

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION
PROGRAM

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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 22, 2023

2023 SPRING EA RELEASE

KEARNEY, NE: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in coordination with the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP or Program), plans to release Environmental Account (EA) water from Lake McConaughy starting on Wednesday (May 24) and continuing through the end of June. The goal is to maintain a flow of at least 1,500 cubic feet per second at the Platte River near Grand Island gage through June 30. This is to be achieved while remaining below the 6.0-foot National Weather Service flood stage at the North Platte River at North Platte gage. The release of water is intended to maintain and enhance the wide, open, unvegetated and braided channel of the central Platte River by inundating sandbars to prevent vegetation establishment. This is the highest-priority EA release currently planned for the 2023 calendar year.

The Program is a cooperative basin-wide effort to assist in the recovery of threatened and endangered species in the Platte River including the whooping crane, piping plover, pallid sturgeon, and the now de-listed interior least tern. The EA water is dedicated to instream flow purposes, specifically providing benefits to the target species of the Program. The planned release will be similar to historic river rises, which resulted from spring runoff in the Platte River basin above Grand Island, Nebraska. Historic high flows helped remove vegetation from the riverbanks and kept the river wide and shallow with bare stretches of sand. This provided a safe place for whooping cranes and other birds to roost at night, provided nesting habitat for least terns and piping plovers, and increased the size of riverine wetlands.

The USFWS Project Leader and acting EA Manager (Mark Porath), PRRIP Executive Director (Jason Farnsworth), and staff of the PRRIP Executive Director's Office (EDO), Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) and Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) will coordinate closely and be prepared to delay, scale back, or terminate releases if required. Weather conditions can change rapidly, so the project partners will monitor weather and flow conditions to minimize the risk of exceeding flood stage at North Platte.

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The Program has liability insurance in place in the event of any associated damages related to the flow release. The Program is committed to restoration of the habitat for the target species in the central Platte River, while at the same time protecting human health and safety and preventing damage to associated land along the river.

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