

USIBWC Citizens Forum
Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve
Imperial Beach, California.
September 6, 2018 6:30-8:30 pm
Tentative Meeting Notes*

Attendees:

There were approximately 19 members of the public present. The meeting was chaired by Carlos Peña, Area Operations Manager. Mr. Peña announced that the Administration had announced the intent to appoint Ms. Jayne Harkins as the Commissioner of the U.S. Section of the IBWC.

Update on USIBWC Projects and Initiatives in the San Diego Project Area

A presentation was made on the ongoing efforts by both the two local offices of the IBWC (U.S. Section in San Diego and Mexican Section in Tijuana) on reducing the number and volumes of transboundary wastewater flows from Tijuana to San Diego. Mr. Peña noted the efforts, new projects and proposed projects in place to achieve such a goal. He noted that since March of this year, no transboundary flows have been noted. The audience and the Board appreciated the efforts and the notification and updates that have been provided.

Mr. Pena presented on status on the Projects in the San Diego - Tijuana area. This included an update on the operation of the Southbay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP). The SBIWTP has been treating an average of 25 million gallons per day of wastewater originating from Mexico. The plant is meeting all discharge permit requirements set by the State of California. The SBIWTP recently finished the construction of two equalization basins. These basins (1.75 million gallons in capacity each) enable the SBIWTP to divert peak flows and allow the plant a more efficient operation during the day.

Mr. Pena presented an update on the berms in the Tijuana River Channel. These berms provide the US and Mexican Section of IBWC the flexibility if there are any transboundary flow events. The berms can provide the ability to temporary store several million gallons of water that may have crossed the International Boundary. This project allowed no transboundary flows entering the U.S. from late March through early October of 2018 as was indicted by the USIBWC Gaging Station. However, with the start of the rainy season, several transboundary flows were noted in late October and November of 2018.

An update was given on the existing USIBWC Canyon Collectors. These collectors have been operating as designed with respect to any dry weather flow events. However, during the recent start of rainy season, the collectors are not designed to collect stormwater.

An update was also given on the EPA/NADBANK Diagnostic Study. This study which will provide stakeholders alternatives for improving the infrastructure in both the U.S. and Mexico. The alternatives will look at potential upgrades on either side of the International Boundary. The report is at 60% with a draft final and final report expected early next year.

Regarding the installation of flow meters, Mr. Pena stated that the U.S. and Mexico continue to work on the replacement and upgrade of meters in the Tijuana River Channel and at strategic locations in Mexico.

Regarding binational inspections, Mr. Pena stated that both Sections continue to conduct site visits in the Tijuana River Basin for potential sources of river contamination.

Mr. Pena also reiterated the Binational Water Quality Sampling program that was mentioned early by PE Nunez and stated that updates/summaries on the reports will be provided at future Citizens Forum meetings.

Protecting San Diego’s Coastal Waters—Timothy D. Stebbins, Ph.D., Senior Marine Biologist

Dr. Stebbins presented an overview on the ongoing South Bay Ocean Outfall (SBOO) Monitoring Program. Dr. Stebbins provided a PowerPoint with the details of the program. It covers a total area of approximately 340 square miles from northern San Diego to Baja California. Sampling is done approximately 200 days per year from the shore/beaches to offshore. There are 103 water quality monitoring stations, 97 benthic (sediment) stations, and 17 trawling and rig fishing stations to assess fish and invertebrate communities. He stated that this program is an extensive program to ensure compliance for the USIBWC international wastewater treatment plant and City of San Diego’s water treatment facilities that both discharge treated wastewater through the SBOO. The program measures and determines compliance as well as assesses any impacts to the local marine environment, including the effects on coastal water quality, seafloor habitats, and marine life. For the SBOO, he stated that this is done with over 2,600 samples and over 11,000 analyses per year. He described the sampling program in detail, including the frequency of certain types of sampling and the types of analyses performed, such as fecal coliform bacteria, plume tracking, ocean current patterns, identifying the species and abundance of certain invertebrates, sampling fish tissue, and remote sensing imagery, among others.

Dr. Stebbins also noted the overall annual cost of the program is nearly \$2 million and also stated that highlights of the program will be available online soon.

The monitoring results show that ocean conditions are generally good in the vicinity of the SBOO and not impacted significantly by wastewater discharge. Compliance with Ocean Plan water contact standards is high except along shore during and immediately after storm events. There is no evidence of the SBOO plume reaching nearshore recreational waters. Fish populations remain healthy.

Dr. Stebbins responded to questions and the only significant questions were on the impacts of coastal beaches. He responded by stating that was a County of San Diego function and under this program.

Board Discussion

The issue of future public comment was raised. Since the meeting tends to go long, the opportunity for the public to bring up issues or concerns was diminished since most people leave early. The Board agreed to put public comment early on future agendas. The Board appreciated the update on the U.S. Section efforts and it was suggested to keep as a permanent meeting topic. A potential topic for future meetings is an update on Mexico’s wastewater reuse project for the Valle de Guadalupe.

Public Comment

A couple from Tijuana brought up the issue of a new subdivision in the Playas de Tijuana area. They wanted to know what USIBWC can do about it. The area in question is near the border and the developer is very close to the U.S.- Mexico boundary. Mr. Peña stated that this is an issue for the Mexican Section of the IBWC and it would be noted to them.

The next Citizens Forum meeting is scheduled for December 6, 2018. The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 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.