

Lower Rio Grande Citizens' Forum Meeting
Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project (LRGFCP) Field Office
325 Golf Course Road
Mercedes, Texas
April 22, 2009
Tentative Meeting Notes*

Board Members in Attendance

Carl A. Boyd
Joseph Coulter
Laura De La Garza
William R. Lewis
Glen Jarvis

Board Members Absent

Bradly Nibert
Kika De La Garza
Mary Lou Campbell
Phillip Waldron
Edward Vela
Jose Muñoz

USIBWC Staff in Attendance

Gabriel Duran
Patrick J. Daize
Rodolfo Montero
Francisco Martinez
Belinda Ibarra
MaryAnn Hutchinson

Members of the Public in Attendance

Claudia Lozano, TCEQ
Rick Reynoso, Progress Times

Mexican Section Staff in Attendance

Engineer Felipe Chalons

Welcome and Introductions

Citizens' Forum Co-Chair Patrick Daize began the meeting with self-introductions. He then introduced Gabriel Duran, Operations Support Specialist, USIBWC.

Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project (LRGFCP) Levee Rehabilitation Using Recovery Act Funds

Mr. Duran began his presentation by thanking the Mercedes office for the good work they had done in Presidio during the 2008 flood there. He stated that LRGFCP crews helped sandbag two miles of levee. He then stated that he was very happy and honored to be a part of the Citizens' Forum meeting.

He then discussed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects in the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project (see presentation at http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/LRGFCLevee_Imprvmnts_04012009.pdf)

Discussion/slides included:

- Act authorized by Congress on August 19, 1935 for the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project
- Federal Project improved upon a system built in the late 1920's
- The Project raised, improved and extended the river levee and developed the interior floodway system
- Slide on levee terminology

Why perform levee improvements?

- FEMA is updating flood insurance rate maps
- FEMA requires levees to contain the 100 year flood with 3 ft. freeboard
- USIBWC notified FEMA in 2006 that it could not certify all the levees as meeting this requirement

- Slide on Recovery Act Projects
- He presented slides with color-coded maps of the proposed and completed enhancement Projects in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties. He also explained how the levees would be raised and/or rehabilitated.
- He discussed the planned levee rehabilitation projects using Recovery Act funds:
 - Lateral A to Retamal Dam
 - Edinburg Pump Channel
 - Hidalgo Phase 1
 - Granjeno to 23rd Street
 - Main Floodway to 23rd Street
 - Main Floodway FM 1015 to Baseline Road
 - Arroyo Colorado North Levee – FM 1015 to Willacy Canal

- He also noted that some segments will be rehabilitated in the future with out-year funding:
 - Baseline Road to County Line
 - Arroyo Colorado North Levee
 - Willacy Canal to White Ranch Road

- He showed slides of what the construction equipment and process will look like.

- Questions about FEMA's levee certification process should be referred to Mr. James Orwat, FEMA, 800 North Loop 288, Denton, TX 76209, 940-898-5302, james.orwat@dhs.gov.
- He discussed some of the potential impacts during construction, including the presence of heavy equipment and workers, efforts to control dust, hours of work, etc.

Question: On the slide where you show the levee improved, it looks pretty bare. Will that area be re-seeded?

Response: Yes. We will be scarifying the side of the levee but we anticipate that grass and other vegetation will grow on the levees to stabilize it; we don't believe re-seeding will be a problem.

Comment: We are in the process of continuing to improve surfaces. We will add grass seed to those areas. We have water trucks that we have rented that can be sent to the areas where we will be re-seeding.

Gabriel Duran added that at this point it was not too late to address those issues because USIBWC had currently contracted a major engineering firm to do all the design work, which is aware of that issue. USIBWC can ensure they consider several avenues to bring the areas to their normal state (grass, vegetation, etc.)

Question: What is the completion date?

Response: The design teams are on an accelerated design schedule and they are going to have all these designs ready by June 1st or 2nd. Then we have to solicit the projects for construction, normally about a 4-month period. We anticipate completing the levee-raising project by November or December of 2010. As you can see that's a lot of work in such a short period but we are trying to be very conscientious in using these funds in accordance with the president's plan to stimulate the economy.

Comment: Mr. Garza and Hidalgo County stated they were trying to facilitate projects that may come up between the levee segments constructed by Hidalgo County & USIBWC.

Response: Yes. There's a little stretch of levee between Granjeno and 23rd street. We are working with the County to acquire some of their designs and incorporate that into the stimulus projects.

Question: Has anybody calculated the total cubic yards of dirt needed for the levee project?

Response: I don't think we have those numbers. I'm sure as soon as we move along the design process and we get the designs back, we will have a better idea. We can get back to you with that information.

Question: How many contracts will be worked on?

Response: Approximately 4 contracts

Question: The entire stimulus package goes considerably up the river. Will you take that money to Laredo and other parts?

Response: In the El Paso-Las Cruces area, approximately \$98 million will be used from Hatch, NM to Little Box Canyon, TX. Roughly about 200 miles of levee will be improved. Some levees don't require too much attention.

Question: Then a lot of the money will be going up there?

Response: The largest amount is coming down here to the Valley. Approximately \$120 million will be used here and about \$98 million in El Paso.

Question: Is Presidio a different project?

Response: Yes, emergency funds were provided to the International Boundary and Water Commission to repair the Presidio levee.

Planned Maintenance and Repair of El Morillo Drain

Continuing with the meeting, Citizens' Forum Co-chair Patrick Daize began his presentation on the Morillo Drain (see presentation at http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/LRG_CF_Pat_Daize_Pres_042209.pdf) His presentation included the following:

- El Morillo Drain Diversion Canal was built to resolve the salinity problem that occurred in the Rio Grande.
- Construction of El Morillo Drain Canal began in 1967, concluded on June 30, 1969, and on July 15, 1969 El Morillo began diverting water.
- In 2007, a reach of the Morillo Canal was encased in pipe.
- In March 2009, the Lower Rio Grande Water Committee transferred their responsibility of operation and maintenance costs to the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority (RGRWA).
- On March 9, an infrastructure assessment was conducted on El Morillo.
- Upcoming Improvements to El Morillo include:
 - Maintain access roads for certain reaches by the unlined and concrete-lined channel.
 - Replace four pump outlets at Morillo Pumping Station.

- Remove silt and debris from siphon and install trash rack at entrance of the Rosita Siphon.
- Pipe Encasement continuation of 170 meters funded by Mexico.

Citizens' Forum Co-Chair Patrick Daize asked Engineer Chalons of the Mexican Section if he had any comments on the encasement.

Engineer Chalons responded that Mexico will encase approximately 170 to 200 meters immediately next to the 300 meters that the U.S. had encased. He then stated that the work will begin in May.

Question: Will the encasement take place downstream or upstream?

Response: Downstream

Question: How soon can we get a cost estimate of the work?

Response: We performed an inspection and we have a detailed cost estimate. We would be more than happy to provide you a copy once the estimate is agreed upon and is signed by both Sections.

Question: Does the Mexican Section of USIBWC have a direct connection to CONAGUA?

Response: The U.S. Section has no direct relationship with CONAGUA. The Mexican Section are the ones that directly work with CONAGUA on Morillo Drain.

Question: Who has the ultimate responsibility?

Response: The Mexican Section

Comment: On day-to-day operations, USIBWC has logs that are generated describing which pumps are in operation.

Dr. Coulter advised that USIBWC probably does have logs; however, that information has never been made available to the Water Committee, which they should because the Water Committee has furnished the funds to run Morillo Drain.

Response: If I understand correctly, you want to know duration. How many pumps are running and how long they are running and have us tabulate that information and provide it to you? USIBWC is currently working on that.

Question: Who does the actual sampling? Is it the Mexican Section or the U.S. Section? I was under the impression that the Watermaster's Office was doing that. Is this information being shared and who has that responsibility?

Response: At Anzalduas Dam, our operators take the water samples in the morning and evening and if the salinity is high, we contact Mexico to see if the pumps are running; if not, we have them contact CONAGUA so that they can inspect the pumps.

Comment: It sounds like you are trying to get a program going to monitor it.

Response: Yes, we are. What I would like to see is a Standard Operating Procedure between Mexico and U.S. for collection of operation reports of metering of water and the distribution of those reports. Right now, everything that pertains to Morillo is photographed and reported. At this point that program is not actually where I want to see it but of course, this is a bi-national issue therefore, we need Mexico's concurrence.

A discussion ensued on the concerns of monitoring for funding purposes and the need to keep the information disseminated amongst all those concerned. Citizens' Forum Co-chair Daize then tasked U.S. Section Engineer Francisco Martinez to work on that process.

Comment: On another subject, I understand that USIBWC distributed letters about the structures along the river and responsibility and some of the water districts advised me that they had received these letters. They advised that USIBWC had an inventory of structures. How is the line of communication coming along with that?

Response: Initially, some advised that they hadn't done maintenance for 30 years. However, at a prior meeting, some long-time USIBWC employees reiterated that it was in fact the licensee's responsibility to maintain the structures. Finally, they accepted it and understood it was their responsibility. What USIBWC will do now is follow up by going out to the structures with the licensees to see what they have done because hurricane season is right around the corner.

Question: Do you have a plan of action for unclaimed structures or those that are not identified? Will you be plugging those up?

Comment: Basically we can identify and look at them critically to see what effects each structure has. Then we will continue to pursue the matter with the licensees; however, if the licensee does not do the work, we will do the work ourselves and bill the licensee. If the structure is not critical and looks like it can be abandoned, then we will look into filling it, only if the structure goes unclaimed.

Comment: So it's on a case-by-case basis?

Response: Yes, it's not a blanket order.

Question: Do you think you will be able to meet that by the beginning of hurricane season?

Response: We are hoping by the middle of next month. That decision will be made on the structures that we have not received a response on. We will then proceed to work on it; however,

we will need an accounting system to prove what work is done and account for the costs and send it to the licensee.

Comment: From the effects of Hurricane Dolly, we did have a flood and some structures failed.

Response: Hurricane Dolly was a blessing in disguise, and the hurricane that hit north after Dolly would have made things worse. After Dolly, USIBWC documented all the damage/flooding and accompanied Border Patrol to view the flooding from the air. Viewing all the damage and flooding gave the USIBWC an idea of our current situation.

A discussion then began on the detrimental effects of Hurricane Beulah, which affected the Valley in 1967. Citizens' Forum Chair Daize then commented on the positive support the Mercedes Field Office had been receiving from Headquarters. He stated that El Paso had done a good job of providing adequate funding and provided great support in filling of personnel vacancies.

The Water Authority commented that they always told the current and previous Commissioner that USIBWC really did not have constituents when they needed help with funding. However, now with the Authority, if word filters out, the Authority can help as a constituency. They then stated that in the current state of some of the structures and the emergency funding, they can press different people to possibly assist with funding.

Before closing the meeting, Citizens' Co-Chair William Lewis commented that the message was getting across that a catastrophic thing could happen. Fortunately, Dolly hit the Valley to prepare us for a more serious scenario. He then asked if there were any suggested future agenda items.

One suggestion was to again post the presentations on the website. Another suggestion was to possibly provide future information on the economic stimulus package levee projects. A final suggestion was Mexico's proposed Falcon-Matamoros piping/aqueduct.

Citizens' Co-Chair Daize then asked Engineer Chalons if he could comment on the Falcon-Matamoros piping. Engineer Chalons stated that the only thing he knew was that the Mexican Section knew about the piping/aqueduct. However, they only needed to figure out how they would be tying it into Falcon Dam.

With no further questions or comments, Citizens' Chair William Lewis thanked Patrick Daize and Gabriel Duran for their presentations. Immediately after, he asked for a proposed date for the next meeting. Receiving a July 15th date, he then thanked the forum and concluded the meeting.

*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.