

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING / WORKSHOP  
GREELEY, COLORADO G.I. FEASIBILITY REPORT/EA  
ISLAND GROVE EVENT CENTER, GREELEY, COLORADO  
6:00-8:00 PM, DECEMBER 4, 2008

ATTENDEES (SIGN-IN SHEET ATTACHED):

20 Members of the General Public  
Dave Wells, City of Greeley  
Adrian Yebra, City of Greeley (Spanish/English interpreter)  
Karen Scopel, City of Greeley  
Ron Hoagland, City of Greeley  
Paulette Weaver, Poudre Learning Center  
Laura Steger, Ottetail Environmental (Corps contractor)  
Sandy Rayl, Corps – Colorado Service Office, Denver  
Mark Nelson, Corps – Omaha  
Katie Reed, Corps – Omaha  
Joel Knofczynski, Corps – Omaha  
Vicki French, Corps – Omaha  
Kara Reeves, Corps – Omaha  
Betty Peake, Corps – Omaha

WORKSHOP FORMAT:

Sign-in sheets, handouts with the PowerPoint slides printed 4 per page, and comment sheets were located on a table by the entry door. Headers on the sign-in sheets, slide handouts, and the comment sheets were in both Spanish and English. Two screens for the English and Spanish PowerPoint presentations were in the front of the room, which had approximately 50 chairs. Each corner of the room had a table – 1 for refreshments provided by the city of Greeley; and 3 tables with maps, handouts, and a whiteboard for recording comments. Each table focused on a different topic: Corps-City Planning Processes; National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) / Ecosystem Restoration; and Flood Damage Reduction / Recreation. During the first 15 minutes of the meeting prior to the slide presentation, attendees had an opportunity to view project maps and converse with Corps and City personnel about the project. Following the 15-minute slide presentation, attendees asked questions, made comments, and received responses from Corps and City staff for approximately 45 minutes. Then attendees had an hour-long opportunity to view project maps, obtain handouts, and exchange more information with Corps and City personnel.

CORPS SLIDE PRESENTATION:

Two slide shows ran simultaneously side-by-side, one in English and one in Spanish. Mark Nelson, Project Manager, welcomed the group. He provided an overview of the Cache la Poudre (Poudre) River at Greeley, Colorado, project and study area, 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. Currently the Corps is 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 potential solutions to flooding problems in the most urbanized portion of the study area, referred to as the “high damage reach”. The nature of the flooding problem and potential solutions for the high damage reach were presented, based upon what had been learned during Phase I. The central finding of the Phase I flood analysis is that major floods exceed the channel and bridge capacity and spread out over the flood plain. Flood stages in the flood plain are controlled by road and railroad embankments and the capacity of associated bridge openings. Given this situation, it will not be possible to protect the high damage reach in Greeley against inundation in major (100-year) floods without lengthening bridges, building levees or some combination of both measures. A flood protection solution based upon channel widening, which was envisioned at the start of the feasibility study, will have to be replaced by a more complicated and costly solution involving levees.

Katie Reed then explained the NEPA process, which she expanded on in response to an attendee’s question. NEPA makes sure that all federal planning is transparent and involves the public throughout the planning process. NEPA is procedural; it states that federal agencies must keep the public involved and also coordinate with federal, state and local government agencies and Tribes, but it does not specify how this must be done. NEPA also says that environmental effects must be considered throughout the process. If the federal action is a “categorical exclusion”, the NEPA process is very short. Katie said that if no significant impacts are expected, an EA is prepared. She identified the various types of environmental resources assessed in the EA. If the EA reveals no significant impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is prepared, and the project can proceed to Plans and Specifications and then Construction. If the EA concludes that impacts would be significant, a determination is made that an EIS needs to be prepared, and there is public involvement during preparation of the EIS also.

Katie explained that riparian buffer restoration/ improvement is especially important for urban streams such as the Cache la Poudre at Greeley. Because the Poudre has lost a lot of its riparian buffer, many ecological services of riparian buffers have also been lost. The river system has been impacted by roads, mining activities, urbanization, and agriculture (with runoff high in nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus). These stressors have promoted colonization by invasive species such as reed canary grass, salt cedar, Russian olive, and leafy spurge. Re-establishing riparian buffers along this portion of the Poudre River system would provide a wildlife migration corridor and other ecosystem services, such as filtering runoff to reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients entering the river. Katie told the group that there are three Federally Listed and Endangered species in Weld County (Preble’s Meadow Jumping Mouse, Ute Ladies’-tresses, and the Colorado Butterfly Plant). In addition, a number of rare species included in the Colorado Natural Heritage Program utilize the Poudre. Katie emphasized that when an area is restored to provide habitat for Federally Listed or other rare species, the restored habitat is also used by many of the 329 fish and wildlife species in Weld County. Katie told the group their input was important for the project along the Poudre. She said they could provide oral comments at the meeting; write comments on the comment form

and either give it to Corps staff at the meeting or mail it to the Corps; or email comments to her at the address on the next-to-last slide on the handout.

#### SUMMARY OF WHOLE-GROUP DISCUSSION AND WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS:

Greeley and Corps personnel facilitated questions and comments from attendees, which focused mainly on topics of general interest. The questions were presented to staff in the 15 minutes prior to the meeting, during the question and answer period following the Corps Power Point presentation and at the tables after the end of the question and answer period. The questions, comments, responses, and discussion are presented by topic as follows:

##### STUDY STATUS:

In response to a question regarding how much of the study was completed at this point, Katie said the Corps was just beginning the entire Feasibility Study, which will include future without project conditions. Mark added that it was found that some topics normally addressed later in the plan formulation process had to be covered in Phase I to determine whether there was a reasonable expectation that a flood damage reduction project could be economically justified. Mark fielded a question regarding flooding on Sheep Draw in 1961, 1965, 1983, and 1999 in areas where houses were constructed despite the perceived flood threat. Mark responded that in Phase I we concentrated on flooding in the Cache la Poudre River flood plain. He noted that the study can expand to tributary streams. He also noted that in scoping the study we became aware of laws that require builders to detain increases in storm runoff on newly developed land up to the 100-year event, so the hydrology of the tributary watersheds would have to be analyzed if added to the study.

##### NEED TO CONSIDER GREELEY AIRPORT FLIGHT PATTERNS WHEN ADDING TO WETLANDS THAT CAN ATTRACT WATERFOWL:

In regard to attracting wildlife through ecosystem restoration (ER) efforts, a concern was expressed that developing additional wetland areas in the vicinity of the Greeley Airport would result in an increase in the number of waterfowl using the area; this could increase the potential risk of waterfowl striking airplanes. Vicki French thought that the Corps should coordinate with the Greeley-Weld Airport Authority/Board on this issue. Mark responded that the Corps would do this. He said that because of the potential increase in bird hazards to airplane safety, ER areas that would attract waterfowl would be located closer to the vicinity of the Poudre Learning Center rather than near the airport. He added that the Corps wanted to get the “biggest bang for the buck” in ER projects. Since the wildlife habitat was already relatively good near the airport, the focus of ER would likely be in somewhat degraded areas upstream of the urbanized area. In these upstream areas the habitat, although damaged, could be greatly improved through increased flood plain connectivity such as oxbow restoration. Another commenter noted that Greeley Airport owned property south of the airport, so it would have to be a player in any ER plan for the airport area. Katie responded that this will be kept in mind and appropriate coordination would occur to ensure that conflicting interests and safety is addressed.

#### POTENTIAL BYPASS AREA FOR FLOOD FLOWS IN HIGH DAMAGE REACH:

In response to a question, Mark indicated that a bypass channel could be used to reduce flooding upstream of the U.S. Highway 85 expressway bridge because the current bridge and road embankment acts as a dam in floods larger than the 25-year event. Katie added that the bypass channel could also include ecosystem restoration and a recreational trail. Katie noted that a recreational trail could fit underneath the existing U.S. Highway 85 Bridge without an environmental corridor, but it could not go through the wastewater treatment plant facilities. One attendee wondered that if a bypass channel would be required to flow on a permanent basis. Mark noted that the bypass channel design could include a headgate, which would allow the bypass channel flow to be regulated and even shut off. Katie responded that there are many intermittent streams on the high plains and they support riparian habitat.

#### BRIDGE CONSTRICTION AND ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS AT FERN AVENUE:

An attendee asked if the Corps study addressed the low-lying bridge on Fern Avenue, which is a bottleneck where debris builds up. Another attendee noted that the channel is so overgrown with sediment deposits and vegetation there that there is no place for the water to go. Joel Knofczynski responded that the bridge is in the Corps hydraulic model. An attendee then stated that Weld County agrees that the bridge needs to be raised, and he had requested county officials to clean up the debris.

#### OTHER CONCERNS ABOUT SEDIMENT AND VEGETATION IN THE RIVER:

An attendee thought one of the problems with cleaning up the river is that it would disturb habitat, thus it has not been done. Another attendee agreed, stating that he has lived near the river for 50 years and locals were able to save property from flooding at the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge in 1983 by clearing debris. Now, the river is plugged with so many trees in places that people can't get to the river to keep it from breaking out. Katie responded that the overgrowth in the channel is principally black willow, which was a non-native species. A comment was made that the river has to be completely clear to reduce flooding; islands and vegetation that exist in the river channel now worsens flooding. Another attendee noted that he has owned property on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue since 1980, and the raised bridge there has somewhat silted in. Another comment stated that the river was cleaned from 49<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue a number of years ago but that is not done now, and the problem has worsened. Katie responded that there is a need for dredging sediment because no riparian buffer is preventing sediment from entering the river. Riparian buffers need to be restored to keep sediment from entering the river in the 17-mile reach; this will reduce the need for dredging. Katie added that the Corps was looking to address the problem rather than providing only temporary solutions. An attendee observed that it seemed the river was historically more open and was able to be cleaned out, but with the Corps project a silt fence would initially be needed to keep the sediment out until the riparian buffer begins functioning. Mark noted that in addition to sediment entering the river from its banks, the buildup of sediment in the reach may be a function of changes in flooding brought about by upstream diversions of higher flows that used to self-clean the river. He also said that the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP) has the potential to

further impact the rate of sediment buildup. Under some scenarios, further sedimentation in the river channel could make the flood situation worse than under existing conditions.

An attendee wondered if the Corps study ties the City's and County's hands in regard to cleaning the river. Katie responded that the City or County could clean the river, but they would need to apply for a Section 404 permit. Dave Wells responded that the city of Greeley stopped sediment removal operations from the river when the requirement to obtain a Section 404 permit was implemented in the 1990s. One property owner along the Poudre encouraged the City or County to resume cleaning the channel. He stated that flood waters cover a large area he owns upstream of the gravel pits, and he can not obtain a Section 404 permit until the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) completes its investigation of his removing willows from the channel to reduce the flood threat to his property. Katie summarized the situation by stating that at some point in the past, the river needed little or no maintenance. Problems increased beyond the natural ability of the river to maintain an open channel and even beyond the fiscal ability of local governments to maintain the capacity of the river channel. Mark agreed with a comment that after the Corps project is implemented, the Poudre channel will still need maintenance, but at that point the river would be more at equilibrium and should require less maintenance than is currently required. The non-Federal sponsor would be responsible for maintaining the channel and would need a Section 404 permit [which the Corps stated after the meeting could be issued for a term of up to 25 years]. Katie added that with ER, the operation and maintenance tasks initially performed by people can be reduced because the river's ability to maintain itself will improve.

In response to a comment that sediment kept entering the 17-mile reach from upstream, Mark indicated that gravel bars have formed and are anchored by willows; the problem worsens because scouring flows may occur only every 6-8 years instead of every 3-4 years. He added that to break this cycle and address the source of the problem, a watershed approach was needed, but Congressional funding mechanisms did not match the science and technology yet.

#### STUDY AREA:

One comment was in regard to how the boundaries of the 17-mile reach were set. Dave Wells responded that the confluence with the Platte River seemed a logical place to start and that the study extends upstream to generally the Windsor-Greeley growth boundary. Mark stated that the city of Greeley is the non-Federal sponsor, so the study has to remain within the funding appropriation for the 17-mile reach and the City's financial capabilities.

#### INVASIVE SPECIES:

An attendee commented that there was a problem with tamarisk (salt cedar). Katie and Mark responded that ecosystem restoration (ER) will remove exotic species such as tamarisk and reed canary grass. During construction, the river will look messy, so they requested all attendees to keep the end goal in mind when they view the river during ER construction. Katie added that is more difficult for exotics to re-colonize the area after a good cover of native species has developed.

#### FLOODWATER STORAGE IN GRAVEL PITS:

An attendee asked if there was an opportunity to buy a gravel pit for storage of flood water. Mark responded that for flood damage reduction, gravel pit storage does not reduce 100-year peak flood flows because all the potential storage would be filled by long duration flows equivalent to 20-year and 50-year flows that occur during the early part of the 100-year flood event. However, Katie noted that acquisition of gravel pits for wetland development can be an important component of ER, and would yield some flood damage reduction benefits.

#### FLOOD PLAIN MANAGEMENT

An attendee asked Joel Knofczynski about the status of a Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) in regard to the classification of his property on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Map.

#### STUDY PLANNING PROCESS AND PLAN FORMULATION:

An attendee was interested in seeing the levee alignments, now that the Corps had found that channel widening would not protect the high damage reach. Mark shared the layouts of Alternatives 1, 1A, and 5 with him at the plan formulation table after the presentation. Another attendee requested a copy of the Phase I Report. Mark directed that person to the City of Greeley's Engineering Department Web site:

<http://greeleygov.com/Engineering/CacheLaPoudre.aspx> , where he could download the reports to the Colorado Water Conservation Board containing the Corps' results so far.

#### ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION / NEPA:

An attendee owned land adjacent to the Poudre on both banks and had already planted two trees on the river bank. She was planning to plant trees all along the bank and wondered if she needed a Section 404 permit. She was told to call the Corps Regulatory Office in Littleton, Colorado, and to contact Katie Reed the following week for the contact information.

#### FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION:

Several attendees viewed the maps of the structural alternatives that were considered in Phase I of the Feasibility Study. Attendees viewed the map showing the damage reaches, high damage reach, and boundary of the 500-year flood plain from which land uses were collected for the economic analysis and often identified the location of their property on the map.

#### RECREATION:

An attendee owned land adjacent to one of the potential trail alignments in the Cache la Poudre River/South Platte River Trail Master Plan and wanted to know if eminent domain would be used to acquire property. Karen Scopel told her that trail lands would be acquired by fee or easement only from willing sellers, and that many donations of land for trails had also been made.

REAL ESTATE:

One attendee had a question about real estate, to which Vicki French responded. The following is a summary of that question and answer:

The lady and her son (who was a real estate agent) had purchased approximately 19 acres out by the airport. She was asking when we (the Corps) would be purchasing their land and how much they would get. Vicki explained to her that the Federal Government does not purchase land for these types of projects. She further explained the acquisition process, by the Sponsor, and that the acquisition must comply with Public Law 91-646. After she showed Vicki where the land is located, Vicki asked the Greeley Trails person to speak with them since it appeared to her that the land would possibly be impacted only by the trail – if at all.