

USIBWC Citizens Forum Meeting
Nov 8, 2012 6:00-8:00 pm
Tijuana Estuary
City of Imperial Beach, California
Meeting Notes*

Board Members in attendance:

Aaron Allen, Office of Senator Juan Vargas
Bob Scott, URS
Mark West, Surfrider
Steve Smullen, USIBWC
Paloma Aguirre, Wildcoast (Alternate for Ben McCue)
Paul Ganster, San Diego State University
Jo Brooks, San Diego Coastkeeper

Board members who were absent:

Scott Huth
Patrick McDonough
Ben McCue

Members of the Public in attendance:

Jim Nakagawa, City of Imperial Beach
Denise Moreno Ducheny, USD-TBI
Chris Peregrin, Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve
Joan Brooks, volunteer, Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve
Javier Heras
Diane Castaneda, Wildcoast
Dennis La Salle, La Salle Solutions
Dennis Breedlove, River Partners
Kimberly McMurray-C. volunteer, Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve

Watershed Planning Discussions at the Binational Border Water Resources Summit, El Paso-Ciudad Juarez, September 2012

Paul Ganster, PhD, Director of the Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias, San Diego State University, gave a presentation about watershed planning issues discussed at the Summit sponsored by the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico. During the summit, brief tours were given of the new Anapra, Ciudad Juarez treatment plant and the Kay Bailey Hutchinson desalination facility on Fort Bliss in the City of El Paso. There was some discussion at the Summit concerning use of the Tijuana River watershed as a binational model for watershed planning. The proposed Minute on the trash and sediment problem in the Tijuana River Valley could provide a focus for future policy development. He presented single slide summaries of the various topics discussed at the Summit, including shared groundwater basins on the San Pedro River and in El Paso/Juarez Valleys, the use of watershed councils at El Paso/Juarez, and an overview of the Colorado River Basin water supply. Recommendations from the plenary session included establishment of sustainable structures such as watershed councils, involvement of stakeholders (especially the public but also academia and

the scientific community), and establishment of a data clearinghouse.

There were various comments, which included that it would be useful to have a binational watershed council for the Tijuana River, an idea expressed by various entities on both sides of the border. CONAGUA had stated in the plenary session that there is no legal framework for them. Steve Smullen (USIBWC) was surprised at the comment by CONAGUA. Although watershed planning is not addressed in the broad sense, there is a model for a binational approach in the Colorado River discussions under recent Minutes (318/317), and in the transboundary aquifer assessment program. These are primarily focused on water allocations and less on issues more distant from the actual border. Paul Ganster was of the opinion that a Minute is needed first before a council could be set up for the Tijuana River. Steve Smullen noted that issues tend to wane without a firm legal basis. Wildcoast suggested they should be developed informally at first. Chris Peregrine asked what the progress was on the Minute. Dr. Ganster said that there was some discussion of a January 2013 timeframe. Steve Smullen thought that this was very ambitious as he did not think there had been much progress of late due to focus on Colorado River issues and finalization of Minute 319.

An Introduction to the Tijuana River Mouth Marine Protected Areas

Diane Castaneda, Marine Conservation Coordinator at WILDCOAST, gave a presentation on the Marine Protected Area (MPA) at the mouth of the Tijuana River. This is part of a network of MPAs that have been designated in southern California over the past several years, in response to passage of the Marine Life Protection Act in 1999. The MPAs are managed by California Game and Fish to better the ecology and biological communities of the Pacific Ocean that have been severely impacted by overfishing and a resulting large decreases in fish populations. Even though mandated by law, there have been no funds allocated through Game and Fish to manage these sites. Wildcoast has been working informally with Game and Fish by providing education and signage to help people better understand the regulations. Basically, for the Tijuana River MPA, there are fishing restrictions for both recreational and commercial (only net fishing, no hook/line) interests. The MPA extends from the south end of Seacoast Drive to the border and about a mile and a half west from the immediate coast.

There followed questions from the audience. What are the restrictions and are they for fishing only? Yes, restrictions are for fish harvesting only. Only net fishing is permitted, no hook and line. Are there any connections in the network of MPAs? No physical connection, but they do provide protected areas that fish can migrate to/from and utilize. There are some biological connections but each MSA is a separate entity. Are there any reserves in Mexico? Yes, some are more successful than others – in some cases in Mexico, the public was not consulted or involved and protection from fishing in these areas is difficult. Many of these areas are in southern Baja California. How far does the MPA extend out to sea, does it include Border Field State Park? 1.5 miles, yes it includes the beach all the way to the border. Chris Peregrine asked if there was an agreement between Wildcoast and Fish and Game. No official agreement. Will access be opened eventually when fish populations increase? Probably not.

Update on Activities at the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) and the Tijuana River Flood Control Project

Steve Smullen, Area Operations Manager, U.S. Section, International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC), gave an overview of activities at both the SBIWTP and the Tijuana River Flood Control Project. The good news is that effluent quality has been in the

single digits for the past three months. Reasons are unknown but it may be a combination of things including higher wastewater temperature and (counter-intuitively) stronger wastewater from Tijuana. Two studies are underway. The first study is to develop alternative solutions to the problem of solids washout which is associated with effluent violations. The second study, which has been funded by EPA through the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC), concerns alternative solids stabilization processes with the aim of reducing sludge volumes for disposal while developing beneficial byproducts such as biogas. Both studies will have deliverables due in the Jan/Feb 2013 timeframe.

The IBWC is also excavating and processing 60,000 cubic yards of sediment and trash from the Flood Control Project, hopefully to be used for beach replenishment.

There is a discharge which began last Friday from the San Ysidro Land Port of Entry of up to 2 million gallons per day of treated groundwater – it is being discharged into the concrete channel in the US and will last for 8-10 months. There may be concerns downstream. Anyone with questions or concerns should contact the California Regional Water Quality Control Board as they issued the permit.

Lastly, CESPT, the Tijuana utility, is repairing/replacing the upper part of the force main /old parallel line so that reclaimed water can be sent from Pump Station No.1 in Tijuana to discharge at San Antonio de los Buenos Wastewater Treatment Plant in Mexico.

There followed questions from the audience as follows: Does Mexico provide any information on toxic pollutants coming into the SBIWTP? The International Boundary and Water Commission is commencing a biannual pretreatment meeting schedule to discuss impacts of old solids and toxics on the SBIWTP secondary plant. There was concern that people were not informed about the General Services Administration (GSA) discharge from the port of entry. Some felt this would exacerbate flooding conditions if the pilot channel downstream was not dredged by the City of San Diego. More questions arose as to location, amount of flow, etc. It appears from early observations that flows will be less than what was identified in the permit.

Suggested future agenda items

- Update /status on projects planned by CESPT, the Tijuana utility (this has already been scheduled with CESPT).
- CONAGUA providing information on watershed councils in Mexico.
- Status of conservation areas (deferred for a couple of Citizens Forum meetings)
- Update on Rio Alamar (Steve Smullen mentioned the San Diego Reader article and USIBWC Principal Engineer John Merino was checking on releasability of Rio Alamar data that had been received from Mexico).

February 21, 2013 was set as the date for the next 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.