RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM
City of Las Cruces Council Chambers
Las Cruces, NM
April 12, 2018
*** Tentative Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:
Danny Chavez, Hudspeth County Conservation and Reclamation
Gill Sorg, City of Las Cruces, City Council
Suleiman Masoud, Del Rio Engineering, El Paso Association of Builders Board of Directors
Walton Low, U.S. Geological Survey hydrologist (retired), Lower Rio Grande Regional Water Plan Technical Advisory Group
Conrad Keyes, Jr., Chair, Paso del Norte Watershed Council, New Mexico State University Emeritus Department Head and Professor of Civil Engineering

USIBWC Staff in attendance:
Edward Drusina, Commissioner, USIBWC
Jose Luis Sierra, Assist. Area Operations Manager, Upper Rio Grande Field Office, USIBWC
Sally Spener, Foreign Affairs Officer, USIBWC
Lori Kuczmanski, Public Affairs Officer, USIBWC
Flavio Apodaca, Supervisory Engineer Technician, USIBWC
Liz Verdecchia, Natural Resource Specialist, USIBWC
Luis Hernandez, Chief, O&M Division, USIBWC

Members of the public in attendance:
Karen Ray, Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID)
John Douglas, EBID
Joan Woodward, Resident
John Diehl, Resident
Zhuping Sheng, Texas A & M University
John Sparks, Arcadis
Joel Mora, Arcadis
Clinton Swearingen, Arcadis
Woody Irving, Bureau of Reclamation
Ben Stewart, Stantec
Gizelle Hurtado, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Ana Donohue, EBID
Kurt Anderson, Dona Ana Municipal Domestic Water Consumers Association (DAMDWCA)
Matthew Lee, Citizen
Dan Makens, Citizen
Delbert Humberson, United States Geological Survey (USGS)
Robert Myer, Citizen
Mike Hallock, Citizen

Welcoming Remarks:
At 6:30 PM, USIBWC Commissioner Edward Drusina made opening remarks. Commissioner Drusina

said there are a lot of new faces in the audience and it's great to have a good group at this meeting. Commissioner Drusina said he looks forward to working with everyone and now we have a budget, we can work on some projects.
Commissioner Drusina told the audience he recently spoke at the Rio Grande Compact Commission Meeting and they are interested in what USIBWC is doing on the Rio Grande and on the American Canal. Commissioner Drusian thanked the Board Members for their volunteer time and for being the eyes and ears of the community.

Commissioner Drusina spoke on the budget—It was a straight-line from the 2017 budget. It was better than some reports we had. We'll have some construction projects awarded here soon. Everything is looking good. The design and construction budget are similar to last year.

Presentation One – Riparian Habitat Restoration in the Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project – Liz Verdecchia, Natural Resource Specialist, USIBWC

The Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project was constructed in the early 1940s. It is 105 miles from Percha Dam to American Dam. It is within a rectified river channel within a leveed floodway and it facilitates deliveries under the 1906 Convention with Mexico.

Historically, the river channel meandered until we modified the channel. Pictures show the building of the levee and excavation the channel cut-off.
The Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project Record of Decision (ROD) was signed by the USIBWC in June of 2009. It stated there would be long-term management of the river corridor in a way to meet mission requirements of water delivery and flood control while also undertaking environmental measures to include habitat restoration of 550 acres and an Environmental Water Transaction Program.

Stakeholders were involved in the decisions. We've had stakeholder involvement since 1999 and ROD implementation meetings were regularly scheduled. Participants included Irrigation Districts, Local Elected Officials, Environmental Groups, Federal Agencies (Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife, Army Corps. of Engineers), USIBWC staff in Engineering, Environmental and Operations Divisions.

The habitat restoration element of the ROD includes 30 conceptual restoration sites totaling 550 acres with 12 sites for the endangered Southwest Willow Flycatcher. The targeted habitats were: Aquatic, open riparian woodland, riparian woodland, riparian forest, dense riparian shrub, riparian savanna, saltgrass meadow, and screwbean mesquite. Currently there are 22 sites totaling 500 acres. There are 12 restoration sites targeting 95 acres of flycatcher breeding habitat.

Restoration Accomplishments from 2009 to 2018: Cooperative Agreements with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), New Mexico State Parks, Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID), U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Restoration is underway at 22 sites totaling 508 acres of which 9 are being restored by USFWS and 13 by USIBWC environmental contractors. Almost 62,000 trees and shrubs were planted from 2011 to 2018. Five hundred acres of saltcedar (an invasive nonnative plant) were cleared and there were 4 prescribed burns for saltcedar debris piles. Fifty-five shallow groundwater monitoring wells were installed, and a monitoring protocol was established.

The USIBWC acquired almost 48 acres of EBID-administered surface water rights. This allowed the USIBWC to irrigate 9 times at one if its restoration sites in the Las Cruces area.

The Collaboration for Restoration Work was done in partnership with Fish and Wildlife to implement 9 sites targeting endangered species habitat.

The Collaboration on Biological Surveys was also a partnership with USIBWC and the Bureau of Reclamation to collect data on targeted and endangered species and perform habitat surveys under an agreement.

Collaboration with Irrigation Districts included: Finalized a Memorandum of Understanding in 2013 with the Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) to work together to implement the Environmental Water Transaction Program (EWTP). In 2013, the EBID Board passed a policy to classify irrigation of restoration sites as agriculture. In summer 2014, the EBID Board approved the first transfers of water rights to USIBWC lands. In October 2017, USIBWC closed on acquisition of 41.75 acres of EBID suspended water rights. Then in January 2018, a Memorandum of Understanding was approved to build irrigation infrastructure. In Texas, USIBWC is working with El Paso County Water Improvement District #1.

Burning of invasive saltcedar is the most effective method to destroy it. If we mulch it, it will come back.

She showed "before" and "after" slides of the sites where saltcedar was burned and native vegetation planted in its place.

She presented photos of the Leasburg Extension Lateral Wasteway #8 Restoration Site in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The pictures show the trees planted by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are slowly growing. In June of 2014, USIBWC irrigated the restoration site. In the photos you can see in September of 2014 how green and dense the area is, so the irrigating proved to do well. There was a fire at the restoration site in October of 2017 that burned some of the vegetation but most of it survived.

Biological Opinion (BO)—The USIBWC consulted with USFWS under the Endangered Species Act Section 7 in 2011-2012. The 2012 BO required establishment of 53.5 acres of flycatcher habitat. The USIBWC re-consulted after the agency's 2016 River Management Plan was finalized with the channel maintenance plan. As a result of that re-consultation, a new BO in 2017 allows USIBWC to remove up to 50 acres of flycatcher habitat (for example, islands in the middle of the channel) as long as there is no net loss of habitat within the Rio Grande Canalization Project.. Restoration work continues, and where islands are removed as part of the channel maintenance program, vegetation from islands with suitable breeding habitat is moved to the bank or to restoration sites as a way to preserve the habitat. For example, willows on 4 acres of islands in the area of the Sunland Park and Country Club Road Bridges were salvaged by USIBWC restoration contractors in Jan.-Feb. 2018 and transplanted at 5 restoration sites in Sunland Park and El Paso.
River Management Plan—The December 2016 River Management Plan describes: restoration work, Environmental Water Transaction Program, floodplain management, endangered species management, mow/ no mow areas, levee maintenance and other operations, and channel maintenance work. More information can be found at: https://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/Project_Documentation.html

To summarize the USIBWC's environmental restoration work in the Rio Grande Canalization Project, there have been collaborative partnerships with multiple entities/agencies. Through these collaborative partnerships, USIBWC has: Implemented 22 habitat restoration sites totaling 508 acres; cleared or treated

about 500 acres of saltcedar; planted about 59,000 trees and 2,000 shrubs with 20,000 more trees and shrubs planned. We continue to monitor sites and all 55 groundwater monitoring wells. USIBWC acquired over 47 acres of EBID surface water rights and we are working to acquire 146 more. We also conducted 9 irrigation events in 4 years and transplanted 4 acres of island willows onto 5 restoration sites.

For More Information: http://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/canalization_eis.html
Contact: Elizabeth Verdecchia, Natural Resources Specialist, 915-832-4701, or elizabeth.verdecchia@ibwc.gov

Questions and Answers:
Working on restoration site #8 and we applaud IBWC as we are seeing new habitat.

Q: Regarding the fire from the pictures, what strategies do we have for fires near or at the restoration sites from fire pits, camps, etc?
A: This happened in Oct. 2017, it appears this was a quick and fast fire that was contained in a berm. We are not sure if the fire was put there on purpose or not. We are working with local law enforcement officials to get a Memorandum of Understanding with the sheriff and city to help with issuing citations. We need to place signs of what is "allowed" and "not allowed" so law enforcement can enforce. We are looking at access points to block access, and put up gates so there is no illegal entry at the drains.

Commissioner Drusina stated the community can help, too. They can report vandalism and form Neighborhood Organizations so everyone is active and to make sure vandalism isn't happening in these areas.

Q: Are you working with the State of New Mexico on the Rio Grande Trail?
A: Commissioner Drusina said IBWC has been in contact with the State of New Mexico regarding a trail. Perhaps we can provide more information at a future Citizens Forum meeting. There has been cooperation.

Q: When the river was canalized, how did that affect the Texas-New Mexico border?
A: The river did not change it

Q: What was planted in the area?
A: Goodings Willows, Coyote Willow Rio Grande Cottonwood, shrubs such as Seap Willow, three leaf Sumac, four wing salt bushes, and Desert Willow.

Q: How deep are the monitoring wells?
A: They are 12-20 feet deep. They went dry in 2013.

Q: Has anyone found the Southwest Willow Flycatcher in these areas?
A: Verdecchia: Yes and no. There are sites we are enhancing, and we have them there, but they like densely-vegetated areas, and at the new sites we are not quite at that point yet for the Flycatchers' likes and needs.

Q: Is it IBWC's job to count the number of Flycatchers or does Fish and Wildlife do that?
A: We do this through Reclamation experts.

Q: What are your plans for the remaining 8 sites? Your presentation mentioned 30 conceptual sites but you've only worked on 22.
A: We probably won't do all 30. We are also looking at aquatic habitat sites now.

Presentation Two: 2018 Upper Rio Grande Field Office Canalization River Channel Maintenance Completed Projects—Jose Luis Sierra, Asst. Area Operations Manager, Upper Rio Grande Field Office

The goals and objectives of the USIBWC's channel maintenance program are to maintain efficient water deliveries to U.S. irrigation districts, municipalities, and Mexico. Other goals are to increase river channel carrying capacity, increase water delivery efficiency, alleviate backwater conditions at drainage structures which outfall into the river, and reduce upstream drainage problems. The work also satisfies the Rio Grande Canalization Project Record of Decision (ROD) channel maintenance requirements.

The Fiscal Year 2018 Canalization Channel Maintenance began on Oct. 25, 2017 and concluded on March 16, 2018 when water was released from Caballo Dam.

A work crew consisting of seven employees who work the front loaders, excavators, bulldozers, and other heavy equipment started at Mesilla Dam. We had employees from our Mercedes Field Office in South Texas come up to assist us with channel maintenance. They worked starting from the north and they met in the middle. In a good non-irrigation season, we clear 120,000 to 140,000 cubic years of sediment. This season we cleared over 178,000 cubic yards of sediment from the Canalization Project plus an additional 40,000 cubic yards or so from the Rectification Project just downstream for a total of 220,000 cubic yards, which is a record. This is good because it increases channel capacity. The crew worked 16-hour days, six days a week.

He presented the following table indicating areas where sediment was removed.

River Channel Maint. & Islands Sediment Removal Locations to Include Upstream And Downstream Of Bridge Crossing	Approx. Sediment Volume Excavated, In Cubic Yards(Cy)
1. Santo Tomas Bridge Crossing Area	6,145
2. Mesquite Bridge Crossing Area	27,837
3. RM 227/Vado Bridge Crossing Area	5,522
4. Anthony Country Club Bridge Crossing Area	10,387
5. FM1905/New Anthony Bridge Crossing Area	9,712
6. Vinton Bridge Crossing Area	6,360
7. Country Club Bridge Crossing Area	8,464
8. Sunland Park Bridge Crossing Area	29,355
9. Anapra/Race Track Dr. Bridge Crossing Area	25,205
10. Courchesne Bridge Crossing Area	20,000
11. Montoya Drain Outfall Area	18,500
12. Canutillo Bridge Crossing Area	11,486
TOTAL SEDIMENT REMOVED	178,973

He showed photos of the areas where work was performed and described the effort.

Santos Tomas Bridge Crossing Area, 6,145 cubic yards of sediment was removed. At this area we encountered problems such as islands on bridges.

At the Mesquite Bridge, it was a very lengthy project taking nearly 3 weeks to complete the 27,837 Cubic yards of sediment.

Vado Bridge was a big project removing 5,522 cubic yards. This project began on Oct. 25 but we had to let the river dry up so because the river was still wet due to the high water table.

Next was Anthony Country Club Bridge Crossing area with 10,387 cubic yards of sediment being removed.

FM1905/New Anthony Bridge Crossing Area had 9,712 cubic yards of sediment removed at this site and it took about a week.

Vinton Bridge Crossing Area—6,360 cubic yards of sediment were cleared from this area.

In Canutillo, 11,486 cubic yards of sediment was removed. In this area we had huge islands on the east side of the river had needed to be cleared.

8464 cubic yards was cleared at the Country Club Bridge Crossing Area. Time was running out so crews went to Sunland Park. At Sunland Park, 29,355 cubic yards was removed. The crew worked with Liz Verdecchia, Natural Resources Specialist, on the restoration site to have willows removed from the river and replanted on the banks.

At the Anapra/Race Track Dr. Bridge Crossing Area, 25,505 cubic yards of sediment was removed.

Montoya Drain—18, 500 cubic yards was cleared. The outfall here is low.

The last project was Courchesne Bridge Crossing Area with 20,000 cubic yards of sediment being removed. There are gaging stations there, and numerous islands at this location.

We completed all of this year's 12 Canalization river channel maintenance projects on March 16, on the start of irrigation season. An approximate total of 178,973 CY of river sediment was removed in these Canalization areas.

The river channel sediment removal performed this year was due to additional personnel brought in from the Mercedes and Ft. Hancock Field Offices to assist.

We continue to develop & obtain critical no-cost Sediment Deposition Agreements. WE have 12 of them with nearby landowners but we need more.

The plan for the late 2018/early2019 is to address priority river channel and arroyo locations listed under the USIBWC River Management Plan - Canalization Record of Decision(ROD) - 5 Yr. Part IV-Channel Maintenance Section. Next year, the sediment schedule will include work sites at various arroyos and siphons, in particular: Placitas Arroyo, Rincon Siphon, Garcia I Arroyo, Rincon Arroyo and Bignell Arroyo, if time permits. Various locations will require willow restoration work, which will require

additional time to perform both river sediment removal and restoration work by the same IBWC personnel. Next year the Hatch area and other areas will need major sediment removal, including Hatch Siphon, Placitas Arroyo, Rincon Siphon, and Garcia I Arroyo and from Rincon Arroyo to Bignell Arroyo.

Questions and answers:

Q: Where does the sediment go?
A: We need to find disposal locations at no cost sites who will take the sediment. This is still a big tasking to find disposal locations.

Q: What is the criteria for prioritizing sediment removal?
A: We have to have the proper water deliveries and I rely on my guys in the field who know the problem areas, such as arroyos that are plugging up. We also consult with the Environmental Management Division to ensure we abide by the Record of Decision.

Q: Are there city or county properties that can take sediment?
A: Yes, we are out there looking at who can take the sediment. The Anthony Sanitation and Water Department will take some. We are also working with the City of Sunland Park.

Q: What strategies to trap some of it before it reaches the channel are being done?
A: Commissioner Drusina: You can build sediment traps. We want to see if farmers and others can build sediment traps. We've asked the Rio Grande Compact Commission to work on this. It's estimated that 400,000 cubic yards of sediment is entering every year.

Q: Have we heard anything about sediment removal at Elephant Butte Dam? I had heard it was supposed to silt up after 100 years and it is now 100- years old.
A: It hasn't silted up as much as predicted. The dam and reservoir are still functioning well.

Q: Irrigation season may end in June or July. Will you be ready to get in the river in September?
A: Yes, our strategy is how soon can we start? We have to let the river dry then we are in there.

Q: Have you looked at a Marsh Excavator?
A: Yes, they are very expensive but they can go in water and could excavate year-round.

Comment:
You used to have more personnel and equipment. We see the direct effect. You cannot convey the flood flows anymore due to silt.

Commissioner Drusina:
The flood carrying capacity of the river meets FEMA standards. We spent $110 million in improving the levees, which area approved by FEMA to keep water in the channel. The 2019 Budget will look smaller, too. Staffing could be cut. It's not positive at this point but we will commit to you we will do our best to keep doing what we can.

Q: Do you have funding this year to remove sediment between now and September 2018? Could you remove an additional 20,000 cubic yard of sediment this year if irrigation season ends early?
A: We'd have to see if we have the personnel.

Q: Have you considered having a consultant to intercept and advise on intercepting sediment year after year?
A: Our consultants are working on the Thurman I and II Arroyos. They started out to be sediment traps and it came back it's better as a sediment basin. They have to have gages on them too.

Public Comment:
Matthew Lee, resident who lives along the Rio Grande near Shalem Colony Bridge: I've lived here four years and the IBWC are the worst neighbors. In March, hunters were shooting guns towards my house. I called the police and they said it's not their problem. On March 12, I called the IBWC office again. I have spoken with your staff and they are very helpful. There is trash along the levee, parties all hours of the night, drag racing the levee. It's got to stop. In April, gates were installed but more needs to be done.

Commissioner Drusina: Thank you for your comments. The gates are working about 80% of the time. We'll survey that area again and we'll look at it again. The "guests" aren't invited. The cars, motorcycles, ATVs, erode the levee and creates problems. We enter into agreements with law enforcement and they are to respond to complaints.

Another member of the public spoke and said he will send a presentation to USIBWC with photos he has taken of the area around Shalem Colony. He is from the Vista Roble dos Estate neighborhood. He agrees with the previous speaker and has ideas about how to address it and wants a dialogue with USIBWC. He believes if you stop the cars, you will stop the problem.

Board Discussion/Suggested Future Agenda Items
Walton Low thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting. He thanked the Board Members for their attendance to the Citizens Forum Board as this is the last meeting with the current board. Applications for the 2018-2020 board will be made available soon. Applications can be mailed, emailed, or faxed to Lori Kuczmanski.

Citizen Forum notices can now be emailed to you rather than snail mail. Send your request to Lori (lori.kuczmanski@ibwc.gov). This will save the agency money on mailings.

Suggested Future Agenda Items:
-Emergency Services access on the levees with issue being locked gates (for the next Las Cruces meeting)
-Certification process of the levees
-Concern of the signs that read: Enter at your own risk

The next meeting will be July 12, 2018 at USIBWC Headquarters in El Paso, Texas.

8:35 meeting adjourned.

*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.