



# *Sustainable Rivers Program*

## Coordination and Outreach Efforts Kansas River Environmental Flows: Information exchange with USBR

July 2021

Compiled by Kansas City District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
601 E. 12th Street, Kansas City, MO 64106

Prepared for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
and other cooperating organizations

## **Kansas River Sustainable Rivers USBR Coordination Meeting**

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Thursday, June 24, 2021

KDWPT Region 1 Office, Hays, KS

1. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Kansas City District hosted a coordination meeting with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Nebraska-Kansas Area Office for the Kansas River Sustainable River Project (SRP). This was conducted as a joint meeting to discuss both the Kansas River SRP and the Kansas River Reservoirs Flood and Sediment Study (Watershed Study) as the two studies have complimentary planning elements. The purpose of the meeting was to allow the planning team for the Kansas River SRP and the study partners for the Watershed Study an opportunity to coordinate with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) on the overall study objectives and framework. During this meeting an overview was provided followed by questions, comments, or concerns that the USBR has related to the two projects. Additionally, there was discussion of identification of any areas where the study partners and the USBR can work together on proposed measures to address issues and problems.
  
2. Discussion
  - The USACE is working in partnership with The Nature Conservancy on the Sustainable River Program: Kansas River. The focus of this program is on habitat below dams and potential minor tweaks to operations to support environmental flow proposals.
  - The USBR reservoirs are managed by KDWPT for recreation, fish, and wildlife purposes under a contractual agreement.
  - The USBR Water Smart Program may have some intersects with the SRP and the Watershed Study and potential input of recommendations.
  - The USBR does not anticipate large changes to irrigation going forward in terms of contractual obligations.
  - The western portion of the Kansas River basin is generally not under USACE control and would like USBR input on how to look at this area (e.g., scale of assessment).
  - Dry periods are a big concern, water conservation measures are currently being implemented. Infrastructure related to irrigation (i.e., pipes, canals) may need to be adapted to meet future demands.
  - Kansas has Regional Advisory Committees that have 14 action plans with goals for each regional area that includes some plans related to USBR reservoirs. This is currently in draft and under review but will be ready for release by September 2021.
  - USBR will look at previous studies/reports that would be useful for the study team to review.
  - Flood waters that are stored in USBR reservoirs could potentially be used for benefits to fish and wildlife or recreation. This could be assessed and ways to use this water when conditions allow.
  - An official coordination letter will be sent to USBR following the meeting.
  - The USBR will be invited to participate in future workshops and coordination meetings as applicable and if the opportunity arises coordinate with USBR on any proposals at USBR reservoirs in the Kansas River Basin.



**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**  
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, KANSAS CITY DISTRICT  
601 E. 12<sup>TH</sup> STREET, 635 FEDERAL BLDG  
KANSAS CITY, MO 64106-2824

July 8, 2021

Mr. Aaron Thompson  
Area Manager  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Nebraska-Kansas Area Office  
1706 West Third  
McCook, NE 69001-0001

Dear Mr. Thompson:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) have partnered to form the Sustainable Rivers Program (SRP) to examine opportunities to optimize reservoir releases and river flows to benefit river ecology while maintaining the federal mandates of the reservoir system in the United States. The mission of the SRP is to improve the health and life of rivers by changing water infrastructure operations to restore and protect ecosystems, while maintaining or enhancing other project benefits. SRP began in 1998 with an initial collaboration to improve the ecological condition of Green River, Kentucky. The Program was formally established in 2002, involved 8 river systems, and focused on reservoir management. SRP is done in partnership with numerous other Federal, state, and nongovernmental entities and works with water managers, reservoir operators, scientists, and other stakeholders to increase the environmental benefits provided by already built infrastructure. In turn, USACE is considering effects to the ecology caused by reservoir operations and examine possibilities for reservoir management modifications within the range of authorized reservoir releases that would create flows beneficial to the Kansas River ecosystem and its biota.

The founding objective of SRP is implementation of environmental flows (e-flows), which are defined as the quantity, timing, and quality of water flows required to sustain ecosystems. SRP efforts complement other reservoir-centric water resource projects by demonstrating that a strategic and science-based approach can be used at USACE projects to maintain or enhance benefits provided to the nation. As of 2019, SRP involved work on 66 USACE reservoirs in 16 river systems and 5,083 river miles. SRP is now the largest scale and most comprehensive program for implementing e-flows at USACE reservoirs.

In 2017, the USACE Kansas City District and TNC Kansas worked together to add the Kansas River to the SRP. The first step of this program was to pull together a workgroup of people representing the various uses of the Kansas River stakeholders (reservoirs, businesses, drinking water, recreation, etc.) and those who study the ecological and hydrological systems of the river, to guide the process of determining e-flows. The next step was to assemble literature and data to identify flow-dependent fish,

mussels, and other species in the Kansas River, examine changes in these species over time, and propose a hypothesis about likely causes of these changes. Using input from stakeholders and data obtained related to hydrology and information from the ecological assessment an e-flows workshop was held in September 2020. The goal of the workshop was to develop e-flow recommendations in the Kansas River Basin that could result in benefits to fish, wildlife, and the ecosystem in general while minimizing conflicts with current human uses. Participants included experts spanning multiple disciplines and included representatives from federal government, state government, academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private industry, and utilities.

This letter is to initiate coordination with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Nebraska-Kansas Area Office on SRP and ask of your interest in participating in a teleconference to provide you with an overview of SRP and discuss opportunities to partner with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Nebraska-Kansas Area Office to develop environmental strategies, using water management flexibility, to complement any environmental flow benefits of actions proposed from USACE reservoirs in the Kansas River Basin. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the project manager, Ms. Laura Totten at [laura.a.totten@usace.army.mil](mailto:laura.a.totten@usace.army.mil) or (816) 389-2137.

Sincerely,

Signature redacted

Jennifer Switzer  
Chief, Planning Branch