

# NEBRASKANS FIRST

Protecting Nebraska's Groundwater for Agriculture



**Testimony of Nebraskans First Director Don Adams  
Before the US Fish and Wildlife Service Regarding the Platte River Recovery  
Implementation Program Draft Environmental Impact Statement  
Kearney, Nebraska  
August 2, 2004**

This draft environmental impact statement essentially gives the green light to the Governance Committee of the Three State Cooperative Agreement Endangered Species Recovery Program to press on in finalizing their plan. For those in the audience today who are not aware of what the Cooperative Agreement is, let me tell you. It is a multi state and federal government program designed to somehow find and redirect massive water into the Central Platte River for alleged species and habitat benefits. Under the program, hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water will be diverted away from irrigation and redirected into instream flows. Additionally, some 30,000 acres of agricultural land in the central Platte valley will be acquired to create critical habitat for certain birds. It is estimated that just phase one of the program will cost taxpayers somewhere around 150 million dollars.

The Cooperative Agreement Program is a Jurassic Park-like reengineering of nature pipe dream that only the US Fish and Wildlife Service would consider, in their own words, "reasonable and prudent."

For years we have pushed hard for the Governance Committee of the Cooperative Agreement Program to consider truly reasonable alternatives that would provide substantial additional river flows while not adversely impacting irrigation practices here in the central Platte. Specifically, forest management in the Routt and Medicine Bow National Forests would allow significantly more snow pack melt to find its way down here. Also, the building of another dam downstream of the Kingsley Dam and dedicating a sufficient amount of stored water there for species needs would fit the bill at a fraction of the cost projected for the Cooperative Agreement Program. Unfortunately, the Governance Committee has given these options short shrift and instead locked onto options that target irrigated agriculture.

If the Cooperative Agreement program is adopted, irrigated agriculture in the Platte Valley will be hit hard and the local economies of the communities, which were built and are now sustained by the dollars generated by irrigated agriculture, will suffer. If enacted, ultimate control of the Platte River will be turned over to the Fish and Wildlife Service forever, where they will implement what they call "adaptive management."

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But the Cooperative Agreement program is not a done deal. The governor has created a citizens advisory council which is closely monitoring the Cooperative Agreement program and will make a recommendation to the governor whether or not he should formally sign on to the final program. I attended this advisory council's meeting last week in North Platte and believe they are open-minded, concerned and not a rubber stamp group.

Also, the government entity at ground zero of this whole thing is the Central Platte Natural Resources District. I have some confidence that the elected board members of this NRD will not agree to a program that would result in economic harm to their constituents while relinquishing regulatory control of the groundwater there to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Finally, and of major significance, is the fact that our Department of Natural Resources has just officially declared the Platte River, from Elm Creek west, as over-appropriated. What this means is that there is no extra available water here for anyone, for any purpose, save for domestic use if a critical need arises. This state declaration should in itself render the Cooperative Agreement program dead in the water.

We look at the central Platte and see the heart and soul of Nebraska irrigated agriculture. The Fish and Wildlife Service looks at the central Platte and sees wetlands, roosting sites, nesting areas, foraging habitats and primary constituent elements. It is their passion to build sandcastles in the sky. It is our mission to do all we can to make sure Nebraskans don't end up living in them.



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