



**Lower Platte River
CORRIDOR ALLIANCE**

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The voice of the Lower Platte.

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, January 19, 2012 9:30 a.m.

Location – Lower Platte North NRD

511 Commercial Park RD, Wahoo, NE

1. **CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS:** The meeting was called to order at 9:35 am by Meghan Sittler. Introductions were made at this time.
2. **PROOF OF LEGAL NOTICE/PUBLICATION:** Meeting notice was published January 6th, 2012 in the *Omaha World Herald*.
3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA:** The agenda was approved by consensus.
4. **APPROVAL OF LPRCA MINUTES FROM OCTOBER 20, 2011 MEETING:** The minutes were approved by consensus.
5. **CUMULATIVE IMPACT STUDY PHASE III UPDATE – JEFF GREENWALD, USACE**
 - a. **SEDIMENT BUDGET ANALYSIS:** USGS has begun the process and a “kick-off” meeting is scheduled for February 9th, 2012 so that any issues that have already come up can be addressed. 90% of the product should be complete by April which will then allow the USGS to make the final touches and get it out to the public. If delayed, the final product should be out this summer.
 - b. **CONCEPTUAL ECOLOGICAL MODEL:** Greenwald’s presentation focused on conceptual models: what they are and are not. Conceptual models can be used to identify problems and appropriate means of assessing solutions, to help identify cause and effect relationships, to predict at what point you are likely to meet a critical threshold, and as an adaptive environmental management tool. Conceptual models are not the truth, final or comprehensive. The objective of constructing the conceptual ecological model for the lower Platte River is to provide a tool for professional investigation and communication with the public, as well as to identify what additional information we need and how all of the factors represented in the model relate to endangered species habitat.

The boundary of Jeff’s conceptual model is the lower Platte River corridor and the upper portion of the watershed as appropriate. The “driver – stressor” format of the model allows one to link relevant factors. The model focuses on three geomorphic and three hydrological system components for which historic function and/or conditions can be assessed and applied to present and future settings. Stressors in the model represent something that causes a change in a component. System components are quantified if possible and ranked as high, medium or low, according to their importance to the system.

Currently in the development stage, Greenwald has constructed models for all six components and now needs input in order to determine how accurate the models are. It is possible

that the models will change. Further, there are other potential elements that can be incorporated in the models.

- c. **FEDERAL FUNDING STATUS:** Greenwald reported that he hopes to know where funds will be distributed by mid to late February, but that he is not certain that the lower Platte River will be included. Funds for several projects were submitted within one request.

6. FLOODPLAIN REMAPPING EFFORT UPDATE – CRAIG WACKER, DNR

Craig Wacker reported on the current status of the collaborative Risk MAP program between the NDNR and FEMA. Wacker presented a map depicting the status of all counties within Nebraska in regard to the completion of a FIRM map, which is a floodplain map that has been officially approved by FEMA. Most counties within the lower Platte River corridor have either a complete or near complete FIRM map. A Risk MAP takes the concept of a FIRM map a bit further by incorporating additional information that communities can use in planning, risk identification, assessment and mitigation. Additionally, communities might use Risk MAPs to outline local regulations more strict than those imposed by federal and state authorities. Incorporating this supplemental information does not require a significant amount of additional resources.

Risk MAP Discovery meetings will take place this spring in communities within the Lewis & Clark and Lower Elkhorn watersheds. Discovery meetings are intended to provide a forum through which the public can share what issues they are concerned about and what products they would like to have in the future. The NDNR is eager to take on the role of facilitating this year's Discovery meetings.

7. SANDBAR DYNAMICS PILOT STUDY UPDATE – JASON ALEXANDER, USGS

Jason Alexander reported on the results of the pilot sandbar dynamics study through which he employed a method of tracking sandbar geomorphology. In summary, this study investigated what height sandbars developed relative to the "formative stage," whether or not the sandbars formed in random locations and how long they remained in terms of both size and location. The results of this study will help natural resource planners and managers assess how proposed water development projects and other upstream infrastructure might impact tern and plover habitat.

Using rapid acquisition survey methods, three surveys were conducted on a 22 mile stretch of the lower Platte River, generally between the towns of Ashland and Plattsmouth. New gages were installed within the study area. Alexander reported on the timeline of the study and is now focusing on writing the open file report which he hopes to have available for review by the LPSNRD and the LPRCA in March. So far, the data has been able to successfully "capture a process of formation" and the results have exhibited good resolution. Further, the results of the study have proved to be applicable in the prediction of inundation during the high flows of 2011. A grant application was submitted to the NET in September of 2011 and expanded sampling can begin in April, 2012 if funding is approved.

8. RIVER OBSTRUCTION REMOVAL AT TWO RIVERS PROJECT UPDATE – DON DAY, OLSSON ASSOCIATES

In light of USACE's prohibition on the use of causeways to facilitate the removal of obstructions at Two Rivers, Don Day presented two alternative options. The first redesign involves the construction of two sets of temporary bridges at a cost of approximately \$1.9 million. The second redesign would employ the construction of only two temporary bridges over the high channel portions of the river and two temporary sand work platforms. The second alternative would reduce cost by close to \$600,000, totaling around \$1.3 million. Both options, however, well exceed the project budget.

The working group met and discussed the issue on January 10th. Another meeting with the USACE is planned and it is hoped that negotiation on the alternatives is still possible. If all options are deemed impractical and estimated costs exceed the budget, planning will focus on the obstructions closest to the banks of the river. The option of applying for and using Recreational Boating Safety funds was mentioned but the possibility of receiving these funds is largely contingent upon the construction of an access point at Two Rivers.

Discussion generated numerous observations and suggestions. It was mentioned that many of the difficulties experienced in the planning of this project have resulted from the negative impacts caused by the recent construction of the I-80 bridge which did have negative environmental impacts. Due in part to this reality, it is important that future negotiations focus on what has been learned from past projects and the ultimate benefits that the obstruction removal will have for both the river and associated biological community, as well as recreationalists. An inquiry was made as to whether the data gathered by the USGS in the sandbar dynamics pilot study could be used to support the preferred option of using a sand causeway. Jason Alexander reported that the technology used in the USGS study could be used to monitor the impact of the obstruction removal project and may hold potential for the provision of metrics which could be used to support the point that the causeways would be temporary and impart minimal impact.

9. LAND SUITABILITY ANALYSIS PREDICTIVE COMPONENTS – MATT PILLARD, HDR INC.

Matt Pillard reported that the next phase of the Land Suitability Analysis began at the end of 2011. The predictive component of the LSA will assess the impact of development and other changes related to the features of the corridor already being monitored. The analysis will consist of “scenario building” by integrating existing data into the model. Results will assist in the proper planning and management of land and resources within the corridor. Meetings to address scenario development are planned for Spring 2012.

10. NICHE AGRICULTURE IN THE LOWER PLATTE RIVER CORRIDOR – MARCO FLOREANI, UNL

Marco Floreani from UNL’s Community and Regional Planning Department gave an update on his ongoing work investigating the potential for niche agriculture within the lower Platte River watershed. Floreani has performed an extensive literature review and reported that locally grown food nets over \$4 billion in direct consumer and restaurant sales. Farm school programs and farmers markets are growing in number. Research also shows that locally grown food increases both employment and revenue in nearby communities. Unlike previous research that has had a limited focus on the impact of locally grown food within metros and communities, Floreani’s research is spatially bound by the lower Platte River watershed. Floreani will continue to develop a model that will analyze how suitably the land within the watershed can accommodate the needs of the local population. Floreani’s work will be incorporated into the Land Suitability Analysis and he will assist with project planning.

11. NEBRASKA LAND TRUST LOWER PLATTE RIVER EASEMENT ACQUISITIONS – JANA SITTLER HAFER, NLT

Jana Sittler Hafer reported that the NLT is currently working on four easement acquisitions within the corridor. The NLT was approached by owners interested in preservation of one 37 acre site that would require some restoration work and cedar clearing. The owners of a 250 acre site are currently evaluating their interest in entering into a conservation easement. Work with the Patterson family is ongoing and they hope to enter their entire farm into an easement. If this easement goes through, the land included would become the second largest protected property in Sarpy County. Another potential acquisition in Cass County with river frontage is currently on hold due to changing land values. Sittler Hafer closed by

mentioning that the NLT is receiving an increasing number of calls from interested landowners and that the only limiting factor for the Trust is funding.

12. PLATTE RIVER RESEARCH STATION PROPOSAL – DR. ALAN KOLOK, UNO

Dr. Alan Kolok presented a summary of the recent accomplishments at the Elkhorn River Research Station and outlined a proposal for a similar station on the Platte River. The Elkhorn station features on-site data acquisition and long-term monitoring of biological and chemical water quality. The relatively small structure is also equipped to pump water directly from the Elkhorn so that the effects that this water has on aquatic organisms can be assessed on-site, three seasons throughout the year.

The Elkhorn station's inaugural event, "What's in Your Watershed Day?" occurred on April 23, 2011. The event included the help of numerous Citizen Scientists who assisted in the collection of data on atrazine throughout the Elkhorn basin. This one-day event resulted in the collection of 110 data points which were used in the construction of a GIS dataset and map. The Elkhorn station has also sponsored a high school research competition among local students who designed research projects that could be performed at the station. More information about the high school program can be found at <http://www.unomaha.edu/envirotox/errscmp.php>

Due to the accomplishments that have taken place at the Elkhorn station alone, the University of Nebraska has proposed, and agreed to provide funding, for three more stations. Kolok hopes to have stations installed on the lower Platte River, the Missouri River and in his laboratory at UNO. Ultimately, the four stations will make-up the "Nebraska Watershed Network." Kolok proposed that a research station is constructed on the Lied Platte River Bridge. Although the University of Nebraska would pay for the costs of construction and operation of the station, Kolok needs to obtain a memorandum of understanding from the Lower Platte South and Papio-Missouri River NRDs. It was suggested that Kolok seek to obtain a memorandum of understanding from the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission as well. It was agreed that the construction of a research station on the Lied Bridge was a worthwhile idea.

13. LPRCA PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY – MEGHAN SITTLER

Five research firms have responded to our request for proposals to carry out the public opinion survey. Interviews with three of these firms will take place on February 2nd and negotiations will take place immediately afterwards.

14. THERMAL IMAGERY FOR NON-POINT SOURCE POLLUTION – MEGHAN SITTLER

Meghan Sittler reported that the LPSNRD board approved the thermal imaging flights at their last meeting on January 18, 2012. The thermal imaging flights will help detect non-point source pollution. The \$140,000 that will be used to fund the flights is leftover from a previous 319 fund. The goal is to get the flights going as soon as possible, get data by June and a report out by July. Eventually, the information gathered will be incorporated into the Mapmaker.

15. PLATTE RIVER ACCESS & WATER TRAIL UPDATE – MEGHAN SITTLER

Meghan Sittler gave a presentation regarding the status of the Platte River Water Trail. The old canoe trail guide map needs to be updated. As for the Louisville access point, Meghan will be working with the NGPC and hopes to get some geofabric laid down and some of the larger rocks immediately around the point removed in order to make it easier for non-motorized boats to put-in. A question was asked about access at

Schramm SRA. There is an access point there, but high water eroded the bank and the landing needs to be refurbished.

16. PLATTE RIVER REST STOP RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE – MEGHAN SITTLER

Although there was a Platte River visitor center at the rest stop near Mahoney SP before construction began, there are no plans to put one in when construction is completed. Meghan did write a letter to the Department of Roads and received a response indicating that the Department was not interested in housing a visitor center at the rest stop.

17. WRDA AUTHORIZED PROJECT UPDATES

- a. Antelope Valley: No Report.
- b. Sand Creek: Project is in the “winding down” phase. Hoping to have operations and management with the NGPC approved and planning to open to the public in mid-March or early April. Work on upstream dams continues but should be completed this summer.
- c. Fremont and Schuyler 205: The Fremont Project is currently on hold due to the Missouri flooding over the past summer which drained people and resources. The size of the project has grown and likely will no longer qualify as a 205 study. The Schuyler Project could be done this year. Schuyler has had a bond approved and is ready to go. A meeting on the Schuyler Project is scheduled for February.
- d. Western Sarpy Clear Creek: The USACE is completing final inspections on completed work. Authorization and appropriation is still being sought from Congress for the final components of the project. An interlocal agreement regarding operation and management is being drafted with the NRDs and the National Guard.
- e. Lower Platte River Watershed Authority: Nothing further to report.

15. OTHER BUSINESS

The biannual newsletter was finalized this week and we hope that it is printing as early as today. We expect to have it mailed out by the end of next week. Keep your eyes out.

16. PUBLIC COMMENT

None made

17. NEXT MEETING DATE

By consensus the next meeting was scheduled for April 19th at 9:30 a.m. at the NDEQ Van Dorn Facility, 2717 S. 8th St., Suite 4 (south corner of building) Lincoln, NE

18. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:09 p.m.

Melissa M Mosier, LPRCA Intern