

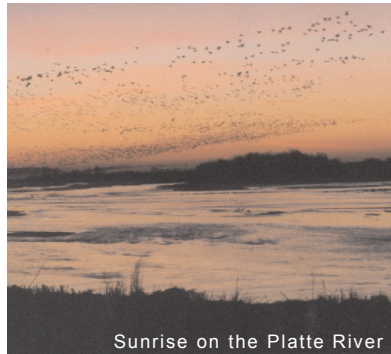
# Saving the Platte River for Wildlife and People

The recovery programs being developed under the Platte River Cooperative Agreement - good first steps toward saving the Platte for wildlife and people.

## Platte River Cooperative Agreement: An Unprecedented Opportunity

### A Long-Term Vision for the Platte

Recognizing that saving the Platte River's threatened and endangered species would require state and federal agencies to work together, in 1997 the Department of the Interior and the governors of Nebraska, Wyoming, and Colorado signed the **Platte River Cooperative Agreement**. The agreement's purpose was to develop a long-term solution that would allow people to continue using the Platte's waters while protecting wildlife for future generations.



Sunrise on the Platte River

Seven years of negotiations have culminated in the proposal of

recovery programs that could:

- Make more water available for wildlife, primarily through better timing and management of flows.
- Protect ten thousand acres of wildlife habitat.
- Allow for growth in future water use without harm to wildlife.
- Enact careful wildlife research and monitoring along the Platte.



A basin-wide recovery program could help restore some of the Platte's sandy, braided channels, shown here.

### A Smarter Way to Manage Water

A basin-wide recovery program could do a lot with a little, managing a relatively small amount of the water that currently flows through the Platte, but managing it in a way that significantly improves habitat.

A basin-wide program could, for example, re-time existing flows to maximize their benefit to wildlife. In the spring, water held in reserve for conservation purposes could be released to boost flows for migrating birds like the whooping crane and to help create and maintain new sandbar habitat for terns, plovers and other birds. In the summer, the released water could support small fish that larger species use for food.

A recovery program could also tap areas where leaky irrigation canals have created artificially high groundwater tables and could collect water through voluntary leases and conservation efforts.

A recovery program could also use major water programs at key sites:

- At **Lake McConaughy in Nebraska**, a program could use an existing "environmental account" of water dedicated to maintaining flows for Platte wildlife.
- Through the **Tamarack Project in northeast Colorado**, water from along the South Platte could be pumped into nearby wetlands, with the water returning through the soil into the river to benefit wildlife.
- At **Pathfinder Reservoir in Wyoming**, a program could help restore the reservoir to its original capacity, collecting extra water for wildlife conservation and Wyoming municipal use.



Pathfinder Dam, Wyoming

Platte River Whooping Crane  
Maintenance Trust



For More Information, visit [www.nwf.org/platte](http://www.nwf.org/platte)

## Restoring Habitat

The recovery programs under consideration would seek to protect and restore ten thousand acres of habitat in the central Platte and to conserve about eight miles of the 80-mile stretch at the heart of the North American Central Flyway.

The proposed programs could remove trees and shrubs along stretches of the river, helping to restore the wide, open, braided channels that migrating birds require. They could also restore wet meadows, providing feeding areas for migrating birds and nesting grounds for prairie species.

The programs would acquire land only from willing sellers, and wherever possible, would allow public access to habitat areas for hunting, fishing and recreation.

## Dealing with Growing Water Needs

Under the proposed programs, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming and the federal government would each enact “depletion plans” that would allow for future water development

without reducing critical Platte River flows.

The depletion plans would take into account new water demands from fast-growing

communities along the Front Range in Colorado and from agriculture, industry and recreation. They would offset that use by releasing water into the Platte at key times.

Water users would benefit from expedited review of their projects for compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The alternative is for each proposed water project to undergo separate ESA review - which could be costly and time-consuming.

## Good Science: Monitoring and Research

A monitoring and research plan could track how changes in habitat and river flows under the Program impact wildlife.

## You Can Help

The Platte River recovery plan was supposed to be completed by December 2000. Missed deadlines have pushed the new completion date to December 2005. In the coming months, the specifics of this recovery plan will be proposed and scrutinized.

You can help ensure that a good recovery program for the Platte River is implemented by visiting [www.nwf.org/platte](http://www.nwf.org/platte) to send an electronic comment letter to decision-makers. We need your help to generate as many of these comment letters as possible so please share this website with friends.

For more information about the Platte River, visit:

[www.nwf.org/platte](http://www.nwf.org/platte)



Funk Lagoon, a wetland south of Kearney, NE



The main channel of the Platte, near Grand Island, NE.



The same stretch of river, dry as a result of drought and upstream diversions.

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