

SUMMARY OF RESOURCE AGENCY MEETING  
GREELEY, COLORADO G.I. FEASIBILITY REPORT/EA  
POUDRE LEARNING CENTER, GREELEY, COLORADO  
9:00-10:50 AM, DECEMBER 5, 2008

ATTENDEES:

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DISCUSSION SUMMARY:

1. Welcome and Introductions. Mark Nelson welcomed the group and began with a brief history of the study by stating that the Corps' Reconnaissance Report for the Cache la Poudre River at Greeley, CO was completed in 2002. He noted that the Corps is currently preparing a Feasibility Report/ Environmental Assessment (EA) of the 17-mile-long study area and has completed Phase I, which focused on existing conditions and the most urbanized portion of the study area, referred to as the "High Damage Reach". Katie Reed indicated that the major purpose of this meeting was to obtain additional scoping information, especially for the portion of the 17-mile long study area outside of the High Damage Reach. Katie then asked everyone to introduce themselves and identify the agency or organization that they represented.
2. Corps PowerPoint Presentation. Mark provided an overview of the project, identified the study objectives, explained the 6-step planning process, noted the types of flood damage reduction components (including non-structural measures) considered, and identified the current status of the study. He distributed a 2-page Progress Report and discussed what had been learned during the Phase I investigation regarding the flooding problem in urban Greeley and potential flood damage reduction solutions. Katie then summarized the NEPA process; displayed the various types of resources included in the

EA; and provided a list (obtained from the Colorado Division of Wildlife Web site) of most of the 329 fish and wildlife species in Weld County, including Federally Listed and other rare species. She explained that riparian buffer restoration/improvement is especially important for urban streams such as the Cache la Poudre at Greeley not only for wildlife corridors, but also for other ecosystem services, such as filtering runoff to reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients entering the river from the surrounding land. She noted that even reaches of the Cache la Poudre that are not highly urbanized are still impacted by human activities.

3. Resource Agency Information, Concerns, Comments, Capabilities, and Needs. Katie asked the group to help identify appropriate habitat types (such as wet meadows and gravel pit wetlands) and sites for restoration and/or improvement. She also requested recommendations on which methods to use, including those appropriate for areas near Greeley Airport that would not exacerbate the risk of birds flying into aircraft. In addition, she wanted each resource agency/organization attendee to indicate what types of information they could furnish and what types of information they would like to obtain from the Corps study. Attendees' responses and ensuing short discussions follow.

A. Michael Menefee indicated that the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) would love to obtain and provide any data on conservation species. Each state has a Natural Heritage Program (NHP); the headquarters is in Washington DC. He is a member of the CNHP conservation services team that obtains data for a database of CO species and provides this data to those who request it. One recent requestor of data is Ottertail Environmental, for use in the inventory of wildlife species in the 17-mile reach of the Cache la Poudre River (Poudre), that they are conducting under contract with the Corps.

B. Pete Conovitz stated that the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) would like to fill gaps in its data and also has data to share. As an example, Brandon Muller said that the CDOW had 50 years of fish sampling data from the Poudre available. He stated that some reaches of the Poudre dry up completely in winter, and other water quality problems are due to residential and agricultural use. Brandon added that there are two reaches that can go dry during the winter within the 17 mile study reach. Poudre River wildlife contribute around ten million dollars to the Greeley economy annually from geese and duck hunting and the river reach is a significant regional waterfowl resource. In regard to developing wet meadow habitat, Dave Wells thought that the bypass channel proposed for flood damage reduction would improve the existing wildlife corridor, but he was concerned that the increased number of birds in the bypass area could affect airplane safety. Brandon thought that because the potential bypass area already had many trees and a lot of backwater, it supported a great deal of waterfowl; he felt ecosystem restoration (ER) might not increase waterfowl (and hazards to airplanes) in this area.

Brandon noted that more gravel mines are planned east (as well as northwest) of Greeley (Highway 85) that could result in more water areas that would attract waterfowl, and are closer to the airport. Karen Scopel thought new gravel pits would not attract more waterfowl because open water areas could be minimized during reclamation to

avoid having to acquire augmentation water rights. At Kara Reeves' request, Brandon identified more planned gravel mining sites on the Corps' map of the 17-mile-long reach. Four sites east of Highway 85 included the old feedlot near Ash Avenue, a site north of the road to the airport near potential bypass channel, also near Ash Avenue, a site just south of the airport and the old sugar beet processing plant near the wastewater plant. In response to Vicki French's question regarding availability of data on planned gravel pit locations, Karen said that gravel mining permit applications became public information when the permits were applied for, not just after they were issued, due to the requirement to notify neighboring landowners of the mining permit application. Brandon reminded the group that moving river flows from one side of the flood plain to the other via a bypass channel entails water rights issues and requires a lot of collaboration with farmers and other landowners. Mark said that a year and a half ago, the gravel pit owners expressed willingness to cooperate with the Corps to achieve multiple purposes through their gravel mining operations; they may be willing to excavate the bypass channel portion of their pit first. He also indicated there could be a headgate if the water treatment plant needs a higher flow for dilution or other purposes. Mark added that the Corps will target ER efforts in less degraded river reaches, where ecosystem improvements can be maximized; thus, ER efforts will not focus on the potential bypass channel or airport areas. Riparian ecosystem restoration efforts in the high damage / flood channel reach will be directed towards developing a viable riparian corridor to allow wildlife migration between areas offering better conditions for species to thrive. In regard to using gravel pits along the Poudre River to provide storage to reduce flood peaks, Mark noted that there was not enough storage volume in all of the pits to capture a 100-year flood. He also cautioned that upstream storage plans (NISP etc.) could further reduce the ability of the Cache la Poudre to move sediment during the annual spring rise and lead to additional aggradation. Katie stated that pollutants from local runoff and associated sediment inputs to the river could be reduced by riparian buffers.

C. Ray Tschillard related that the Poudre Learning Center (PLC) wants students to have more access to the river. Currently, public access to the river is minimal because most of the Poudre River bank is privately owned. Programs at the PLC are sponsored by four school districts, and the PLC is also partnering with other agencies and organizations to share data. PLC takes advantage of the fact that there is a lovely stretch of the Poudre River available to study right in Greeley. Paulette Weaver had nothing to add to Ray's remarks. Katie indicated that she will coordinate further with the PLC in the future regarding public significance of ER efforts along the Poudre. She explained that there are three types of resource significance: 1) institutional, such as Federal Listing of a species as Threatened or Endangered; 2) technical; and 3) public, which is documented by involvement of community groups, coordination among agencies/ organizations to recognize the importance of Poudre River resources and their improvement, and other evidence of community support.

D. Scott Franklin of the Corps' Littleton, Colorado, Regulatory Office explained why Section 404 permits were required for dredge and fill in wetlands. He indicated that the Federal Aviation Administration should be contacted regarding any Corps work in the vicinity of Greeley Airport. Scott also mentioned that the Northern Integrated Supply

Project (NISP) Draft EIS was publicly available. Katie indicated she has a copy and has looked through it. Mark indicated that within the potential levee (high damage) reach there was room for a riparian corridor and low-flow channel; however, the Corps project had to get rid of the reed canary grass and plant native species to aid riparian obligates. Katie asked how the Section 404 permit process could be accommodated in advance, so that after the project is constructed, there will be no delay in the sponsor's ability to conduct operation and maintenance (O&M) tasks, including removing willows from the channel. Scott responded that an individual permit would be needed, and it could be issued for a period as long as 25 years. Mark stated that based on the public scoping workshop held the evening of December 4, 2008, there was a major public concern about the willows that are currently choking the channel, impeding stream flow, and resulting in increased sediment deposition, which increases the threat of flooding; he asked Scott if the willows could be removed from the channel now. Scott replied that they could, but that some operational restrictions would be required, and he told Dave Wells and the city of Greeley to call the Regulatory Office for suggestions and restrictions; he also advised contacting the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). In regard to the City of Greeley not continuing O&M of the channel upstream of the High Damage Reach since the 1990s, Dave Wells indicated restarting these O&M actions now would not be effective in reducing flooding within the High Damage Reach apart from a flood control project. The difficulty in obtaining a 404 permit at the time, coupled with the high cost of channel maintenance work, led to the end of channel clearing around 1990.

E. Pete Plage said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) did not believe that any of the three Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered species (Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse, Ute Ladies'-tresses, and Colorado Butterfly Plant) exists in the 17-mile-long reach of the Poudre at the present time; however, they may in the future. On the other hand, many bird species covered by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act exist in the study area. The Service favors the increased environmental opportunities that this Corps project offers. However, he was concerned about the high cost of ER. Betty Peake responded that the ER portion of the project has by definition a 1.0 benefit-cost ratio (BCR). She explained that costs attributed to both flood damage reduction (FDR) and ER components of the FDR/ER project are apportioned between FDR and ER, thereby increasing the BCR for the FDR component. Mark noted that the location of restoration efforts within the 17 mile reach will be impacted by the unit cost of restoration (i.e. acres, lineal feet), so the study will emphasize locations where overall restoration benefits can be maximized. Betty noted that recreation development must have a BCR of at least 1.0, and most facilities must be sited on lands acquired for the FDR and/or ER components. Betty distributed a list of recreation facilities that are compatible with ER; they can be cost-shared 50%, but the total Corps recreation cost-share amount can not exceed 10% of its cost-share amount for the FDR/ER project without recreation. She added that public involvement will assist in determining recreation facilities and siting.

F. Ginny Lightsey-Ceehoxne said the Poudre River Trail was concerned mainly about trails and other recreation facilities. Katie assured Ginny that she would be kept posted on recreation planning efforts regarding the Corps project.

G. Karen Scopel indicated that the City of Greeley was coordinating with the Weld County Weed Manager, who claimed that salt cedar and Russian olive as well as other invasive species were becoming a problem along the Poudre. City of Greeley staff subsequently found 12 salt cedars upstream of Island Grove Park. A regional effort is underway to develop a plan to control salt cedar and Russian olive in the South Platte watershed that would include the Poudre River. Once that plan is approved there may be funding available for projects. Karen noted that a new organization was forming to support open space and trails projects in Greeley and might eventually help with securing funding for open space projects. She thought that the Poudre River would be of primary interest to the organization. Katie said she would coordinate with Karen and these groups.

H. Laura Steger is a biologist with Ottertail Environmental, which is conducting an inventory of wildlife in the 17-mile-long study area under a contract with the Corps. Katie indicated that the work Laura was doing would improve the accuracy and completeness of the feasibility report section detailing existing conditions for wildlife resources. That section is an important part of preparing for either an EA or an EIS.

I. Joe Busto manages the South Platte River from Coal Mine Avenue to Hampden Avenue for the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB). Joe indicated that a coalition of advocates will be important to this project, and he encouraged local groups to contact Chris Sturm at CWCB, who administers grants for watershed planning that could help local Poudre planning efforts. Joe thought it unwise to install a lot of ER at levees. Sandy Rayl responded that she liked the concept of setback levees and installing ER measures between the levee and the bank, but she cautioned that current Corps regulations prohibited vegetation on levees (other than short grasses) or within a 15-foot-wide maintenance area along the base of levees. Joe advised contacting Bryan Kohlenberg of the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District regarding vegetation at its levee project at Globeville in the Commerce City area. Joe wanted to know if real estate costs had been identified yet, and Vicki responded that they could not be identified until the project footprint was determined. Joe thought some organizations may be eligible for a GOCO Legacy grant (funded by Colorado state lottery proceeds) to cover expenses of purchasing land from willing sellers and developing trails and other recreation facilities along the river. Karen noted that the City of Greeley received a grant for a “Fishing is Fun” project at a site that also provides water storage in lined gravel pits, where the water has now been drawn down low to put water back into the Poudre River. Pete Plage added that Evans Pit Operators also augment low river flows from gravel pit storage. Karen felt that the gravel pit restoration requirements from the DMG (Department of Minerals and Geology?) are minimal. Katie stated that a year and a half ago the Corps met with gravel mine operators, and they appeared to be receptive to multiple purpose operations. Scott advised the group that the Colorado Rock Products Association was a good organization to contact. Joe said that he didn’t have much information the application water law to potential uses of gravel pits. Ray suggested that Central Colorado Water Conservancy District (CCWCD), which has information about water law, be consulted regarding water rights (and augmentation requirements for wetlands at gravel pits); he invited them to this

Resource Agency Meeting, but they could not come. [After the meeting, Betty Peake identified the following telephone number for the CCWCD: (970) 330-4540.]

J. Dave Wells noted that considerable information on the Cache la Poudre River study, including technical reports produced thus far, is available for download at: <http://greeleygov.com/Engineering/CacheLaPoudre.aspx>

4. Information on Potentially Significant Impacts. Katie indicated that the Corps was leaning towards preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) instead of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Corps has not found that the project would result in any significant impacts on threatened and endangered species or cultural resources. She requested that group members let her know if they were aware of any potentially significant impacts that could occur to any major resource as a result of the Corps project. Karen Scopel responded that the entire reach of the Cache la Poudre River was a Natural Heritage Corridor, but there would be no problems if the project did not impact irrigation facilities.

5. Next Resource Agency Meeting. Katie told the group that in April 2009, staff from the Corps' Engineer Resource and Development Center (ERDC) would be coming to Greeley for a field investigation and to provide technical advice. She said that another Resource Agency Meeting may be held at that time. The meeting ended at 10:50 am.