

Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Overview

Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Proposed First Increment Extension Environmental Assessment

Introduction

The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (Program) has three main elements, as follows:

1. **WATER**—Increasing stream flows in the central Platte River during relevant periods
2. **LAND**—Enhancing, restoring, and protecting habitat lands for the target bird species
3. **ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**—Accommodating certain new water-related activities

The Program began implementing these elements in 2007. Interests in land are acquired only from willing participants and are held by a land interest holding entity, allowing taxes to be paid. This avoids increasing local citizens' tax burden due to lands being removed from the tax roll. Program lands are managed under a "good neighbor" policy.

The Program is led by a Governance Committee (GC) consisting of representatives from Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska; the Bureau of Reclamation; the Fish and Wildlife Service; South Platte River and North Platte River water users; Platte River water users; and environmental groups.

The Program established key standing advisory committees to assist the GC in implementing the Program. Those committees are the Technical Advisory Committee, the Land Advisory Committee, the Water Advisory Committee, the

Independent Scientific Advisory Committee, and the Finance Committee. In addition, an Adaptive Management Working Group helps inform the GC on implementing the Program's adaptive management plan.

Project Background



In July 1997, governors of the Platte River's three basin states joined with the Secretary of the Interior to sign the Cooperative Agreement for Platte River Research and Other Efforts Relating to Endangered Species Habitat along the Central Platte River, Nebraska. The GC was formed as part of this agreement to develop a proposal for the Program to be evaluated by the Department of the Interior (Department) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The GC completed a final proposal for the Program that is documented in the 2006 Final Program Document. They intended for the Program to acquire and manage land and water resources to provide benefits for four target species on the river in Nebraska: the endangered whooping crane, interior least tern, and pallid sturgeon and the threatened piping plover. In the fall of 2006, following completion of the NEPA and ESA processes and signing of the Record of Decision by the Secretary of the Interior, the Final Cooperative Agreement was signed by the States and the Department committing to participation in and implementation of the Program. Congressional authorization to continue the cooperative effort through the implementation of the Program and authorizing appropriations were provided in 2008 (P.L. 110-229). The Program is being implemented incrementally, with the First Increment covering the 13 years from 2007 through 2019.



Program Goals

The overarching goal of the Program is to use land, water, and scientific monitoring and research, provided by the states and federal government, to secure defined benefits for the target species and their habitats in the central Platte River.

The Program provides ESA compliance for existing and certain new water-related activities in the Platte basin, upstream of the Loup River confluence for potential effects on the target species. In addition, the Program is working to reduce the likelihood of other species in the area listed under the ESA. Finally, it is mitigating the adverse effects of certain

Achievements to Date

1. 90,000 AFY toward the Program's First Increment water objective have been achieved.
2. The First Increment land objective and associated milestone has been achieved. The Program currently protects over 12,000 acres in the Associated Habitat Reach through sponsorship agreements, purchases, leases, or perpetual easements.
3. The Program has implemented integrated multi-disciplinary monitoring and research, culminating in the Program becoming the first large-scale endangered species recovery program in the country to complete one full loop of the adaptive management cycle.
4. The Program has facilitated over 180 streamlined Section 7 consultations by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service since the Program began in 2007.

new water-related activities through approved depletion plans.

A primary focus of the Program is enhancing, restoring, and protecting habitat lands for the target species mentioned above.

Program Extension

The signatories to the Program are proposing a 13-year extension of the first increment. The extension would not change First Increment objectives or the implementation framework.

This extension would provide additional time to complete and operate Program water projects and to conduct additional research necessary to better understand the volume of water necessary to achieve target species objectives.

Program Costs and Cost Sharing

The total cost of the Program in terms of cash, water and land has been and will continue to be shared equally between the federal government and the states.

