

USIBWC Citizens Forum
Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve
Imperial Beach, California
June 1, 2017
***Tentative Meeting Minutes**

Board Members in Attendance:

Ed Spriggs, City of Imperial Beach
Marisa Quiroz, International Community Foundation

USIBWC Staff in Attendance:

Steve Smullen – Area Operations Manager, USIBWC

Welcome Remarks:

At 6:30 PM, the Citizens Forum convened with Mr. Ed Spriggs stating that the mission of the Citizens Forum is to promote an exchange of information between the public and the USIBWC. It is not an advisory board to the Commission. He requested citizens fill out comment cards if they wanted to make a general comment. Audience members could ask pertinent questions to the respective presentation following the presentation and before public comments were heard. There were approximately 80 members of the public present.

The board members introduced themselves. Mr. Spriggs introduced the first speaker, Dr. Yamilett Carrillo of the International Community Foundation.

Presentation one—[Building a Sustainable Water Future in the Tijuana-San Diego Region](#)

Dr. Carrillo spoke about her 10 years of study concerning the binational Colorado River watershed initiative that was kicked off by Minute 306. She considered Minute 306 to be similar with the recent Minute 320 signed for the Tijuana River Watershed. She spoke of the 2010 Mexicali earthquake and how that was an impetus to quickly address both Mexico water unavailability due to supply water damage and the shortage limitations in the U.S. that were a result of long standing drought and low water supplies in Lake Mead.

Minute 319 allowed for the storage of Mexico water in Lake Mead were considered a win- win for both countries, as it allowed Mexico to conserve water that would otherwise be wasted, and increased the level of water in Lake Mead which provided a means for lower Basin water users to utilize water over a longer period. She compared the earthquake to the recent events in Tijuana regarding aging infrastructure. Dr. Carrillo stated that if the actions resulting from Minutes 317-319 were possible in a basin that was much larger and affected many more people, states and agencies than the Tijuana River Watershed, then there was no reason the Minute 320 initiatives could not be successful as well. The work to conduct binational agreements is in no way easy or rapid. Dr. Carrillo finished by saying that it would be beneficial to strengthen civil engagement, develop a binational communications plan and integrated watershed management plan, and create a pathway for residents and philanthropy to support community needs.

Mr. Spriggs asked if anyone had questions.

One attendee asked if there was a parallel between the two watersheds since the Colorado River Delta is in Mexico and the Tijuana River Delta is in the U.S. Dr. Carrillo stated that even though this is the case, there are still issues that require binational cooperation to achieve. No real effective solution can be implemented unilaterally.

Another individual asked why this was being presented as it had nothing to do with the sewage spill and that is what people were there to hear. Board Member Marisa Quiroz said that Dr. Carrillo's presentation had been scheduled for months and that her professional work and willingness to present to the Citizens Forum should not be disrespected. Unfortunately, due to several individuals, the question period was cut short so the next presentation could be made.

Mr. Spriggs introduced Mr. Steve Smullen, Area Operations Manager, who presented a summary of the 2017 sewage spill investigative report. Mr. Smullen introduced several other members of the Minute 320 water quality workgroup and stated they would be providing portions of the presentation. The individuals are Gabriela Torres, Surf Rider; Doug Liden, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Chris Helmer, Imperial Beach.

Presentation 2—[Tijuana River Wastewater Spill Investigation, February 2017](#)

Mr. Smullen showed the slides summarizing the actual spill details and showed some photos provided by CESPT of the work involved in completing the repairs to the Insurgentes/ Oriente collector. Mr. Smullen also provided an update of the status of the recommendations in the report.

A handout was provided at the meeting summarizing the status of the recommendations.

Mr. Smullen introduced Gabriela Torres who presented rainfall data and river water quality data plotted against flow, both for the past winter and historically since 2013. There is a clear indication that bacterial contamination is high during wintertime runoff events. Ms. Torres summarized the current sampling and testing program by various entities and stated she is working with resident groups to try to implement additional rapid water quality testing that could be used to advise residents of Imperial Beach of the safety of weekend beach and water use. Ms. Torres was hopeful that residents could assist in some of the sampling and testing.

Mr. Doug Liden presented historical information relative to EPA funding for border wastewater infrastructure over the years, and stated that the EPA funding levels has dropped continuously and dramatically since the late 1990s, and has become almost insignificant over the past 3 years. Only \$10 million United States Dollars (USD) was allocated by EPA border wide last year, with about \$1 Million USD for Tijuana.

Mr. Liden then introduced some animated slides of the wastewater infrastructure in Tijuana, showing untreated and treated wastewater flows and discharges in both wet and dry times. Lastly, Mr. Liden provided a summary of future actions, including working with Scripps and Southern California Coastal Research Water Project on new science such as the dye study and the use of diagnostics for environmental monitoring.

Mr. Chris Helmer followed with a message of thanks to all the attendees for their participation and concern and stated that the energy of the members of the audience is how solutions get started. He encouraged all people to write to their elected officials in support of additional funding for EPA to continue implementation of the Border Environmental Infrastructure Fund program.

Mr. Smullen briefly discussed the updated CESPT report that had been prepared by BECC/NADBANK after numerous meetings with elected officials in both countries, including the Mayor of Imperial Beach, Serge Dedina. The immediate and near term projects were described using the graphic.

Mr. Smullen ended the presentation by stating that the overall estimated cost to fully implement the plan

was \$410 Million USD, none of which was available except for the \$6M USD for rehab of six critical collectors.

Mr. Spriggs then asked for questions concerning the presentations.

One resident stated that all the work is reactive in nature and not proactive. Who should we write to and how much and what are we asking for? Mr. Spriggs suggested that \$400M for improved Tijuana wastewater infrastructure would be a good start. Yes, the solutions tend to be reactive in nature. We need to be more resourceful and reuse of wastewater may be the answer. The updated master plan is a good start.

A resident asked if USIBWC supported a capacity upgrade for Pump Station CILA and use of the SBIWTP for treatment, since the primary plant has a capacity of 75 mgd? Mr. Smullen said that we support modifications to Pump Station CILA to optimize operation. The resident asked if we have a plan: yes or no. Mr. Smullen answered no.

One attendee asked why we can just use the money planned for the Border Wall and fix Oroville Dam and give the rest to Mexico as a good neighbor since their problems affect the U.S. Mr. Spriggs stated that this question was not related to the presentation.

A citizen asked the capacity of the SBIWTP and SBWRP. Answer is total about 27 mgd which is discharged through the South Bay Ocean Outfall. He asked if all the solids are removed. Mr. Smullen said yes, effluent water quality is less than 10 mg/l TSS and BOD. How can we do to assist Mexico with their infrastructure problem? Mr. Smullen said that we need to put pressure on Mexico to uphold their Treaty obligations. Another audience member stated that pressure was not going to work, economic sanctions would be much better.

One attendee asked why we couldn't get students or civil engineers to solve problems since everything costs so much money. Doug Liden thought that reuse could save a lot of money if people would only consider it not a toilet to tap solution. It is far cheaper than expensive desal and could decrease the amount of imported water required.

Another individual had a question on one of the slides which showed that the USIBWC spends \$1M per year on ocean monitoring but no detrimental effect on the ocean from the SBOO discharge has ever been proven. Mr. Smullen responded that the pollution comes from the river and other sources and not from the ocean outfall.

Mr. Spriggs then asked speakers to provide comments in turn.

Baron Partlow – We are running out of patience. The 90% sewer coverage in Tijuana vs 40% in the rest of Mexico is distorted. He stated that the U.S. needs to use sanctions – and suggested 5 hours' closure of San Ysidro Land Port of Entry every day the beach is closed in Imperial Beach.

Luis Monteagudo (County of San Diego) – He urges appropriate and immediate actions to stop public health hazard and risk to tourism dollars. The swamp that has been drained is in our backyard. Suggested \$30 Million to improve the Tijuana River Valley.

Bryan Brillhart - Wildlife has taken a hit, and both wildlife and habitat appears to be degrading. They can't survive here anymore. Get money and fix it.

Oscar Romo – I have been working in the Tijuana River Valley and in Mexico as a researcher for 35

years and was heartened to see that the investigation report did not find any intentionality of purpose on the part of Mexico for the spill. In my dealings in Mexico, I continually encounter local people in Tijuana who are saddened and embarrassed by the spill.

Leon Benham- 120,000 people cross the border every day and spend money here, yet we do not receive any sales tax proceeds from them. There is no long-term plan for the river. The river floodplain needs to be cleared so the sediment can get to the sea. Trash needs to be removed.

Mark Leach - If the feds cannot provide the funding, then the other two options are the State and County. Raquel Madden spoke about Senator Hueso's office introducing bill to reallocate funds for acquiring parkland in the Tijuana River Valley and is working to maximize funding at the State level.

Chris Harris (CBP spokesman) - I'm concerned about the health and safety of men and women that protect our border- we need to identify key player and what their responsibilities are.

Bill Davis - suggested building a high wall in the U.S. all along the southern edge of the Valley and a long jetty to the ocean so that all flow into the U.S. Tijuana River Valley would be swept up and discharged into the ocean on the south side of the jetty. This would effectively keep the discharges on the Mexico side.

Bill Sayer- We should apply pressure to the City and the County of San Diego.

Pete Smith – Agrees with the level of concern shown at the meeting. He said that he was overwhelmed with the level of paperwork – drafts, protocols, Minutes. We should just go to Mexico and talk to them informally and solve the issue that way. For example, the collector collapse was known on January 1 and there was plenty of time to plan, obtain equipment, etc.

Ginger Sacco – Spoke on the need for improved communication and reduction in time to act. As a veteran, she knew that time is of the essence in maintaining systems. Everyone can do their part, for example in picking up trash. She then showed some examples of trash found in the river valley, including medicines (pills in original packing), a tequila bottle filled with brown water, a picture of a married couple, and release bracelet from the LA jail.

There was no Board discussion. The next Citizens Forum meetings are scheduled for September 7 and December 7.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 pm.

*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.