

RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM
USIBWC Headquarters
El Paso, Texas
July 12, 2018
*** Tentative Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:

Blanca Trout, Canutillo Independent School District
Jim Maxfield, Mid-West Textile Co., Save the Valley
Mark Calamia, National Park Service
Kirk Clifton, National Hispanic Cultural Center
John Unruh, Retired, U.S. Geological Survey
Yvonne Curry, Conde, Inc.
Danny Chavez, Hudspeth County Conservation and Reclamation
Philip Partridge, Outdoor recreation enthusiast
Jamie Barron, local property owner
Walton Low, Retired, U.S. Geological Survey
Via phone: Paul Tashjian, Audubon New Mexico

U.S. Section, International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) Staff in attendance:

Jose Nuñez, Acting Commissioner
Daniel Avila, Principal Engineer, Operations Department
Dr. Padinare Unnikrishna, Chief, Engineering Services Division (Acting Principal Engineer, Engineering Department)
Jose Luis Sierra, Supervisory Facilities Operation Specialist
Sally Spener, Foreign Affairs Officer
Lori Kuzmanski, Public Affairs Officer

Members of the public in attendance:

Robert Kimpel, Hudspeth Farmers
Jaime and Javier Armendariz, Citizens
Carlos Rincon, EPA
Ed Trout, Citizen
John Sparks, Arcadis
Pete Alvarez, Citizen
Jeff Scarborough, Freese and Nichols, Inc.
Joel Mora, Arcadis
Ben Stewart, Stantec

Welcoming Remarks:

At 6:30 PM, Acting Commissioner Jose Nuñez convened the meeting. He welcomed the group, introduced board members and allowed the audience to introduce themselves. The first presentation was announced.

Presentation One: Overview of the History, Mission, and Projects of the International Boundary and Water Commission – Lori Kuzmanski, Public Affairs Officer, USIBWC

Ms. Kuzmanski began her presentation by going over the agency's mission, which is to apply the boundary and water treaties between the United States and Mexico. She provided a brief overview of some of the boundary Treaties and the structure of the IBWC per the 1944 Water Treaty. The International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) has a U.S. Section and a Mexican Section, each

headed by a Commissioner. Under the Convention of 1906, the United States delivers Rio Grande water to Mexico at Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua; this water is stored at Elephant Butte Dam in New Mexico and then released downstream into the Rio Grande. A 1933 treaty was enacted to stabilize the international boundary at El Paso-Ciudad Juarez by straightening the Rio Grande channel and erecting flood control levees in both countries. This part of the Rio Grande is known as the Rectification Project. To settle a longstanding boundary dispute at El Paso-Ciudad Juarez after the Rio Grande channel shifted, the 1963 Chamizal Convention provided for the relocation of the Rio Grande to a concrete-lined channel through the central part of the sister cities. IBWC Minutes were discussed, which are binding Commission agreements intended to implement treaty. There are currently 324 Minutes approved. Ms. Kuczmanski then discussed the USIBWC field offices along the border from South Texas to San Diego, CA and what their mission is in relation to the agency's mission. Commission responsibilities include boundary demarcation, operation of international wastewater treatment plants, operation of international dams, flood control, and water delivery.

Question: Why did you build the wastewater treatment plants for Mexico?

Jose Nuñez: Mexico paid for part of the construction costs and pays for part of the operations and maintenance.

Question: Did you build a treatment plant in Juarez after the cholera epidemic there?

Carlos Rincon, EPA: The Ciudad Juarez treatment plant was funded through the Border Environment Cooperation Commission-North American Development Bank.

Presentation Two – 2018 Upper Rio Grande Field Office O&M Critical Mission Directives and Responsibilities– Jose Luis Sierra, Supervisory Facilities Operation Specialist

Mr. Sierra gave a background on the mission and responsibilities of the Upper Rio Grande Field Office.

Flood Control Responsibilities

Flood control responsibilities include inspecting and maintaining approximately 220 miles of river levees along the river beginning below Percha Dam, NM to Little Box Canyon, TX. This includes 4,500 acres of river floodplains and 18.5 miles of canals. The IBWC inspects and maintains 210 drainage and irrigation structures. The IBWC inspects and maintains 5 major sediment control dams -- Green, Jalarosa 1 & 2, Crow Canyon & Broad Canyon, all five located in northern Doña Ana and southern Sierra Counties, (south of Garfield Bridge, north of Hatch, & northwest of Radium Springs). We operate and maintain 2 major diversion dams -- American Dam and International Dam in El Paso, Texas-Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. The IBWC inspects, monitors and maintains four flood warning stations and five flow gaging stations throughout the entire project

Boundary Demarcation and Ports of Entry Responsibilities

The IBWC maintains several international bridges, including Bridge of the Americas (BOTA), Ft. Hancock/Porvenir Bridge & Tornillo/Guadalupe Bridge. We perform weekly trash removal, monthly sweeping, fencing repairs, boundary monuments maintenance and pavement markers replacement. The USIBWC is charged with the maintenance of flag poles & replacement of U.S. flags, as needed at the following bridges: Santa Fe, Stanton and Bridge of the Americas. IBWC is in charge of maintaining the yellow pavement makers that mark the boundary on the international bridges. At Fort Hancock, it is not a commercial bridge, therefore there is low traffic.

Upper Rio Grande Flood Control Canalization Project Limits

The USIBWC's Rio Grande Canalization Project runs from Percha Dam, NM to the American Dam in El Paso, TX. This is about 106 river miles. The Rio Grande design flow for the region ranges from 13,000

cubic feet per second (cfs) in the upper reach to 24,000 cfs in the Chamizal Project area near downtown El Paso, TX-Cd. Juarez, Chih.

Canalization Segment Five Sediment Control Dams

The five sediment control dams located at tributary arroyos were constructed to reduce flood peaks and sediment inflows into the Rio Grande, thereby reducing the average annual maintenance cost for the Rio Grande Canalization Project. Between 1969 and 1975, five dams were constructed by the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) (now NRCS) at four major arroyos. They are designed, with one exception (Broad Canyon; 50-year Design), to provide sufficient storage capacity to contain an estimated 100 years of sediment inflow and to control the estimated 100-year flood. The five sediment control dams, outlet works and access roads, are maintained by the USIBWC-Las Cruces Facility. The local entities sponsoring these five SCS projects are the Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) and the Caballo Natural Resources Conservation District.

Sediment Control Dams

USIBWC Las Cruces Field Office personnel are required to inspect and maintain all five sediment control dams. Also, they facilitate yearly inspections with EBID, NRCS, and representatives from the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer.

Canalization River Projects

Typically, 100,000 to 120,000 cubic yards (CY) of river sediment are removed during the non-irrigation season, which is from late October to mid-March. Because there is water in the river during the irrigation season, we are only able to do river sediment removal work during five months per year. During the fiscal year (FY) 2018 non-irrigation season, 12 river channel maintenance projects were undertaken in the Rio Grande Canalization Project. An approximate total of 178,973 CY of river sediment was removed. The river channel sediment removal performed this year was due to additional personnel brought in from the Mercedes and Ft. Hancock Field Offices to assist. This is not the norm. Usually only the local staff works this area, but we really needed assistance to get this area cleaned up, and our staff did a great job getting it done.

In late 2018/early2019 during the non-irrigation season, it is scheduled to address priority river channel and arroyo locations listed under the USIBWC River Management Plan - Canalization Record of Decision(ROD) - 5 Yr. Part IV-Channel Maintenance Section. FY 19 river sediment removal schedule will include work sites on various arroyos and siphons, including Placitas Arroyo, Rincon Siphon, Garcia I Arroyo, Rincon Arroyo and Bignell Arroyo. Various locations will require work to restore willow trees for wildlife habitat, which will require additional time to perform both river sediment removal and restoration work by the same IBWC personnel. Where there is established habitat in areas where we perform sediment removal work, we have to preserve and relocate and vegetation, which is very time consuming.

Proposed 2018/2019 work sites

During the 2018-2019 non-irrigation season, the following estimated amounts of sediment are expected to be removed at the following locations:

- Hatch Siphon, 4,000 cubic yards
- Placitas Arroyo, 13,000 cubic yards
- Rincon Siphon, 15,000 cubic yards

- Garcia Arroyo, 12,000 cubic yards
- Rincon and Bignell Arroyos, approximately 56,000 cubic yards

Diversions Dams Maintenance

American Dam Field Office personnel are required to inspect and maintain both diversion dams (American and International) as a priority. The field office staff are also working with the USIBWC's Engineering Services Division (ESD) on projects to rehabilitate gates, cables, seals, trunnions, sprockets, motors, limit switches, etc. At International Dam, winter maintenance completed December 1, 2017 included the following: Cables were replaced, gates were exercised, the dam was power washed, cleaned, scraped and painted. Limit switches were adjusted.

Five-Year U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Diversions Dams Inspections

In order to perform the 5-year USACE diversion dams inspections it is necessary to remove the silt from the upstream and downstream aprons of the dams. 30,000 cubic yards of material were removed at American Dam and 20,000 cubic yards at International Dam.

Rectification Project Chamizal Concrete Channel Area

Project area is from start of Chamizal concrete channel at the Chihuahuita neighborhood near downtown El Paso to 2.5 miles downstream. (Remaining 2.5 miles downstream are under maintenance responsibility of the Mexican Section of the IBWC.)

Scheduled for July-August, perform required maintenance on silt and vegetation removal from start of Chamizal concrete channel at Chihuahuita to 2.5 miles downstream.

A Mexican contractor has already started their downstream end of required maintenance on silt and vegetation removal on the Chamizal concrete channel.

Rectification Project segment of the Rio Grande

We cover approximately 95 river miles from the end of the concrete-lined Chamizal Project river channel downstream to Little Box Canyon.

Major Maintenance. Project: Guayuco Arroyo

In 2017, 42,944 CY of sediment were removed. This is a major arroyo requiring continual, regular maintenance. In 2018, approximately 8,000 CY have been removed from this Arroyo. We must coordinate with the Mexican Section of the IBWC to request permission to work from the Mexican side of the river. Will address this again as 2018 rain events require work to be done. For the Guayuco Arroyo, we are stabilizing the opposite Mexican bank, which had eroded, and re-aligning the confluence so it's not perpendicular but angled. We hope this will reduce future maintenance needs.

Fort Quitman Gaging Station

Removal of silt at this critical site is required to improve the ability to accurately measure flow at the Fort Quitman Gaging Station site. Approximately 15,000 cubic yards of material was removed.

Ft Quitman Gaging Station to Neely Arroyo

To address local flooding, we are removing sediment in this area.

Neely Arroyo- Local Flooding Problem Area

At Neely Arroyo, we have localized flooding. The water table is high and for 18-24 months, then the water just stands there. We are obtaining some additional equipment to double the river capacity in the Ft. Quitman/Neely Arroyo area. We are making it wider and deeper. But Neely Arroyo is too wet for some equipment. Levee repairs and grading at Neely Arroyo assist in addressing adjacent local flooding. There has been river flow covering the floodplain. This entire general area needs to be addressed as a total separate river dredging project, as it has not been addressed for a number of years.

Mr. Kimpel: What about a pontoon excavator?

Sierra: We no longer have them. We are seeking quotes on the equipment but don't currently have funding for it.

Mr. Kimpel: I think you need to blast out Little Box Canyon. I think that's the obstruction.

There were suggestions from the board and audience to request assistance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Ft. Bliss, or NRCS. USIBWC noted that it is exploring alternatives for blocking sediment from reaching the river. Agencies like the USACE are not free.

Boundary Preservation segment of the Rio Grande

In the area of Arroyo Del Fraile, a downstream area known as the Boundary Preservation Project, we widened and re-established the Rio Grande pilot channel to approx. 38' and removed an average of 3' of sediment, totaling approximately 55,736 CY to date. We have re-established the pilot channel for approx. 2.5 miles upstream of Del Fraile. We are working on two fronts: from Ft. Hancock downstream and from the Del Fraile Arroyo upstream.

Mr. Kimpel stated his view that the Del Fraile Arroyo area should not be a priority due to low land values there. He said in the area of the Guayuco Arroyo a state highway had water on it and he thinks the State of Texas may sue IBWC.

Question: Why did you build sediment control dams in New Mexico but not in Texas?

Sierra: The NRCS built the dams. USIBWC just maintains them.

Question: What do you do about salt cedar?

Sierra: We work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove salt cedar with heavy equipment and then we mulch it.

Question: How do you determine how much sediment there is?

Padinare Unnikrishna: We hired Tetra Tech to do sediment transport studies and identified alternatives. We then designed the Thurman I and Thurman II sediment basins. We are looking at potential sediment control projects at other arroyos as well. We have looked at nine locations where sediment is a concern, based on the Tetra Tech study.

Sierra: We had islands by Canutillo Bridge. We had to work there last year and this year.

Question: Can environmental organizations help with the habitat relocation? Can you use their manpower?

Sierra: We get help from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and are also trying to get a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bureau of Reclamation to help us.

Question: Have you asked nonprofits to help?

Jose Nuñez: Community college students and schools help with water quality monitoring and tree planting.

Question: Have you reached out directly to them? Groups like the Nature Conservancy?

Mark Calamia: Maybe you could have formal agreements for different groups like Southwest Environmental Center, Audubon, etc. You could have them sign an agreement to partner with them. We would have free flow of information between these groups about restoration.

Question: What do you do with the sediment that you remove?

Sierra: We talked to ranchers and farmers and developed no-cost agreements to deposit it on their lands. For sediment disposal sites, we have 6 Memorandums of Understanding in the Rio Grande Rectification Project and 12 in the Rio Grande Canalization Project.

Mr. Kimpel offered to accept sediment as his land is close to the river.

Daniel Avila: We are working with the property owners and trying to get others to accept it.

Question: Is it good soil?

USIBWC: It's good soil that many farmers and ranchers like.

Mr. Kimpel: It has rocks and things in it but you have to agree to take it as is.

Danny Chavez, Hudspeth County Conservation and Reclamation District, expressed his appreciation for the work being undertaken but also expressed concern that USIBWC had not done enough over the previous 20 years. He said the equipment in the USIBWC yard at the Ft. Hancock Field Office has not been used in 20 years. Acting Commissioner Jose Nuñez and Principal Engineer Daniel Avila explained that more sediment is deposited in the Rio Grande than is removed: 400,000 cubic yards of incoming sediment per year versus 175,000 cubic yards removed. It was noted that nearby property owners should do more to control sediment originating on their lands. USIBWC has a limited budget, and equipment does remain idle when there are inadequate funds for repairs. In addition, federal agencies have budgetary restrictions; budgets are straight-lined (no increases from one year to the next) so work needs to be prioritized, given limited resources.

Presentation Three: Orientation for New Citizens Forum Board Members – Lori Kuczanski, Public Affairs Officer, USIBWC

Before beginning her presentation on the orientation for new board members, Ms. Kuczanski and Jose Nuñez handed out IBWC commemorative coins and Certificates of Appreciation for the Board Members.

The purpose of the Citizens Forum is to facilitate the exchange of information between the USIBWC and the local community regarding any projects (current and future) that the USIBWC may be involved in or related issues.

The Board Member duties include attending the public meetings four times per year and the term is for 2 years. The Citizens Forum is not a federal advisory board; the goal is to exchange information and receive feedback from a variety of viewpoints.

Board Members will not be disruptive during the meetings and will not serve as a spokesperson for the IBWC. Serving on the Board is voluntary and there are no reimbursements for expenses. It is requested that Board Members send requests to the Public Affairs Officer on any suggestions for future topics to be presented at meetings.

There are two co-chairs for the Board, with one being the USIBWC and one being a community co-chair who is elected by the Board members, and they will alternate chairing the meetings.

It was agreed that the board would meet the second Thursday of every third month at 6:30 p.m.

The community co-chairs will be Walton Low (Oct. 2018 meeting), USIBWC (Jan. 2019 meeting) Blanca Trout (April 2019 meeting), USIBWC (July 2019 meeting) Mark Calamia (October 2019 meeting), USIBWC (January 2020 meeting), and Kirk Clifton (April 2020 meeting).

Questions and comments:

Clifton: Should we use Robert's Rules of Order? I don't think the meetings should go beyond their scheduled time.

Low: Meetings never exceed two hours (except for this one). There is no need for Robert's Rules. Usually there are only 2 presentations, lasting a total of 1 to 1 ¼ hours.

Board Discussion/Suggested Future Agenda Items:

Jose Nuñez: An update on the USIBWC sediment basin projects.

Lori Kuczanski: Law enforcement issues along the river/USIBWC property. This is an issue that has been raised by residents who live along the river.

Walton Low: We could hear from the Doña Ana County Sheriff.

Mark Calamia: People who live by the river are the best sources of information to IBWC. He suggested to develop a survey or have focus groups to see what the grassroots community wants, outside of the meeting. USIBWC could have a contractor perform a focus group to assess issues and needs. We should ensure there's follow up.

Sally Spener: The purpose of the Citizens Forum is for the board members to facilitate the exchange of information with the public, to represent the community groups, people who live along the river. The board should let USIBWC know what the community concerns are and share with the community the information that is discussed at the meetings.

Lori Kuczanski: We can take the board on field trips.

Kirk Clifton: How EBID coordinates with IBWC. Another suggested agenda item is City of Las Cruces utilities discharges to the river.

Partridge: A problem is public awareness. You need a public relations budget.

Jose Nuñez: FEMA certification of the Rio Grande flood control system, interior drainage (flood control on the land side of the Rio Grande levees). We should hear what the City of Las Cruces is doing for interior drainage.

Calamia: Historic preservation, wildlife habitat restoration, wetland improvements.

The next meeting is scheduled for Oct. 11 at 6:30 p.m. at Las Cruces City Hall.

Jose Nuñez: USIBWC is going to be moving its office to the building next door at the corner of Executive Center Blvd. and N. Mesa Street so future El Paso meetings may be at the new building.

*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.