



International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section

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USIBWC STARTS WORK ON RIO GRANDE LEVEE IMPROVEMENTS IN CAMERON COUNTY, TEXAS

U.S. Commissioner Carlos Marin of the International Boundary and Water Commission announced today that the United States Section of the Commission (USIBWC) has begun work on Rio Grande levee improvements in Cameron County, Texas. When completed by summer 2008, the project will ensure that all river levees in Cameron County provide adequate protection from the 100-year flood.

According to USIBWC studies, portions of the Rio Grande flood control levee are not high enough to meet Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements. FEMA requires that levees be able to contain the 100-year flood with three feet of freeboard (the distance between the water surface elevation and the top of the levee). To meet this requirement, the USIBWC is raising deficient levee segments from Donna Pump to 26 miles downstream from the Gateway Bridge. The levee will be raised by up to 30 inches to ensure adequate freeboard.

FEMA is developing Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Cameron County to identify properties at risk of flooding. Where levees are inadequate, property owners may be required to purchase flood insurance. The USIBWC is working quickly within available funds to raise the levees so that property owners in adjacent areas can be spared the flood insurance requirement.

“Our priority is to raise river levees in the urban area of Brownsville before the start of the hurricane season,” said Commissioner Marin. “We will undertake additional improvements in the Lower Rio Grande Valley as funding becomes available.”

The USIBWC is using its own personnel to design and construct the levee improvements in Cameron County. Preparatory work to survey and clear the levees began in late 2007. USIBWC construction crews began placing new material to raise the levee this month. The preliminary cost estimate for the project is \$1.5 million

During the current fiscal year, \$10 million has been appropriated to USIBWC for levee work on the Rio Grande Flood Control Project in Texas. In July 2007, the USIBWC announced that it had reached agreement with Hidalgo County Drainage District #1 for a cooperative project to raise Rio Grande flood control levees in Hidalgo County. With the new appropriation, the USIBWC expects to award a construction contract to raise a 3.3-mile levee segment from the Banker Floodway to the Hidalgo-Reynosa Bridge. The USIBWC is also working on Rio Grande levee-raising projects in El Paso County, Texas and Doña Ana County, New Mexico.

For more information:

Sally Spener
915-832-4175
sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov