



THE BOUNDARY MARKER

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GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY HELD FOR LEVEE PROJECT

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) held a groundbreaking ceremony in Granjeno, Texas on October 21 to mark the start of construction on Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project levee improvements. The work is being carried out with appropriations from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act).

Four construction contracts have been awarded in the Lower Rio Grande Valley for levee work along the Rio Grande near the City of Hidalgo and along the interior floodways in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties.

The ceremony was held along the Banker Floodway where the USIBWC construction ties into levee improvements previously constructed by Hidalgo County. The USIBWC is raising levee height to comply with standards established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the 100-year flood.

“We are moving forward quickly to implement these projects so we can meet the goal of the Recovery Act to jumpstart the economy and create jobs,” said U.S. Commissioner C.W. “Bill” Ruth. “At the same time, we are making

significant improvements to the flood control infrastructure in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.”

The groundbreaking ceremony included participation from local elected officials, Congressional offices, the U.S. Department of State, the State of Texas, and the construction contractors.

Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas said, “Together we’ve made history – Hidalgo County

has never received a federal infusion of funds this large before the levee projects – and we’ve preserved history. We’ve also preserved economic development opportunities for our region, which will help us to continue to weather the national recession.”

The Recovery Act includes \$220 million for USIBWC levee work in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and the Upper Rio Grande Flood

Control Project in West Texas and Southern New Mexico. Recovery Act construction in the Upper Rio Grande is scheduled to begin in early 2010.

The USIBWC provides regular public updates on its planning and spending of Recovery Act funds at www.recovery.gov. An updated project schedule is available at www.ibwc.gov/Recovery/RGF.html.



Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas (left) and Commissioner Bill Ruth at groundbreaking.



USIBWC ANALYZES OPTIONS TO FIX PRESIDIO LEVEES

The U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for improvements to the Rio Grande Flood Control Project at Presidio, Texas. The EIS analyzes seven alternatives related to structural repairs to flood control levees or enhanced flood protection.

The USIBWC operates and maintains 15 miles of Rio Grande flood control levees in the Presidio area. The levees, designed to contain the 25-year flood, were damaged during a Rio Grande flood in 2008. Emergency repairs were completed in 2009 to restore damaged levees in the urban part of Presidio prior to the summer monsoon. The EIS examines potential long-term levee improvements.

The alternatives include the “No Action” alternative whereby no additional levee repairs will be made beyond the emergency repairs already completed. Other alternatives would restore damaged and eroded levee segments to the project’s original 25-year design flood or raise the existing levee to provide protection from the 100-year flood. Additional alternatives consider various levee alignments to provide 100-year protection for developed areas while maintaining 25-year protection for agricultural lands.

For each alternative, the EIS identifies potential impacts to biological resources, cultural resources, water resources, land use, socioeconomic resources, transportation, and environmental health.

In September and October of 2008, a major Rio Grande flood swept through Presidio and its sister city of Ojinaga, Chihuahua, shutting down the international bridge for weeks and causing flood damage on both sides of the border.

A segment of the U.S. flood control levee in a rural area downstream from Presidio was overtopped and failed, sending floodwaters onto adjacent farmland and a golf course. Upstream, USIBWC crews worked to shore up the levees protecting the urban part of Presidio, working 24 hours per day to combat seepage and sand boils that put the levees at risk of failure.



During the 2008 Presidio flood, USIBWC crews placed plastic sheeting to shore up the levee.

In Mexico, levee failures caused major flooding in Ojinaga and forced the closure of the international bridge after the Mexican access road and port facilities were flooded.

Following the flood, both Sections began work on emergency levee repairs and plans for long-term improvements.

Once the EIS is finalized in early 2010, the USIBWC will select an alternative for future implementation. The Draft EIS is available online at http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Draft_EIS_FCI_Presidio_111709.pdf.



COMMISSION ADOPTS NEW BOUNDARY MAPS

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC), has adopted new maps of the international boundary line along the Rio Grande. The maps were adopted in accordance with the 1970 Boundary Treaty, which specifies that the boundary is the middle of the river channel of greatest average width over its length. By treaty, the Commission is the entity responsible for determining the location of the U.S.-Mexico border and delineating it on maps.

U.S. Commissioner C.W. “Bill” Ruth and Mexican Commissioner Roberto F. Salmon signed Minute 315 adopting the new maps on November 5, 2009.

The Minute was subsequently approved by the two Governments, bringing it into force as an agreement between the United States and Mexico.

“The Commission was originally established in 1889 to resolve boundary disputes when the river channel shifted,” said Commissioner Ruth. “Delineating the international boundary remains an important part of our mission to this day.”

The Commission has also initiated work to prepare new boundary maps for the Colorado River, which forms the U.S.-Mexico border



Officials from the IBWC and INEGI, Mexico’s mapping agency, reviewed the new boundary maps at U.S. Section Headquarters.

for 24 miles near Yuma, Arizona-San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora.

IBWC SUPPORTS GROUNDWATER STUDY

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC), has signed a Joint Report of the Principal Engineers in support of the United States-Mexico Transboundary Aquifer Assessment Program. In accordance with the Joint Report, the IBWC will coordinate binational aquifer assessment activities conducted by U.S. and Mexican agencies, universities, and others.

The objective of the program is to improve the knowledge base of transboundary aquifers. To further this process, the IBWC will

provide the framework for exchanging data, facilitate agreement on the aquifers that will be evaluated, establish binational technical committees for the aquifers selected, and serve as a repository for binational project reports.

The Joint Report will facilitate U.S.-Mexico cooperation related to the Transboundary Aquifer Assessment Act, legislation passed by the U.S. Congress three years ago. The Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to establish a program to characterize, map, and model priority transboundary aquifers.

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