

Southeast Arizona Citizens Forum

Sahuarita, Arizona

January 20, 2011

*Tentative Meeting Notes

Board Members in Attendance

John Light

Alejandro Barcenas

Ben Lomeli

Bill Odle

James Barr

Jenny Neely

John Ladd

Rosanna Gabladon

Claire Zugmeyer, Alternate for Emily Brott

USIBWC Staff in Attendance

Commissioner Edward Drusina

Sally Spener

Alison Lamb

Richard Balmes

Ken Johnson

Dennis Engel

John Light opened the meeting by welcoming everyone in attendance and introducing Commissioner Drusina. New Board members were then introduced.

Remarks by Commissioner Drusina

Commissioner Drusina then spoke on a brief history of the Southeast Arizona Citizens Forum. The Forum was initiated in 1999 by then Commissioner John Bernal. The initial forum was set up for the Upper Rio Grande(TX and NM), and then in later years added the Lower Rio Grande (TX), Colorado River(CA and AZ), Southeast Arizona(AZ) and San Diego (CA). Around 2006 interest for the Southeast Arizona Citizens Forum waned and was no longer held. Commissioner Drusina felt that the timing now is right to start up again with tonight being the first meeting since 2006. The forum is set up to facilitate the exchange of information between the USIBWC and the public for Pima, Cochise and Santa Cruz Counties. This is a two-way flow in the exchange of information. Commissioner then gave his expectations of the Board members. They are expected to attend the Citizens Forum meetings four times per year at various locations and to serve a two-year term. He presented board members with a Commission coin to thank them for their service. Commissioner then turned the meeting over to Sally Spener, the Public Affairs Officer for the USIBWC.

Southeast Arizona Citizens Forum Orientation

Ms. Spener gave a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the USIBWC which included the following highlights:

History

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) established the international boundary.

Treaty of December 30, 1858 – re-established the southern boundary of Arizona and New Mexico.

Convention of July 29, 1882 –Established a temporary Commission to survey the land boundary and establish the monuments.

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

The Treaty of 1944 defined positions for the US and Mexican Sections of the Commission.
(Commissioner, Secretary, two Principal Engineers and a Legal Advisor).

Spener then discussed IBWC Minutes. Minutes are decisions of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) and are binding agreements of the IBWC that are intended to implement treaty. Minutes take effect one they are approved by the U.S. Department of State and Mexico's Foreign Affairs Ministry. There are currently over 300 minutes.

Projects

The United States Section of the Commission (USIBWC) has the following project offices: San Diego, CA; Yuma, AZ; Nogales, AZ; Upper Rio Grande (which includes the El Paso, TX-Las Cruces, NM area); Presidio, TX; Amistad Dam, TX; Falcon Dam, TX; and the Lower Rio Grande (Mercedes, TX).

The IBWC has three international wastewater treatment plants. They are located in San Diego, CA; Nogales (Rio Rico), AZ and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. The IBWC is also responsible for flood control, water accounting, and two storage dams.

The IBWC also maintains 258 principal boundary demarcation monuments.

Spener reviewed Citizens Forum board members' roles and responsibilities. There are two co-chairs for the board, with John Light of the USIBWC being one. It was decided at this time by the board to delay the appointment of the second co-chair until a later date. It was determined that the next forum will be held on April 7th at the Nogales City Hall.

Nogales Field Office Responsibilities

John Light, Area Operations Manager for the Nogales Field Office, then gave a presentation. He began his presentation by giving a brief overview of the geographic responsibilities of the Nogales Field Office. The area is the international border from the Arizona/New Mexico State Line to Lukeville, Arizona. Some of the functions of the Nogales Field Office include operations and maintenance of the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant, Flood Control, Land Boundary Demarcation, Transboundary Sanitation issues, and to also serve as a liaison between local operations and other USIBWC departments and divisions.

Update on the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant (NIWTP) included the following: a technology upgrade was completed in June of 2009. This upgrade has vastly improved the quality of the effluent. The upgrade was funded by EPA/BECC grants and is an advanced treatment system (BNR). 80% of the flow to the treatment plant comes from Mexico. Light then gave a brief overview of the history of the NIWTP. The original plant was built in the 1950's and located in downtown Nogales. It was then re-located to its current site in 1972 where the capacity was increased. The NIWTP was upgraded in 1992 which increased capacity and upgraded the technology. In 2009, technology was upgraded but capacity was reduced. Some of the challenges to the current plant are: it is extremely expensive to run, requires highly-skilled personnel, much more sensitive to influent flow makeup, and is a biological process which is incapable of treating metals entering the facility. The current plant is operating at 116% of its capacity. Some of the success is that ammonia has been essentially eliminated, CBOD and TSS have been significantly reduced in the effluent and turbidity has significantly improved. In regards to the NIWTP finances, the NIWTP is operated by the USIBWC and receives reimbursements for the O&M cost from the City of Nogales and from Mexico. The USIBWC does not own the influent wastewater, the effluent or biosolids that are generated.

Light then provided an overview of other projects the Nogales office is involved with, starting with flood control (Nogales Wash). The Nogales Wash was built by the USIBWC in the 1930's and ownership was transferred to the City of Nogales, Arizona once the project was completed. The Nogales Wash is the main drainage for both Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico. The office does have a monitoring program for fugitive sewage flows. The frequency and intensity of the fugitive flows has decreased in recent years as Mexico continues to improve upon their collection system. Chlorine is used by Mexico to disinfect fugitive flows. Alternatives to using chlorine have been discussed as this is not an ideal

solution, but a viable alternative has not yet been found. The ultimate solution would be to eliminate the need for disinfection altogether. The USIBWC works with local, state and federal entities as well as Mexico to mitigate flooding issues associated with the Nogales Wash.

The Nogales Office is also responsible for 96 land boundary monuments. Of those monuments, 82 are made of cast iron and the other 14 are masonry. All were installed in the 1800's. Monuments are the treaty-recognized international boundary and only by the concurrence of the US and Mexican Commissioner can a monument be moved.

In regards to transboundary sanitation, this office assists in the investigation of fugitive flows, defensive works, providing technical assistance and coordination with EPA/Arizona Department of Environmental Quality/Mexican Section of the Commission, and local government offices.

Light then gave an update on the International Outfall Interceptor (IOI). The IOI conveys sewage from Mexico and the United States to the NIWTP. The IOI was constructed 40 years ago and the first 6000 feet are located underneath the concrete-lined portion of the Nogales Wash. Relocating the IOI out of the Nogales Wash is a high priority as the recent failure demonstrates that the structure is reaching the end of its life cycle. The IOI is vulnerable if the Nogales Wash structure were to fail during a storm event. The Nogales Wash conveys approximately 12,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) of storm water during a heavy rain event and the IOI conveys 32 cfs of wastewater at peak flow. If a failure of the IOI occurs in the concrete-lined portion of the Nogales Wash, the wastewater would be diverted back into the IOI downstream of the failure, as was done during the recent repair.

The meeting was then opened up to questions and comments:

Sherry Sass from Friends of the Santa Cruz River thanked Mr. Light for his presentation, stating that she has been involved in water issues for over 20 years. She still sees some of the main issues being the IOI, the inability of the plant to take care of metals and that pretreatment has a long way to go. Regarding the cadmium issue affecting the treatment plant, ADEQ and IBWC have done a wonderful job. Is handling the cadmium issue a high priority and are we working on a permanent solution? Commissioner Drusina responded that yes, resolving the cadmium issue is a high priority and one part of the solution is the building of the Los Alisos treatment plant in Mexico. At that time John Light extended special thanks of recognition to Hans Huth of ADEQ for working with local officials in Mexico on monitoring the pretreatment program.

Another question raised was regarding groundwater. Is this being tested? John Light answered that the wells in direct proximity of the plant itself are tested.

Board Discussion

It was decided that the next meeting would be April 7th with a start time of 5:30 pm at the Nogales City Council Chambers, if available. Another question was the possibility of a tour of the NIWTP before the meeting. It was decided that this tour would be possible for board members.

Suggested Future Agenda Items

Some of the issues/concerns for future meetings were discussed. Issues raised included the following topics: Concerns on the local water supply; flooding issues in the Nogales Wash and the condition of the aged Wash. In Cochise County members would like a tour of the San Pedro River and the border fence is a hot topic. A question was raised on whether the USIBWC is working with the Department of Homeland Security. Answer was only in the respect that it does not obstruct or deflect any stormwater or natural river flows between the two countries and that we have access to the monuments.

Meeting was adjourned with Commissioner Drusina again thanking everyone for attending.

*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.