THE BOUNDARY MARKER

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IBWC PROTECTS COMMUNITIES FROM MAJOR FLOOD

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC), was in flood operations for most of July and August as major flooding hit the Rio Grande following Hurricane Alex and Tropical Depression #2. The Commission's flood control infrastructure protected thousands of residents on both sides of the border from the worst flooding in decades.

Release of floodwaters from Falcon Dam

Hurricane Alex made landfall in northeastern Mexico on June 30 followed days later by Tropical Depression #2. The two storms dumped more than 20 inches of rain in Mexico, filling dams on Mexican tributaries to the Rio Grande and causing serious flooding south of the border. As flows from the Mexican tributaries arrived in the Rio Grande, the Commission's two big storage dams—Amistad Dam at Del Rio, Texas-Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila and Falcon Dam at Falcon Heights, Texas-Nueva Ciudad Guerrero, Tamaulipas—rose rapidly, forcing the Commission to make flood releases. Releases from Amistad were the highest since 1974 while Falcon Reservoir exceeded the record elevation set in 1958. The IBWC's dams and others in Mexico held back floodwaters that otherwise would have caused even more serious flooding downstream.

In the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project in South Texas and adjacent parts of Tamaulipas, the Commission diverted Rio Grande flow into the interior floodways in both the United States and Mexico in order to limit flood flows on the river at Brownsville-Matamoros. This marked the first diversions into the U.S. interior floodway since 1988, with flow volume nearly four times greater than had ever been experienced since the floodway system was reconfigured in the 1970s.

The U.S. levees held back the floodwaters, with only minor problems experienced. The U.S. Section has worked aggressively to improve the levees for the last few years, aided by significant funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The levees were in the best condition in years and additional improvements are still underway.

Water was diverted into the U.S. floodway for the first time since 1988.

COMMISSION SIGNS COLORADO RIVER AGREEMENTS

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, has recently concluded two Minutes related to the Colorado River—Minute No. 316 on the Yuma Desalting Plant (YDP) Pilot Run and Minute No. 317 establishing a framework for U.S.-Mexico cooperation on the Colorado River.

Located in Arizona, the YDP was constructed by the U.S. government to comply with agreements regulating the salinity of Colorado River water delivered to Mexico. It operated briefly in the early 1990s but since then the U.S. has used other means to reduce the salinity of deliveries, including bypassing saline irrigation return flows to the Wellton-Mohawk Bypass Drain, which eventually flows to the Santa Clara Wetland in Mexico. During the YDP Pilot Run, which is being undertaken by the Bureau of Reclamation, a portion of these irrigation return flows will be desalinated and included in Colorado River deliveries to Mexico.

Commissioners Salmon *(l)* and Drusina *(r)* signed Minute No. 316 at the Yuma Desalting Plant.

Absent other actions, operation of the YDP would reduce the quantity and increase the salinity of water flowing through the Wellton-Mohawk Bypass Drain to the Santa Clara Wetland. Given the interest of both governments in preserving the environmental values of the Santa Clara Wetland during the YDP Pilot Run, Minute No. 316 establishes a commitment by Mexico, the United States, and nongovernmental organizations from both countries to contribute water to the Santa Clara Wetland. This water helps to preserve the ecosystem of the Santa Clara Wetland, part of the Colorado River Delta Biosphere Reserve in Mexico. The agreement also includes a binational environmental monitoring program of the Santa Clara Wetland.

"This agreement addresses water supply, water quality, and the environment," said U.S. Commissioner Edward Drusina. "This is another success in the Commission's efforts to increase U.S.-Mexico cooperation in the Colorado River Basin."

Building on that cooperation, the IBWC concluded Minute No. 317, which notes the interest of the Commission in exploring opportunities for binational projects that conserve water, minimize the impacts of potential Colorado River shortage conditions, and generate additional volumes of water using new water sources by investing in infrastructure such as desalinization facilities. The agreement also notes interest in the possibility of permitting Mexico to use U.S. infrastructure to store water (there are no Colorado River reservoirs in Mexico).

The Minute formalizes a process for stakeholder participation through various binational groups to explore potential areas of cooperation and to consider projects or initiatives of interest to both countries, such as those related to water conservation, new water sources, system operations, and the environment.

Mexican Commissioner Roberto Salmon stated that signing this Minute represents an historic moment in bilateral relations with respect to water management on the Colorado River, given that it establishes the framework for creating projects that will permit the transition toward sustainability in the basin that will benefit residents of both countries.

RECOVERY ACT LEVEE WORK ADVANCES

At press time, the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) was nearing award of the final contracts for Rio Grande levee rehabilitation out of $220 million appropriated to the agency in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). The purpose of the Recovery Act is to create and save jobs, promote economic recovery, and invest in infrastructure that will provide long-term economic benefits.

Construction of Recovery Act levee improvements began in 2009 in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and expanded to the Upper Rio Grande in 2010.

Construction has already been completed along the North Banker Floodway in Hidalgo County and will be completed in many other parts of the Lower Rio Grande Valley by year's end. The levee projects helped to protect the region from the recent flood caused by Hurricane Alex and Tropical Depression #2. Recovery Act construction in the Upper Rio Grande is scheduled to be completed in 2011.

Upper Rio Grande levee construction

Contracts were recently awarded for levee improvements in Fabens, Ft. Hancock, Presidio, and El Paso, Texas; and Sunland Park and Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The USIBWC is raising levee height and making structural improvements, where needed, to provide enhanced flood protection along the Rio Grande and the interior floodways in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

COMMISSION MOURNS GUNAJI

Former United States Commissioner Narendra Gunaji passed away on April 6. Appointed by President Ronald Reagan in 1987, he served the Commission until 1994.

Narendra Gunaji

Originally from India, Commissioner Gunaji received his B.S. degree in Engineering from the University of Poona, later earning masters and doctorate degrees in hydrology and water resources from the University of Wisconsin. Prior to his appointment to the Commission, he served as Professor of Civil Engineering at New Mexico State University.

Under his leadership, the Commission made significant advances in a number of areas, particularly its sanitation work. He doubled the capacity of the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant, which treats sewage from the cities of Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora. He also concluded the agreement to construct the Nuevo Laredo International Wastewater Treatment Plant, the first treatment plant for that Mexican city, as a binational project funded by both countries. He was also the architect of the agreement to construct the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant in San Diego, California. This project intercepts sewage from Tijuana for treatment in the United States, with discharge of the effluent offshore. Thanks to Commissioner Gunaji's vision, conditions in the Tijuana River Valley and at Imperial Beach have improved greatly.

One of his last wishes was to have his ashes spread at American Dam. A ceremony in his honor was held in May attended by members of the Gunaji family, Commission personnel and retirees, and family friends.

International Boundary and Water Commission
United States and Mexico

United States Section
4171 N. Mesa Street
Suite C-100
El Paso, TX 79902-1441
Phone: (915) 832-4100
Fax: (915) 832-4190
http://www.ibwc.gov

Commissioner.....Edward Drusina

Principal Engineer .....Carlos Peña

Principal Engineer.....John Merino

Secretary.....Adolfo Mata

Mexican Section
Av. Universidad No. 2180
Zona de El Chamizal
A.P. 1612-D C.P. 32310
Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua
Phone: (011-52-656) 613-7363
Fax: (011-52-656) 613-9943
http://www.sre.gob.mx/cila/

Commissioner.....Roberto F. Salmon

Principal Engineer.....Gilberto Elizalde

Principal Engineer.....L. Antonio Rascon

Secretary .....Jesus Luevano

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International Boundary and Water Commission
United States Section
4171 N. Mesa Street, Suite C-100
El Paso, TX 79902-1441