

Rio Grande Citizens Forum  
July 19, 2012  
Elephant Butte Irrigation District Board Room  
Las Cruces, NM  
\*Meeting Notes

Board Members in Attendance:

Valerie Beversdorf, Elephant Butte Irrigation District  
Kevin Von Finger, El Paso County  
Daniel Chavez, Hudspeth County Reclamation District #1  
Travis Johnson, Travis Johnson Law Firm  
Conrad Keyes Jr., Paso del Norte Watershed Council  
Sal Masoud, Del Rio Engineering  
Mary Frances Keisling, Save the Valley

USIBWC Staff in Attendance:

Sally Spener  
Elizabeth Verdecchia  
Stefany Carrillo  
Sandra Camacho  
Edward Drusina  
Sheryl Franklin  
Andrea Glover

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Xochitl Torres Small, Senator Udall's Office  
Dwayne Solana, City of Sunland Park  
Debbie Lujan, Town of Mesilla  
Woody Irving, Reclamation  
Fernando Cadena  
Barney Sugarman, Mesilla Valley Home Owner's Association  
Isabelle Johnson, water user  
John Douglas  
Taylor Moore and children from Anapra community  
A number of other members of the public were in attendance who did not sign in.

**Update on the Rio Grande Water Deliveries, Percha Dam to American Dam**

U.S. Commissioner Edward Drusina with the International Boundary and Water Commission spoke briefly about the Rio Grande Canalization Project from Percha Dam to American Dam along the Rio Grande. He said that last spring there was a lot of confusion and concern about water releases and how they would be handled. Due to this discussion the government has decided to carry out an analysis of water deliveries in this area. This analysis is

going to consist of hiring a consultant to analyze the water and how it's being impacted when it's released. This analysis is considered necessary and the final decisions and overall contract will be by done by the end of October of this year. Copies of the report will be available to the public.

### **Emergency Action Plans, Elephant Butte Irrigation District's Experience**

Civil Engineer Jim Covey, with the Elephant Butte Irrigation District gave a presentation on the Emergency Action Plans from the Elephant Butte Irrigation District's perspective. Before starting his presentation he explained that he would focus on the Apache Brazito Mesquite Site #1 and that it would not be a technical presentation but an overview. Emergency Action Plans (EAP) have been 40 years in the making and are carried out by the Federal Government. The reason why Emergency Actions Plans are prepared is because the law dictates that "owners of dams classified as high or significant hazard potential shall prepare, maintain and exercise an emergency action plan for immediate action in the event of potential dam failure." EAPs are also required for dams under the jurisdiction of the State Engineer as determined by dam height and storage capacity. Low hazard means probably no loss of life and low economic cost; significant hazard means probably no loss of life and significant economic loss; and high hazard will probably cause loss of life if it were to breach.

The Emergency Action Plans' content should have: certifications, basic data for dam, the emergency level evaluation process, notification flowchart, roles and responsibilities, inundation map, and evacuation plan. The inundation map is 95% of the work of the Emergency Action Plan and the evacuation map is what an Emergency Action Plan really needs. The Office of the State Engineer (OSE) has a template for all the mentioned required content. The inundation map process consists of having watershed characteristics, storm event hyetograph, inflow hydrograph, dam characteristics, breach analysis, outflow hydrograph, flood routing analysis, and the inundation map.

When referring to the Apache Brazito Mesquite #1, the storm event for which it was designed in 1964 includes a pool for the 50-year, 6-hour storm event, an emergency spillway sized for the 5.52 inch rainfall event (the 1,000 year storm). But OSE dam safety officials have insisted on a design for the probable maximum precipitation (PMP) event of 20 inches, the probability of such an event occurring is 0.

The inflow hydrograph into the dam for the Apache Brazito Mesquite #1 is of 7,400 cubic feet per second (cfs). For the outflow hydrograph with the PMP it would be 14,300 cfs but would only last 10 to 15 minutes. The inundation map forms the basis for the evacuation map and the Local Emergency Management group is responsible for it.

Public- What is the cost of such analysis?

Jim Covey- There is a lot of work so it would be very expensive. We have to come up with something better.

Public- When you refer to loss of life do you refer to human being only?

Jim Covey- Yes, it is only human beings.

Public- Are you going to exercise your Emergency Action Plan at tabletop first?

Jim Covey- Yes, we do simulations and table tops.

Public- Is there anything being done on tabletop for storm water retention for any of these dams?

Jim Covey- I can't speak to that. All I can say is storage of water violates the 96-hour rule of the EAP.

Conrad Keyes- If we have a 1,000 year storm, how big of an area will that storm cover?

Jim Covey- It will cover a very wide area.

Conrad Keyes- If we have a storm of that magnitude, is all that water going to be held back?

Jim Covey- It is more than likely that Elephant Butte Irrigation District would lose some levees.

Public- Can you briefly explain the 96-hour rule?

Jim Covey- As I remember correctly, if we don't drain our dams in 96 hours we have a different situation and we get into water law problems.

Conrad Keyes- Any dam must be drained in the State of New Mexico.

### **Construction Update of Levee Projects in Doña Ana County and El Paso County**

Andrea Glover, USIBWC Civil Engineer, gave a presentation on the Upper Rio Grande Flood Control Levee Projects. She gave a list of the current levee projects: Mesilla Levee Improvements Phase 1 and Phase 2, Canutillo Levee Improvements, Sunland Park Levee Improvements, Vado Levee Design Phase 1 and Phase 2, Courchesne and NEMEXAS Levee Design, American Canal Re-Lining Design, and Ysleta to Fabens Levee Improvements. She showed the cost, completion date and mileage each project has (see details at: [http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF\\_URG\\_FCP\\_Presentation\\_071912.pdf](http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_FCP_Presentation_071912.pdf)).

Mesilla Phase 1 will be finished pretty soon. Mesilla Phase 2 was shut down but will hopefully finish it by December of this year. Canutillo Phase 1 has construction done. Sunland Park will have construction finished next month. Vado Levee Design has its design complete and the USIBWC is waiting on funds for construction and hope to do it next year. Canutillo Phase 2 has the design 90% complete. Courchesne and NEMEXAS Reach Designs have 60% of their design complete but construction is based on funding and it could be constructed in 2018-2020. The American Canal Re-Lining Design is 60% complete with construction estimated for 2013 or 2014.

For the Rio Grande Rectification Project, from El Paso to Fort Quitman, the agency has completed the design for a 15.7-mile reach from Ysleta Bridge to Fabens. Construction is expected to be awarded in 2012 and the solicitation announcement is out. There is also the "Paisano Project" but it is not scheduled for construction yet.

Public- The City of El Paso has a mountain river trail and I have heard that their plan is to bring a trail from Borderland to the east side of the Rio Grande and hit the floodway. What do you know about it?

USIBWC staff in attendance at the meeting were not aware of the plan.

Public- Are you re-vegetating?

Andrea Glover- We are working to re-vegetate the areas where we have completed construction but due to low rainfall, we are not getting enough vegetation.

Public- Is there any consideration for how much water is being used by the water trucks?

Andrea Glover- The contractor has to purchase the water that is needed.

Public- So that stimulus money does not cover the Canutillo Phase 2?

Andrea Glover- No.

Public- We are from Sunland and we have a concern in the Anapra area? Do you have any information of the Courchesne project, what is going on, where is it going, if it's delayed?

Andrea Glover- Honestly I do not know, design on that is not complete; I just found out about the American Canal Re-lining 2-months ago.

### **Public Comment**

Taylor Moore- I am a volunteer in community center, La Casita, in Anapra, that closed 3 weeks ago. May I introduce these children that are with me from Anapra and ask my questions?

Conrad Keyes- You have ten minutes since it will take part of our meeting.

Taylor Moore- Is there an innocent reason why the community of Anapra was not addressed first when you began to repair the levees?

Commissioner Drusina- The levee construction took care of what is called "shovel ready" projects and the government provided money for those. We were prepared to move forward with construction with a minimal amount of design. The funding went towards the design of the Anapra project in September with 60% completion by today. Construction, if funds become available, will follow between the years 2018 to 2020.

Taylor Moore- Why wasn't this problem addressed first?

Commissioner Drusina- The "shovel ready" projects were executed first. Yours was not forgotten, the design is being completed this year.

Taylor Moore- Who can I contact to begin looking at the files that relate to the Sunland Bridge from the period of evacuation to now?

Commissioner Drusina- You can contact John Merino, chief engineer, he can sit with you and explain you everything.

### **River Restoration Activities in the Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project**

Elizabeth Verdecchia, Natural Resource Specialist with USIBWC gave a presentation on this topic. Ms. Verdecchia started by saying that the Canalization Project was built by IBWC in the 1930's and 40's. The agency rectified the channel to improve flood control and facilitate water deliveries but as a result it removed miles of natural habitat and stakeholders expressed their concerns to the agency about the management of the river. In 2009 a decision was reached and an Integrated Land Management Alternative was selected that would take a 10-year implementation period which will improve the aquatic and riparian habitats of 30 restoration sites. This project also addressed the Endangered Species Act (ESA) liability and the floodway vegetation management for 2,000 acres.

The first step to the implementation plan was to have soil and groundwater surveys, Southwestern Willow Flycatchers and Yellow Billed Cuckoo surveys, Intensive Cultural Resources surveys and Section 106 clearance, as well as site implementation plans. After this was done there was work on the Environmental Water Rights Framework, and conceptual restoration plan land acquisition (many areas were on private property), biological assessment and section 7 consultations were done, pilot project implementation, restoration signs were purchased and installed, and Record of Decision implementation meetings were regularly scheduled.

IBWC wants to implement 5 restoration sites. She went on to explain each site's size, how they are being treated and what has been planted. Pictures were shown to see the improvements of each site.

The future tasks for this project are to define areas of no-mow zones, update river management plan, do a Flycatcher Management Plan, increase signage, and prioritize next restoration sites.

Kevin Von Finger: I want to nominate a site of no-mow by the park by the racetrack on the east side.

Elizabeth Verdecchia- There is a possibility there.

Public-Where are you buying all these trees?

Elizabeth Verdecchia- From Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge; they have a great variety.

### **Board Discussion/Suggested Agenda Items**

Conrad Keyes Jr. - There is a Paso del Norte Watershed Council meeting on August 7, you are all welcome to come for lunch at 12 but the meeting will start at 1. The topic is based on the results of the 319 *E. Coli* project.

Travis Johnson thanked the Commissioner and board members for the work they do with the community.

Commissioner Drusina- There is going to be a Bi-national Border Water Resources Summit this year. It is a big step toward improving water quality and its timing is ideal. Hopefully we get a lot of participation with the international speakers.

Sally Spener- The Bi-national Border Water Resources Summit will be one day in Cd. Juarez and one day in El Paso, on September 28 and 29.

### **Suggested Future Agenda Items:**

1. Mesilla, America, and International Dam Improvement
2. Update on where is IBWC on the parking area at Country Club Road and the river
3. How and why IBWC did not finish the Anapra Levee before other projects.
4. Update on where FEMA is in its Map Revisions.

Next meeting scheduled for October 16, 2012 in El Paso, TX. A possible field trip to the restoration sites might be considered

\*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.