

# **Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Project**

Meeting Minutes

North Platte, NE – Twin Platte NRD Office

September 14, 2009

**Call to Order and Attendance** – With a quorum present, Chairman Kent Miller called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. CDST. Those in attendance were: Jennifer Schellpeper (via telephone) and Jim Schneider (Nebraska Department of Natural Resources), Ron Bishop, Mark Czaplowski, Duane Woodward, Angela Warner, and Matt Bohnenkamp (Central Platte NRD), Kent Miller and Ann Dimmitt (Twin Platte NRD), Rod Horn and Kyle Liebig (South Platte NRD), John Thorburn and Larry Reynolds (Tri-Basin NRD), John Heaston (The Nature Conservancy), Ron Cacek and Tina Kurtz (North Platte NRD), and T.J. Walker (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission). Miller reported that the PBHEP abides by the Open Meetings Act in conducting business and noted that a copy of the Open Meetings Act was displayed in the meeting room.

**Meeting Notices** – Chair 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** – Motion by Ron Bishop, second by Rod Horn to approve the minutes of the August 3, 2009, PBHEP meeting as distributed prior to the meeting. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

**Development of Method of Calculating Credit for Water Saved** – Jim Schneider provided two handouts, the first illustrating DNR’s perspective on different approaches to measuring potential differences between certified irrigated acres and 1997 levels of developed acres, and the second providing three approaches (simple, analytical and numerical) to calculating depletions and accretions. Schneider noted the need for inclusion of some historical perspective regarding irrigation use and the need to be mindful of the frequency and timing of that use.

Ron Cacek reported that the NPNRD had received an inquiry regarding permits that may be needed from the NRD or the state for a construction project that will require fill material from a pit which would result in the creation of a body of water. Considerable discussion followed regarding approaches to calculating and crediting saved water. The group discussed the matter of who is affected by state and federal permitting and funding related to endangered species, how they relate to the Nebraska New Depletions Plan associated with PRRIP, and thus potentially in need of water offsets for new developments. The group agreed to continue to discuss these matters at future meetings. Jim Schneider and Jennifer Schellpeper will continue to work with authorities with the Nebraska Department of Roads and county officials. John Heaston will utilize his contacts with Nebraska gravel miners (PACE) to continue to address the issue as relates to new and expanded sandpits. For the time being, the PBHEP approach will be that if Nebraska entities are not caught in some regulatory or funding “net”, then depletions associated with their projects will not be addressed. If they have a state or federal “net”, the group will use

direction found in the NRCS depletions calculator and will charge \$2,500 per acre-foot of depletion to the river.

Schneider laid out an approach to calculating saved water by multiplying the Stream Depletion Factor (SDF) by the Crop irrigation Requirement (CIR) less any change in recharge. The consensus of the group is to utilize a COHYST-based approach to calculate water savings for PBHEP factoring in historic frequency of irrigation use. Jim Schneider and Ron Bishop will provide the group, at next month's meeting with examples of such calculations made from surface water, ground water and co-mingled irrigated acres.

**Development of Ranges of Water Payments** – Angela Warner reviewed a series of spreadsheets distributed prior to the meeting related to her compilation of PBHEP area county assessor taxation data for land values. The data compared values of irrigated, dryland and grassland acres by soil type/land capability class for each county involved. Warner pointed out that the county data used to calculate these median land values was derived from the past three years values, excludes high and low “outlier” values. Examples from counties within each participating NRD were reviewed and discussed as an alternative to establishing land values for conservation easements by formal real estate appraisal. Ron Bishop emphasized that the payments to landowners would ultimately be for acre/feet of water saved to the river.

The group agreed that the use of this approach provided a reasonable, timely and cost-effective means of calculating the value of land rights acquired by conservation easements and further agreed to formally propose the use of this methodology to the NET, as an alternative to the use of full real estate appraisals (two per county) for establishing the value of PBHEP payments to landowners. Mark Czaplewski will contact the NET and set up a meeting to pursue approval of this approach. Ron Bishop, Angela Warner, Mark Czaplewski and possibly Kent Miller would represent the PBHEP team in making the presentation to the NET.

**Other** – Czaplewski briefly reported on the activities of the Education and Outreach Committee. He noted the Committee's work on a PBHEP logo and brochure. This material will be further discussed at the October 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. Miller noted that agenda will also include a review of examples of calculations of water savings credits for both surface and groundwater to be brought forward by Jim Schneider, Tri-Basin NRD's request for funding assistance related to a water lease from Central NPP&ID, and Committee reports.

Rod Horn mentioned the issue of county taxation of irrigated lands under federal programs such as CREP and EQIP. He and Kyle Liebig will continue to work with officials from Kimball County on the issue and keep the group apprised of any developments they hear of.

Miller reminded the group of meetings currently scheduled for the following dates: October 5, November 13, January 5, February 2, and March 2, all starting at 10:30 a.m. CDST or CST in North Platte at the offices of Twin Platte NRD.

**Adjourn** – The meeting was adjourned at 1:36 p.m.