HISTORY AND PROJECTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION

Sally Spener
U.S. Secretary
USIBWC
The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, is responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties between the two countries and settling differences that arise in their application.
EARLY HISTORY OF THE IBWC

- **Convention of Nov. 12, 1884** – Adopted rules about the location of the boundary when the rivers changed course.

- **Convention of March 1, 1889** – Established the International Boundary Commission.

- Focus on maintaining the boundary.

*Boundary Monument*
- Monuments placed within line of sight
- 258 principal monuments
- Hundreds of intermediate markers
Monument 16 (1850s)
New Mexico just west of El Paso, Texas

Monument 121
Overlooking Nogales, Arizona (1890s)
IBWC makes official determination of international boundary

Responsible for boundary demarcation at bridges and ports of entry
CONVENTION OF 1906

- Distribution between Mexico and US of Rio Grande waters at El Paso-Cd. Juarez
- U.S. to deliver 60 kaf/yr
- Proportional reduction in deliveries in case of extraordinary drought
- Water stored in Elephant Butte Dam, NM
- Water diverted by Mexico at International Dam

American Dam
CONVENTION OF 1906

American Dam

International Dam
CONVENTION OF 1933

- Stabilized the boundary in the El Paso-Juarez Valley
- Straightened the river channel
- Flood control levees in both countries
- Rio Grande Rectification Project

*The meandering river channel was straightened.*
CONVENTION OF 1933
1944 WATER TREATY

TREATY OFFICERS

U.S. SECTION
• Commissioner
• Secretary
• 2 Principal Engineers
• Legal Advisor

MEXICAN SECTION
• Commissioner
• Secretary
• 2 Principal Engineers
• Legal Advisor
Decisions of the Commission are recorded in the form of Minutes.

Minutes are binding agreements of the IBWC intended to implement treaty.

They take effect once approved by the U.S. Department of State and Mexico’s Foreign Affairs Ministry.

IBWC Commissioners sign Minute 325
Mexico delivers water to the U.S. from Ft. Quitman to Gulf

U.S. receives 1/3 of the waters arriving in the Rio Grande from 6 Mexican tributaries

Minimum annual average of 350 kaf in cycles of 5 years

Treaty authorized construction of up to three storage dams on Rio Grande; only 2 were built
1944 WATER TREATY – RIO GRANDE

El Paso-Juarez Convention of 1906

1944 Water Treaty

International Dams
1944 WATER TREATY – RIO GRANDE
1944 WATER TREATY–COLORADO RIVER

- U.S. to deliver to Mexico a volume of 1.5 maf/yr
- When there are surplus waters, U.S. to deliver to Mexico a total volume of up to 1.7 maf/yr
- In extraordinary drought, Mexico reduced in proportion to U.S.

Colorado River at Northerly International Boundary
CHAMIZAL CONVENTION

- 1963 treaty settled a boundary dispute at El Paso-Cd. Juarez
- Relocated Rio Grande in a concrete-lined channel
- Transferred 630 acres of land to Mexico and 193 acres to US
- Replacement of six bridges

Rio Grande in Chamizal Project channel
CHAMIZAL CONVENTION

Cordova International Bridge of the Americas

American Canal

Rio Grande

US

MX
1970 BOUNDARY TREATY

- IBWC to maintain Rio Grande and Colorado River as the boundary
- Boundary is middle of the channel occupied by normal flow or middle of the channel with greatest average width over its length
- IBWC delineates boundary on maps
- IBWC may stabilize or rectify the channel (numerous rectifications carried out)
- Prohibits construction of works that would obstruct or deflect normal or flood flows

Rio Grande at Los Ebanos
SANITATION

- 1944 Treaty authorizes Commission to give “preferential attention to the solution of all border sanitation problems”
- IBWC performs water quality monitoring
- 3 international wastewater treatment plants
  - Nogales
  - South Bay
  - Nuevo Laredo
Located at Del Rio, TX-Cd. Acuña, Coahuila

Built in 1969

Impounded Rio Grande extends for 75 miles, covers 65,000 acres

Normal conservation capacity of over 3 million acre-feet

Hydroelectric power plants in both countries
FALCON DAM

- Built in 1954
- Reservoir covers 78,300 acres at conservation capacity
- Normal conservation capacity of 2.6 million acre-feet
- Hydroelectric power plants in both countries
FLOOD CONTROL

- 4 USIBWC Flood Control Projects
  - Tijuana River – San Diego, CA
  - Upper Rio Grande – Southern New Mexico and West Texas
  - Presidio – Big Bend area of Texas
  - Lower Rio Grande – near McAllen, Harlingen, Brownsville

- USIBWC maintains flood control levees, tracks flow, operates diversion dams in coordination with Mexico
LOWER RIO GRANDE FLOOD CONTROL

Anzalduas Dam in 2007

Retamal Dam on July 18, 2010
FLOOD CONTROL- CANALIZATION

- Rio Grande Canalization Project
  - 105 river miles from southern New Mexico to El Paso
  - Water delivery and flood control project
  - USIBWC maintains river levees
  - Undertaking habitat restoration

*Rio Grande at Sunland Park, NM (2011)*
FLOOD CONTROL- CANALIZATION

Restoration site near Las Cruces, NM

June 2014
October 2015
LEVREE CONSTRUCTION
Signed Sept. 2017
Interim agreement through 2026 on US-Mexico Colorado River cooperation
Extends or modifies provisions of Min. 319

ADWR Director Tom Buschatzke speaks at Min. 323 signing ceremony
Major elements of Min. 323

- Mexico can defer delivery of its annual allotment for delivery in a future year, which boosts Lake Mead
- Mexico’s participation in drought savings
- Mexico shares shortages in low-reservoir conditions
- Mexico receives additional water in high-reservoir conditions

Mexico diverts Colorado River water at Morelos Dam
Major elements of Min. 323

- U.S. investment in water conservation projects in Mexico in exchange for a share of conserved water
- Water for the environment and investment in habitat restoration
- Salinity management
- Efforts to control daily flow variability in deliveries to Mexico