

**Rio Grande Citizens Forum  
Weslaco, TX  
May 14, 2014  
Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:

Rodolfo Montero, USIBWC Mercedes Field Office  
Omar Rios  
Humberto Barrera  
Joe Califa  
Hudson DeYoe

USIBWC Staff in attendance:

Rodolfo Montero, Area Operations Manager, USIBWC Mercedes Field Office  
Carlos Peña, USIBWC Principle Engineer of Operations  
Leslie Grijalva, Environmental Protection Specialist  
Ramon F. Navarro, Civil Engineer, USIBWC Mercedes Field Office

Welcoming Remarks

At 2:00 PM Citizens Forum co-chair Omar Rios convened the meeting. He welcomed the group, introduced present board members and then asked the audience to introduce themselves. He then invites Leslie Grijalva to the podium for the 1<sup>st</sup> presentation.

Presentation 1- Water Quality in the Lower Rio Grande: Annual Water Quality Update and Basin Advisory Meeting- Leslie Grijalva, Environmental Protection Specialist, USIBWC Texas Clean Rivers Program

Leslie Grijalva presented on the history of the Clean Rivers Program (CRP) (posted on the IBWC website) and discussed their role in the monitoring of the Rio Grande's water quality. She explained that the CRP is a state fee-funded program that consists of a group of federal, state, and local organizations 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. She spoke about the

monitoring stations located in the lower Rio Grande, and the partners in the area that assist with sampling those stations.

Ms. Grijalva then went on to inform those present about the impairments for water quality in the lower Rio Grande, which include bacteria. She discussed the improving bacteria levels in Brownsville, attributing them to the opening of the wastewater treatment plant in 2008, and stated that bacteria is increasing in Rio Grande City and McAllen. She also discussed the salinity issues, and how the USIBWC and the Rio Grande Watermaster handle high salinity in the water. The data does not indicate that there is a salinity problem, but CRP will continue to monitor the data. Ms. Grijalva also informed the public about the progress of the Lower Rio Grande Water Quality Initiative, which is a binational study looking at salinity and bacteria in the lower Rio Grande from Falcon Dam to the Gulf of Mexico. The project included a reconnaissance survey of the area in December 2013.

Ms. Grijalva then gave an update on the Rio Salado fish kill near Falcon Reservoir. She gave a timeline of the events, beginning from the date of the fish kill siting to when the USIBWC first learned of the problem. The IBWC and TCEQ mobilized teams to collect samples, within two days after learning of the issue. Both the testing done by CONAGUA and the testing done by the USIBWC and TCEQ did not indicate any contaminants in the water, and every parameter tested below the water quality standards. There were no other fish kills reported downstream, and results were inconclusive as to what may have caused the fish kill. She explained that there were no indications that there was any significant or immediate threat to water quality in Falcon Reservoir. Ms. Grijalva also explained that contrary to what had been reported, a source for the contamination had not been confirmed. Ms. Grijalva then went on to explain what the IBWC and TCEQ do in response to fish kill reports, which includes cooperation with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Kills and Spills team, and coordination by all agencies involved. She cited other examples in the Rio Grande where fish kills have occurred and are usually attributed to natural causes, such as low dissolved oxygen and high temperatures. Ms. Grijalva stated that as a result of this incident, the IBWC (U.S. and MX Sections) are reviewing their protocols to improve communication with domestic authorities about fish kills on tributaries to the Rio Grande, so that information can be shared in a timely manner between the two sections.

Presentation ended with contact information for the Clean Rivers program staff and was opened for questions.

Question- Why does Arroyo Los Olmos have a standard that is lower than the rest of stations (because the line is at the bottom)? Answer- The standard is actually the same, but the scale is different for that graph. The station has had several high exceedances and required a much larger scale to graph the numbers.

Question- What exactly was tested for during the testing of the water of the Rio Salado fish kill? Answer- Let's go back to the slides that list the parameters. Discussion on the parameters and what they show.

Question- If it took so long for you to get notification, would anything have even showed up by the time you tested? Answer- No, anything in the water would have probably no longer been in the area anymore. However, there were no reported fish kills on either side of the border anywhere downstream after that initial report. Had something been in the water, it would have affected the fish all the way to the Gulf.

Question- What is being done to make sure that Mexico notifies you more quickly than this time? Answer- The IBWC, both Sections, are reviewing their procedures. Currently we do not have a procedure that would require either side to notify the other within a specific time period. That is being reviewed, and we hope to establish some guidelines to make sure something like this does not happen again.

CRP then received a comment from the public praising the presentation as informative and concise in the information provided.

#### Presentation Two- Rio Grande Levee Rehabilitation Projects in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties- Ramon F. Navarro, Civil Engineer, USIBWC

Mr. Navarro started his presentation by giving a brief history of the levee projects in the lower Rio Grande Valley area. He also gave a brief history of how the USIBWC received ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) funds to complete the levee rehabilitations throughout the boundary.

Mr. Navarro then went project by project, describing which areas each levee pertained to, using maps of the areas to make the areas clearer to the audience. Some of the levee projects are currently stalled due to funding issues. Some are in application phase, which means that the applications have been put together for the plans and have been submitted to FEMA for approval before construction can begin. Others are in various stages of completion, including some that are at 90% completion. He also announced that two-three had been 100% completed earlier in the year. Mr. Navarro then went on to describe the individual p[rojects, showing the audience what exactly had been done to each levee to rehabilitate it (if it was raised, by how much, with what material, etc). Each project included estimated costs and the contractor that it had been awarded to for the duration of the project.

Presentation ended with contact information for the construction projects and was opened for questions.

Question- What needs to be done so that the projects that are currently on hold get underway? Answer- Unfortunately, that is up to Congress. We have no control over that, Congress needs to approve of a budget.

This continued with several concerned citizens. Carlos Peña then stated that as Mr. Navarro had said, we have no control over the budget issues.

Write to your Congressman and get them to act.

Question- You said that the levee project near Rosita (?) was completed. It is not. Answer- Yes, actually it is. That project was completed earlier this year.

Questions on other projects in the area. Mr. Navarro responded to these by going back to the slides so they could record the information.

### Suggested Future Agenda Items

Several citizens said they would like to be updated on the levee projects at the next meeting.

\*Meeting minutes 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 Citizen Forum Meetings, they may not necessarily be

accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions.