



THE BOUNDARY MARKER

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IBWC STRENGTHENS COLORADO RIVER COOPERATION

In accordance with the August 13, 2007 Joint Statement of the United States and Mexico related to the Colorado River, a Binational Core Group has been created to address joint cooperative actions for the use of Colorado River waters in both countries. The group was convened March 11 in Phoenix, Arizona by the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico.

The objective of the joint cooperative process is to establish, under the auspices of the Commission, an international group of representatives of federal, state, and expert non-government organization stakeholders from the United States and Mexico to explore, identify, and ultimately implement water conservation, shortage management, augmentation and environmental initiatives with binational benefits in the areas of environmental, agricultural and urban water use. All joint cooperative projects and measures must be consistent with the 1944 Water Treaty, which allots a portion of the waters of the Colorado River to Mexico.

The Binational Core Group established four Work Groups to pursue cooperative actions in four broad areas: 1) conservation, 2) new water sources, 3) environmental issues, and 4) system operations. The Work Groups are interesting in exploring joint cooperative actions in areas such as irrigation district conservation projects, seawater desalination, and environmental restoration. The Work Groups will study a variety of issues and report back to the Binational Core Group, which will

recommend which activities merit further action or implementation.

“The U.S. Section of the Commission is very interested in promoting cooperation in the region among interests from the United States and Mexico. Through this group, we will be able to consider joint projects to benefit water users in both countries,” said U.S. Commissioner Carlos Marin.

Mexican Commissioner Arturo Herrera added, “Considering the cooperative relationship that prevails among Colorado River stakeholders, both in Mexico and the U.S., the measures adopted in this meeting strengthen binational efforts, which will allow for the identification and implementation of joint measures to assure the sustainable management of the waters of the Colorado River. This sustainability optimizes water supply for environmental, urban and agricultural uses to counteract variations in the basin due to climate change or operation of the basin’s infrastructure itself.”

The August 2007 Joint Statement expressed

the interest of authorities from both countries in reinforcing bilateral cooperation regarding issues related to the lower portion of the Colorado River through a process coordinated by the International Boundary and Water Commission. The document expressed the interest of U.S. and Mexican authorities in considering cooperative, innovative, and holistic measures to ensure that the Colorado River is able to continue to meet environmental, agricultural, and urban demands of both nations.



Lower Colorado River near Yuma, Arizona



SANITATION PROJECT TO BE BUILT IN SAN DIEGO

After considering a report by the Government Accountability Office assessing time lines and costs for two options for wastewater treatment, the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has decided to upgrade the existing South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) to secondary standards. The USIBWC has determined that upgrading the existing plant in San Diego is the quickest and most cost-effective means of achieving compliance with the Clean Water Act and provides better utilization of U.S. taxpayer funds.

“Our design will be completed in June and Congress has already appropriated funds for the project. We are ready to move forward with construction to complete this upgrade as soon as possible,” said USIBWC Commissioner Carlos Marin.

The SBIWTP currently provides advanced primary treatment for 25 million gallons per day (mgd) of sewage from Tijuana, Mexico. The Clean Water Act requires cleaner secondary treatment. Under the selected alternative, activated sludge secondary treatment facilities will be constructed at the SBIWTP. The capacity of the facilities will be expanded to accommodate peak flows of up to 50 mgd.

The USIBWC decided to upgrade the SBIWTP for the following reasons:

- Funding has been appropriated to start construction
- Costs less than the option of constructing secondary facilities in Mexico
- Earlier completion date (January 2011) than secondary facilities in Mexico
- Greater certainty in completing the upgrade within the estimated time frame; fewer uncertainties than the option of constructing secondary facilities in Mexico
- Allows for potential expansion of up to 100 mgd to meet long-term needs of the San Diego-Tijuana region
- Consistent with existing agreements with Mexico (Minutes 283 and 311)
- No additional approvals required from governmental entities in Mexico



Secondary treatment facilities will be built at this site just west of the existing plant

The Fiscal Year 2008 appropriations bill provided funding to the USIBWC for construction of secondary treatment facilities but specified that none of the funds could be obligated before the Government Accountability Office (GAO) completed a report on two proposed upgrade projects – secondary treatment at the SBIWTP or in Mexico as proposed by Bajagua, LLC.

The GAO submitted its report in April 2008, noting that the SBIWTP upgrade has lower estimated costs. The GAO also indicated that the estimated time line for the SBIWTP upgrade has fewer unresolved issues that could delay construction as compared to the proposed plant in Mexico. After considering the GAO report, the USIBWC decided to move forward with construction of activated sludge secondary treatment facilities in the United States.

The project will go out to bid in the near future and the construction contract is expected to be awarded in 2008. The plant upgrade is scheduled to be completed by late 2010 or early 2011.

The existing plant was constructed in the 1990s to treat wastewater from Tijuana that had entered the United States via the Tijuana River. Originally conceived as a secondary treatment plant, funding constraints, litigation, and other factors delayed construction of the secondary component of the plant.



AGREEMENT REACHED ON RIO GRANDE MAINTENANCE

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, in February concluded an agreement for maintenance of the Rio Grande flood control project in the El Paso-Juarez Valley. The agreement, Minute No. 313, "Maintenance in the Rectified Channel of the Rio Grande," was signed in El Paso, Texas by the Commissioners and Secretaries of the two Sections of the Commission. The agreement makes recommendations for works in critical locations where the Rio Grande channel has problems conveying normal and flood flows as a result of sediment, vegetation growth, and levees in poor condition.

"This agreement will enable the Commission to undertake critical work to remove sediment caused by the 2006 flood," said Commissioner Marin.

In August 2006, heavy rainfall in the region sent the river into flood stage. In the United States, the floodwaters did not breach the U.S. Section's protective levees. After the water subsided, a substantial amount of sediment was left behind in the river channel.

Minute No. 313 covers a 91-mile reach of the river from El Paso-Ciudad Juarez downstream to Fort Quitman. In accordance with the agreement, each country will be responsible for removing sediment from specific river reaches totaling 45.5 miles each. The works will be carried out by personnel or contractors from the U.S. Section and the Mexican Section of the Commission. Each Section will also be responsible for maintaining the floodway and levees in its own country.



Silt removal and bank stabilization work will be carried out near International Dam.

Minute No. 313 further identifies priority sites affected by flood flows during the 2006 storms. The priority works include sediment removal and

levee repairs in both countries. Both Sections began work at priority sites in 2007.

The U.S. Section has already restored the river levee from near Asarco to the Zaragoza International Bridge. The Mexican Section, using funds provided by the U.S. Section, removed sediment from a portion of the concrete-lined Chamizal Project channel through central El Paso-Ciudad Juarez.

The U.S. Section Work Plan for 2008 includes the following activities:

- Stabilization of the river bank immediately downstream of International Dam through the installation of rip-rap
- Silt removal and channel realignment (as required) immediately downstream of International Dam
- Environmental permitting for realignment of the river at the Diablo and Guayuco Arroyos in Hudspeth County

In signing the Minute, the Commissioners observed that without a clear understanding of the responsibilities to be undertaken by each Section, it has been difficult to schedule and arrange necessary maintenance work on an ongoing basis. Failure to remove silt and attend to other maintenance tasks presents a risk of municipal flooding and could result in a change in the river's course, altering the international boundary.

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