Project use.

**Committee Structure** – In order to more effectively conduct Project business, the group agreed to form several committees: 1) Steering and Financial Committee, 2) Education and Outreach Committee, 3) Habitat Management and Monitoring Committee, and 4) Water Tracking and Accounting Committee. Mark Czaplewski will send out an email requesting volunteers for membership in each Committee.

**Next Meeting and Adjourn** – The next Project meeting will be held on April 21, 2009, starting at 10:30 a.m. CDST in North Platte at the offices of Twin Platte NRD. The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Mark Czaplewski