

Overview of Proposed First Increment Extension

Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Proposed First Increment Extension Environmental Assessment

Introduction

The U.S. Department of the Interior (Department), Bureau of Reclamation, Great Plains Region, is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) to analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed First Increment Extension. Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), working with the States of Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska, water users, and environmental and conservation organizations, proposes to extend the First Increment of the basin-wide, cooperative Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (Program) by 13 years. The Program provides Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance for existing and new water related activities in the Platte River Basin.



Purpose and Need

Federal action is needed to complete the remaining milestones not achieved within the prescribed 13-year timeline of the Program First Increment. Completion of the Program's First Increment is necessary to secure the defined benefits under that basin wide approach for federally listed threatened and endangered species,

thereby providing continued compliance with the ESA for certain existing and future water related projects and uses in the Platte River Basin upstream of the confluence with the Loup River.

The purpose of this action is to continue implementing projects to provide additional water to reduce shortages to Service target flows; continue land management activities necessary to provide habitat for target species; and continue integrated monitoring, research, and adaptive management to assess the progress of the Program and to inform future management decisions.

Activities need to be consistent with and support meeting the Program's First Increment objectives to:

- Provide water capable of improving the occurrence of Platte River flows in the central Platte River associated habitats relative to the present occurrence of Service species and annual pulse target flows (hereinafter referred to as "reducing shortages to target flows") by an average of 130,000 to 150,000 acre-feet per year as measured at Grand Island, Nebraska. Target flows would be examined through the Adaptive Management Plan and peer review and may be modified by the Service accordingly. These species and annual pulse target flows would continue to serve as an initial reference point for determining periods of excess and shortage in the operation of Program reregulation and water conservation/supply projects.
- Protect, restore where appropriate, and maintain at least 10,000 acres of habitat for the benefit of target species in the central Platte River area between Lexington and Chapman, Nebraska, and continue progress towards the Program's long-term land objectives.

Proposed Federal Action

The Department, working with the three states, water users, and environmental/conservation organizations, propose to extend the First Increment of the basin wide, cooperative Recovery Implementation Program to meet its obligations under the ESA. The Federal action described and evaluated in this Programmatic EA is a 13-year extension to the First Increment of the Governance Committee Alternative as described in the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS; April 2006) and Record of Decision (September 2006). The proposed first increment extension activities are further described in the “Addendum to the Final Platte River Recovery Implementation Program – First Increment Extension” as adopted by the Governance Committee on June 7, 2017. This programmatic EA evaluates and discloses the effects of this proposed 13-year extension and will support a determination as to whether there are significant effects warranting the preparation of an EIS.

What happens if the Extension is not Implemented?

If the Proposed First Increment Extension is not implemented, the Program would end. Without a Program, each water project or activity in the Basin that requires federal approval, permitting, or funding would undergo separate ESA section 7 consultation, implementing separate mitigation measures.

Although it is not possible to foresee just what form ESA compliance without a Cooperative Program would be for those projects having a federal nexus, the following seems likely to occur:

- Owners and users of water projects would be individually responsible for offsetting current and future adverse effects on the target species and critical habitat using a combination of water, land, and financial measures.
- Any interim ESA compliance available during the Cooperative Agreement would be lost for those projects subject to ESA compliance. Consultation would have to be reinitiated.

