

Colorado River Citizens Forum  
El Centro, CA  
May 25, 2011  
Tentative Meeting Notes\*

Board Members in attendance:

Elston Grubaugh	Kevin Eatherly
Wade Noble	Bill Plummer
Stella Mendoza	Jose Angel (representing Nancy Wright)

Board Members absent:

Marcos Moore  
Miguel Figueroa  
Sam Spiller

USIBWC Staff in attendance:

Anna Morales  
Diane Hinkle  
Sally Spener

MXIBWC Staff in attendance:

Juan Riosmoreno

❖ 14 Members of the public in attendance.

- New River Wetlands Project, Improving the Quality of Water – Al Kalin, local Imperial Valley farmer and Advisory Committee volunteer of the Citizen’s Congressional Task Force on the New River.

In 1997, Leon Lesicka, a local construction contractor, and Congressman Duncan Hunter formed the Citizen's Congressional Task Force on the New River (CTFNR) to address problems through the following actions:

- Obtaining grant monies
- Obtaining the necessary permits
- Constructing wetlands – 2 sites
- Constructing aeration structures along the New River

Problems of the New River water content are agricultural runoff, raw sewage, foam, organic compounds, metals, pesticides and diseases.

The wetlands are important in helping to break down nutrients, create wildlife habitats, absorb heavy metals and filter out toxins. Benefits of the wetlands are that they process nitrates, sequester phosphates, release oxygen, remove carbon dioxide, and for recreation and bird watching.

It works by decreasing acidity, metals, pathogens, trace organics, nitrogen and phosphates. Aquatic plants provide oxygen to nitrifying microorganisms. In the presence of oxygen, nitrifying bacteria convert the ammonium to nitrate which is converted to gaseous nitrogen by denitrifying bacteria and N is lost in the atmosphere.

Wetlands are nature's filter. Most wetlands are used to treat tertiary wastewater from domestic treatment plants. Agricultural wetlands differ in necessity to remove sediment.

Design considerations:

Area requirements, water depth, number of cells, cell shape, flow velocity, wastewater retention time, substrate.

### Pilot Projects:

Imperial Site: 68 acres off Rice Drain, uses agricultural water, has a settling pond and four (4) wetlands.

Brawley Site: 7 acres on Imperial Research Station, uses New River water, has a settling pond and two (2) wetlands.

Monitoring of the wetlands has shown that both Imperial and Brawley wetlands have shown improvements in key water quality parameters, such as fecal coliform and total suspended solids.

### Future of the Project:

Reconnaissance inventory of the wetland and sedimentation basin sites of the New and Alamo Rivers have been completed. There have been 25 -35 favorable sites identified of which 10 have been selected. Biological/archeological surveys have not been completed for all sites. CEQA/NEPA permits are prepared as needed due to lack of funding. Construction is almost complete on the Shank Road site.

New Construction Westmorland Wastewater Treatment Plant went online in 2006 removing phosphates and nitrates. It has been closed down and no longer operating.

New Construction Shank Road: Design is complete and construction is 95% complete. It serves as an educational outreach to Magnolia/Mulberry schools. Funds are needed.

New Construction Holtville: Design is complete and the land has been purchased. Grading has begun. Awaiting funds.

The constructed wetlands provide the following benefits:

- Biologically and physically effective reduction of pollutants
- Outreach education available to all students in Imperial County
- Habitat for fish, migrating waterfowl and a variety of other birds
- Recreational benefits such as hunting, fishing, bird watching, hiking and family outings

Information can be obtained at [www.newriverwetlands.com](http://www.newriverwetlands.com) email: [newriver@usa.net](mailto:newriver@usa.net)

Imperial County Farm Bureau's Voluntary Silt Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Program believes that less silt equals less phosphate. Farmers have agreed to try and reduce silt in their drain water by 50% over a 13 to 15 year period. Yearly goals were set and the areas are divided into 10 different drain sheds.

California Regional Water Quality Control Board and the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) do the monitoring. Farmers are not required to monitor as long as they meet their goals.

Assistance is given to individuals in meeting TMDL requirements. It allows growers to maintain control over their own farming operations and protects them from individual scrutiny from the Regional Board. Growers who are participating in the program are not subject to additional enforcement actions as long as goals are being met.

Farm Bureau's responsibility under the Voluntary Compliance Program:

- Organization of program membership
- Provide technical assistance to farmers

- Liaison between regulatory agencies and farmers
- Educate Regional Board
- Educate farmers
- Educate Imperial Irrigation District (IID)
- Obtain and maintain grants to run the program
- Provide on-farm assistance with a consultant

A user friendly website has been developed [www.ivtmdl.com](http://www.ivtmdl.com).

Where are we now:

- 98+% farmable acres have completed Farm Water Quality Management Plans –updated yearly
- Unofficial monitoring results show dramatic progress in reducing silt loading
- 50% reduction of silt in the New River
- 38% reduction of silt in the Alamo River

We continue to educate individual farmers on Best Management Practices.

Looking to what lies in the future, we continue to hold drain shed meetings and continue to furnish reports. Continue to meet and work with IID and meet compliance goals and look for new funding sources.

Q. What was your original funding source for this project?

A. We have received many federal grants as well as IID's help for operations and maintenance.

- **New River Strategic Plan (TAC) Update Jose Angel, P.E., Assistant Executive Officer, Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board.**

New River originates in Mexicali Valley, Mexico and crosses into the USA at Calexico. The flow at the border is 150,000 acre feet/year. It travels 60 river miles to the Salton Sea which has a total flow of 450,000 acre feet/year. Flow sources are urban, agricultural and industrial discharges. This river was once considered the most polluted river in North America.

Salton Sea Watershed is more than 8,000 square miles. It is an important habitat for migratory birds, etc. Impairment problems are pathogens, nutrients, pesticides, metals, trash and sediment along with multiple agencies, jurisdictions and interests and cross border pollution.

#### Mexicali Wastewater Treatment

Costs of Improvements in wastewater treatment reducing the amount of sewage (\$84.5 million)

11 emergency repairs (\$7.5 million)

#### Mexicali I Projects (\$51 million)

Sewer main rehabilitation ( ~20 miles)

Telemetry equipment

Completed in 2004

#### Mexicali II Projects (\$26 million)

20 million gallons/day/(mgd) pumping plant

20 mgd force main  
20 mgd treatment plant

#### Binational Monitoring Program:

##### Examples of Improved conditions

- Fecal, E-Coli bacteria from Mexico has been reduced from greater than 1,000,000 to approximately 100 – 60,000/100 ml
- Amount of nutrients from Mexico reaching the Salton Sea reduced in half.
- Five times as much oxygen in the water

There is still more to do regarding pesticides, metals and trash.

Primary sources of pollution from Mexico are trash, metals from industries, raw sewage, agricultural runoff and pathogens.

Primary sources of pollution from US from agriculture are nutrients, sediment, and pesticides and there is also urban runoff.

#### Assembly Bill 1079 (AB 1079):

Authored by Assembly Member V. Manuel Perez, 80<sup>th</sup> District, which was signed into law in 2009. This bill establishes a Technical Advisory Committee to prepare a Strategic Plan that will identify restoration and/or clean-up options. It also requires the California-Mexico Border Relations Council to adopt the Strategic Plan.

#### Technical Advisory Committee (TAC):

CalEPA Secretary chairs the Border Council

Appointed the Technical Advisory Committee

Committee developed a charter with the following work groups:

- Impairments Workgroup
- Remediation Workgroup
- Visioning Workgroup
- Background/Funding Workgroup

The Strategic Plan must contain the quantification of current and projected New River water quality impairments and their threat to public health. Prioritization of the actions necessary to protect public health and to meet New River water quality objectives and other environmental goals, such as improving the quality of water flows into the Salton Sea, are included. The identification of potential funds for the implementation of the project, and potential lead agencies that would be responsible for environmental review of activities and related to the cleanup and restoration of the New River is another aspect. There is planning for a river parkway.

Non-Point Source (NPS) results to date: 97% of the farmers have signed on to TMDL program. Imperial County Farm Bureau (ICFB) program featured in USEPA brochure "TMDLs and Agriculture in the West." ICFB received Governor's Environment and Economic Leadership award (2004). Water quality improvements (~30% silt load reduction).

#### Funds available to Implement AB 1079:

In the Legislation there is \$800,000 from Prop 84 and \$3.2 million from the Federal Transportation Equity Act, which requires the \$800,000 state match. The State Water Resources Control Board has put up \$400,000 from the Cleanup and Abatement Fund (which is separate from legislation but sought because of delays in bond sales). City of Calexico to fund preparation of the plan.

Collaboration is the key, finding the positive qualities that make each area valuable to restore, sharing information, agreeing to communicate perspectives, identifying and prioritizing projects and jointly finding funding.

Submit ideas or comments to:

Calexico New River Improvement Project  
Technical Advisory Committee

Email: newriver@calepa.ca.gov

Phone: 916-324-2568

FAX: 916-324-0908

Mail: New River Improvement Project  
California Environmental Protection Agency  
Border Affairs Section  
1001 I Street, 24<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

For more information: [www.calepa.ca.gov/border/newriver](http://www.calepa.ca.gov/border/newriver)

Q: Where is the money going to come from?

A: Congress has earmarked \$20 million for the New River. This is a difficult question to answer, we do have our work cut out for us.

Q: Has the phosphate level in the Salton Sea lowered?

A: Yes, it has significantly improved. Comment from Al Kalin that odor problem has significantly decreased.

Q: Will the fishing habitat return?

A: With a 30% level of salinity we are not sure of what type of species will be able to tolerate this level of salinity.

- **U.S. – Mexico Colorado River Joint Cooperative Process – Sally Spener, Public Affairs Officer, USIBWC**

The 1944 Water Treaty provides that the US shall deliver to Mexico a volume of 1.5 million acre-feet (maf)/year of water from the Colorado River. When there are surplus waters, US to deliver up to 1.7 maf/year. In extraordinary drought, Mexico reduced in proportion to US. The US has always met delivery obligations. Due to a decade of drought, reductions to Mexico are possible in the foreseeable future.

Salinity – Minute 242 regulates salinity of water delivered to Mexico. Minute requires that water delivered to Mexico be similar in quality to that delivered to US users. The US has undertaken various projects to control the salinity.

Shortage management:

The US Department of the Interior (DOI) prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to address potential Lower Basin shortages and issued a Record of Decision in December 2007. We consulted with Mexico about the EIS. The shortages would only affect Arizona and Nevada. The EIS identified a program known as Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS), which allows the states to conserve water or generate new water and store it in Lake Mead for later use. Basin States want a voluntary shortage-sharing agreement with Mexico.

#### Colorado River Joint Statement

Statement issued in 2007 by DOI and Mexico's Ambassador. IBWC should be utilized to expedite discussions on Colorado River cooperation on the following issues:

- Continued needs of both nations for water, the study of the hydrological system and potential impacts of climate change, including effects of the ongoing historic Colorado River drought.
- Environmental priorities
- Opportunities for water conservation, storage, and supply augmentation
- Potential opportunities for more efficient Colorado River water deliveries to Mexico.

#### Joint Cooperative Process

- IBWC established a Binational Core Group to consider cooperative efforts (03/08)
- Core Group includes federal, state and nongovernmental organization (NGO) representation
- Core Group established Work Groups with broader stakeholder participation; Work Groups meet more frequently.

#### Four Work Groups:

- New Water Sources – particular interest in binational desalination
- Conservation – especially irrigation conservation projects
- System Operations – seeking efficiencies in how the system operates
- Environment – preserve and restore the ecosystem of the limitrophe and Delta

Minute 314 was signed in November 2008 as a 5-year extension to a previous agreement. This Minute allows Mexico to use US infrastructure to convey a portion of Mexico's allotment of Colorado River water to Tijuana during emergencies. The international connection is at Otay Mesa. Mexico covers all costs.

#### US Mexico Joint Declaration 2009:

The Joint Declaration of DOI Secretary and Mexican Ambassador Sarukhan (Jan 15, 2009) notes that recent period of historic drought in the Colorado River Basin and growing recognition of the potential adverse impacts of climate change have stimulated efforts to identify cooperative and innovative approaches to ensure that the Colorado River allotment of each nation will continue to meet the needs of both nations. Applauds of the efforts of IBWC to help identify cooperative and innovative measures that both countries could implement. Both governments support efforts to identify opportunities for water conservation, storage, supply augmentation, and environmental protection.

Minute 316, signed in 2010, provides for the United States, Mexico and non-governmental organizations to arrange for the conveyance of 10,000 acre-feet (12.3 million cubic meters (mcm))each of water to the Santa Clara Wetlands in Sonora in connection with the Yuma Desalting Plant (YDP) Pilot Run. The Pilot Run undertaken by the US Bureau of Reclamation in Arizona concluded this spring.

Minute 317 was signed in June 2010, which identifies the framework for US and Mexico cooperation on the Colorado River. Four (4) workgroups have been listed in the Terms of Reference. It provides for a Consultative Council with state representation to consider policy and legal issues. It outlines a process to be used that could

identify projects to minimize shortage conditions, generate additional volumes of water, conserve water and permit Mexico to use US infrastructure to store water.

Minute 318 was signed in December of 2010 which allows Mexico to delay delivery of a portion of its Colorado River allotment through 2013 until earthquake repairs are completed. Minute 318 also allows Mexico to adjust its delivery schedule downward by a total of up to 260,000 acre-feet when it cannot utilize its full allotment due to damage to its irrigation infrastructure. The water would then be delivered to Mexico in subsequent years after repairs are made to irrigation district canals. The Minute also states the desire of both countries to schedule future delivery of water in such a fashion so as not to trigger or exacerbate any potential shortage conditions in the United States.

The Leadership Team identified issues and projects to consider in 2011:

- Shortage Management
- Surplus sharing
- Intentionally Created Mexican Allocation (ICMA)
- Exchange of Water
- Water for the environment
- Salinity

#### **Public Comment/Suggested Future Agenda Items**

- East Wetlands and Hunter's Hole Project
- Mexico – Pronatura – Upland Projects
- Impact of Laguna River Fire at Mittry Lake
- Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP) – Laguna Restoration Project
- Invasive Species

Next meeting to be held in Yuma tentatively for September 7, 2011. Location TBD

Thank you to all the presenters for their presentations.

\*Meeting notes are tentative and summarize in draft the contents and discussion of Citizens Forum Meetings. While these notes are intended to provide a general overview of Citizens Forum Meetings, they may not necessarily be accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions.