

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION
PROGRAM

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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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2022 SPRING 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 25) 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 Grand Island gage until June 30, while remaining below the 6.0-foot National Weather Service flood stage at the 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 only EA release currently planned for the 2022 calendar year.

The PRRIP 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 and pallid sturgeon. The EA is water dedicated to instream flow purposes, specifically providing benefits to the target species of the PRRIP. Target species include the threatened and endangered species and the interior least tern. 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), Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) and Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) staff will coordinate closely and be prepared to scale back or terminate releases if required. Weather conditions can change rapidly, so the partners will monitor weather and runoff conditions to minimize the risk of exceeding flooding stage.

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The PRRIP has liability insurance in place in the event of any associated damages related to the flow release. The PRRIP 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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