

**Lower Rio Grande Citizens' Forum Meeting
April 19, 2006
Brownsville, Texas**

Tentative Meeting Notes*

Board Members in Attendance:

Neil Haman
Joe Coulter
Martha Noell
Wayne Wells
Laura De La Garza
Jose Muñoz
William Lewis

Board Members Absent:

Mary Lou Campbell
Kika De La Garza
Jerry Freeman

USIBWC Staff in Attendance:

Carlos Marin
Enrique Reyes
Raymundo Aguirre
MaryAnn Rivera

Mexico IBWC Staff in Attendance:

Ing. Felipe Chalons

About 29 other people in attendance.

Welcome and Introductions:

Citizens' Forum Co-Chair Wayne Wells gave the welcome and introduced the other Co-Chair, USIBWC Lower Rio Grande Project Manager Rick Reyes. Mr. Reyes asked those in attendance to introduce themselves. Rick then introduced the presenters for the presentations as follows:

ARROYO COLORADO WATERSHED PROTECTION PLAN

Laura De La Garza, Watershed Coordinator for the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership, gave an update and highlights on the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan. She gave a brief history of what led up the community-based planning effort, described the water quality

impairments, the sources and causes of those impairments, and what is planned in order to improve the quality of water in the Arroyo Colorado.

Ms. De La Garza described the main sources of pollution to the Arroyo Colorado as coming from agricultural fields, municipal wastewater treatment facilities, and urban storm water runoff. She explained that part of the problem of the Arroyo Colorado is the physical characteristics of the stream itself and the TCEQ TMDL Section is conducting a Phase II TMDL analysis to determine how much of the problem is associated with pollutant loading and how much is due to the physical characteristics of the stream.

The basic plan is to reduce the amount of total nitrogen, orthophosphate, biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), bacteria and suspended sediment entering the Arroyo Colorado. The overall goal of the plan is to achieve a 20% reduction in nutrient loading over the next ten years. The plan proposes to achieve reductions of the pollutants of concern by:

- Encouraging the voluntary adoptions of best management practices (BMPs) on irrigated cropland fields such as nutrient management, land leveling, and improved irrigation techniques.
- Supporting new and improved wastewater treatment facilities (WWTFs).
- Increased wastewater and storm water infrastructure development for rural and unincorporated low-income communities within the Arroyo Colorado.
- Encouraging and supporting enhanced treatment of effluent from WWTFs.
- Supporting the adoption of BMPs to control nonpoint source pollution (storm water runoff) from municipalities.
- Filling data gaps and continuously monitoring the progress of the plan.
- Conserving and restoring existing riparian wetland habitats.
- Reducing channel and stream bank erosion.
- Constructing wetlands to improve quality.
- Providing information and education on water quality issues.
- Providing information and education on low impact urban development techniques.

LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: Managing Public Use, the World Birding Center, and Supporting Nature-based Tourism in the Valley

Ken Merritt, Project Leader for the South Texas Refuge Complex, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, presented a program on the National Wildlife Refuges in the Valley and nature tourism. A general overview of Santa Ana, Lower Rio Grande Valley and Laguna Atascosa was presented along with a specific discussion of the current status of the “wildlife corridor”. Information was also presented on the unique wildlife species that occur in the Valley, especially the unique birds that draw tourists to the area. A brief discussion of economic benefits of eco-tourism informed the audience that the protection and restoration of wildlife habitat is a key ingredient in bringing over \$150 million to Valley businesses each year.

STATUS OF USIBWC LEVEE REHABILITATION PROJECT

Dr. Raymundo Aguirre, USIBWC engineer, gave this presentation concerning the status of the

levee rehabilitation project. Dr. Aguirre gave a brief explanation of the background of this project including the results from studies that have been done on the IBWC levees and how these studies have shown deficiencies in both levee heights and in structural integrity in some areas. He described the levee reaches which are currently being addressed for rehabilitation. These reaches include the following: Mission Levee, Anzalduas Dam to Hidalgo Loop(Common Levee), Hidalgo Loop Levee, Lateral A to Retamal Dam, Progreso Bridge Area, Upstream Of Brownsville Area, and Interior Floodway Levee. He stated that the Hidalgo Loop Levee is being done in two phases with the final design of Phase 1 currently being 95% complete and the estimated construction cost being \$3.56 million. Dr. Aguirre added that the conceptual design of Phase 2 is 95% complete and the estimated construction cost for this phase is \$4.44 million. On the Mission Levee and the Common Levee, an Environmental Assessment is in progress and the estimated completion date is September, 2006. On the reach from Lateral A to Retamal Dam, the scope of work for an Environmental Assessment has been completed with the estimated completion date for the assessment being September 2007. Finally, the scope of work for geotechnical field surveys of all levees except the Hidalgo Loop Levee has been completed.

After the presentation there were several questions.

Joe Tucker: What happened to the three feet of freeboard the river levee was raised to provide? Can IBWC duplicate the water elevations from 1967 using the model?

Aguirre: Conditions at the time and tools available at the time are the difference.

Tucker: Is the IBWC saying the flood profile computations after the 1967 flood were all wrong?

Aguirre: I have not compared them. Calculations are based on certain distributions of flow.

Tucker: Are we going to have problems in the interior floodway that we don't have now?

Aguirre: We've recognized that.

Joe Coulter: Commented that if the 1967 flood were to occur now it would be a disaster. Said he hoped that the plan IBWC comes up with is reviewed by others so it won't be just IBWC's plan.

Marin: Should know in the next few weeks if the supplemental process can add money this fiscal year for the levee project. Also working on '07 budget to add \$10 million.

MORILLO DRAIN REHABILITATION PROJECT

Acting United States Commissioner Carlos Marin gave a presentation on the Morillo Drain Project. He stated that \$650,000 had been received as a result of efforts from Senator Hutchison. The money had been given to EPA and EPA has transferred \$625,000 to IBWC. EPA kept \$25,000 for administrative purposes. In an effort to utilize the money, IBWC has requested recommendations from Mexico's National Water Commission (CNA) for ways to improve the project and cut down on O&M costs. At the present time, CNA is working on plans for stabilizing the steep slopes between the Morillo Canal and the Anzalduas Canal.

Rick Reyes asked for any other comments from the public and there were none. The meeting was adjourned. After the meeting, Rick discussed the location for the next meeting with board members present and most agreed that Weslaco would be preferable.

*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.