HISTORY AND PROJECTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION

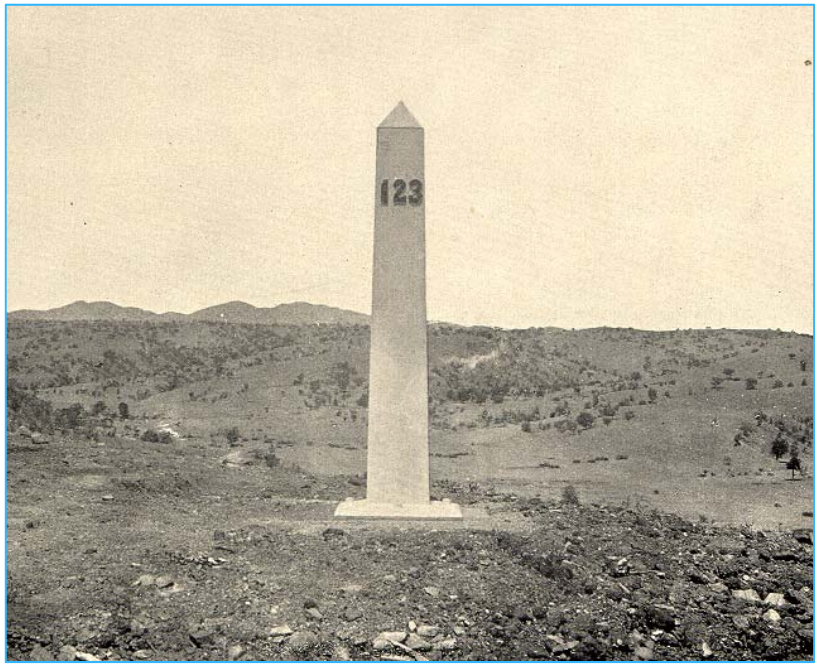
Sally Spener
U.S. Secretary
USIBWC

MISSION

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, is responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties between the two countries and settling differences that arise in their application.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE IBWC

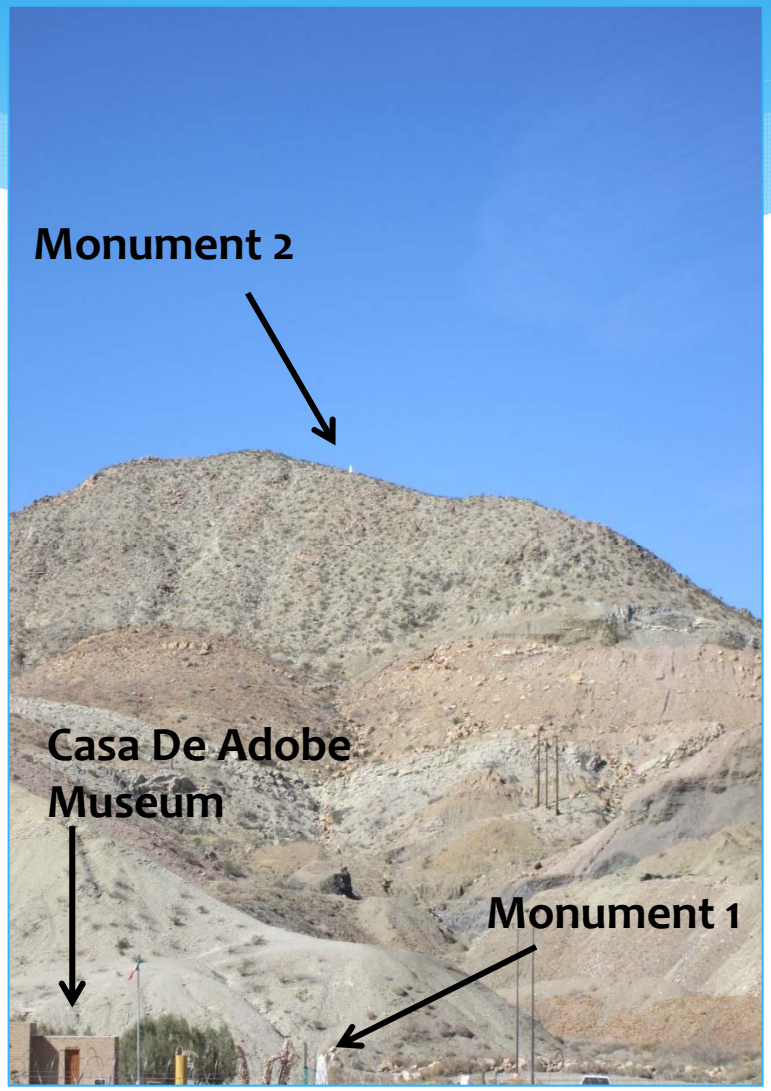
- **Convention of Nov. 12, 1884** – Adopted rules about the location of the boundary when the rivers changed course.
- **Convention of March 1, 1889** – Established the International Boundary Commission.
- Focus on maintaining the boundary.



Boundary Monument

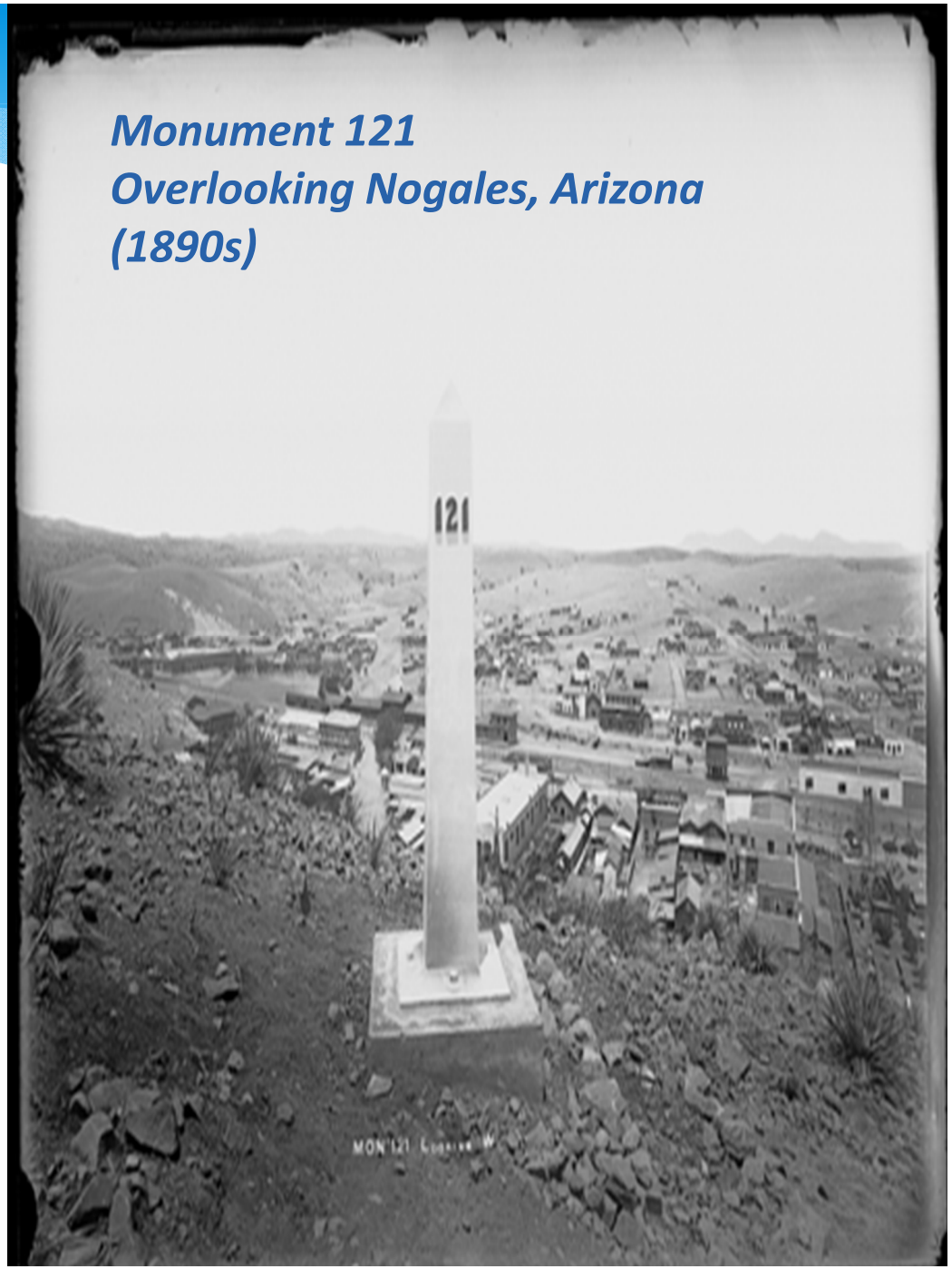
BOUNDARY MONUMENTS

- Monuments placed within line of sight
- 258 principal monuments
- Hundreds of intermediate markers



Monument 16 (1850s)
New Mexico just west of
El Paso, Texas

Monument 121
Overlooking Nogales, Arizona
(1890s)



BOUNDARY DEMARCATION

- IBWC makes official determination of international boundary
- Responsible for boundary demarcation at bridges and ports of entry

Tecate Port of Entry

CONVENTION OF 1906

- Distribution between Mexico and US of Rio Grande waters at El Paso-Cd. Juarez
- U.S. to deliver 60 kaf/yr
- Proportional reduction in deliveries in case of extraordinary drought
- Water stored in Elephant Butte Dam, NM
- Water diverted by Mexico at International Dam

American Dam

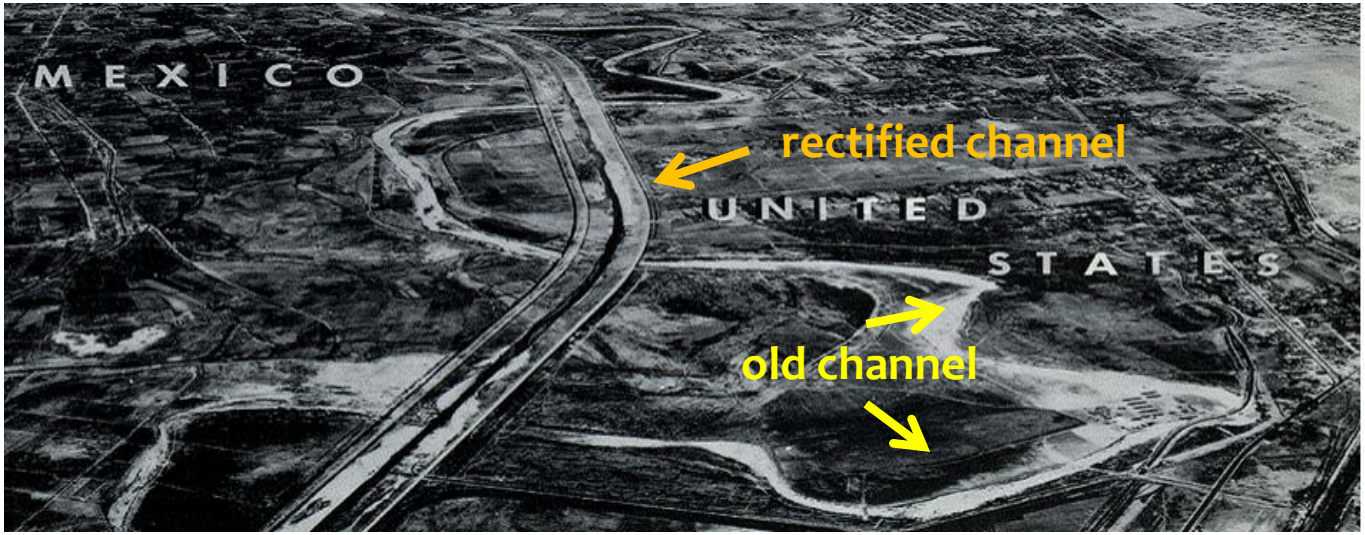
CONVENTION OF 1906

American Dam

International Dam

CONVENTION OF 1933

- Stabilized the boundary in the El Paso-Juarez Valley
- Straightened the river channel
- Flood control levees in both countries
- Rio Grande Rectification Project



The meandering river channel was straightened.

CONVENTION OF 1933

1944 WATER TREATY

TREATY OFFICERS

U.S. SECTION
- Commissioner
- Secretary
- 2 Principal Engineers
- Legal Advisor

MEXICAN SECTION
- Commissioner
- Secretary
- 2 Principal Engineers
- Legal Advisor

IBWC MINUTES

- Decisions of the Commission are recorded in the form of Minutes.
- Minutes are binding agreements of the IBWC intended to implement treaty.
- They take effect once approved by the U.S. Department of State and Mexico's Foreign Affairs Ministry

IBWC Commissioners and Secretaries sign Min. 319

1944 WATER TREATY – RIO GRANDE

- Mexico delivers water to the U.S. from Ft. Quitman to Gulf
- U.S. receives 1/3 of the waters arriving in the Rio Grande from 6 Mexican tributaries
- Minimum annual average of 350 kaf in cycles of 5 years
- Treaty authorized construction of up to three storage dams on Rio Grande; only 2 were built

Rio Grande at Ft. Quitman

1944 WATER TREATY – RIO GRANDE

El Paso-Juarez
Convention of 1906

1944 Water Treaty

1944 WATER TREATY – RIO GRANDE

1944 WATER TREATY–COLORADO RIVER

Colorado River at Northerly International Boundary

- U.S. to deliver to Mexico a volume of 1.5 maf/yr
- When there are surplus waters, U.S. to deliver to Mexico a total volume of up to 1.7 maf/yr
- In extraordinary drought, Mexico reduced in proportion to U.S.

CHAMIZAL CONVENTION

- 1963 treaty settled a boundary dispute at El Paso-Cd. Juarez
- Relocated Rio Grande in a concrete-lined channel
- Transferred 630 acres of land to Mexico and 193 acres to US
- Replacement of six bridges

Rio Grande in Chamizal Project channel

CHAMIZAL CONVENTION

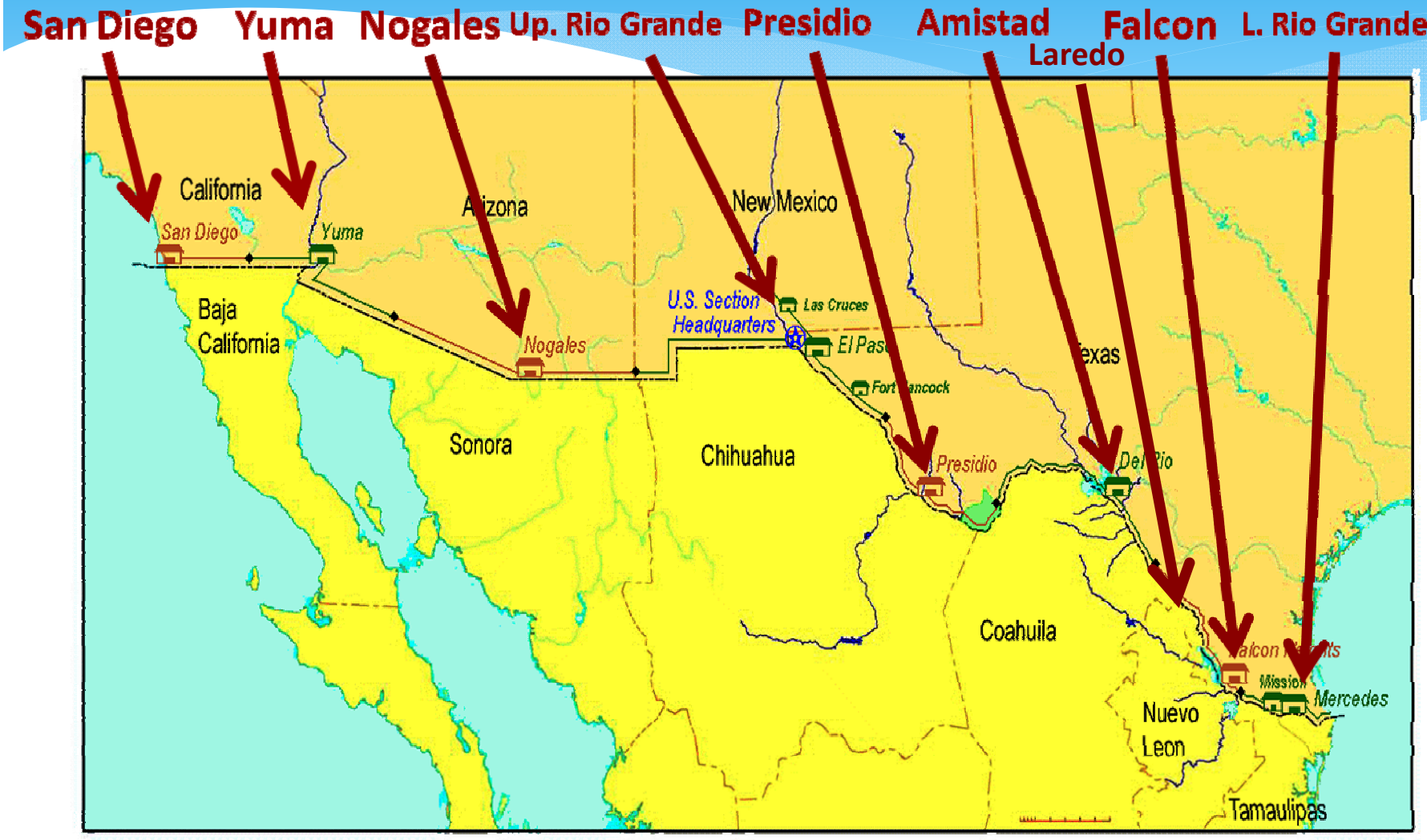
Cordova International Bridge of the Americas

1970 BOUNDARY TREATY

- IBWC to maintain Rio Grande and Colorado River as the boundary
- Boundary is middle of the channel occupied by normal flow or middle of the channel with greatest average width over its length
- IBWC delineates boundary on maps
- IBWC may stabilize or rectify the channel (numerous rectifications carried out)
- Prohibits construction of works that would obstruct or deflect normal or flood flows

Rio Grande at Los Ebanos

USIBWC FIELD OFFICES



SANITATION

- 1944 Treaty authorizes Commission to give "preferential attention to the solution of all border sanitation problems"
- IBWC performs water quality monitoring
- 3 international wastewater treatment plants
  - Nogales
  - South Bay
  - Nuevo Laredo

Nogales IWTP

AMISTAD DAM

- Located at Del Rio, TX-Cd. Acuña, Coahuila
- Built in 1969
- Impounded Rio Grande extends for 75 miles, covers 65,000 acres
- Normal conservation capacity of over 3 million acre-feet

Amistad Dam

FALCON DAM

- Located at Falcon Heights, TX-Nva. Cd. Guerrero, Coah.
- Built in 1954
- Reservoir covers 78,300 acres at conservation capacity
- Normal conservation capacity of 2.6 million acre-feet

Falcon Dam

FLOOD CONTROL

Presidio levee during 2008 flood

- **4 USIBWC Flood Control Projects**
  - **Tijuana River** – San Diego, CA
  - **Upper Rio Grande** – Southern New Mexico and West Texas
  - **Presidio** – Big Bend area of Texas
  - **Lower Rio Grande** – near McAllen, Harlingen, Brownsville
- USIBWC maintains flood control levees, tracks flow, operates diversion dams in coordination with Mexico

LOWER RIO GRANDE FLOOD CONTROL

Anzalduas Dam in 2007

Retamal Dam on July 18, 2010

FLOOD CONTROL- CANALIZATION

Rio Grande at Sunland Park, NM (2011)

- Rio Grande Canalization Project
  - 105 river miles from southern New Mexico to El Paso
  - Water delivery and flood control project
  - USIBWC maintains river levees
  - Undertaking habitat restoration

FLOOD CONTROL- CANALIZATION

Restoration site near Las Cruces, NM

LEVEE CONSTRUCTION

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION, UNITED STATES AND MEXICO
UNITED STATES SECTION

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