

LOWER RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM
October 10, 2012
International Boundary and Water Commission
Lower Rio Grande Field Office
325 Golf Course Road
Mercedes, TX 78570

Meeting Notes*

Lower Rio Grande Basin Study

Jeff Gerber, Environmental Protection Specialist, US Bureau of Reclamation, Oklahoma-Texas Area Office, introduced himself and briefly explained the mission of the Bureau of Reclamation to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public. Mr. Gerber spoke about the WaterSMART (Sustain and Manage America's Resources for Tomorrow) Program that was established under Secretarial Order 3297 and how it helped create the Basin Studies Program. The Basin Studies are cost-shared assessments of water supply and demand and identification of climate adaptation strategies.

Basin studies have a large geographic scope and require a 50-50 cost share. They incorporate climate variability projections, supply/demand updates, compare options to meet future supply needs, and have findings and recommendations.

The Lower Rio Grande River Basin Study is being undertaken in conjunction with the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority and a team of private consultants. There is an existing imbalance between supply and demand that will likely increase by 2060.

The study report is expected to be completed in 2013. It will consider various climate projections, runoff scenarios, and agricultural demands. The planning aspects will consider and eliminate certain alternatives and will identify a preferred alternative for feasibility-level design.

Public- You always hear these rumors about the ice caps and the Gulf of Mexico will be taking away shoreline. How does all that play into this?

Jeff Gerber- We didn't model that. We modeled the impacts used on these control points within the watershed and what the precipitation outlook is. I haven't heard anything so severe that the Gulf of Mexico is going to come to McAllen in any years. If ocean levels do rise, your Gulf Coast aquifer will get recharge of more salt water in the groundwater layer coming in and more saltwater coming in where you used to have fresh water.

Economic Impact of Nature Tourism in the Rio Grande

Kyle R. O'Haver, Natural Resource Specialist, Estero Llano Grande State Park, World Birding Center, introduced himself and briefly explained the economic impact of nature in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The birding industry has been on the forefront of nature tourism and has expanded to other nature-related activities such as butterflying, dragonfly watching, nature photography, and general nature and wildlife experiences.

There are approximately 520 bird species in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Only 4 states have recorded more species than this 4-county area. There are approximately 300 species of

butterflies and 110 of dragonflies, and over 1000 plant species, including many not occurring elsewhere in the United States.

There are various birding locations including World Birding Centers, National Wildlife Refuges, Audubon facilities, other nature centers and parks, and levees. The World Birding Center covers 120 miles along the Rio Grande corridor, including the Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco, which has the largest wetlands environment in the World Birding Center network.

There are 7 major nature festivals held in the valley each year, bringing in hundreds of out-of-town visitors. Winter Texans also enjoy bird watching and other nature activities. This brings money and jobs into the community. It is calculated that visitors spend \$497.72-\$822.08 per person on nature tourism experiences, with a total economic output for the Lower Rio Grande Valley of \$463 million and 6,613 jobs.

Public- Why is it that ravens don't come across the river?

Kyle R. O'Haver- We have Chihuahuan Ravens in the Valley. A good place to find ravens is at the Brownsville Landfill because they like to find places where there is a lot of food.

Public- What about security on the parks there around the river?

Kyle R. O'Haver- That is addressed on the second in-house impact study. Overall the majority of them did feel safe and overall the parks are safe. There are a lot more visitors that have positive experiences, than there are having bad experiences.

Suggested Agenda Topics for next Citizens Forum

Drought Preparedness

Mexican Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (CILA) - have CILA personnel address the topics below:

Levee Improvements, etc. (issues they are working on)

Morillo Drain

To discuss what they are doing in regards to water (water issues, water qualities, water priorities)

Water Priorities in Mexico

If there are other issues/projects you would like to hear, please email the Lower Rio Grande Field Office at Rodolfo.montero@ibwc.gov or sally.spener@ibwc.gov

Next meeting scheduled for January 9, 2013.

*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.