

PODCAST 2009-05

PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY PROGRAM

Run Time=10:33

Welcome to the US Bureau of Reclamation Great Plains Region Podcast.

((SOUNDER))

Supplying water to residents, businesses, and agriculture while protecting the environment and species diversity can be a difficult balance to maintain.

The US Bureau of Reclamation, in partnership with a number of Federal, State and Local agencies, is taking part in an ambitious project to help threatened and endangered species on the Platte River, which runs through portions of Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska.

The cooperative agreement, known as the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, has provided an alternative to years of costly courtroom battles over limited water supplies and environmental protection issues.

John Lawson is the Wyoming Area Manager for the Bureau of Reclamation:

LAWSON01

***THIS IS SOMETHING THAT GOES BACK A GREAT DEAL OF TIME. AS EARLY AS 1982, WE WERE NOTIFIED BY THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE THAT RECLAMATION'S OPERATIONS ON THE PLATTE RIVER SYSTEM NEEDED TO HAVE A REVIEW UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT TO DETERMINE IF WE WERE AFFECTING THE ENDANGERED SPECIES, AND IF WE WERE, WAS THERE A WAY THAT WE COULD DEVELOP A REASONABLE AND PRUDENT ALTERNATIVE TO BASICLY MITIGATE THAT. SO RECLAMATION BEGAN AS EARLY AS THAT TIME TO START LOOKING AT OUR OPERATIONS. IN THE EARLY 90'S WE ACTUALLY STARTED TO FORM A TEAM TO GO FORWARD AND DO AN ANALYSIS AND BY '94, THERE WERE SEVERAL OTHER THINGS THAT CAME UP IN THE BASIN THAT WERE NON-RECLAMATION THAT BROUGHT THE INTEREST OF THE OTHER STATES INTO PLAY. THAT IS, COLORADO, NEBRASKA AND WYOMING. SO THERE***

**WAS A PLAN PUT IN PLACE TO DEVELOP A COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE THREE STATES AND INTERIOR SO SEE IF WE COULD MAKE AN EVALUATION TO MAKE AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TO SATISFY THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT NEEDS, NOT ONLY FOR RECLAMATION, BUT ALL THOSE THAT WERE IN THE BASIN THAT HAD A PRESENCE AND HAD A NEED.**

Doctor Jerry Kenny, PhD, is the executive director for the program:

**(KENNYO2)**

**YOU CAN REALLY TRACE THE ROOTS OF THIS PROGRAM BACK TO, FUNDAMENTALLY, THE TIME OF THE PASSAGE OF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT IN THE EARLY 1970'S. DURING THE 1970'S AND 1980'S, THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ISSUES AROSE IN EACH OF THE THREE STATES. SO FOR EXAMPLE, IN NEBRASKA THERE WAS "FERC" RELICENSING OF PROJECTS FOR NEBRASKA PUBLIC POWER DISTRICT AND CENTRAL NEBRASKA PUBLIC POWER AND IRRIGATION DISTRICT. IN COLORADO, THERE WERE SPECIAL USE PERMITS ON FOREST SERVICE LANDS THAT WERE UP FOR RENEWAL. AND IN WYOMING THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION FEDERAL PROJECTS PROVIDED THE FEDERAL NEXUS THAT BROUGHT ENDANGERED SPECIES ISSUES TO THE FOREFRONT. SO EACH OF THOSE ISSUES, YOU KNOW, FOR A TIME, PEOPLE WERE TRYING TO DEAL WITH THEM SEPARATELY, BUT OVER TIME IT EMERGED THAT REALLY THE BEST WAY TO APPROACH THIS WAS IN A MORE COOPERATIVE, COMPREHENSIVE FASHION.**

After several years of negotiations between interested parties, an agreement was signed in 2007 by the Governors of the three states and federal officials to plan and execute the recovery effort.

The program can be broken down into three areas, a water plan, a land plan, and adaptive management of species habitat.

Some goals of the first phase of the program are quite specific, such as obtaining ten-thousand acres for habitat restoration, and reducing deficit water flows in the

habitat area by 130-150 thousand acre feet per year. But a solid benchmark for success when it comes to increasing numbers and survival rates of target species is more difficult to define.

Doctor Kenny tells us those species include three birds; Whooping Crane, Piping Plover and the Interior Least Tern, as well as one fish; the Pallid Sturgeon:

**\*KENNY01\***

***ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT GOALS ARE LESS QUANTANTATIVE, AND THAT IS THAT WE ENHANCE SURVIVAL RATES OF WHOOPING CRANES DURING SPRING AND FALL MIGRATION AS THEY'RE PASSING THROUGH THE CENTRAL PLATTE PROGRAM AREA. WE ALSO WANT TO INCREASE THE NUMBERS OF TERN AND PLOVER THAT ARE USING THE CENTRAL PLATTE. WITH REGARD TO THE OTHER SPECIES, WE HAVE AN INTEREST IN THE PALLID STURGEON IN THE LOWER PLATT, BUT THAT IS THAT IS NOT A PROACTIVE INTEREST, IT'S A DO NO HARM INTEREST IN THAT WHATEVER WE DO TO HELP THE BIRDS, WE JUST DON'T HARM THE FISH.***

The first increment of the program will run for thirteen years, since undoing more than a century of changes brought about by human activity isn't an overnight process. Nevertheless, there have already been visible results on and around the river drainage:

(KENNY03)

***"WITH REBOUNDS, START WITH THE TERN AND PLOVER. THE TERN AND PLOVER IN 2007 WERE AGAIN NESTING IN THE CENTRAL PLATTE, WHICH THEY HADN'T DONE FOR THE PREVIOUS TEN YEARS OR SO. SO GETTING THE TERN AND PLOVER BACK ON THE RIVER AND CENTRAL PLATTE, THAT WAS A VERY GOOD THING. SO OVER THE LAST COUPLE YEARS, WE'VE HAD SOME FAIRLY CONSISTENT NUMBERS, AND THAT'S SOMEWHERE BETWEEN TEN AND FIFTEEN NESTING PAIR ON THE RIVER. IF YOU INCLUDE THOSE THAT ARE NESTING ON THE MANAGED SANDPIT, WE'RE UNDER A HUNDRED BIRDS, BUT THAT'S BETTER THAN WE WERE A COUPLE YEARS AGO"***

So how does the Bureau of Reclamation fit into all this? As John Lawson explains, the Bureau's role has evolved and adapted to meet changing demands over the past century:

## **LAWSON02**

***THIS PROJECT THAT I'M THE ADMINISTRATOR ON HERE ON THE NORTH PLATTE PROJECT, THE FIRST DAM WAS BUILT ...COMPLETED IN 1909, ACTUALLY IT'S A HUNDRED YEARS OLD. AND AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, WHEN THAT STRUCTURE WAS COMPLETED, IT WAS TO SERVE ONLY ONE PURPOSE AT THAT TIME, AND THAT WAS TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE WATER FOR AGRICULTURE SO PEOPLE COULD SUSTAIN A LIVING OUT HERE IN THIS SEMI-ARID AREA. AS THE YEARS HAVE GONE ON, THE NUMBER OF INTERESTS AND STAKEHOLDERS HAVE INCREASED ENORMIOUSLY...SO NOW WE HAVE FACILITIES THAT WE CONSTRUCT THAT THE ORIGINAL INTENT WAS TO STORE WATER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FUEL AN ECONOMY, AND NOW IT'S EXPANDED TO ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS, FISHERY NEEDS, RECREATIONAL NEEDS, MUNICIPAL WATER NEEDS, AND IT WAS KIND OF ONE OF THESE THINGS, IT JUST KIND OF CAME AND GREW OVER THE YEARS. SO NOW WE ARE SITTING WITH A MYRIAD OF STAKEHOLDERS THAT WE NEED TO TRY BALANCING OUR APPROACH WITH REGARD TO MANAGING THE WATER, STILL MEETING OUR ORIGINAL OBLIGATIONS, BUT MANAGING SUCH THAT WE CAN ALSO PROVIDE BENEFITS FOR ALL THESE NEW NEEDS AND STAKEHOLDERS THAT HAVE CAME ON THE HORIZON. OVER THE NUMBER OF YEARS THAT WE'VE BEEN OPERATING HERE.***

When it comes to managing water, whether it's for irrigation, flood control, drinking supplies, or protecting species habitat...timing – as they say—is everything:

***STORAGE IS NOTHING MORE THAN RETIMING FLOWS. YOU CATCH WATER AT A TIME WHEN IT'S PLENTIFUL, AND SOMETIMES IT'S MORE THAN PLENTIFUL IT'S GREATER THAN WHAT YOU WANT, YOU CATCH THAT WATER IN A STORAGE RESERVIOR AND THEN YOU RELEASE IT AT A LATER TIME TO MEET A CERTAIN NEED. SO IN A LARGE PART, THE FLOW RETIMING CONCEPT IS, WHEN IT COMES TO THE ENDANGERED SPECIES, THAT THERE'S CERTAIN FLOWS THAT ARE***

**DESIREABLE IN THE CENTRAL PLATTE AT CERTAIN TIMES, AND IF WE CAN MANAGE WELL ENOUGH TO CAPTURE THE FLOWS IN STORAGE FACILITIES WHEN THOSE FLOW ARE ACTUALLY IN EXCESS OF THE NEEDS, AND THEN RELEASE THEM AT A TIME WHEN IT WOULD MEET THOSE TARGET FLOWS, THOSE FLOW NEEDS FOR THE SPECIES, THAT IS WHAT IS INTENDED IN THE TERM "FLOW RETIMING"**

And for those who wonder if it's worth the effort and expense to protect every single species, Doctor Kenny offers his personal observation:

KENNY04

**I LIKE TO THINK OF IT AS, IF YOU'RE IN AN AIRPLANE, AND A RIVET POPS OUT OF A WING, THE RIVET BEING, YOU KNOW, A SPECIES GOING EXTINCT, ONE OR TWO RIVETS, THE PLANE CAN STILL FLY, YOU'RE OK. IT BECOMES A QUESTION OF WELL, HOW MANY RIVETS CAN POP OUT OF THAT WING BEFORE IT FALLS OFF AND THE PLANE CRASHES. I DON'T WANT TO FIND OUT THAT ANSWER BY KNOWING HOW MANY RIVETS HAVE POPPED OUT WHEN THE PLANE CRASHES. SAVING THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES, KEEPING AN ORDERLY, HEALTHY SUSTAINABLE ECOSYSTEM HAS VALUE TO EVERYBODY ON THE PLANET.**

As John Lawson sums up, this highly successful program continues to receive broad support from water users, environmental and conservation groups, the states of Colorado, Nebraska and Wyoming as well as the U-S Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation:

LAWSON04

**WHAT I HAVE SEEN IS A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS THAT HAS NOT ONLY BEEN INITIATED DURING THIS TIME BUT CONTINUES TO BUILD AND CONTINUES TO STRENGTHEN. THAT'S THE KIND OF PROCESS THAT'S ABSOLUTLY IMPERATIVE FOR A PROGRAM LIKE THIS TO BE SUCCESSFUL. THERE ARE SO MANY ENTITIES, THERE ARE SO MANY INTERESTS THAT IF YOU DON'T FIND A WAY TO BE VERY COLLABORATIVE ABOUT IT AND ALSO TO BE VERY INCLUSIVE AND NOT EXCLUSIVE ABOUT IT, IT ISN'T GOING TO WORK. AND WHAT I'VE NOTICED IS**

***THIS PROGRAM, I WOULD SAY SETS ONE OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF HOW THAT PROCESS HAS EVOLVED INTO A VERY INCLUSIVE PROGRAM FOR EVERYBODY TO BE ABLE TO COME TO THE TABLE AND PROVIDE INPUT.***

For more information on the web, visit [PLATTERIVERPROGRAM-DOT-ORG](http://PLATTERIVERPROGRAM-DOT-ORG) or follow the link from the Bureau of Reclamation Great Plains region website, [WWW-DOT-U-S-B-R-DOT-GOV-FORWARD SLASH-G-P](http://WWW-DOT-U-S-B-R-DOT-GOV-FORWARD_SLASH-G-P).

This podcast was produced by Belongie Entertainment for the Bureau of Reclamation, Great Plains Region, Office of Public Affairs.

((SOUNDER))

RECLAMATION, MANAGING WATER IN THE WEST...