



## **LOWER RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM**

**Wednesday, October 21, 2009**

**4:00 – 6:00 P.M.**

**USIBWC Conference Room**

**325 Golf Course Road**

**Mercedes, Texas 78570**

**Tentative Meeting Notes\***

- **Welcome – Bill Ruth, Commissioner, USIBWC**

Mr. Bill Ruth appreciates the efforts and hard work of the forum board. He states that IBWC is here to serve the public and do the job assigned to this agency. He would like to interact with the public to see what is important to better serve the Valley Area. A Commission was formed in 1848 to survey and demarcate the boundary and to resolve the boundary issues between the U.S. and Mexico. This agency was born in 1889 as the International Boundary Commission and its mission has evolved over the years. Its responsibilities now include flood control; the IBWC discharges water from the international storage dams at the request of the state.

- **Introduction of New Board Members**

The board members briefly introduced themselves including new and returning board members: Bill Lewis, Carl Boyd, Bob Beattie, Darla Jones, Jerry Freeman, Sofia Benavides, Bradley Nibert, Philip Waldron. Eddie Lucio, III and Godfrey Garza were absent due to previous commitments.

- **Board Member Orientation – Sally Spener, Public Affairs Officer, USIBWC**

There was a brief orientation for the new board members covering the history and projects of the Commission as well as board member responsibilities (see full presentation at [http://www.ibwc.gov/Citizens\\_Forums/CF\\_Lower\\_RG.html](http://www.ibwc.gov/Citizens_Forums/CF_Lower_RG.html)). The IBWC is an agency with both a diplomatic and engineering function. The following treaties and projects were briefly mentioned: 1944 Water Treaty, Chamizal Treaty, 1970 Boundary Treaty, Sanitation Projects, Water Quality, and Boundary Demarcation. Citizens Forum Board members serve as volunteers. The Co-chair helps determine meeting dates and agendas. All meetings are opened to the public. Meeting materials are available online.

- **IBWC Projects in the Lower Rio Grande Valley – Rodolfo Montero, Area Operations Manager**

Mr. Rodolfo Montero gave a presentation (full presentation available at: [http://www.ibwc.gov/Citizens\\_Forums/CF\\_Lower\\_RG.html](http://www.ibwc.gov/Citizens_Forums/CF_Lower_RG.html)) that describes the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project Office in Mercedes and its activities. Some of the items mentioned in the presentation were: Sixty-three employees safeguard and take care of the project. Anzalduas and Retamal Dams safeguard for floods in which diversion of water is needed into the floodways. The slides covered the following: Flood Control, Mowing Operations (8,000 acres yearly), Rio Grande River clearing and wildlife corridor, levee roadway

maintenance (270 miles of levee), levee structure maintenance 550+ drainage and irrigation structures, traffic control operation, levee reconditioning, pilot channel/drainage ditch cleanout, hydro operations, Anzalduas Dam - 24 hour dam operations for diversion of irrigation water to Mexico and floodwaters to the U.S. as well as maintenance of two dam gates per year, Retamal Dam only used for flood operations, Banker Weir Project, Flood Operations, Morillo Drain Project, Morillo Drain Encasement Project, American Recovery & Reinvestment (ARRA) Act Projects (Map Slide), Levee Rehabilitation Projects.

- **Development of FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Hidalgo and Cameron Counties**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) discussed FEMA standards for levee certification/accreditation (see the complete FEMA presentation on the USIBWC web page at [http://www.ibwc.gov/Citizens\\_Forum/CF\\_Lower\\_RG.html](http://www.ibwc.gov/Citizens_Forum/CF_Lower_RG.html)). Flood insurance studies are being done throughout the Valley. FEMA is responsible for preparing Flood Insurance Rate Maps. FEMA does not own or operate levees. For a levee system to be certified/accredited, there has to be a plan to maintain levees. If you have any questions about flood insurance, please e-mail: Linda Delamare at: [Linda.delamare@dhs.gov](mailto:Linda.delamare@dhs.gov).

In reference to FEMA, Commissioner Ruth stated that the IBWC will keep FEMA posted when levees will be certified. Levee certification is a long process and IBWC will hopefully complete this by 2011 based on the levee construction projects that are planned or underway. IBWC will maintain close communication with FEMA on all projects.

- **Public Comment**

Citizen question: Why does IBWC have only ten million dollars in funding to fix levees in Hidalgo County?

Commissioner Ruth: USIBWC has just started with construction contracts out of \$220 million dollars appropriated for Rio Grande levee rehabilitation through the Recovery Act. About half of that funding will be spent in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, mostly in Hidalgo County. We expect to be able to certify all levees from Peñitas to the Gulf of Mexico. The work will be completed by December 2010 or early 2011.

Eric Ellman from los Caminos del Rio made a statement that it is important to remind everyone to protect the public health in reference to water. Water can impact the health of people. There will be a Binational River Festival and we should be using the river for recreation. The previous Rio Fest made local and regional news. The plan now is to have a second River Festival and we have five months to get it altogether. The River Festival in March will commemorate late USIBWC Commissioner Carlos Marin because he supported the River Fest.

- **Suggested Future Agenda Items**

Progress on American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Projects

\*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.