



International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section

For immediate release
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USIBWC COMPLETES FLOOD CONTROL PROJECTS

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has completed a project to raise Rio Grande flood control levees in El Paso County, Texas. Work began in May 2007 and was completed in September. A sediment removal project undertaken jointly with the Mexican Section of the Commission was completed in November.

“This work ensures that our levees are high enough and 163,000 cubic yards of material removed from the river channel to protect much of El Paso from a major Rio Grande flood,” said USIBWC Commissioner Carlos Marin.

The levees were raised as needed through much of the urban portion of El Paso, covering the area along the river from near Asarco to the Zaragoza International Bridge. Levee height was increased for levee segments totaling 9.5 miles. The work was conducted using USIBWC personnel and equipment at a cost of \$810,000. The USIBWC used 56,400 tons of embankment material and 30,900 tons of surfacing material.

The USIBWC initiated the project after studies showed some levee segments were not high enough to contain the 100-year flood with 3 feet of freeboard (freeboard is the distance from the water surface elevation to the top of the levee).

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is currently updating flood hazard maps for El Paso County. Property owners where levees are inadequate may be required to purchase flood insurance. By raising the levees, the USIBWC expects to save many residents the expense of this insurance.

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, has also completed a project to remove sediment from the concrete-lined portion of the river channel through central El Paso-Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, an area known as the Chamizal Project. Crews removed 163,000 cubic yards of silt from a

2.2-mile reach of the Chamizal Project at a cost of \$800,000, including \$650,000 secured by Congressman Silvestre Reyes as supplemental funding.

Although El Paso experienced significant flooding from storms in 2006, the Rio Grande flood control levees were not overtopped. Flooding occurred due to unprecedented amounts of water in arroyos and urban drainage systems.

Even with completion of a significant amount of levee work in 2007, additional work remains in the Upper Valley and Canutillo areas of El Paso County and portions of Doña Ana County, New Mexico in order to meet FEMA requirements. This work will be undertaken subject to the availability of federal appropriations. The USIBWC has also begun a major project to raise and rehabilitate levees in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties in South Texas. The USIBWC is coordinating with the Mexican Section on additional flood control improvements in the area of El Paso-Ciudad Juarez.

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