

**INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP**

**PLATTE RIVER NETWORKING CONFERENCE**

Midtown Holiday Inn  
Grand Island, NE

October 6-8, 1989

From its headwaters in Colorado and Wyoming to its confluence with the Missouri River at Bellevue, Nebraska, the Platte River has increasingly been assaulted by human activities.

Quoting from the report, "The First Ten Years, 1979- 1989", by the Platte River Whooping Crane Habitat Maintenance Trust, "The pioneers noted that the Platte River was 'a mile wide and an inch deep'. That is far from true today. It's obvious that the Platte River has changed drastically.

"The channel has narrowed. Wet meadows have dried up. Native grasslands are disappearing under the plow. Trees and shrubs are invading the river.

"The development of upstream water diversion projects and the reduction of flows in the river have changed the environment. Those changes are threatening the wildlife which for years have depended upon the Platte for their existence."

The assault continues. Additional water projects in all three states containing the Platte are proposed that will impact the river. With this increase in activity, the issues and the battles have become more complex.

It has become obvious that a more coordinated, organized, and effective approach is needed if humans and wildlife are to coexist along the Platte. To assist in this effort, the Institute for Conservation Leadership is conducting a networking conference, to build an interstate network of conservation and environmental leaders concerned about the future of the Platte River.

The goals of this two-day conference are:

- \* To expand the network of conservationists working to protect the Platte River;
- \* To identify ways and means of broadening public awareness and support for the campaign to protect the Platte River;

- \* To identify and prioritize issues for action by state and region;
- \* To increase communication and cooperation among leaders;
- \* To further develop action planning on the identified issues and establish a continuing informal network.

In order to maximize the development of voluntary conservation action, all work toward these objectives will be by the attending volunteer conservation leaders. Professionals in environmental areas are asked to attend and share their knowledge and expertise.

Registration costs for this conference include two days lodging (double occupancy), four meals and meeting costs. In an effort to encourage grassroots participation, a grant from the National Wildlife Federation will be used to reduce attendance costs for conservation volunteers; therefore, two different registration fees are necessary, one for volunteers in environmental work and one for professionals.

Due to space restrictions, attendance must be limited to the first 150 respondents

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AGENDA

**Friday, October 6**

8:00 - 10:00 p.m. Informal reception and registration in  
Conference hospitality suite.

**Saturday, October 7**

7:30 a.m. Continental breakfast and registration in  
Pioneer Room

9:00 a.m. Welcome and Introductions

9:45 a.m. An Appraisal of the Situation - The Platte  
River Trust

10:15 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. State and National Break-Out groups  
What's Happening? - Threats and Resources  
Colorado  
Wyoming  
Nebraska  
National

12:15 p.m. Lunch - Buffet at poolside

1:30 p.m. State and National Break-Out Groups  
A. Identify issues  
B. Establish priorities and, by consensus;  
C. Identify action, (who, what, and when)

4:00 p.m. Plenary Session:  
Break out group summary reports (20 minutes  
each)

5:30 p.m. Adjourn for day

5:45 p.m. Transportation to Platte River Pit Fondue

6:00 p.m. Platte River Pit Fondue hosted by NeWF  
-10:00 p.m.

(more)

**Sunday, October 8**

7:30 a.m. Breakfast at Pool side

8:30 a.m. Brainstorming Break out groups

- I. How to reach out to new audiences.
- II. How to improve the network.
- III. How to increase public awareness.

10:00 a.m. Plenary Session

- Reports from Groups
- Summary of Saturday Reports
- Discussion: Interstate Coordination

  - National Activities
  - State Network Development

11:30 a.m. Summary and Evaluation

12 noon Challenge and Closing - John Vanderwalker

12:30 p.m. Departures

Summary Proceedings and a Participant List will be mailed to all participants within four weeks of the session.

# Conservationists Agree to Chart Plan for Platte

By Fred Thomas

World-Herald Staff Writer

Grand Island, Neb. — Leaders of national and regional environmental groups agreed Sunday to develop a plan for managing the Platte River that encompasses all interests — irrigation, power, domestic users, wildlife and others.

They said they hope to enlist public and private agencies to develop a plan similar to the \$30 million one created to try to save Chesapeake Bay.

They also said they would seek national legislation to protect the Platte, perhaps by designating it "an endangered river."

The agreements came as about 80 leaders from groups in six states and Washington, D.C., concluded a two-day conference sponsored by the Institute for Conservation Leadership, a Washington-based group formed by the National Wildlife Federation.

## Protection Sought

Leaders said the Platte has received neither the protection nor public understanding it deserves as an ecological resource of international significance.

John VanDerwalker, director of the Platte River Trust, said that for decades water developers determined what would happen to the Platte, but they focused only on their narrow interests, not on public values.

Environmentalists, unorganized and lacking enough scientific data, fought narrow-focused projects and became known as people opposed to most everything, he said.

Now the thinning ozone layer, the high rate of cancer among farmers who use pesticides and other health and environmental concerns have awakened people and created "a very powerful constituency," the Grand Island-based scientist said.

People want to know what can be done, and the environmental community can provide the leadership and scientific data people seek, instead of just being against projects, VanDerwalker said.

He said a new era is beginning in water use — making projects more efficient and eliminating waste.

There is enough water in the Platte system to provide more for wildlife without taking any away from irrigators, domestic users and others, just by reducing the waste of water, he said.

The Central Platte Natural Resources District at Grand Island and the Farwell Irrigation District north of the city are examples of agencies that have programs to use water more efficiently, he added.

Conference leaders decided to:

- Revive the Platte River Conservation Caucus, a coalition of people concerned about the river, and attempt to get 20 or more organizations involved, from farm groups to river protectors.

- Hold regular meetings in Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming, the states containing the Platte system. The next meeting likely will be in the Kearney area in March, when the sandhill cranes are migrating through, and the following one in Wyoming, so participants can study the storage of water in reservoirs on the North Platte River.

- Develop a national public awareness campaign on the Platte's significance. It would incorporate literature, a videotape and a slide show already done by the National Audubon Society but would look at broader issues.

Bill Howard, National Wildlife Federation vice president in Washington, said a management plan is a necessity, but something such as endangered rivers legislation is needed to protect the river while the plan is being developed.

The Platte is of worldwide importance, and protecting it is beyond the scope of a management plan, he said.

## Chesapeake Bay

The Chesapeake Bay plan grew out of concern in three states over pollution of the bay. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provided financing, scientists were hired, and an advisory group was formed to oversee development of a plan.

Liz Raisbeck, Washington-based lobbyist for the Audubon Society, said public education is needed, adding that even "Nebraskans as a whole don't appreciate the Platte."

During the weekend, ecologists explained that the Platte serves more than 300 species of migrating birds, including six species that are endangered or threatened. The river also is home to 350 species of plants, plus other wildlife and aquatic life.

Bill Whitney, co-director of the Prairie/Plains Institute at Aurora, Neb., suggested developing a greenway along

# Environmental Groups To Chart Plan for Platte

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the Platte that would draw tourists interested in nature, history and other topics, creating economic benefits for communities as well as protecting the river.

Carse Pustmueller, Audubon Society Platte River scientist in Boulder, Colo., said developing the management plan would keep united the scores of Coloradans who banded together to fight the Two Forks Dam project but who might drift away when Two Forks is rejected by the EPA.

The EPA has taken the first two steps in a three-step process that would veto construction of Two Forks, a proposal of the Denver Water Board to dam the South Platte near Denver to store water

for future municipal use.

Speakers said the proposed plan would be far broader than a Platte River management study that the federal Bureau of Reclamation and the Fish and Wildlife Service have been overseeing. It deals only with the impact of water development on endangered species.

Speakers said protecting the Platte will be difficult because the situation is complex ecologically and politically.

In workshop sessions, participants drew up lists of more than 20 threats to the Platte.

They ranged from all-terrain vehicles driven in environmentally sensitive areas of the river channel to continued housing development along the river and the lack of a law keeping a minimum flow of water in the river.