

**Written Testimony of Jason Mead
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Wyoming Water Development Commission
Before the Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
U.S. House of Representatives
H.R. 3237 Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Extension Act**

July 19, 2019

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member McClintock, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of H.R. 3237, the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Extension Act.

My name is Jason Mead and I am the Acting Director of the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC). Harry LaBonde, the previous WWDC Director, is currently serving as Governor Mark Gordon's representative on the Governance Committee of the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program. I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the Wyoming Water Development Commission to extend sincere appreciation to Rep. Neguse for his leadership in introducing this important legislation, and to Rep. Cheney for being a co-sponsor. I also thank the co-sponsors from our fellow basin states of Colorado and Nebraska.

The North Platte River runs through the State of Wyoming and is a critical water supply for irrigation and municipal use. Wyoming has been a strong partner with our neighbor basin states of Colorado and Nebraska in seeking cooperative management of the Platte River because of its importance to all of our states and our water users. I support the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program because it is important to continue the conservation efforts regarding four threatened or endangered species in the central Platte River region in Nebraska, while at the same time protecting water users in Wyoming.

Wyoming benefits from the streamlined Endangered Species Act consultation process that is part of the Program, as multiple water projects have met their permitting requirements using this approach since the Program began in 2007. As part of the original authorizing legislation, the Program led to the successful implementation of the Pathfinder Modification Project on Pathfinder Dam and Reservoir in Wyoming. The Pathfinder Modification Project provides storage water that serves both as Wyoming's water contribution to the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program as well as water for municipal use by communities along the North Platte River. This continued water use is vital to the State of Wyoming.

The Program is a multi-state, collaborative program where the three states of Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska have been working with the Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, water users, and environmental groups to recover the target species. The Program currently preserves and improves over 12,000 acres of critical habitat in central Nebraska and provides approximately 115,000 acre-feet of water by score to the central Platte. The Program also maintains an organizational structure that ensures appropriate federal and state government and stakeholder involvement in the implementation and is one of the only species recovery programs

in the country that has successfully completed a full loop of the adaptive management cycle by providing scientific learning for use in decision-making. This all makes the Program a model for successful species recovery.

The states and the federal government equally share the Program cost — in terms of cash, water, and land. In addition to the environmental account water that is part of the Pathfinder Modification Project, Wyoming contributed \$6 million in cash during the First Increment of the Program and has agreed to provide another \$3.1 million during the 13-year extension proposed by this legislation.

The Program's major milestones for the First Increment included retiming and improving flows to reduce target flow shortages by an average of 130,000-150,000 acre-feet per year; and protecting and maintaining 10,000 acres of habitat in Nebraska. The Program has met all of its land and adaptive management milestones; however, the extension is needed to allow the Governance Committee additional time to develop and implement key water projects.

The Program partners want to achieve all of the milestones and we have reached an agreed-upon approach to extend the program for another 13 years (from 2020-2032). The Secretary of Interior, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska as well as all Program stakeholders unanimously agree that a 13-year extension of the Program and additional funding will provide the time and tools necessary to meet the water milestones. This extension would allow for the Program to continue as the reasonable and prudent alternative for Endangered Species Act compliance, while at the same time protecting current water users and allowing development of new water uses. This Program is viewed as a model on how, with collaboration, the Environmental Species Act can be integrated into the management of habitat and water use within a river basin. We urge Congress to act now because the authority for the Secretary to implement this Program terminates on September 30, 2020. H.R. 3237 is vital to providing the authorization for the extension for another 13 years.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope that you will support this important legislation for Wyoming.