

Colorado River Citizens Forum
Yuma County Development Services Building
Yuma, Arizona
Wednesday, September 10, 2014
4pm till 6pm
Tentative Meeting Notes*

Board Members Present – 10
USIBWC Staff Present – 1
General Public Present – 36

Welcome and Introductions

Meeting opened by Co-Chair Anna Morales @ 4:04pm

Board members introduced themselves, and then audience introduced themselves and stated their interest in the Citizens Forum.

Considering Water for the Environment in Arizona through Understanding Science, Policy and Water-User Perspectives

Anna Morales introduced speaker #1 Kelly Mott Lacroix, Research Analyst, University of Arizona Water Resources Research Center (presentation posted on the USIBWC website at:
http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_CR_Considering_AZ_091014.pdf)

A roadmap for considering water for Arizona's natural areas indicates we need to understand water needs of riparian and aquatic ecosystems then identify voluntary, stakeholder-driven options for addressing water needs of natural areas. Although they are not perfect, we use the terms "water for natural areas" and "water needs for riparian and aquatic ecosystems" to refer to water for animals and plants that live near and in rivers and streams, and how much water is required to keep them healthy over time. It should be understood that "water needs" and "health" of an ecosystem are defined within the context of human priorities.

Various meetings, surveys, workshops, and other activities were undertaken, involving over 1,000 people across the state representing diverse interests.

A key issue is what sort of ecosystem do we want or are we managing for and what data exist to help us provide the right amount of water to the resource?

The effort studied various rivers in Arizona and various fish and plant species. Various perspectives on water issues were noted and grouped into themes.

Finally, the presentation discussed the path that needs to be taken to move forward and lists recommendations, including: improve education, provide funding to maintain water in natural areas, set priorities, manage water supply for multiple benefits, address data gaps, establish voluntary partnerships, develop conservation programs, improve energy efficiency, modify permitting process, provide legal standing to natural areas.

There is significant interest in water for natural areas but lack of data and communication hinders our path forward, which must consist of cooperation and education as key solutions and it should come from the local level. There is overwhelming agreement that we should consider ecosystems in our water management but divergent ideas on how to do so.

At the end of her presentation, Kelly advised that on September 24, 2014 there will be a Webinar giving full details and discussion in regard to the subject of her presentation.

Water Resources Research Center web site is: wrrc.arizona.edu/waterrapids

Question – Is the Department of Water Resources on the task force?

Answer (Kelly) – The Department of Water Resources is on another task force; they didn't have enough time to join in with this one.

Comment – The Department of Water Resources is showing cooperation & collaboration through other sources.

Question – What is your position on priority for water use during a drought?

Answer (Kelly) – Research shows that the stance normally follows what people care about, what gets the most attention normally is taken care of first.

Question – During this project what was the A-ha moment?

Answer (Kelly) – I was overwhelmed by the people's participation in the focus groups which brought about many ideas and areas of concern.

Question – Prior to this study did you take stock of what had already been done, checking the information done in previous studies?

Answer (Kelly) – Information was taken/received from round tables, focus groups, etc.

Minute 319 Colorado River Environmental Pulse Flow and Ecological Restoration Activities

Anna Morales introduced speaker #2 Dr. Francisco Zamora, Director of the Sonoran Institute's Colorado River Delta Legacy Program discussing Minute 319 Colorado River Environmental Pulse Flow and Ecological Restoration Activities. He presented a video of the breathtaking and historic surge of water that was released into the Colorado River in the spring of 2014. The water surge, called a "pulse flow" was a grand experiment of the US and Mexican governments, and the many nonprofits and advocates

working on saving the river's mighty Delta. The new water created, once again, a river connected to the sea. Families, children and communities celebrated the return of the water, as did the birds and wildlife in the region. On May 14, 2014, the cool, fresh water of the Colorado River touched the salty water of the Upper Gulf of California -- an event that has not occurred regularly in at least a half a century. The pulse flow was an initiative associated with the historic 2012 agreement between the US and Mexico, called Minute 319 of the International Boundary and Water Commission.

Comment – To learn more about the topic, go to <http://raisetheriver.org>

Question – Was there any water added to the pulse flow from Mexico?

Answer (Francisco) – No additional water added to the pulse flow

Question – Can you comment on the monitoring efforts from the Pulse Flow?

Answer (Francisco) – Teams from both countries worked on a plan to monitor baseline vegetation and sediment about 50 people in all. In about 90 days the report will be submitted of the initial monitoring results.

Comment – Next year there will be a more detailed report on the results.

Comment – Target habitat restoration area is 2000+ acres. Of that, 1000 acres are at active restoration sites.

Question – Pulse flow was a one-time release but how are the systems being maintained currently?

Answer (Francisco) – Yes, it was a one-time event for 8 weeks then you have the agreement for the base flow over the 5 years of Minute 319.

Question – What are the economic benefits?

Answer (Francisco) – Currently they are not prepared to document economic benefits. They are trying to capture information on the amount of money being generated for economic benefits and have noticed numerous new start-up business opportunities in the area.

Comment – For numerous weeks there were tours in the area and citizens all around taking pictures, lots of families playing in the water west of Yuma etc.

Question – How was the water made available for the Pulse Flow, was it purchased and where did it come from?

Answer (Francisco) – For the base flow money was made available from private sources and/or donations.

Comment – US committee provided about \$800,000.00 of the \$2.1 million that is needed.

Update on Implementation of the Yuma Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District Pilot Following Program

Anna Morales introduced speaker #3 Perri Benemelis, Senior Analyst, Central Arizona Groundwater Replenishment District (CAGR) discussing the update on Implementation of the Yuma Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District Pilot Following Program. (presentation posted on the USIBWC website at http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_CR_CAGR_091014.pdf)

Central Arizona Water Conservation District referred to as CAWCD board approved a pilot program in September 2013. The length of the program was 2 – 3 year terms that were to be re-evaluated at year 3. The project allowed farmers to fallow lands that would otherwise be farmed and conserve water would be saved in Lake Mead. The land base price was \$750 per acre; district reimbursement \$21.36 per acre; district administration equals \$10,000 per year. Estimated cost per acre-foot of water equals to \$130.

The enrollment target for the program was 1,500 acres. To participate in the program the acreage must have been farmed 4 of the last 5 years and would be irrigated for the production of crops if the acreage were not enrolled in the following program, among other requirements.

For the enrollment process, in September 2013 an initial solicitation letter was sent out, October 2013 application review & quantification, November 2013 final program solicitation letter was sent out, November & December 2013 landowner agreements were signed. There were 1,491 acres that applied for enrollment; of these 1,421 acres met the qualifications.

Next was the field verification process which confirmed fallowing on enrolled fields, verified enrolled field boundaries and acreage, established the basis for the 1st program payment, and finally worked with regulators to establish & verify foregone consumptive water use. For the 1st field verification results, there were 151 fields visited and fallowing confirmed for all enrolled fields. The total quantified fallowing acreage was 1,402.80 and the first payment by the district was \$525,121.50

The presentation included maps of the location of enrolled fields and photos of fallowed farmland.

The conservation quantification method will follow guidelines established by other fallowing programs. Water savings quantification is based upon the reduction in crop consumptive water use. This will apply only to net cropped acres.

Question – What is the length of the fallowing study?

Answer (Perri) – The program is 2 terms, 3 years in each term for a total of 6 years.

Question – The upkeep and weed control, is that paid for out of the \$750.00 received per acre?

Answer (Perri) -- Yes

Comment – Consulting company that has been contracted is doing the quantitative assessment.

Question – What are some examples of what can be done with the dust?

Answer (Perri) – Irrigation, plow, leave stubble, they are allowed to use water for dust control but that usage amount is then deducted from allocations.

Comment – There are provisions in the program that allow for substituting so that you are not using the same land for the entire 3 years of the program.

Question – What are the third party impacts?

Answer (Perri) – Third party impacts are still being studied.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Board Discussion/Future Agenda Items

1. Following program
2. Impact of California drought on the area

Meeting adjourned at 5:27pm by co-chair Anna Morales

* 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 USWBIC policy or positions.