

## **PLATTE RIVER ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

### **"COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT" UPDATE**

We regret to report to Nebraska irrigators that Congress just recently passed legislation to implement the Platte River endangered species recovery program, known as the "Cooperative Agreement" (CA). Senate Bill 752 and House Resolution 1462 will authorize the Secretary of Interior to proceed with the program. In 2006, the governors of Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska, and the Department of Interior signed off on the final agreement. Nebraska governor Dave Heinemann was pressured hard by Nebraskans First and the Central Platte Natural Resources District not to sign off on the CA because doing so would effectively hand over control of the Platte River to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and result over time in a huge economic hit on central Nebraska Platte communities as hundreds of thousands of highly productive irrigated farm land is reverted to dryland. For ten years we fought tooth and nail against Nebraska entering into this abominable anti-irrigation program.

In a nutshell, the ultimate goals of the CA are to create 30,000 acres of new habitat for terns, plovers and whooping cranes, and generate an additional 417,000

acre feet of Platte River river flows as measured at Grand Island. The CA is structured into three phases. Phase I (2007-2020) will require about 72,000 groundwater irrigated acres in the central Platte valley to be retired. The potential on-farm and off-farm impacts of Phase I will amount to a 261 million dollar hit on the local economies. Subsequent increments will require the retirement of an additional 340,000 acres of groundwater irrigated farmland, causing an additional economic loss of roughly 300 million dollars. The total economic hit for the period 2007-2056 will be a staggering \$557 million, according to a study by HDR Engineering, Inc., of Denver.

The FWS now holds all the cards and they alone will decide if the CA is doing enough for the birds based on a concept they call "adaptive management."

Nebraska U.S. Senator Ben Nelson was a co-sponsor of Senate Bill 752. He said this about the program: "This recovery legislation is necessary to improve and maintain the habitat for threatened and endangered species along

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### **ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT REALITIES**

*The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is regarded as one of the most comprehensive wildlife conservation laws in the world. When Congress approved the ESA in 1973, our nation's leaders acknowledged that many of our native plants and animals were in danger of extinction.*

*In 30 years of implementing ESA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most species while consuming significant amounts of conservation resources and furnishing landowners with negative impressions. America's farmers, ranchers and private property owners have the most important role in saving endangered species, as 90 percent of endangered species in the U.S. have habitat on private land. Research has shown that ESA has created disincentives that prompt landowners to rid their property of the potential to attract listed species and the liability that comes with the presence of endangered species.*

—National Association of State Foresters

*Look at the train wreck we have in the United States in the name of the Endangered Species Act. "Our" government continues to restrict the proper use of natural resources in the name of minimizing species extinction. There have been nearly 1,500 species placed on the list since its inception and the plan has less than a 1 percent success rate. Unless of course you consider the critical habitat designation for some species that can't even be proven to exist. This debate recently surfaced again about the Preble meadow jumping mouse that has critical habitat designation even though, as Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal said, "The additional scientific study once again confirms that there is no such beast as a Preble's meadow jumping mouse."*

—Trent Loos, Faces of Agriculture