

**USIBWC Citizens Forum Meeting Minutes**  
**September 7, 2017**  
**Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve**  
**Imperial Beach, California**  
**\*Tentative Meeting Notes**

**Board Members in Attendance:**

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

**USIBWC Staff in Attendance:**

Steve Smullen, Area Operations Manager,

**Board Members Not Present:**

Antonio Martinez  
Stewart Halpern  
Paola Avila  
Rick Van Schoik

**Welcoming Remarks:**

Steve Smullen kicked off the meeting at 6:30 p.m. by 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. There were approximately 80 members of the public present. He requested that people fill out comment cards if they wished to make a general comment. Audience members could ask questions pertinent to the presentations following the presentations and before public comments were heard.

He also announced that due to an injury the previous day, Raina Fulton of the Army Corps of Engineers would not be presenting, but that she would be invited to the next meeting in December. There would likely be more information available at that time regarding the Phase 1 H&H report.

Mr. Smullen said that there were copies of two documents on the sign-in sheet table. One was a response letter from Commissioner Drusina to the South Bay mayors' letter of July 7, 2017, which outlined steps that the USIBWC will take to conduct a feasibility study for a sediment basin in the main channel of the Tijuana River upstream of Dairy Mart Bridge; the other is a USIBWC press release issued on August 9, 2017, summarizing the status of recommendations made in the April 2017 Spill Investigative Report. If there were not enough copies, please provide Steve Smullen with your name and he will see that you get a copy. Ed Spriggs stated that as City of Imperial Beach councilman he had a vested interest in supporting and maintaining the communication between the IBWC and the public; unfortunately, some of the other board members may not feel similarly. The negative press resulting from the spills that have occurred in 2017 may be the reason for the poor Board attendance at the last several meetings.

Steve Smullen introduced Jeff Crooks of the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve who provided an overview of the Estuary and the research and monitoring activities that are conducted there.

**Presentation One: Coupled Research and Management of the Tijuana Estuary– Jeff Crooks, Research Coordinator, Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve**

The Estuary is a nationally important one formed under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1970. It is one of the few intact estuaries in California that has not been subject to infringement by urban development. It is part of the Southern California Bight, and shares similar characteristics with estuaries

further north and in Baja California.

It is where 3 major habitats come together: ocean, land and river. It is highly resilient because it is highly dynamic. It has great capacity to handle differing levels of inputs. Mr. Crooks noted the historical ecology in the Tijuana River Valley study published recently and discussed the changes in the river valley from sparse willow and scrub habitat with interspersed salt flats to a more dominant riparian and taller tree habitat that has been a result of the influxes of water into the valley in the last 20 years. The Estuary itself and areas close to the ocean and near Oneonta Slough have largely remained unchanged since historical times.

The research at the Estuary consists primarily of monitoring physical data such as temperature, pH, water level, salinity, chlorophyll, dissolved oxygen and nutrients. Mr. Crooks showed, in graphical form, water level responses to the March 2011 earthquake in Japan, which he likened to “water sloshing in a large bathtub”. Monitoring of water level and dissolved oxygen levels prefaced the closing of the mouth of the river several times in the past 3 years. This monitoring enables management to predict to some extent future closings and can expedite preparation of response activities, such as alerting the public and physically cutting a path to the surf to allow the river to reach the ocean. Some of the closings are natural occurrences that are seen at other southern California estuaries such as Los Penasquitos, and some have been thought to be accelerated by beach replenishment actions and high wave action during El Niño periods. The science of beach erosion and movement is a complicated one. Physical monitoring of temperature has shown a definite upward trend over the past 20 years, and monitoring of wave height and water levels is indicating increased sea level rise. Both substantiate the concept of climate change due to global warming. During the El Niño of 2015-2016, water levels were noted one foot higher than they would be normally, and this can be used to predict future levels. An extreme event now could become the normal water level in 20 years. Mr. Crooks noted the inputs of nutrients of ammonium and orthophosphate, fertilizer if you will, that occur during winter and are normally seen every year. This year due to the large spills, the nutrient levels were very high and what was mystifying was the very high levels of oxygen which had never been seen before. Mr. Crooks postulated that this could be due to phytoplankton blooms, algae production, or there could be a benthic component which was contributing to the high levels.

### **Questions and Answers:**

What is the impact of the large spills?

We don't fully know yet because of limitations on research during the bird breeding season, but we will start investigating after Sept 15. The Estuary doesn't really have a handle of the effects on animals other than that seen during mouth closures when oxygen levels are low, resulting in the death of leopard sharks and other species.

What other physical data shows trends besides temperature and wave height?

We have noted decrease in pH likely due to ocean acidification.

You mentioned fertilizer input?

Mr. Crooks stated that he was referring to the nutrients in wastewater runoff that can cause growth of vegetation and production of algae.

Paloma Aguirre asked about the impact of human-caused beach replenishment and how that can be better managed in the future.

Mr. Crooks said that obviously grain size played a role since it was well sorted, which helps the beach replenishment material stay on the beach and not be washed to sea, but still allows it to roll around - in this case south to the mouth of the river.

Would it be possible to build some sort of breakwater that would eliminate the potential for the beach to move south and close the mouth?

Mr. Crooks stated that this would likely introduce other problems that could have more serious implications.

Will construction of a sediment basin eliminate the water coming into the Estuary?

It is not likely that the flow into the Estuary will be eliminated by construction of a sediment basin.

### **Update on Minute 320 Actions to address Tijuana River Water Quality**

Mr. Smullen then presented the status of actions and agreements under Minute 320, specifically the water quality agreements that have been completed or are under progress to comply with the recommendations which were made a part of the February 2017 Spill Investigative Report.

Action items noted include: development of a binational water quality monitoring plan, meter installations for the Tijuana River in Mexico and for Pump Station CILA, formalized protocols for Pump Station CILA operations and maintenance, spill notification protocols (including internal to Mexico), increased frequency of river inspections, specification for an emergency generator for PS CILA, feasibility study for a large sediment basin upstream of Dairy Mart Bridge and/or Smugglers Gulch, and update on the status of CESPT's emergency rehabilitation of sewage infrastructure and overall Master Plan.

Mr. Smullen then ran through a description with photos of planned meters on the Rio Alamar above the confluence with the Rio Tijuana, on the Rio Tijuana at Pump Station CILA (including river level upstream of PS CILA at a vehicular bridge and bubbler downstream of PS CILA, to determine the flow just before entering the US), and flow meter at Pump Station CILA itself. The PS CILA metering has been partially installed but a transmitter is awaiting repair and a conduit must be installed between the meter and the sensor.

This will enable on/off notification of PS CILA pumps and the flow being pumped will also be available on a website. All the work should be completed by the end of September.

Mr. Smullen then described the monitoring program proposed by CONAGUA at the Minute 320 Binational Core Group meeting last week, which includes 12 sites on the Rios Alamar, Tecate and Tijuana that would be sampled twice a month for various constituents including metals and bacteria. This monitoring would be effective immediately. This proposal by CONAGUA has a significantly greater number of sites than originally discussed between the two sections of the IBWC in July.

### **Questions and Answers:**

Will the meter at PS CILA notify of spills?

No, only when the pump station is turned on or off.

Why is U.S. side frequency monthly and does not include metals when Mexican side is more frequent and does contain metals?

The US side plan originally did have metals testing and may have been an omission. The proposal for a monitoring plan was to provide a set of baseline data that could be used to see trends in the river and watershed, not to advise of spills.

Is this U.S. side monitoring plan funded?

No, not at present – the U.S. side would likely be funded by the USIBWC out of discretionary funds.

Mr. Smullen outlined the proposed scope of work for the diversion and pumping infrastructure diagnostic. This is to determine existing capacities and limitations, low-cost modifications to increase diversion during runoff events, and recommendations for new infrastructure that could be added both in Mexico and/or the U.S. to divert additional flows and dispose of them a) back to Mexico, b) through the emergency connection or c) to the South Bay Ocean Outfall (SBOO), with or without treatment at the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP). This diagnostic will be funded by the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC)/EPA and the contract will be issued by BECC. The draft has been circulated and has been provided to Mexico for review and comment. All alternatives analyzed will be measured against reductions in transboundary flow and beach closure days.

### **Questions and Answers:**

What is a diversion?

Pumping flow out of the river into the Tijuana sewer system or U.S. side infrastructure.

What is the timeframe for the diagnostic?

Our goal is to have it issued by October 2017, with a 6-month timeframe for completion.

Does the SBIWTP have additional capacity?

We have additional advanced primary capacity but not secondary. Our real limiting factor is solids processing and any additional treatment of river flows would have to include additional solids processing equipment.

What is capacity of South Bay Ocean outfall (SBOO)?

200 million gallons per day (mgd), however, only a small percentage of that is being used at present.

Why was it built so large when plant is only 25 mgd?

Infrastructure is normally built to last 30-50 years, and so the SBOO was larger than needed at the time. You don't want to go in later and increase the size – it is much more cost effective to plan and upsize now rather than wait to build.

How large does a sediment basin need to be for it to capture all the flow?

The basin is for sediment and not storage for runoff. There would be a separate diversion point for water, it's all about how much you want to pump and where you are going to put it.

Can we build a 100 mgd plant to take care of problem?

A 100 mgd plant may be able to handle a significant part of storm runoff, but not extreme storms. In terms of dry weather flow, 100 mgd is more than the wastewater production in Tijuana at present. Mr. Smullen stated that building a larger plant still does not address the failing pipelines in Tijuana and that spills would continue until that problem was addressed.

An individual stated that it would take \$1.1 B United States Dollars to expand the plant to 100 mgd and it would only be used for several days per year, and likened it to driving a racecar to go to the grocery store. Another member stated that beaches are closed for far longer periods than several days.

Mr. Smullen then presented an update on the Minute 320 sediment and solid waste working group discussions and actions. Primarily at present it is an information exchange on sediment and solid waste removal and disposal activities, but includes initiatives like the H&H study, sediment basin feasibility study (scope of work to be issued in 2018), trash boom feasibility scope (seeking funding), the Plastic Bag Project Tijuana, Marine Debris grant study as well as Tijuana River Action Month activities.

Lastly, Mr. Smullen provided information on the Mexican non-governmental organizations' (NGO) proposal for funding from the Rio Arronte Foundation to work on Tijuana River Watershed issues. The expected completion of the Master Plan for the proposal is November 2017. This would be a great source for multi-year funding for projects in the watershed.

### **Public Comment**

Baron Partlow – Climate change is here and the impact will be disastrous. Tough sanctions are the only option. Mexico is delivering punches and we need to deliver knock out blows.

Ginger Sacco – Believes that there have been as many as 11 spills that have gone unreported based on observation of the IBWC gage. She is concerned about water quality. Her son had open heart surgery and swimming is the only type of exercise available, and a cut resulting from contact with a contaminated object could be deadly. Urges appropriate and immediate actions to stop public health hazard

Linda Heath – Monitoring and testing should be for the right pollutants, there does not seem to be adequate frequency of testing. Sand and sediment should be tested, and sampling done in the river should not be done at the bank.

There was no Board discussion.

### **Topics for next meeting are:**

1. Army Corps of Engineers presentation on H&H
2. Inviting a Mexican NGO to present their proposal to the Rio Arronte Foundation
3. Latest update by USIBWC on Minute 320
4. Rick van Schoik's report out on the presentation made at the World Water Congress in Cancun in June 2017 regarding transboundary groundwater basins.

The next Citizens Forum meeting is scheduled for December 7, 2017.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 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.