O
n the 118th day of being the U.S. Commissioner of the International Boundary and Water Commission, Commissioner Jayne Harkins held her first “All Hands” meeting with USIBWC employees to give her priorities and to talk with employees.

All Field Offices participated in the meeting via Video Teleconference, or VTC. This was the first meeting Commissioner Harkins had with more than 200 employees.

During the meeting, Harkins outlined her five priories for the Commission, which are:

**Border Sanitation**—Along the U.S.-Mexico border, the natural drainage of flow from Mexico into the United States, coupled with population growth and aging infrastructure, have caused sanitation issues in several communities along the border.

**Treaty Water Deliveries**—Provided under the Treaties with Mexico, as well as...
meeting the water quality requirements.

**Infrastructure**—The USIBWC has a responsibility for dams, bridges, levees, and floodways, which need improvements and adequate maintenance.

**Communication and Collaboration**—Strong communications and collaboration both within the organization and externally improves the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization.

**Safety and Security for Employees**—The field work of the IBWC employees, which includes work at dams, bridges and power plants, brings its own unique safety hazards, coupled with it being in the border environment, adds specific security issues unique to our organization. It is very important the USIBWC staff go home to their families each day.

Sammy Rey, Human Resources Assistant, was in attendance for the Commissioner’s remarks. Being a fairly new employee to the USIBWC, Rey said the meeting was useful.

“I thought it was informative and everyone was receptive to what Commissioner Harkins was saying,” said Rey. “I appreciated the meeting.”

Harkins looks forward to working with the United States and Mexico on a variety of comprehensive water, infrastructure, and sanitation projects along the border to improve the well-being of our country and our relationship with Mexico.

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Diving for Rails

The guide railings for a Mixed Liquor Recycle (MLR) pump had become damaged and dropped into one of the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant bioreactors. There are two ways to recover the railings. The first option is to completely drain the bioreactor and then go in and recover the railings. The second option is to send in a diver. Since the NIWTP is operating at 117% of its capacity, the first option was not available.

A diving firm out of Tucson who specializes in this type of work was contracted. The diver was able to recover the guide rails and reset them in their proper position all without disruption of the normal bioreactor process.

Although the work seems unpleasant, the divers are completely encapsulated within a dry suit.

The work they perform gives treatment plants important options in situations such as ours.

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A diver retrieves a rail from the bioreactor at the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant (Photo by John Light, Area Operations Manager, Nogales Field Office, USIBWC)
Upper Rio Grande Field Office Awards

The Upper Rio Grande Field Office in El Paso, Texas, hosted an Employee Appreciation Ceremony on March 7 for employees’ federal and Commission service.

Robert Holland, Heavy Mobile Equipment Mechanic, was recognized for 35 years of Commission and Federal service; Luis Ramos, Engineering Equipment Operator, was awarded for 20 years of Commission service, and 40 years of Federal service; and Art (Arthur) Benavidez, Engineering Equipment Operator, was recognized for 20 years of Commission service, and 25 years of Federal service.

A separate awards ceremony was organized among peers to recognize employees from all the Upper Rio Grande Field Offices for the hard work and dedication to the mission.

Rosie Montes, Area Operations Manager, Upper Rio Grande Field Office, asked employees to nominate their peers for their hard work and awarded them with a certificate at their ceremony.

Peers gave the “Above and Beyond” award to Rebecca Hardin and Flavio Apodaca for their hard work and dedication to the mission. Hardin was nominated and selected by her peers for consistently following up on issues and deadlines. Apodaca was awarded for assisting and supporting the mission with tasks out of his responsibly and for being a team player. Apodaca also took the initiative in supporting and advising the new Upper Rio Grande Field Office Assistant Area Operations Manager, Xochitl Aranda, in her duties.

In addition to service awards, the Field Offices were recognized for achieving a safe work environment.

The Las Cruces Field Office was awarded the Safety and Performance and Evaluation Award for 2018; American Dam Field Office was awarded the Safety and Health award, and the Zacarias Dominguez Field Office was awarded the Office of Workers’ Compensation Award.
Boundary Marker

Inspection of Falcon Dam Spillway Stoplogs

The staff oversaw the contract for the rehabilitation and certification of the 12 spillway stoplogs. The work on the 40,000 lbs. metal structures included non-destructive testing, inspection and repair of welds and bolts, and sandblasting and painting.

In 2017, during the 5-year Safety of Dams inspection, it was recommended by the technical advisors that all the spillway stoplogs be rehabilitated. The stoplogs are used to create a dry work area between the front of the spillway gate and the reservoir water. First, the stoplogs with expansive water proof seals on the edges are installed one by one in front of the spillway gate to prevent any additional reservoir water from reaching the spillway gate. Then the water between the spillway gate and the stoplog is removed by raising the spillway gate. This creates a dry work area between the spillway gate and the stoplogs that allows maintenance staff to inspect and rehab any one of the six spillway gates.

Falcon Dam was constructed by the U.S. and Mexico pursuant of the Water Treaty of 1944. The dam and reservoir is an international multi-purpose storage dam on the Rio Grande in Falcon Heights, Texas. The dam was dedicated on Oct. 19, 1953.

Staff performing the final inspection of the spillway stoplogs. Courtesy photo
Water conservation projects under Minute 319 are being implemented in Baja California and Sonora, Mexico.

IBWC Minute 319 on U.S.-Mexico cooperation on Colorado River management was developed to increase efficiencies of water usage and reduce the effects of drought in the west, among other goals. Titled “Interim International Cooperative Measures in the Colorado River Basin through 2017 and Extension of Minute 318 Cooperative Measures to Address the Continued Effects of the April 2010 Earthquake in the Mexicali Valley, Baja California,” Minute 319 explored options to accomplish certain projects to help achieve these goals. Among the possibilities explored were canal linings, the development of new water sources, and the sharing of shortages.

The conservation work evolved into more than 50 projects with the cooperation of the Mexican government and stakeholders in the U.S. including the seven states in the Colorado River Basin, non-governmental organizations, and federal agencies including the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The total investment for the conservation projects is $18 million U.S. dollars. These projects include canal linings, control structures such as gates, and laser leveling of agricultural lands to increase water efficiency. These projects have conveyed water more efficiently to users in Mexico that struggled before to have reliable water with minimal losses.
Resurfacing the levees in Mercedes

The USIBWC Lower Rio Grande Field Office crews completed the U.S. levee resurfacing project on the Main Floodway, the Arroyo Colorado, and the North Floodways, covering Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy Counties. The contract was issued to purchase the flex-base material and transport it to the different levee roadway reaches. The work entails the preparation of the levee by mowing and removing brush on the levee crowns, the placement and grading of the flex-base material, and compaction of the flex-base material was completed by in-house Heavy Equipment Crew, Tractor Operator, and Maintenance personnel.

Flex base is a flexible coarse material that is most often used for temporary roadways. The purpose of this project is to have drivable roadways especially during flood events. This allows our personnel to safely and effectively transit throughout our floodway and patrol the levees under rainy conditions. Not having drivable levee roadways would make it unsafe for our employees to drive on the levees and manage flood events. During flood events, our personnel drive the levee to inspect and operate structures, to report water elevations, to inspect levee slopes for erosion and boils, and to transport equipment and sandbags where needed.

Additional funding this year allowed the Lower Rio Grande Field Office to complete 37 miles of levee roadway. Levee resurfacing covered 17 miles in the Main Floodway, nine miles in the North Floodway, and 10 miles in the Arroyo Colorado.

The Mercedes Field Office operates two international dams, covers 270 miles of U.S. levees along the river and floodways, and is responsible for 30,000 acres of interior floodway.