

**Lower Rio Grande Citizens' Forum Meeting
Rio Grande Valley Partnership Board Room
Weslaco, Texas 78596
January 21, 2009**

Board Members in Attendance

Carl A. Boyd
Dr. Joseph Coulter
Laura De La Garza
William R. Lewis
Bradly Nibert
Phillip D. Waldron

Board Members Absent

Kika DeLa Garza
MaryLou Campbell
Glen Jarvis

USIBWC Staff in Attendance

C.W. "Bill" Ruth
Al Riera
Patrick J. Daize
Rodolfo Montero
Francisco Martinez
Aurelio Garza
Joel Saldivar
Belinda Ibarra
MaryAnn Rivera

Members of the Public in Attendance

Robert Saenz, Half Associates
Ann Williams Cass, Proyecto Azteca
Jim Duty, Malcom Pirnie, Inc.
Martin Vila, P.E., Raba-Kistner
Stanley Wilcox
Kenneth Jones, LRGVDC
Jared Janes, The Monitor
Joey Gomez, Rio Grande Guardian
Claudia Lozano, TCEQ

Joe Tucker, retired USIBWC
Felipe Chalons, Mexican Section, IBWC
staff member, Texas Department of Agriculture

Citizens' Forum Co-Chair Patrick Daize began the meeting with self-introductions. He then introduced Dr. Joseph Coulter.

Dr. Coulter presented an old newspaper clipping that referenced El Morillo Drain and went into detail on the individuals in the clipping. He then went into a brief history of the Morillo Drain. Showing a few slides of the El Morillo he then went on to discuss a printed brochure on the Morillo Drain Diversion Canal.

Brochure included:

- History
- Benefits
- Hypothetical Impacts
- Construction

Dr. Coulter then went into detail on the many issues affecting the drain and canal and reiterated the importance of having it functioning properly. He suggested the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority make more frequent visits to keep abreast of the maintenance needs and added that the counties were contributing funds and had a right to know the status of repairs and maintenance. Asking if there were any questions and getting no response, Dr. Coulter concluded his presentation.

After Dr. Coulter's presentation, Co-Chair Patrick Daize introduced newly-appointed IBWC Commissioner C.W. "Bill" Ruth but not before giving a brief biography and accomplishments before becoming Commissioner.

Commissioner Ruth stated that he was pleased to be the newly-appointed Commissioner; however, he expressed sadness at the unfortunate situation (death of Commissioner Marin) that brought him the appointment. He expressed his commitment to the International Boundary and Water Commission.

He then gave a presentation about the Safety of Dams issue. Commissioner Ruth advised that there was a joint inspection of the 4 Dams in 2007. He stated there was a bi-national team consisting of U.S. Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, USIBWC, Mexican Section of the IBWC, Comision Nacional del Agua, SRE (Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations) and that the team adopted Corps of Engineers Dam Safety Action Class (DSAC) standards in their assessments. His presentation included:

A. Dams are ranked per Corps of Engineers Dam Safety Action Classes (DSAC)

- DSAC I - Urgent and Compelling (unsafe)
- DSAC II - Urgent (potentially unsafe)
- DSAC III - High Priority (conditionally unsafe)
- DSAC IV - Priority (marginally safe)
- DSAC V - Normal (safe)

He then continued to state that studies were based on engineering judgment for probability of failure and consequence of failure, and then addressed the following conclusions:

B. Safety of Dams Assessment

- All dams found to be generally well maintained and able to operate under normal conditions.
- Report recommends that a panel of geotechnical consultants be convened.
- Expert panel established in 2008 to study Amistad Dam.
- 2007 reports for all dams are available on the USIBWC web page at: <http://www.ibwc.state.gov/PAO/CURPRESS/2005/Dams.pdf>

C. Falcon Dam – DSAC III - High Priority - (conditionally unsafe)

- Concern about construction lift joint seepage
- Report recommends additional studies

D. Anzalduas Dam - LRG Diversion Dam - DSAC IV - Priority (marginally safe)

- Report recommends updating of electrical and mechanical systems, sediment removal.

Commissioner Ruth advised that IBWC has since purchased new GPS technology and stated that there have also been studies to perform risk analysis.

Anzalduas was rated a Priority 4. Recommendations include purchase and installation of a back-up power generator, upgrade of control room instrumentation and wiring, monitoring a cracked gear in one of the gates, and removing sediment and sand bars near the dam. A substantial upgrade of the control panels was completed in 2007. An emergency back-up power system has also been installed.

At Retamal, that dam was rated a DSAC III. That dam has been known for center gate oscillation. It was designed to work automatically but it didn't work. Therefore, IBWC altered its operation. The panel suggested using the two side gates to release flows downstream. Two large sandbars have developed downstream. The IBWC is currently working with the Mexican Section to do the work to remove the sandbar instead of contracting it out.

Retamal Dam is a higher priority than Anzalduas Dam. Retamal Dam is used to divert Mexican floodwaters and if something is to happen to Retamal there can be a much higher risk.

E. Retamal Dam – Lower Rio Grande Diversion Dam - DSAC III - High Priority (conditionally unsafe)

- Concern about central gate oscillation during floods.
- Report recommends modifying flood operations to reduce use of central gate and replacing the gate lifting system.

F. Amistad Dam - DASC II - Urgent (potentially unsafe)

- Concerns about impact of naturally occurring sinkholes
- High risk in terms of potential loss of life and economic damages.
- More study recommended.

G. 2008-2009 Activities

- Bi-national panel of experts formed.
- Focus on Amistad Dam due to high priority for action.
- Experts conducted additional studies in 2008.
- Report due in early 2009.

H. Amistad Dam - 2009 Draft Report

- Identifies potential dam failure modes.
- Recommends risk reduction measures.
- Recommends future studies and risk analysis.
- Affirms rating of DSAC II - Urgent (potentially unsafe)

Sinkholes were found at Amistad Dam in early 1990 when the reservoir was low. There were 26 identified sinkholes on the Mexican side, which varied in severity. We tried to place concrete in the holes but it was found to be unsatisfactory. Therefore, a different methodology was used. We found that we needed to do more work to determine what the condition was and what repairs needed to be done. Equipment has found that we have not had any progress at Amistad.

Question: How large are the sinkholes at Amistad Dam?

Response: Several meters in diameter.

Question: Is there an immediate threat at Amistad?

Response: Find comfort in knowing that Amistad has been monitored and there has been no significant change from past years.

I. Future Actions

- Implement risk reduction measures and conduct additional studies of Amistad Dam.
- Conduct additional studies of Falcon Dam as funding becomes available.
- Design, fund, and construct any structural fixes that may be recommended.
- Continue to monitor operations of Anzalduas and Retamal Dams.

Question: So you're saying there is no money for the dams from the stimulus package?

Response: No, all of the funding will go to the levee rehabilitation.

Then Commissioner went into a discussion of how the funds would be divided between the Lower Rio Grande levees and the Canalization Project in El Paso and New Mexico. He then commented on how this would be an opportunity of a lifetime to get the floodway system back to the condition it should be. Then continued to state that if we get the stimulus package it will be a plus because if we don't then it will take about 20 years at the previous funding levels to complete the work; this is an opportunity we could not afford to miss.

Question: Where will you get the funding for repairing the dams?

Response: From IBWC's budget.

Question: Have you already allocated funds for those projects?

Response: We have; however, we are assessing the needs. We do not just throw money at a problem; we assess it first then take measures.

Commissioner Ruth then added that IBWC was also doing structural repairs to the levees and moving equipment to priority areas, such as Presidio, where levees were damaged in last year's flood, to conduct the work. Additional studies are also underway.

Comment: I think that if FEMA states that the levees still don't meet the criteria, I don't think it will be fair to the taxpayer.

Question: Has there been a Safety of Dams inspection at Marte Gomez?

Response: Yes, every so many years, I don't have any information or date on that.

Question: Have the lengths of the levees increased?

Response: There are no more miles in levees; it's the same as we've always had.

Former Project Manager Joseph Tucker then advised that USIBWC's Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project (LRGFCP) had a total of 60 employees during his tenure and he is wondering how they are currently performing with a downsized office. He stated that he felt that the

LRGFCP currently did not have the resources necessary to maintain the floodway system along with all the other maintenance operations.

Former LRGFCP Shop Foreman and current Citizens' Forum Board Member Carl Boyd then joined in a discussion with former Project Manager Tucker and Commissioner Ruth on a very brief but interesting history on IBWC maintenance during their tenures. Mr. Boyd and Mr. Tucker ended the conversation agreeing that if the Valley had a major flood, it would probably be totally devastating to the Rio Grande Valley.

Commissioner Ruth, Mr. Tucker, Mr. Boyd, and a few attendees then went into a brainstorming session in seeking resources within the districts, cities, etc. in the event of a flood. Adding that in the past they sought help from the sugar mill north of Santa Rosa. Citizens' Forum Board Member Laura De La Garza added that Steve Bearden was the manager at the sugar mill and was at the main office.

Former Project Manager Tucker then commended Commissioner Ruth for his appointment, stating that he had hired him as Assistant Project Manager after being a term employee involved in an IBWC construction project and that he had chosen him because of his diligence and experience. After a round of applause, Commissioner Ruth concluded his presentation

After Commissioner Ruth's presentation and discussion, Area Operations Manager and Citizens' Forum Co-Chair Patrick Daize gave a brief status report on the levee rehabilitation project undertaken by USIBWC crews in Cameron County. He then went into a discussion on the reason behind the levee work delay. He then added that it had been a challenge and that he had requested additional personnel from other project offices. He then stated that part of the delay was attributable to testing, re-testing, weather, and material delivery delays. Citizens' Chair Daize then went into detail on the number of miles completed, and the amount of material delivered.

Question: Are all levees going to be up to FEMA standards?

P.E. Al Riera Response: IBWC still has to look at the overall system. The elevation was projected for a 100-year flood. IBWC currently has an Emergency Operations Manual in place. IBWC still has to do the as-builts then submit them to FEMA and that FEMA will state if IBWC can self-certify the levees.

Question: Will FEMA extend the timelines?

Response: Not sure.

Question: Do you know FEMA's deadline?

Response: Not sure.

Question: Is there a work program that will be set in place with the stimulus? What happens if the stimulus doesn't pass?

Commissioner Ruth's Response: IBWC will be back on normal schedule.

Question: Then where would the funding come from for the rest of the projects?

Response: From IBWC's own fiscal year budgets.

After the question and answer session, Citizens' Chair Patrick Daize stated that if there were no other questions or comments, he then wanted to redirect the forum to a proposed date for the next meeting. A Citizens' Chair member suggested the 2nd or 3rd Wednesday in April. Another member concurred on the 3rd Wednesday in April.

Before continuing with the agenda, Citizens' Forum Board Member Laura De La Garza stated she would be going to Washington and would be willing to take information on behalf of the Citizens' Forum. Ms. De la Garza was thanked for offering to do so.

Citizens' Forum Co-Chair Daize then asked about future suggested items for the agenda. The members suggested an update on the stimulus package; however, earlier Dr. Coulter too had suggested a status report on the Inspection/Status of the Morillo Drain.

Before ending the Forum, members requested the presentations and the Safety of Dams report be posted on the IBWC website.

With no further questions or comments, Citizens' Chair Daize thanked the forum and concluded the meeting.