

**Rio Grande Citizens Forum**  
**El Paso, Texas**  
**November 6, 2013**  
**\* Tentative Meeting Notes**

Welcoming Remarks:

At 6:30 PM Citizens Forum co-chair Carlos Peña convened meeting. He welcomed group, introduced present board members and the let audience introduce themselves. Invited Lisa Ramirez to Podium for 1<sup>st</sup> presentation.

Annual Update on Water Quality for the Rio Grande and the Clean Rivers Program (CRP) – Lisa Ramirez, P.E., LEED AP, USIBWC CRP Program Manager, and Leslie Grijalva, CRP Quality Assurance officer.

Lisa Ramirez presented on the history of the Clean Rivers Program (CRP) (posted on IBWC website at [http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF\\_URG\\_WQ\\_CRP\\_011414.pdf](http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_WQ_CRP_011414.pdf) ) and discussed their role in monitoring the river's water quality. She explained that the CRP is a state-funded program that consists of a group of federal, state, and local organization that have an interest in the health of Texas' streams, rivers, and lakes. Additionally, she gave an overview of CRP activities which included water monitoring, quality assessment publications, outreach, environmental education, and public participation such as the Basin Advisory Committee.

Ms. Ramirez went on to inform those present that the CRP was holding a student essay and drawing contest for grades K-12 with the categories split in three; K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. The entries were to address the three areas, 1) the importance of water, 2) how the Rio Grande was important to them, and 3) how they enjoy the river. Entries due December 6, 2013. Winning entries are to be published in the 2014 Basin Highlight Report with the first place drawing being the cover.

Ms. Ramirez discussed the El Paso Community College (EPCC) Service Learning (SL) Program explaining that IBWC is one of a few agencies in partnership with EPCC providing students with hands-on experience in environmental sciences. Additionally, EPCC has provided a grant for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) students through the Service Learning Program. Students gain hands-on experience in water quality monitoring, river cleanups, outreach activities, scientific literature reviews and creation of materials such as videos, brochures and website. The grant also includes training of teachers on incorporating SL in the classroom. Ms. Ramirez concluded her portion of the presentation and turned the podium over to Ms. Leslie Grijalva.

Ms. Grijalva summarized the main issues concerning the upper Rio Grande sub basin. She highlighted bacteria and nutrients and salinity noting that some waters in the Upper reaches are naturally saline.

She continued with showing examples of the problems that can be seen because of these concerns mentioned above. Fish kills, foam on water and invasive species.

Ms. Grijalva summarized the assessment that Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) performs every year, integrated report. 2012 report released and approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) May 2013. She outlined the network and process used to list a water body on the 303(d) list for either a concern or impairment. She presented the actual standards that are enforced as of 2010 and the proposed new standards awaiting approval for 2012. She explained that not every parameter that CRP monitors has standards. She updated audience that Rio Grande in its entirety is listed as primary recreation

use and noted the difference between primary and secondary. Ms. Grijalva also described the changes for the Upper reaches on the 303(d) list.

Two examples of parameters, E.Coli and Conductivity, were provided by Ms. Grijalva and she explained what spikes in historical data graphs mean. She also described the current ongoing Mercury study in this region.

Quality update closed with summarization of other programs available to get involved in water quality like Adopt-a-River and Paso del Norte Watershed Council.

Presentation ended with an orientation of the CRP website <http://www.ibwc.gov/CRP/Index.htm> and the meeting was opened for questions.

Carlos Peña asked three questions:

Question - Do we know the source of the spikes for the station data shown? Answer - No we haven't identified a certain source. We don't do source tracking on a regular basis. Spikes can be related to rain runoff. EPCC currently doing source tracking study. CRP just monitors.

Question - Does the mercury study include monitoring of fish tissue? Answer - Just water quality.

Question - What is the definition of least disturbed stream? Answer - Pristine conditions.

Questions asked by others:

Question - Seemed like Presidio had quite a bit of stations but nothing between Fabens and there. Why are there no stations in that gap? Answer - There are sites there but are decommissioned due to security concerns, there was a shooting there a few years ago.

Question - What is considered a legal discharge? Answered by Carlos Rincon of EPA, and Leslie - Anything with a TCEQ permit, Rio Grande doesn't have enforcement because it is international. TCEQ has database of all permits.

Question - When will nutrient standards come out? Answer - We don't know. TCEQ is working that now. We anticipate TCEQ will forward standards in a year or so and then they would need EPA approval.

Question - Is Arsenic included in CRP monitoring? Answer - We do look for it. El Paso gets testing from El Paso Water Utility.

Dr. Keyes commented on New Mexico portion above El Paso to dams up north about monitoring from past 2-3 years. He said that effort did involve some source tracking. This is available on Paso del Norte Watershed Council website, [www.pdnwc.org](http://www.pdnwc.org). Also Paso del Norte Watershed Council's next meeting is December 6 at 1:00 at USIBWC.

With the questions answered, Ms. Grijalva's presentation was completed and the meeting was turned over to Dr. Padinare Unnikrishna.

Water Budget Study for the Rio Grande Canalization Project - Dr. Padinare Unnikrishna, Hydraulic Engineer, USIBWC

Dr. Unnikrishna went on to present on the Rio Grande Canalization Project - Preliminary Water Budget Study (the presentation is posted on IBWC website at: [http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF\\_URG\\_Can\\_Study\\_011414.pdf](http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_Can_Study_011414.pdf)) describing the current project that is nearing end of study. He explained that the study is being done in partnership with the United State Bureau

of Reclamation. The study is being conducted by Tetra Tech, consultant, and will be completed January of 2014. The study is analyzing severe drought, implications of delayed and normal irrigation releases, magnitude of individual water budget components, developing models for predictive capability and obtaining recommendations/insights on managing water releases in the years ahead.

Dr. Unnikrishna discussed the components of the Water Budget Study such as the *Study Area*, selection of the *Time Step* (annual, monthly, weekly, etc.), and the *Calculations* over each time step. He explained that the Change In Storage was calculated by subtracting the outflow of water from the inflow of water.

The presentation provided various models, charts and graphs summarizing the data that has been gathered to date. The summary indicated that 1) releases were mostly accounted for by irrigation diversions, downstream outflow and seepage, 2) channel seepage varied between 18 and 25% of the total inflows, 3) a delayed irrigation release decreased channel seepage by 2.7% to 5.5% of Caballo Dam's 2012 release. (Note: increase in pumping may increase initial seepage and decrease these percentages.) 4) study provides a good foundation for future water budget studies and water management along the Rio Grande Canalization Project.

Recommendations made included 1) delayed releases and/or shortened releases that may provide some decrease in channel seepage, 2) improvements in data collection, 3) integrated surface water and groundwater evaluation is required as the USGS 2007 groundwater model needs updating for subsequent years, 4) improved understanding of processes controlling river-groundwater exchanges, 5) extend the study downstream to include Ft. Quitman to include El Paso water use, 6) explore alternate software for better quantification of channel seepage and groundwater return flows so that they can be included in the water budget calculations.

Presentation ended with the recommendations and the meeting was opened for questions.

Question - If gauging at American Dam then why the difference in figures? Answer - Due to different variables.

There were no further questions.

Dr. Unnikrishna then turned the meeting over to Ms. Andrea Glover.

Update on Rio Grande Flood Control Levee Construction and Design Schedule – Andrea Glover, Civil Engineer, USIBWC

Ms. Glover provided a brief update on relevant construction projects referring to a handout she provided to members of the audience. (Construction Flyer - handout posted on the IBWC Website at [http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF\\_URG\\_Flyer\\_011414.pdf](http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_Flyer_011414.pdf).)

She discussed the status with each of the projects and the meeting was opened for questions.

Question - What is the status of the levee certification process? Answer - Mr. Carlos Peña responded that IBWC has been working on certifying levees to FEMA.

There was some concern among some members of the audience about quality control and delays in completing rehabilitation of some levee segments because of the need to rework some of the segments. The U.S. Section is working through the contracting process and legal issues to address the problems; the goal is to make sure the levees are completed in a structurally sound manner.

There were also questions about the sound of the floodgate at Country Club Bridge. Neighbors have complained that it makes a bothersome noise when vehicles drive over it. USIBWC engineers are preparing a report on this to consider options. The gate appears to be working as intended and installation appears to have been done appropriately by the contractor.

#### Public Comment

The meeting was then opened for public comment.

Bill Addington spoke about the effort to remove Asarco-contaminated soil from the area around the American Dam and American Canal. He stated that it should not be disposed in the Camino Real landfill and he expressed concern about whether that landfill has adequate environmental safeguards to handle waste related to Asarco. USIBWC stated that the soil removed from USIBWC lands would be taken to a federally certified landfill determined by the contractor removing the soil.

Carlos Rincon (EPA) announced a meeting on November 19 with Mexican officials at the American Dam/Carlos Marin Field Office of USIBWC.

#### Suggested Future Agenda Items

Presentation by the Ciudad Juarez water utility or the Mexican Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission about adding Ciudad Juarez primary effluent discharge downstream of Ciudad Juarez in the Juarez Valley.

Asarco remediation

Mr. John Balliew suggested siltation and carrying capacity of the Rio Grande from Fabens to the county line.

Chris Canavan, New Mexico Environment Department, proposed New Mexico water quality, a study in the lower reach by El Paso.

\*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.