

Rio Grande Citizens' Forum
August 4, 2005
El Paso, TX
Tentative Meeting Notes*

Board Members in Attendance:

Mike Fahy
Joe Groff
Alisa Jorgensen
Sal Quitanilla
Chuy Reyes
Irene Tejeda

Board Members Absent:

Kevin Bixby
Chris Brown
Lupe Garcia
Keith Landreth
Alexandro Lozano
Henry Magallanez
Denise McWilliams

Alternates Absent:

Ed Dominguez
Ed Provencio

USIBWC Staff in Attendance:

Gilbert Anaya
Wayne Belzer
Patricia Dominguez
Carlos Marin
Sally Spener

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Martha Reyes Ysleta Independent School District (YISD)
Andy Ramirez, YISD
Robert Kimpel, farmer
Valerie Beversdorf, EBID
Archie Clouse, TCEQ
Cory Horan, TCEQ
Elizabeth Kistin, University of Oxford
David Kistin, University of New Mexico
Roberto Rios, EPCWID #1
Joe Castro, TCEQ
Chris Canavan, NMED/SWQB
Inga Groff, League of Women Voters

Jaime Iglesias, Texas Cooperative Extension
John Sproul, UTEP-CERM, Rio Bosque Park
Nancy Hanks, Paso del Norte Watershed Council
Robert Garcia, DSHS - Office of Border Health
Jorge Castillo, TCEQ
Robert Martinez, U.S. Border Patrol
Chuck Kooshian, City of El Paso Planning
Ari Michelsen, Texas A & M University - TAES
Steven Silver, Groundwork El Paso
Anna Fahy, El Paso Community College
David Austin, Rio Grande Institute
Lorenzo Arriaga, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Woody Irving, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Jeff Langman, USGS
Bill Teague, TCE, Culberson County

Friends of the Rio Grande Award Ceremony

Wayne Belzer, Clean Rivers Program (CRP) Manager for USIBWC, stated that part of our program is to get input from the citizens about needs to be done. Last year, we picked up another item to try to expand our program. We teamed up with TCEQ on the Friends of the Rio Grande Initiative. He then introduced Cory Horan of TCEQ.

Mr. Horan noted that CRP is primarily a data collection program for water quality across the state and TCEQ contracts with IBWC for the Rio Grande Basin. The Legislature recommended the Friends of the Rio Grande program which gave us the opportunity to give back to stakeholders as a more direct support line. IBWC was the perfect choice to do this program. There are three main goals: 1) volunteer water quality data collection, 2) volunteer public citizen clean ups, 3) general outreach on water quality issues. Today we are recognizing those upstream of Amistad.

Archie Clouse, Regional Director of TCEQ was recognized to present the awards jointly with Wayne Belzer. Awards were presented as follows:

- Culberson County - rainwater recapture
- Groundworks El Paso - a local organization beautifying our river, making parks along the river to improve the riparian habitat.
- Paso del Norte Watershed Council - put together a web site for the general public to learn about water issues in the region
- Rio Bosque Park - UTEP and many other organizations worked to get the park established to improve the habitat in the region

Clean Rivers Program and Water Quality Update in the Upper Rio Grande Basin

Wayne Belzer provided additional information about the CRP. TCEQ and IBWC continue to work on education and outreach, water quality monitoring, and protection of the environment. We have other agencies in this region that do some of this work. Through the Friends of the

Rio Grande, over \$69,000 in assistance has been provided. The State of Texas has provided funds.

CRP does water quality monitoring and we seek partnerships. The Rio Grande Basin has the highest number of partners. Texas A & M Kingsville has recently agreed to do work in the Rio Grande Basin to look at tributary flow in the Laredo area.

CRP does special studies such as:

- Salinity source tracking in the Pecos River. Texas A & M will do more work in this area especially due to salinity at Amistad, a drinking water source.
- Real time monitoring along the Pecos River and Rio Grande. We are going to add 3-4 more sites on the Rio Grande and another site on the Pecos to provide real time data on water quality in the area.
- Tributary inflow in the Laredo area - to be done by Texas A & M Kingsville

In compiling and analyzing water quality data, a 5-year running average is looked at. The results are then compared to the standards for the river's use in the area such as a drinking water source or for recreation. The same issues we had last year are the same now - primarily bacteria, nutrients, total dissolved solids, and salt loading in the Rio Grande. The entire Upper Rio Grande reach from El Paso to Amistad shows impacts. In El Paso, we have a bacteria issue but that issue is beginning to go down due to work by agencies in New Mexico and Texas. But downstream of El Paso those issues arise again. We have phosphorous issues until the Conchos River confluence and TDS issues throughout.

For more information, the Annual Report is available online in PDF format at: www.ibwc.state.gov/CRP/Welcome.htm. We would be happy to provide a hard copy of the report to anyone who would like a copy once it returns from the printer.

Lorenzo Arriaga suggested that the next step may be some kind of interpretive study to identify hot spots, source spots, and treatment methods. Belzer replied that source identification is important and difficult. Right now we are collecting data and making our best guess.

Carlos Marin noted that IBWC has a lot of dealings with TCEQ such as on the water debt in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Mexico owes us about 100,000 acre-feet right now after owing us more than 1 million acre-feet in the past. Our cycle year ends in September and they are about 200,000 acre-feet behind on the current year deliveries. So we hope not to end in deficit on that one. TCEQ also works with us on spills on the Rio Grande and other issues like that.

Overview of El Paso County Water Improvement District #1

Chuy Reyes, General Manager and Board Member, gave this presentation. He presented a slide with the names of the board members and officers noting that the board has many years of experience and they have been great supporters for him as he began work as General Manager during the drought.

The EPCWID#1 is a political subdivision of the State of Texas. The district is empowered to

levy and assess taxes against lands having water rights within the boundaries of the district. The district covers an area from the state line at Anthony to Tornillo/Hudspeth County line. It covers part of the Upper Valley and from past Bowie High School to the Hudspeth County line. The majority of irrigable land is located south of North Loop.

The project as we know it today was completed in 1925. In 1996 the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation deeded to the district all the easements, canals, ditches, drains, rights of way, etc. There are 400 miles of drains and 350 miles of canals. The district has 70 employees. 376,860 acre-feet of water is their allocation from the Bureau. The board establishes the allocation to the water users after the Bureau has allocated to the irrigation districts. A full allocation allows water users four acre-feet. A full allocation would provide small tract water users (those with two acres or less) about ten irrigations. The district has 32,000 water accounts, 85% of them are small tract. PSB is their largest user. The district has three sources of water - project water/Elephant Butte Dam, 62 district water wells, and treated sewer water through agreement with the PSB.

Drought and its effects. We entered into a drought two years ago; less water means less revenue. They reduced the operating budget from \$8 million/year to \$5 million and laid off 18 employees. They canceled and postponed some projects such as concrete lining of canals. On the positive side, the board had the foresight to drill 62 wells. During the first year of the drought, they delivered two acre-feet of water and the second year they delivered three acre-feet of water including water delivered to the Rio Bosque, PSB, and others.

One of the biggest accomplishments has been to bring the irrigation district board and PSB back to the negotiating table. We were able to stay the lawsuits and dismissed all lawsuits against each other. We negotiated a short-term forbearance contract to allow the PSB to seek contracts from water users on plots of two acres and up so that the farmer can enter into negotiations with the PSB to lease water to the PSB for up to five years. We were able to drill 20 water wells inside the city limits. The City of El Paso receives half of that water when the wells are in production. They also receive project water into the Jonathan Rogers Treatment Plant and they use the well water. We came to agreement with the Hudspeth irrigation district, El Paso Water Utilities, and others on certificates of adjudication. We were the only irrigation district in Texas that had not done that and it was a big accomplishment.

Cooperation between agencies. Monthly meetings are held with El Paso Water Utilities (EPWU), Elephant Butte Irrigation District, Mexico, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and IBWC to discuss allocations and water orders. We try to coordinate our water orders to minimize conveyance losses. Other monthly meetings are held with the water utility and farmers to address concerns. They produce a newsletter during the irrigation season and they have a web page, www.epcwidl.org.

Joe Groff - Where is your water measured?

Reyes - At American Dam

Chuck Kooshian - Do you receive treated wastewater in exchange for project water?

Reyes - We have three different contracts that we have agreed to. That sewer water is available to us southeast of the Jonathan Rogers Treatment Plant where it is mixed with project water. But

we do exchange some project water. Those contracts can be viewed by the public.

Alisa Jorgensen - How much water is produced by the 62 wells?

Reyes - Up to 80,000 acre-feet.

Inga Groff - What is the status of the well being made available to the Rio Bosque?

Reyes and John Sproul (Rio Bosque manager) - We are waiting to hear back from the driller as to when he can come back. We are hoping that he will do it soon, maybe in October.

Jaime Iglesias - Is the water exchange with EPWU based on volume or quality?

Reyes - It is based on both. The formula that is used can be provided to the public.

Jorge Castillo - A couple of months back, there was discussion in the press of modification of election rules for the district. What is the status of that?

Reyes - The bill died so we would have to take it back up next time around. We want to protect our water users and the people who are actually paying the taxes and use the water so they can control their own destiny. There are 190,000 eligible voters in the district. If the state were to only allow the water users to vote, then it would drop down to about 95,000 (VERIFY THIS NUMBER).

Sal Quintanilla - When will you shut down the dam for the end of this irrigation season?

Reyes - We are thinking of shutting down at the end of the second week of October depending on water orders at that time. They will leave some water in the dam and we will start much better next irrigation season.

Marin - The water that arrives here at El Paso where USIBWC diverts the water for use by the irrigation district. Any water below American Dam down to International Dam belongs to Mexico. Mexico diverts its water at International Dam and from there down, the river is basically dry. The Bureau controls the water that arrives here and the IBWC splits it into different ownerships. Last weekend, we had an issue where there was trash affecting the gates of the dam and Mexico didn't get some of their water.

Update on Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for USIBWC Flood Control Projects

Gilbert Anaya provided this update. The intent of the Programmatic EIS was to develop an environmental document to look at our five flood control projects located in the Tijuana River in California, the Canalization and Rectification Projects in this area, Presidio, and in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. The process was initiated and ongoing. There were certain things that came up during the process where we had to re-evaluate what we were going to do because of differences in time schedules for addressing these issues. There were time constraints for some of the projects and that was starting to become an issue. We had some projects initiated in South Texas, particularly the Hidalgo Hike and Bike Trail project, and in Hidalgo County in Hidalgo and Mission. These were relying on us having a Programmatic EIS by next year.

Because of ongoing issues in other areas, such as the Canalization Project, we were not going to meet that deadline so we decided to postpone that process in order to go to site-specific EAs and EISes. We have put the Programmatic on hold and will address the projects on a site-specific basis. What this means for the Canalization Project is that the O & M will continue as we have been doing in the past. We will apply for necessary permits to conduct the work. Regarding the Record of Decision, because of the concerns of the stakeholders, Gov. Richardson, and Sen. Bingaman, the signing was postponed for a year. We are working with those stakeholders to address those concerns that have been ongoing. We intend to meet our obligations for the Canalization and Rectification area. We have a MOU to do an EIS for the Rectification Project and it is our intent to fulfill our obligation.

Jorge Castillo - Do you recall the length of the Hike and Bike Trail in Hidalgo?

Anaya and Carlos Marin - About 4 miles. A portion of it will be on the levee itself.

Anaya - The other EA is 6-7 miles, and a third is about 10 miles of levee that will be improved

Ari Michelsen - When do you anticipate a ROD coming out for the Canalization EIS?

Anaya - That won't occur until there is some sort of consensus among the stakeholders involved. There is still concern about the preferred alternative and making it amenable to the parties involved.

Michelsen - What if that leads to an alternative not in the original EIS.?

Anaya - It would probably need to be a supplemental if that's the case.

Public Comment

Robert Kimpel - We have a problem in Hudspeth County on the Guayuco Arroyo. The Diablo has a dam and another arroyo has a lake. Is there any type of a process to request a flood control study on the Guayuco Arroyo? It would help the IBWC and the farmers.

Marin - Due to the financial situation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, IBWC, and the Bureau of Reclamation, it would take a concerted effort to show the need for it. We have removed a lot of sediment in the area. Perhaps a new project could be put together with the other federal agencies. Last year, due to the sediment, the river bed was higher than the adjacent farm lands and the water was flooding the adjacent land. We can look into it to see what we can come up with and contact the Corps of Engineers.

Kimpel - It's one of the few unprotected arroyos and it has a large watershed that drains into it. Last monsoon season a year ago there was a lot of sediment.

Marin - We will look into it.

Joe Groff requested additional information about the rainwater harvesting effort in Culberson County that was recognized with the Friends of the Rio Grande award. Bill Teague of Culberson County stated that annual precipitation is about 11 inches /year. The program just started this year so no measurements have yet been made. The initial effort is to put a 2500 gallon tank at the courthouse to capture surface runoff from the roof. Savings will be measured by looking at the water bill. They will irrigate the front and side lawns along the courthouse and vegetable crops. If we can do this then we can encourage other counties to do it.

Ari Michelsen - Texas A & M Research Center in El Paso will be investigating rainwater harvesting and will install those tanks this fall and do the economic study.

Suggested Future Agenda Items

Joe Groff - Good Neighbor Environmental Board to discuss their latest report.

Reyes - Save the Valley efforts.

Jaime Iglesias - Salt content in the soil in the Lower Valley of El Paso. Sodium and salt is coming up to really high levels.

Marin - Salt cedar report by Jaime Iglesias.

Member of the public- Update on pending and recent legislation at the federal level. There are a number of bills of interest.

Fahy - Proposals from three of the members of the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission have been selected by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for Water 2025 Challenge Grant awards during

the 2005 program. They are El Paso Water Utilities, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, and Las Cruces. Representatives from each of the three organizations can be invited to describe their respective projects.

Joe Groff suggested that e-mail addresses for the speakers be provided on the meeting agenda.

*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.