

RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM
City of Las Cruces Council Chambers
Las Cruces, NM
October 13, 2016
*** Tentative Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:

Danny Chavez, Hudspeth County Conservation and Reclamation
Gill Sorg, City of Las Cruces, Council
Ray Spears, Captain, Game Warden, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
John Balliew, President/CEO, El Paso Water Utilities
Yvonne Curry, American Society of Civil Engineers Francine Jefferson,
Leticia Jimenez, property owner along Rio Grande
Suleiman Masoud, Del Rio Engineering, El Paso Association of Builders Board of Directors
Ryan Ward, Policy Analyst, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
John Cornell New Mexico Wildlife Federation, President of Doña Ana County Associated Sportsmen

USIBWC Staff in attendance:

Jose Nuñez, Principal Engineer
Flavio Apodaca Operations and Maintenance Supervisor - Engineering Tech
Jose Luis Sierra, Assistant Area Operations Manager, Upper Rio Grande Field Office
Sally Spener, Foreign Affairs Officer
Lori Kuczmanski, Public Affairs Officer

22 Members of the public in attendance:

Mike Matthews, Captain, Southwest Area Operations, New Mexico Game and Fish
Olga Pedroza, Las Cruces City Council
Dona Ana Mutual Water
Carol McCall, Planner, City of Las Cruces (Retired)
Kevin Bixby, Southwest Environmental Center
Carolyn Casillas, Retired school administrator
John Douglas
Woody Irving, Bureau of Reclamation
Zack Libbin, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
Johannes Hubmann, Viadonau.org
Maria, Milanes, New Mexico State University, WRII
Jason Vazquez, Arcadis (Consultant)
John Sparks, Arcadis (Consultant)
Jordan Parr, Intern, Senator Tom Udall's office
Chris Canavan, New Mexico Environment Department
Jerry Pauls, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Earl F. Burkholder, retired teacher New Mexico State University, and Global Cogo, Inc.

Amy Haas, General Counsel, New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission
Lewis Roder, Construction Engineer, BNSF Railroad
Dennis Coberly, Citizen
Delbert Humberson, USGS
Jerry Paz, resident

Welcoming Remarks:

At 6:30 PM, Citizens Forum Co-Chair Jose Nuñez convened meeting. He welcomed the group, introduced board members and let the audience introduce themselves. Jose Nuñez read out loud the agenda that was distributed to all citizens at the meeting. Mr. Nuñez then stated the first presenter would start.

Presentation One – Rio Grande Corridor Project, Looking Back – Carol McCall, Planner, City of Las Cruces (retired)

Carol McCall presented the Rio Grande Riparian Ecological Corridor Project and how the project transpired. Ms. McCall identified the plan by giving background on the grant, stating that in 2000 the grant was awarded with funds from EPA Sustainable Development Challenge Grant and National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program Technical Assistance grant. Contributing partners were Elephant Butte Irrigation District, Southwest Environmental Center, IBWC – US Section, New Mexico Department of Fish and Game, Doña Ana County, Town of Mesilla, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

The project draws from the mission of the many diverse stakeholders and, with input from the public, describes a set of goals to encourage the sustainable development of the 11-mile Rio Grande Corridor. Ms. McCall outlined the project boundaries – an 11-mile corridor that extends south from the Shalem Colony Bridge (Black’s Bridge) to the Mesilla Dam. The project complements the larger objectives of the Comprehensive Plan by creating opportunities for multi-jurisdiction cooperation and public involvement. Various public input meetings and workgroup sessions were held. Some of the concerns expressed at the meetings were code enforcement, especially for illegal dumping, and interest in Rio Grande history and culture, nature centers, and outdoor classroom opportunities.

The Comprehensive Plan Goals, that derived from the various work group and stakeholder meetings, were:

1. To preserve, enhance and restore native habitat diversity
2. Preserve farmland and open space
3. Create a multi-use trail system
4. Increase ecotourism
5. Expand recreational opportunities
6. Educate the public

McCall informed the public of proposed projects to include wetlands sites along the river, two additional parks, the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park, Rio Grande Cultural Complex, and Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.

The proposed Management Concepts were:

1. Farmland and open space preservation
2. Multi-jurisdictional responsibility
3. Make the corridor “safe, sound and sanitary”
4. Accessibility (improving accessibility)

5. Community outreach and education

McCall said the plan makes suggestions for more funding but the funding needs to be secured by the stakeholders. Funding is the responsibility of the agencies. Even though 12 years has passed, the goals are as relevant as ever.

McCall stated that as a result of the effort, there is now a tremendous trail system, including the 4-mile Outfall Channel multi-use trail. The wetland that we did build became the centerpiece of the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park. It brought together a lot of agencies. Southwest Environmental Center and City of Las Cruces did outreach about the river, water education, and on preventing pollution. Hard copies and digital copies of the plan are available upon request.

Questions and Answers

Question: Have other agencies completed projects that could be added to this list?

Carol McCall: Southwest Environmental Center La Mancha Wetland is practically completed. The final phase would be to connect it to the river.

Leticia Jimenez, board member: As more people use pathways, safety is of concern. What steps if any, have been taken to address that?

Carol McCall: I don't know which agency provides enforcement. In years past, I was told the Sheriff's Department does enforcement.

Gill Sorg, board member: The New Mexico State Rio Grande Trail was recently started by the Legislature. It's meant to go from Texas to Colorado along the Rio Grande. The section in the City of Las Cruces will be the first one dedicated to the State Trail.

Carol McCall: That's exciting. It's really handy the floodway is really wide. There are some sections that there just isn't any land. It could go into private property but how to go about it, I don't know. We are the first leg of that trail.

Francine Jefferson –I think it's nice the trails come together at the university. This is nice for the community.

Carol McCall: There are some traffic hazards at that site and there is a proposal for bike lanes and roadway modifications to be more bike friendly.

Presentation two – Migratory Bird Hunting on the Rio Grande in New Mexico, IBWC Property – Mike Matthews, Captain, Southwest Area, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

Captain Matthews said his area goes from Socorro to the Arizona state line. He supervises officers and activities in the area along the Rio Grande from Percha Dam south to Texas.

Captain Matthews gave Dove Hunting season dates of September 1, 2016 through October 13, 2016, then December 5 through December 31, 2016. Duck Season is October 27 through January 31, 2017.

However, along the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico, there isn't really a duck season since the river typically runs dry in the winter.

He described [the areas that are open to hunting](#): Highway 187 north of Hatch; Highway 154 south to Highway 393, and Highway 28 south to Highway 189 (Mesquite south to Vado). The latter, located at the

southern end, gets particularly heavy use during the first weeks of September and the area gets crowded. The biggest problem his agency sees is littering in the Mesquite to Vado area. Hatch, New Mexico north isn't heavily populated, but as we move South, there's a closed area that we have had the most problems with. There's a yellow gate and they have houses, pecan farms. They get quite a few calls regarding hunting too close to the properties.

As a state agency they can't enforce the areas on federal lands that are closed to hunting. All they can do is ask hunters not to hunt in the IBWC closed areas. They don't issue tickets; they just ask hunters to leave the area. It would require adoption of a special state Commission regulation to enforce it but their Commission doesn't generally adopt that type of regulation.

In New Mexico you may not discharge a weapon within 150 yards of a home. That is one of their biggest violations.

Captain Matthews informed the public the average violations are:

1. Hunting without a license
2. Unplugged shotguns
3. Exceeding bag limits
4. Littering

Captain Matthews said littering along the river is the biggest problem, especially between Mesquite and Vado. After the hunting season, it looks "pretty beat up." It was out of control in the past but now it's controlled (due to recent IBWC policy on hunting along the Rio Grande) so it's working better. He said if his agency personnel aren't standing there all the time, it's hard to enforce.

Presentation three – 2016 Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons on USBWC Levees in El Paso & Hudspeth Counties, Ray Spears, Captain Game Warden, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Captain Spears introduced himself as the Game Warden for El Paso and Hudspeth Counties. He has 12 wardens and gave locations -

- 4 Game Wardens - El Paso County
- 3 Game Wardens - Hudspeth County
- 1 Game Warden - Culberson County
- 2 Game Wardens - Reeves County
- 2 Administrative Assistants - El Paso Office

Captain Spears said dove hunting is the biggest season in El Paso. He said his office starts getting calls in July for dove hunting season. There are two different dove season zones in El Paso and Hudspeth County. It's divided by Fort Hancock. There's the North Zone (El Paso and northern Hudspeth Counties) and the Central Zone.

The North Zone season begins September 1, 2016 through November 13, 2016, then December 17 through January 1, 2017. The daily bag limit is 15 birds (mourning, white-winged and white-tipped). Legal shooting hours are ½ hour before sunrise to sunset.

Central Zone season begins September 1, 2016 through November 6, 2016, then December 17, 2016 through January 8, 2017. The daily bag limit is 15 birds (mourning, white-winged and white-tipped). Legal shooting hours are ½ hour before sunrise to sunset.

Captain Spears said hunters were waiting at the gate at 2:00 a.m. to begin hunting at sunrise. Four officers checked about 200 hunters in the first weekend. He said hunters were out all day and on the levee on September 1 scouting out the area.

Captain Spears showed on the map that below Interstate 10 is the central zone.

Captain Spears informed the citizens that another big season is Teal Season. Dates were September 10 to September 25, 2016 with a daily bag limit of 6 birds (blue-winged, green winged and cinnamon teal). Legal shooting hours are ½ hour before sunrise to sunset.

For duck season, we fall into the High Plains Mallard Management Unit. Hunting dates are October 29 - 30, 2016, and November 4 through January 29, 2017. Captain Spears said it's great to see hunters out there. With the influx of personnel at Fort Bliss, there is increased hunting of teal and ducks.

Captain Spears showed the citizens a map of El Paso and Hudspeth Counties. [The hunting areas along the Rio Grande in this area are described by the numbered markers along the river.](#) IBWC closed a popular area by Ysleta and hunters were sneaking in so now the game wardens tell them to go farther down.

Violations: Most of the violations our officers are seeing are no Hunter Safety Education, in particular the soldiers don't know why Texas requires hunter safety. Other violations include unplugged shotguns, no hunting licenses, over bag limit or no Harvest Information Program (HIP) certification.

Another violation is littering in El Paso and Hudspeth Counties although it's not as bad in Hudspeth County. In Texas, the game wardens can enforce littering laws (shells, beverage containers, shotgun shell boxes are common trash) and public intoxication law.

Questions and Answers:

Sally Spener (USIBWC) –You said litter is an issue. Is there something we can do to help? If we put trash cans out, would hunters use them? Can we get people out to clean up after the season?

Answer: Mike Matthews—Along with signs, you can put trash cans out. The first one to two weeks are the busiest. Signs that say, “Hunters, this your area, clean up!” might help.

Sally Spener—If we put a trash can by the gate at the Ysleta-Zaragoza Bridge, would the hunters take trash with them to put in the trash can when they exit?

Captain Spears—Yes, I think they would take the trash out, but it's only as good as the hunters want it to be. I think we can put 55-gallon barrels out. I've been talking with hunters about post Dove Season cleanup or a group like Safari Club International. We could have a cookout and partner to put something together after next year's season.

Carol McCall—How often do people get busted for litter? I know in New Mexico if someone sees you littering, you can call the 800 number and they'll send a nice letter to the person based on their license plate number. Busting people would go a long way!

Answer: Mike Matthews—We have to witness it. It's one of those laws that's hard to enforce.

Captain Spears –When we have a big group, we'll watch with binoculars and if they throw their stuff out, we can issue them citations.

Flavio Apocada (USIBWC): What about carcasses left behind, which brings animals, and after a while the smell?

Captain Spears –We ask hunters to clean by the river and leave it there. There are different animals there, too, and they will eat it. If you go back a few days later, it's gone! We try to get them to get down there, but some will listen and some won't. You'll see some with plastic bags cleaning it.

Jerry Paz: I have a house on the river and hunting season is big. Can IBWC put up stakes to gage the 150 yard markers so people don't hunt too close to homes in our neighborhood? Metal posts or stakes posted red with signs to mark the proximity of the homes might help.

Sally Spener (USIBWC)—You're in an area where hunting is allowed?

Jerry Paz: No.

Sally Spener: We closed that area to hunting because of the homes nearby.

Leticia Jimenez, board member—I've heard for 2 hours about lack of enforcement. Maybe as a Commission we can come up with enforcement. I live along the river, too, but not where they hunt. I have some issues, dumping, motorized vehicles. Maybe better communication with agencies, phone #'s of agencies would be a suggestion.

Sally Spener (USIBWC): Our staff at American Dam is very good with working with community members. We get calls that the gate was vandalized, etc. and we will go out there to address it.

Leticia Jimenez: Suggests improving the way information is disseminated rather than dealing with it one by one.

Presentation four – De-Silting Activities in the Rio Grande, by Flavio Apodaca, Supervisory Engineering Technician, Upper Rio Grande Field Office, USIBWC

Flavio Apodaca gave a presentation on De-Silting Activities in the Rio Grande. The USIBWC Upper Rio Grande Project staff maintains 221 miles of flood control levees and floodways. An extremely important maintenance activity includes the grading and removal of sediment at the arroyo mouths and sediment removal within the pilot channel. This ongoing activity is to maintain efficient water deliveries to U.S. Irrigation Districts, Municipalities, Mexico and improve operations at the diversion dams in the Upper Rio Grande area.

There are three field offices within the Upper Rio Grande Project – American Dam/Carlos Marin Field Office, Las Cruces Field Office, and the Zacarias Dominguez/ Fort Hancock Field Office.

There are two diversion dams in the El Paso area – the American Dam and the International Dam. At the American Dam we control the flows going to Mexico and divert U.S. flows into the American Canal. At the International Dam we divert the flows into Mexico.

He showed before and after photos of sediment removal at various locations.

In 2015, the amount of sediment removed after irrigation season was 28,000 cubic yards at the American Dam. It is estimated that in 2016, about 30,000 cubic yards of sediment will be removed after irrigation season.

At International Dam, sediment removed after irrigation season was at 6,540 cubic yards with a start date of 4/14/2015 and was completed 6/1/2015. At the International Dam, current estimated sediment deposit after the 2016 irrigation season is 19,500 Cubic Yards, which is more than last year.

At the Tonuco Arroyo, accumulated sediment was estimated at 107,450 cubic yards in 2015. Prior to the beginning of 2016 irrigation season, 50,000 cubic yards of sediment have been removed and it is estimated that there are 57,450 cubic yards of sediment that still need to be removed.

In 2015, 17,663 cubic yards of sediment was removed at the Guayuco Arroyo. Current estimated amount for removal is at 20,000 cubic yards.

Below the Chamizal to the Riverside Dam, the project area is from the end of the Chamizal concrete channel to the Riverside Dam, which is 9.18 miles in length. The estimated amount of accumulated sediment within the pilot channel is approximately 21,000 cubic yards.

In the Rio Grande Rectification Project, there is a section that is 32.46 miles in length that has not been desilted since the 1980s and presently is heavily silted. It is estimated there is approximately 1,904,743 cubic yards of material that needs to be removed to bring this project back to its baseline. The proposal is a crew and equipment which would be solely dedicated to removing silt along this section. The sediment removal on the Rectification Project is from station 94+211 (Fort Hancock) to the end of the Rectification Project (Little Box Canyon).

Flavio Apodaca informed the citizens of the Field Office Goals and Objectives:

1. Maintain efficient water deliveries to
 - a. U.S. Irrigation Districts
 - b. Municipalities
 - c. Mexico
2. Increase in Channel Carrying Capacity
3. Increase water delivery efficiency
4. Alleviate backwater conditions that create drainage problems
5. Increase river bank stability
6. Improve operations at Diversion Dams
7. Increase in carrying capacity of irrigation canals

In summary, we will be prioritizing the following arroyos for the 2016/2017 de-silting: Navarrette Arroyo, Tipton Arroyo, Trujillo Arroyo, Montoya Arroyo, Holguin Arroyo, Tierra Blanca/Green Arroyos and the Montoya Drain. Total sediment removal volume is 2,097,743 cubic yards, and is a 5-year project.

Principal Engineer Jose Nuñez (USIBWC) continued the presentation to discuss Rio Grande Canalization Project Sediment Trap Design. This is a pilot project to construct sediment traps near Hatch, New Mexico. The design project is to construct Pilot Sediment Traps at the mouths of Thurman I and II Arroyos with prior long excavation. The purpose is to capture and remove arroyo sediment prior to reaching the Rio Grande. Design project was award September 2016 and a project kickoff meeting is scheduled for October 20, 2016. The design is to be completed in 2017 with construction to begin in 2017/2018.

Questions and Answers

Woody Irving, Bureau of Reclamation –When will the presentation be available?

Sally Spener (USIBWC): It will be posted on our web page in the near future.

John Balliew (board member): There is flooding in Hudspeth County now, a huge amount of sediment. We need to get you additional resources.

Sal. Masoud (board member): What do we do with sediment that is removed?

Jose Luis Sierra (USIBWC): That is our biggest question. We are talking with farmers, ranchers, and businesses. It is expensive to dispose at the landfill so it's not a good idea to do that. We try to be good stewards of government money.

Leticia Jimenez—Have you talked with home builders?

Flavio Apodaca—Yes. It's not the soil they like to use. It has too much organic matter and they can't use it.

John Balliew (board member): The bottom of the channel keeps rising. If it's on the field, it's hard to irrigate, need to look at other options.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Board Discussion/Suggested Future Agenda Items

The next meeting will be January 12, 2017, at USIBWC Headquarters in El Paso, TX.

Yvonne Curry: USIBWC had been talking about building flood walls in the Upper Valley along the Rio Grande. Can we get another presentation on that? There were too many questions we didn't finish. This is for the areas that don't have levees.

Jose Nuñez (USIBWC) noted that the design has been completed but will not be built until there is funding.

Sal Masoud: Supports including this on the agenda.

John Balliew: Wants presentation on work at the bottom end of the Rectification Project channel. Also, El Paso Water Utilities can give a presentation on interior drainage; they have some new developments.

Jose Nuñez noted that FEMA requires interior drainage certification in order to accredit levee systems.

7:55 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.