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DRAFT PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
Taken on August 28, 2007

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PUBLIC HEARING
DRAFT PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
Improvements to the USIBWC Rio Grande Flood Control
Projects along the Texas-Mexico Border

August 28, 2007

On the 28th day of August, 2007, the
following public hearing came on to be heard regarding the
above-referenced matter, held in Wyndham Hotel, 2721 South
10th Street, McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas.

Proceedings reported by computer-aided
transcription.

1 SIGN-IN APPEARANCES:

2 Carlos Victoria

3 Anthony Davis

4 James Hinson

5 Carlos Pena

6 Annette E. Escobar

7 Nancy Ramirez

8 Godfrey Garza

9 B. Eduardo Mendez

10 Carl Boyd

11 Kay Wolf

12 Laura De La Garza

13 Jennifer Bergham

14 Eric Ellmer

15 Rick Reyes

16 Ernesto Reyes

17 Omar Anzaldua

18 Juan Trevino

19 Maria T. Garcia

20 Joel Munguia

21 Troy Allen

22 Eve Gonzalez

23 Daniel Izaguirre

24

25

P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

August 28, 2007

6:07 PM

MR. PENA: Good evening. Thank you for all coming out. My name is Carlos Pena. I'm the environmental manager division engineer for the U.S. Section of IBWC. I'd like to welcome all of you to tonight's public hearing on the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact statement for improvements to the U.S. Section IBWC Rio Grande flood control flood projects along the Texas-Mexico border.

For the record, let me state that this public hearing is being convened at 6:07 PM on Tuesday, August 28th, 2007, at the Wyndham Hotel located at 2721 South 10th Street in McAllen, Texas.

I want to let you know that the entire proceedings are being recorded by a court reporter and that an official transcript will be prepared and posted on our U.S. Section IBWC Web site within a few weeks of this week. I thank you again for coming out. I'll be your moderator for this meeting. But before we do, I want to give a few administrative remarks.

If you haven't done so or before the end of the meeting, please sign in. There's a sign-in sheet at

1 the entrance to the room, and please write clearly so we
2 can make sure we get your names and e-mails, and so forth.

3 The purpose of this meeting is just another
4 step in the NEPA process. Many of you will remember we
5 had a public scoping meeting in January 2005, and some of
6 you were present at the time of the project.

7 Tonight, however, this is a public hearing,
8 a forum that provides an opportunity for members of the
9 community to provide comments on the draft Programmatic
10 EIS. A draft Programmatic EIS was officially released for
11 public review following a notice of availability that was
12 published in the federal register on August 10th, 2007.
13 Tonight we'd like to hear your comments on the draft.

14 At the back of the room as some of you saw,
15 we have available pocket folders with a copy of the
16 presentation that includes maps and has written comment
17 sheets. We also have electronic copies available if some
18 of you are interested. They're also available at the
19 entrance to the room.

20 The environmental review process is
21 mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act or
22 what's commonly referred to as NEPA. Your input and
23 comments are beneficial to our environmental review. U.S.
24 section IBWC is most interested in hearing reviews,
25 opinions, recommendations concerning the draft

1 Programmatic EIS. I want to clarify one thing up front is
2 that this is a public hearing, and the purpose of this
3 hearing should provide you opportunity to present your
4 views, opinions and recommendations concerning this draft
5 Programmatic EIS. Your comments will be addressed in the
6 final EIS statement, and tonight, USIBWC we will not be
7 responding to any comments, however, if there are any,
8 anything we can do to clear up any factual or clarifying
9 questions, we'll respond to those.

10 After the presentation, we'll open up
11 comments to the public here, and we'll be providing you
12 with some ground rules for that.

13 The U.S. Section of IBWC is the lead
14 federal agency in the project. The USIBWC will be leading
15 the project through the environmental review process.
16 Also the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Fish and
17 Wildlife Service in the Corpus Christi office and the U.S.
18 Corps of Engineers Galveston District office are also
19 cooperating agencies for this project.

20 Several members of the project team are
21 also here and I want to introduce you to them. We have
22 Rick Reyes who some of you know is the manager for the
23 Mercedes office. We have a consulting firm, Parsons
24 preparing the Programmatic EIS. And Carlos Victoria here
25 who is the project manager. James Hinson who is our lead

1 biologist, and Anthony Davis in the back is our senior
2 environmental engineer.

3 After my remarks here, I'll be turning the
4 podium over to Carlos Victoria who will be provide an
5 overview of the project.

6 Following the presentation we will open up
7 the hearing for public comment. Your comments are very
8 important to us, and again, we're not here to respond to
9 questions on the subject matter on the draft, on the draft
10 problematic EIS, however, we'll respond to both oral and
11 written comments to part of the final problematic EIS.

12 We'll be taking comments this evening
13 either in written or oral form. And as I stated before we
14 have a court reporter, Annette, here who will be taking
15 everybody's comments. And if you have a comment you want
16 to make, if you can please state your name and who you are
17 with to make sure we get a proper record of that.

18 And so that everybody has an opportunity to
19 make sure his or her comments are part of the official
20 record, when you came in we had some forms that you can
21 fill out, to do that. And there is either a blue card or
22 the white sheet is for the written comments. Either of
23 those two forms will be taken here today.

24 Anybody needs one, raise your hand and
25 we'll provide those to you now.

1 Those of you who already written your
2 comments, if you want to give them to our staff, you can
3 do so and you can stay for the rest of the meeting. If
4 you have a brought a prepared statement, please make sure
5 your name and address is on it so we can attach it to the
6 comment forms to have a record of that.

7 If you've already mailed in your comments
8 to the USIBWC, there is no reason to submit those again.
9 For those of you wishing to speak tonight, please fill out
10 the request card and hand it to our staff to make sure and
11 note that. I'll try to call you in order in which the
12 cards are received. And again, you do not need to provide
13 them in writing if you already have written comments made
14 to us.

15 As I mentioned, Annette will be providing
16 this, will be turning in the statement of record for all
17 the participants here who will be providing a statement.

18 So again, if she can't hear she may raise
19 your hand and let you know she can't understand you so
20 well. So, please, part of the record we want to make sure
21 to get everybody's statement correct.

22 When I call you -- when I call your name,
23 please come forward or if you want stand up here. We're
24 in a small room so that we can hear your comments and
25 state your name, again, and your affiliation and then

1 begin your statement. Those are the ground rules.

2 There's refreshments in the back if you
3 want to grab some of that before we start, and with that
4 I'll turn it over to Carlos.

5 MR. VICTORIA: Thank you, Carlos.

6 Good evening. What I'd like to do for you
7 tonight is to review some important issues and aspects of
8 this Programmatic EIS. We're going to cover three
9 specific areas.

10 First, we're going to have an overview of
11 the three Rio Grande flood control projects. They are
12 currently maintained and operated by the USIBWC.

13 Next, we have the process that was followed
14 to select the alternatives for evaluation in the PEIS, the
15 Programmatic EIS, and we give some examples of improvement
16 measurements that are under consideration.

17 And finally, the evaluation of potential
18 impacts for each alternative that was conducted at
19 Programmatic level. We'll come back to the programmatic
20 level. Let's get started with the projects' description.

21 There are three projects operated by the
22 USIBWC along the border on the Rio Grande, and they are
23 indicated by those, in this diagram by the red boxes.
24 Starting downstream from the City of El Paso, the upstream
25 most project, we have the Rectification Project and

1 continues with the Presidio Project, and the third one to
2 the down to the Gulf of Mexico the Lower Rio Grande Flood
3 Control Project, locally, the one we have most interest.

4 The box indicates not only the location,
5 but also gives you an idea of the size, the scale of the
6 project. We'll go over an overview of those three
7 projects. I'm going to refer you to the handouts. We
8 have some maps because at this scale you won't be able to
9 see much of it, so please refer back when you need to see
10 some of the details.

11 The reason we're evaluating the three
12 projects in one single Programmatic EIS is because they do
13 share a number of features. The first one is that all
14 were built with three objectives.

15 The first one was to protect urban and
16 agricultural areas from flooding on both sides of the
17 border.

18 The second one is that they were built to
19 ensure water delivery for agricultural and municipal use;
20 and they were also built to maintain the international
21 boundary along the Rio Grande Valley as it has been
22 established by international treaties.

23 The second common feature of this project
24 is a relatively narrow floodway that is enclosed by levies
25 in both margins of the river.

1 Third feature is vegetation control is
2 required in the floodway typically done by mowing, is to
3 prevent disruption on the flow of water in the floods.

4 The fourth feature is the need to maintain
5 the stream channel to ensure sufficient water deliveries.

6 And finally, as is true for most of the Rio
7 Grande, there is a wide variation seasonal changes in
8 stream flow.

9 Having this features in common, let's go
10 with the first project, the Rectification Project. As I
11 was mentioning, it's located further upstream with the
12 three projects.

13 Key features are an approximate length of
14 86 miles, river miles along the Rio Grande heading
15 downstream from American Diversion Dam in El Paso to Fort
16 Quitman. The levee system covers most of the project area
17 and has a typical levee height of seven to ten feet.

18 The floodway is narrow with an average
19 width of 600 feet. And an important feature is that the
20 entire floodway is under direct control of the USIBWC.

21 The maintained stream channel is up to a
22 hundred feet in width. And the base stream flow is
23 relatively low most of the year because by far the Rio
24 Grande flow is controlled by upstream reservoir operations
25 both in Mexico and in Texas.

1 Downstream from the Rectification Project
2 is the Presidio Project. This one is the smallest of the
3 three projects and is also maintained and operated by the
4 USIBWC.

5 Key features of this project is a length of
6 13 river miles along the Presidio-Ojinaga Valley.

7 Second, it has a large levee system
8 relative to the other two flood control projects. Levee
9 height ranges from 12 to 35 feet. The increase in
10 height -- increases in height downstream, and the reason
11 for this is that the Rio Concho from Mexico is a major
12 tributary to the Rio Grande and comes halfway through this
13 project.

14 And finally, the project has a very narrow
15 floodway and runs through an increasingly steep terrain.

16 The third project and the longest and the
17 more complex one is the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control
18 Project. This project extends 186 miles from Penitas near
19 here to the City of McAllen, all the way to the City of
20 Brownsville near the Gulf of Mexico.

21 The levee system itself covers nearly
22 106 miles along the river and the typical height is about
23 15 feet, varies anywhere from eight to maybe 20. That's
24 about average.

25 In terms of the floodway, the area is far

1 greater than those of the Rectification-Presidio Projects.
2 One key difference for this particular project is that the
3 jurisdiction of the USIBWC of the floodway is very
4 limited. Maintenance of the commission is limited to two
5 narrow corridors along this project. One it goes along
6 the stream bank and the second one is around the levee
7 system. The rest of the floodway really is on the private
8 ownership for agricultural purposes or is extensively as a
9 natural resource conservation agency by state, federal
10 agencies and other non-environmental organizations. So
11 this is the key difference with the other two projects.

12 Another unique feature for this project is
13 the presence of two flood diversion dams. And each one
14 runs the flood water into two interior floodways, one in
15 Texas, the other one into Mexico.

16 Summarizing the general picture of these
17 three projects, what makes them unique relative to each
18 other is first scale, which as we mentioned 13 miles for
19 the smallest one to 186 to the Rio Grande Valley. And
20 scale extent to the floodway dictates to large extent the
21 potential for multipurpose use.

22 Second, the difference is that the extent
23 of the required floodway maintenance varies, and as we
24 mentioned, under the control of the USIBWC of the
25 maintenance of the floodway control.

1 Third difference between them is that
2 dry-weather flows varies widely between the three projects
3 and some regions of the river is nearly dry most the year.
4 Other sections have a pretty steady flow and that would be
5 the case of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Project.

6 A final feature that varies widely among
7 the projects are the existing of proposed plans for
8 habitat diversification and improved water use. Most of
9 them are located actually in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.
10 There are not very many other two projects upstream.

11 With this overview of the three projects,
12 let's go up to the development alternatives. As indicated
13 in this diagram, the formulation of improvement
14 alternatives is a key step in the Programmatic EIS
15 preparation. During the alternative development, comments
16 from the scoping process were addressed and incorporated
17 as applicable. Those scoping meetings were held about a
18 year and a half ago here in McAllen, plus El Paso and
19 Presidio.

20 The alternatives report was completed in
21 final form in February 2007. Under the basis of those
22 alternatives, we prepared the evaluation of impact.

23 Let's consider the alternatives that were
24 selected for the evaluation.

25 Steps that we followed to select

1 alternatives is, first, improvement measures were
2 identified from the scoping process, then measures that
3 were feasible for implementation were selected for each
4 project based on unique features of each project. And the
5 final and third step is that the measures were organized
6 into alternatives for improvement of the flood control
7 project.

8 A key criteria that must be emphasized was
9 the compatibility with the project mission of flood
10 control, water delivery and boundary stabilization.
11 Measures or alternatives that were not compatible with
12 this basic needs of the project were excluded or modified
13 to extend that were workable.

14 The four alternatives that were selected,
15 first, no action alternative, which is really no action
16 simply maintained the current operation and maintenance
17 activity that are currently maintained.

18 The second one is the enhanced operation
19 and maintenance alternative;

20 Third is the alternative that focuses on
21 water resources management in addition to the other
22 measures;

23 And finally there is alternative that
24 focuses on the multipurpose use of the project, the
25 project management alternative.

1 The first alternative as required by the
2 NEPA process, that is, continuation of current practices.

3 Let's go to some examples of what is being
4 done currently. There are four areas in which the USIBWC
5 maintains to operate this projects.

6 First, is the levee system is maintained in
7 regular basis and repairs needed, plus the grass areas are
8 mowed to prevent structural damages.

9 Second, floodway management is largely
10 conducted by seasonal mowing to maintain grass vegetation
11 to prevent disruption of the flood water flow.

12 Third, is a channel maintenance which
13 includes the stabilization of stream bank and removal of
14 channel obstructions.

15 In some cases, and on as needed basis,
16 dredging of the channels is needed. That doesn't happen
17 here in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, but it's been done in
18 the Rectification Project previously, on a regular basis,
19 at least ten years or so.

20 The next alternative deals primarily with
21 operational features of the flood control projects. The
22 enhanced operation of the maintenance alternative
23 incorporates improvements to the levee system as well as
24 measurements, measures that are dealing with the
25 maintenance of the floodway and stream channel.

1 Typical changes to the levee system are the
2 increasing height and the improvements in the structural
3 condition to prevent leakage.

4 In terms of floodway maintenance, changes
5 could be made if this alternatives were adopted in the
6 extent or timing of vegetation mowing or removal. And
7 there's also options to make changes for sediment removal
8 and disposal.

9 Under the next alterative, we go beyond
10 those improvements that are directly related to project
11 functionality, and this is the integrated water resources
12 management alternative in which we take all these
13 potential options from the previous alternative and we add
14 measures for a fishing water use, water conservation
15 measurements, included in salt cedar removal and the
16 potential improvements in water quality. Typically all
17 these measures would be adopted within the project right
18 of way.

19 The final alternative goes beyond the core
20 mission of the projects and water management measures that
21 we mentioned briefly.

22 There are two categories, general
23 categories in which those additional measures would fall
24 into. Those that apply directly to the jurisdictional
25 floodway, for example, the potential use for recreational

1 areas, trails. And second set of measures that would be
2 implemented outside the actual project area in support of
3 regional initiatives and that would be conducted on the
4 cooperative agreements. Some examples of those regional
5 initiatives could be upstream sediment control, wildlife
6 habitat improvements and diversification of aquatic
7 habitat.

8 The next slide is a table which summarizes
9 this concept and shows how the increasing level of
10 measures associated into the alternatives.

11 The rows indicate the categories of
12 measurements in the areas of functionality improvements,
13 water resource management and multipurpose use of the
14 project. The three alternatives are listed on the
15 right-hand side. If you follow the rational increasing
16 the number of measurements, the measure that would be
17 included to each of those alternatives.

18 The final step in the operation of the PEIS
19 is the evaluation of impacts. Something very important to
20 keep in mind is that this evaluation was done at
21 programmatic level. This defers from the conventional
22 environmental impact statement in that actually specific
23 plans or engineering works that has been defined a
24 Programmatic EIS actually takes into account potential
25 measurements that could happen over the next ten,

1 actually, at 20 year time frame was selected for this
2 purpose.

3 Once we have this document in place, what
4 happens is in the future, future actions will require as
5 needed initial documentation that are assigned specific,
6 and we'll respond to the specifications of each of the
7 proposed actions.

8 Those impacts were evaluated for each of
9 the alternatives and for each project and multiple
10 resource areas were evaluated for each.

11 Key main resource areas cover water
12 resources, biological resources, including wildlife
13 habitat and vegetation, historic and archaeological
14 resources, changes in land use, socioeconomic aspects and
15 environmental health issues such as air quality and noise.

16 Potential impacts identified vary with each
17 of the flood control projects, but in general we can
18 generalization that there is a potential to impact or to
19 improve wildlife habitat and aquatic ecosystems depending
20 on which measures are implemented.

21 Cultural resources also could be affected
22 to some extent, and that would apply mostly to the levee
23 expansion areas. Typically, when plans are underway for
24 the Lower Rio Grande to increase the height of the levee
25 to improve the flood containing capacity and you increase

1 the height of the levee, also the footprint, the width of
2 the levee increases, so that's where the engineering work
3 takes place in one of the examples.

4 No large scale changes in land use are
5 anticipated. And then effects on regional economics,
6 influx of money to the economy, air quality would be minor
7 or temporary.

8 There were a number of issues that were
9 identified during the evaluation impact. Some of them
10 include the need for increased flood containment capacity
11 was always a primary consideration, in some cases a
12 restriction for the kind of measures that can be adopted.

13 Flood control, the floodway restricted with
14 habitat measures that could be implemented. Given the
15 limitation of water supply in the Rio Grande, the water
16 availability is a key criteria to make environmental
17 initiatives feasible.

18 And another point to be considered is that
19 the floodway is being increasingly used for more extensive
20 work patrol operations, so any changes, really, need to be
21 consistent or compatible with those actions.

22 With these three points in mind, what I'd
23 like to do now is to return to Carlos the microphone or
24 podium and he will facilitate hearing from you during the
25 public comment section. Thank you.

1 MR. PENA: Thank you.

2 As I mentioned, part of our analysis we're
3 asking for your input. We're interested in hearing from
4 all of you to find out if you have any particular
5 concerns, questions or comments about this draft
6 Programmatic EIS. And if you have any questions or
7 concerns, this is the time to express them or bring them
8 forward to us.

9 Remember that the September 24th is the
10 date we will take comments up until that time so we have a
11 couple more weeks to do that.

12 I'll continue with the second part. As I
13 mentioned before, we're going to take comments from you.
14 As I mentioned we're interested in what you have to say,
15 so -- we won't be making any official responses or
16 comments. All responses will be included in the final
17 Programmatic EIS after we had a chance to consider all of
18 the comments fully.

19 I'm going to call for our first group of
20 speakers here.

21 Laura de la Garza.

22 MS. DE LA GARZA: Thank you. I appreciate
23 this opportunity to review and comment on the draft of
24 Programmatic EIS. My name is Laura de la Garza. I serve
25 as a board member of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Citizens

1 Forum and I'm also watershed coordinator for the
2 implementation of the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection
3 Plan.

4 The watershed protection plan was developed
5 by the Arroyo Colorado watershed partnership, a coalition
6 of over 500 individuals representing federal, state and
7 local agencies, NGOs and concerned citizens of the general
8 public.

9 The implementation of the plan is a
10 regional initiative, not only to improve the quality of
11 water in the Arroyo Colorado and Lower Lagune Madre but
12 also an initiative to promote a driving environment and
13 economy for the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The focus of my
14 comment this evening is the Lower Rio Grande Port Isabel
15 project as the interior floodway is connected to and part
16 of the Arroyo Colorado.

17 First of all, I acknowledge the mission of
18 the IBWC, including the immense responsibility to minimize
19 potential flood impacts through levee and floodway
20 projects. Improvement to flood control systems including
21 levees are part of the Corps mission. Moreover, the IBWC
22 has adopted additional goals that include improvement to
23 water use, quality, conservation, and multipurpose
24 utilization of projects in support of levee regional
25 initiatives for recreational use and environmental

1 improvement.

2 The draft Programmatic EIS is being
3 prepared to evaluate the maintenance and improvement
4 alternatives to maximize flood protection. It also
5 provides alternatives to minimize potential environmental
6 impact; however, the draft EIS does not address water
7 quality.

8 Again, there is a regional initiative to
9 improve water quality in the Arroyo Colorado. The top
10 strategy of that plan is the construction of regional and
11 individual wetland systems.

12 As many of you know, wetlands not only
13 improve water quality, settle out sediments and provide
14 habitat, they also provide recreational, educational and
15 economic opportunities.

16 Other strategies in the Arroyo Colorado
17 watershed protection plan include the support of best
18 management practices for agriculture, improved wastewater
19 collection and treatment facilities, including improved
20 infrastructure for colonias, the support for ongoing
21 local, federal and state agencies and other organizations
22 in regards to habitat conservation and protection and
23 restoration of existing repairing areas resacas and fresh
24 water wetlands.

25 In the plan, we also call for reduction of

1 stream channel and bank erosion and the development of
2 alternative drainage ditch maintenance and practices.

3 The partnership plans to submit formal
4 comments regarding this draft PEIS and they will be along
5 the lines of the need to address water quality with
6 consideration to the added potential of creating
7 environmental recreational and economic opportunities.
8 Again, all this while considering the mandate for flood
9 protection boundary stabilization and water delivery.

10 Representatives of the IBWC Mercedes field
11 office are valued members of our partnership and increased
12 participation in the IBWC is encouraged in the evaluation
13 and positive development of wetlands projects.

14 As brought up at the last citizens forum
15 meeting held here in the Valley, we also look forward to
16 discussing alternative stream and drainage ditch
17 configurations that promote improved water quality. Also
18 recommended is an increased IBWC participation in current
19 and future efforts of other agencies, local governments
20 and organizations for increased use of the Lower Rio
21 Grande Valley as an ecco-tourism destination, improve our
22 local economy and promoting habitat enhancement and
23 recreational opportunities.

24 Tourism is estimated to bring over a
25 hundred million dollars annually to the Lower Rio Grande

1 Valley and increased attention to water quality and
2 habitat restoration to build on an economic potential.
3 Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

4 MR. PENA: Thank you, Laura. Next speaker
5 is Eric Ellmer.

6 MR. ELLMER: I didn't have time to prepare
7 a text because I was reminded of this meeting recently.

8 I represent Los Ninos Del Rio. It's a
9 nonprofit organization that was founded in '91 to promote
10 and preserve, preserve and promote the environmental and
11 cultural heritage of the Valley from Laredo to
12 Brownsville. And we just recently have received new
13 funding to reinvigorate the organization. It's been quiet
14 the last few years. We're doing -- our goal is to get
15 more people to visit historical places that have been
16 previously preserved by the organization along the
17 corridor and to get them to do that through recreational
18 programs.

19 We're in the process of identifying wraps
20 for peddling and paddling in and around the river, and all
21 of this is very closely tied to economic initiative. The
22 medium term goal is to get national heritage area status
23 for the region and all that kind of goes underlying with
24 what Laura de la Garza was saying about ecco-tourism for
25 the area.

1 There's been a huge investment in birding
2 made down here which appeals to the twelve million birds
3 in the country. Their numbers are declining though
4 according to the studies by the outdoor industry
5 association. The people who are most active at it are
6 getting older and retiring, and worse, they're not really
7 being replaced by a younger generation.

8 Conversely, there's 20 million paddlers in
9 the country and the same studies shows that their numbers
10 are increasing and it's particularly increasing among
11 Hispanics. So twice as many paddlers out there that could
12 be potentially coming down to this area to engage in that
13 kind of activity, and seven times as many cyclists, there
14 are 80 million cyclists in the country.

15 We just finished making a presentation
16 yesterday with the City of McAllen that involves creating
17 a 50-mile loop that stitches together irrigation drainage
18 and IBWC right-of-ways. We've had some preliminary
19 discussions with the IBWC about using the levees with some
20 of the absolute finest opportunities down here. We got a
21 representative from the Hidalgo County Drainage District
22 here who has been involved in the same discussions.

23 And one of the real challenges to attract
24 the people that come down here and bicycle and also to get
25 the local people primarily involved in more active use of,

1 really, some of the best habitat that is down here which
2 is along your levee system. One of the true challenges is
3 getting people to come out when all the trees have been
4 cut down.

5 So one of the things we really want to
6 encourage and we are really pleased to see that the draft
7 includes an alternative, and I really emphasize multiple
8 use. We'd really like to see long hard thought given to
9 how levee improvements can incorporate amenities that will
10 encourage more people to get out there.

11 Some other managers of property, like,
12 Godfrey Garza has told me that, you know, he feels like
13 having more people out there is something that is actually
14 an impediment, deterrents to vandalism and other things
15 that are going to endanger your work.

16 So we'd like to see where -- in fact, we
17 are offering small stipends to engineering students to
18 investigate possible alternatives or design alternatives
19 that will allow you to incorporate shade trees, native
20 vegetation, you know, into levee improvements so that in
21 10 or 20 years in addition to preventing flooding that's
22 going to jeopardize the area, you can actually be
23 providing something that's going to create some economic,
24 you know, stimulants for more growth here. So thank you
25 very much.

1 MR. PENA: Thank you.

2 Next speaker is Godfrey Garza.

3 MR. GARZA: Thank you very much for your
4 time and opportunity to speak here.

5 As I mentioned, my name is Godfrey Garza.
6 I serve as a drainage manager for Hidalgo County. I would
7 just like the IBWC, to remind them, I guess, that one of
8 the core objective is flood control. It is great for the
9 economy, for the ecco for water resources, but a lot of
10 these issues have come to pass because the population
11 growth we had in Hidalgo County.

12 If these levee systems are not repaired,
13 properly maintained, there is no ecco growth down in South
14 Texas. Again, we need to remember that the levees are for
15 flood control. If they have dual use that's great, but we
16 need to look at the primary objective of the levee system
17 when it was built, which is mandated by the treaty and
18 maintain flood control in our area.

19 As citizens, we want to have the best for
20 everybody, but I think life is one of the most important
21 things down in our area, and this levee system we have
22 down here protects over a million population, and we got
23 over \$30 billion worth of assets down over here. And this
24 community is not just a community itself, but fine
25 financial resources as a whole. We are talking hundreds

1 of thousands maquilas down over here that operate both in
2 Mexico and the United States. They keep the General Motor
3 plants, the Emerson Electric, and all companys operating.
4 If we do not have a solid flood control system that we can
5 maintain and properly, then we're going to lose the
6 advantage, all the growth we had.

7 And part of the issue the IBWC has gotten
8 into, this is my personal opinion, is allowing more
9 vegetation growing in the floodway system that is causing
10 the levees, because the levees do not wear away nine feet
11 to ten feet. Start looking at the environmental issues,
12 the back water, start looking at different moments in the
13 ground. And those are millions and millions of dollars we
14 the taxpayer is not spending in to raise levees because
15 levees do not disappear eight or nine feet like people
16 driving up and down on them over a short period of time.

17 There are other issues that are in place
18 for levees to be efficient and we need to be sure if we're
19 going to do these improvements, what needs to happen is
20 ten years from now, 20 years from now we're not going to
21 have a similar situation where the environment is taking
22 over and the wetlands have taken over and trees have grown
23 in there, and we need to start looking at different
24 priorities, not against vegetation.

25 I've got farmland. I love it. But I have

1 to look at the citizens that live down here and I think
2 IBWC needs to remember what their core objective is flood
3 control. Thank you.

4 MR. PENA: I don't have anymore cards.
5 Would anybody else like to make a comment.

6 MR. REYES: I'll make one.

7 MR. PENA: Please state your name.

8 MR. REYES: My name is Ernesto Reyes for
9 the ecological service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and
10 the refuge manager could not be here for the Lower Rio
11 Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

12 One of their concerns is, which I hate to
13 bring this is up, is the proposed border fence. And of
14 course, they're proposing to build that fence on the north
15 side of the levee. And one of the things is some of these
16 levees are supposed to be raised, you know, several feet
17 high and wide, and so we just, the refuge is concerned
18 about if the fence is not coordinated with the levee with
19 expansion, then what's going to happen if they put it too
20 close to the levee on the north side, what's going to
21 be -- what's going to happen it's going to have to expand
22 to the south side, and that's where they have the most,
23 the better habitat for some of the refuge which is the
24 south side of the levee.

25 So that's one of the considerations that

1 the refuge would like the IBWC to look is when they
2 propose a fence not to be too close because if that
3 expansion happens, you know, we would like to have it on
4 the north side instead of the south side that's going to
5 be impacting the better habitat on the refuge. Thank you.

6 MR. PENA: Anybody else like to make a
7 comment?

8 If there's not, I would like to make a
9 final reminder that the comment period is open until
10 September 24; therefore, any comments you wish to submit
11 you can do so. Here is the mailing address for mailing
12 your comments in.

13 And if you haven't done so, I know some
14 people got here late. There's a registration form in the
15 back so we can get your name and number, e-mails, to have
16 further information or documentation to make sure we get
17 that to you.

18 For the record, the time now is 6:50. This
19 public hearing is concluded. And I thank you again for
20 coming out and taking part in this process and we'll be
21 seeing more documentation in the near future regarding
22 this process.

23
24 (Proceedings concluded at 6:50 PM.)
25

1 THE STATE OF TEXAS §

2 COUNTY OF HIDALGO §

3 I, ANNETTE E. ESCOBAR, Certified Shorthand
4 Reporter in and for the State of Texas, do hereby certify
5 that the above and foregoing proceedings were had which at
6 the public hearing on the Draft Programmatic Environmental
7 Impact Statement held in McAllen, Texas on August 28,
8 2007.

9 I further certify that this Record of the
10 proceedings truly and correctly reflects the exhibits, if
11 any, offered by the respective parties.

12 I further certify that the total cost for
13 preparation of this Record is \$_____ and is due and
14 owing by USIBWC.

15 Witness my official hand this 15th day of
16 October, A.D., 2007.

17

18

ANNETTE E. ESCOBAR, CSR-RPR
Texas CSR No. 5475

19

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