

Rio Grande Citizens Forum held at USIBWC Headquarters
El Paso, TX
Thursday July 24, 2014
6:30pm – 8:30pm
Tentative Meeting Notes*

Board Members in Attendance

Carlos Leon – El Paso County
Austin Marshall – University of Texas at El Paso
Gill M. Sorg – City of Las Cruces
Dale T. Reinhart – Town of Clint
John Balliew – El Paso Water Utilities
Sal Masoud – Del Rio Engineering
Travis Johnson – El Paso attorney
Carlos Peña – USIBWC

International Boundary and Water Commission Staff in Attendance

Matt Myers – USIBWC
Gilbert Anaya – USIBWC
Enrique Muñoz – IBWC/Mexican Section
Shellie Muñoz - USIBWC

ATTENDEES

Efrain Robles – Lower Valley Water District
Lacy Levine – Dept. of Agriculture
Woody Irving – Reclamation
Kareem Dallo – City of El Paso
A. L. Goodloe – Self
Gonzalo Cedillos – El Paso Water Utilities (EPWU)
Ed Guerrero – Bureau of Land Management, Las Cruces
Yvonne Curry – Conde, Inc.
Matias Segura – URS
Roberto Diaz de Leon – City of Sunland Park
Ron Parks – Sundt
Robert Kimpel – Hudspeth County Farmers & Landowners
Chris Canavan – New Mexico Environment Department
Ray Aaltonen – New Mexico Game & Fish
Vernon Wilson – City of Sunland Park
C. Arizpe – EPWU

Dwaine Solana – City of Sunland Park
Bert Juarez – Parkhill Smith Cooper
S. Villalobos – Arcadis
Philip Partridge – Self
Linda Vazquez – City of Sunland Park
Carlos Rincon – US EPA
Gary Esslinger – Elephant Butte Irrigation District

Welcome and Introductions

Meeting called to order by Co-chair Carlos Peña @ 6:35pm starting at the back of the room everyone stood and did self-introductions ending with the Board members then John Balliew introduced the first Speaker and topic.

Interior Drainage Analysis for El Paso

1st Presentation – Interior Drainage Analysis for El Paso – Matias C. Segura III, PE, CFM, Senior Advisor URS Corporation (Presentation posted online at:
http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_Drainage_Analysis_072414.pdf)

Presenter noted that the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has performed rehabilitation work on the Rio Grande levee to provide adequate freeboard for 100-year flood flows. In order to certify the levee system to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), there must be an interior drainage analysis for the land side of the levee system in the City of El Paso.

Following a 2006 flood in El Paso, significant stormwater infrastructure improvements were made. In 2010, there was the El Paso County Stormwater Master Plan. In 2014, there was the City of El Paso Interior Drainage Study. The purpose of the interior drainage study is determine the effects of the Rio Grande on the levee and the interior drainage system. The study provides maps of flood depths in different parts of the city considering the impacts of the 100-year storm on the river and/or interior drainage systems. The study provides a planning tool to help determine flood risk in urban areas.

Question: What entity is funding this project?

Answer (Segura): El Paso Water Utilities

Question: What is being done or looked at north of I-10?

Answer (Segura): It will be considered in Phase II.

Question: In the study, what are you certifying?

Answer (Segura): This study is a small component of the large package that FEMA must accept for the levee to be included on flood insurance risk maps to “meet levee standards.”

Question: What are the impacts in regards to Mexico & New Mexico?

Answer (Segura): We are accounting for the flow of the water, making sure that the levee isn't breached. The area north of this study area will be considered in Phase II, and once approved by FEMA as meeting standards, all the areas will be connected. Larger models not presented this evening include all flows upstream.

Comment (Carlos Peña) – As of today Mexico is still trying to catch up, both sides working to equalize levee concerns.

Question: Studies consider river in 100-year flood stage. During a 100-year flood stage in the river, rainwater from the interior will not be able to drain out to the river because the levee will block it. What about this flooding?

Answer (Segura): We currently have information/studies that show what the impact is with or without the levee, what can be changed to improve it, etc.

Comment (John Balliew): The study will allow FEMA to certify the levee and then we can get the flood insurance rate maps done.

Comment (Danny Chavez): Flow software was used in 2011 to gather information and data as we see in the first phase of the study but phase II is still to come so some items are yet to be determined.

Question: If you calculate capacity of the river at high flood, are you assuming that Mexico's side is at the same level?

Answer (Segura): FEMA map revision and study is being done on US side. The study does look at the northern levee side and how it impacts this side; the levee takes into account flow on both sides.

Question: Does the Mexico side have levees?

Answer (Segura): They have levees but not of the same quality as the US side. When we are protecting the US interest, we take into consideration the Mexican side.

Comment: There are some problems with area flooding in homes and churches; you need to go see the area.

Response (John Balliew): Most communities have concentrated flows that increase with building and we are looking at that trying to take that into consideration in Phase II of the study.

Comment: Citizens are renting pumps, having to pump 50 to 100 gallons of water a day, which is a big problem.

Response (John Balliew): The area is in the system for capital improvement. Come into the office to see our engineer to see our strategy and plans for that area. More levees are to be constructed as we get financial support from the government. Complex areas are further down on the phase list; these are the more complicated areas that need to be fixed. But we are planning, designing, for these levees to be constructed in the more complex areas as we get funding.

The Paso del Norte Watershed- Based Plan, Mitigation Measures to Reduce Bacterial Pollution in the Rio Grande

Co-chair Carlos Peña introduced 2nd Presenter, Christopher Canavan, New Mexico Environment Department.

2nd presentation – The Paso Del Norte Watershed Based Plan – Mitigation Measures to Reduce Bacterial Pollution in the Rio Grande – Christopher M. Canavan, New Mexico Field Offices Team Lead, New Mexico Environment Department --- (Presentation posted on website at: http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_NM_Env_Dept_072414.pdf)

In 2007, the State of New Mexico issued a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for *E. coli* bacteria. The Paso del Norte Watershed Council received grants to work on water quality. A preliminary watershed plan was produced in 2008, which recommended a water quality sampling program and increased stakeholder outreach. Monthly sampling began that year.

Mr. Canavan described *E. coli* bacteria as a pollutant that originates via feces of warm animals. Most strains of *E. coli* are not harmful to humans but it is an indicator of fecal contamination – contamination that can be associated with other disease like hepatitis A or cholera.

A watershed plan was drafted in 2013 and approved by EPA in June 2014. Elements of the watershed plan include identification of sources of contamination, description of management measures, implementation schedule, and monitoring, among others. The project area includes areas along the Rio Grande from Southern Sierra County, New Mexico downstream to El Paso, Texas. Elephant Butte Irrigation District conducts monitoring work.

From January 2009-December 2011, only 7% of samples exceeded the criteria for *E. coli*; about half of these were related to stormwater runoff events. Anthony Bridge sampling revealed a pattern of elevated *E. coli* unrelated to stormwater events. Some drains also have high concentrations. A microbial source tracking study began in the fall of 2010 to determine the source host organism at selected sites.

While much of the impairment is linked to stormwater events, there are exceptions near Anthony and Sunland Park where there can be high bacteria not associated with stormwater runoff. Drains may be a contributing factor. It could also be related to wastewater treatment plants at Vado and Sunland Park.

Current mitigation efforts included enforcement to curb manure and trash disposal in irrigation district drains, a constructed wetland at the terminus of Montoya Drain, planned construction of a new Santa Teresa Wastewater Treatment Plant, and R-cubed Manure Digester along dairy row.

No Questions

Final Environmental Assessment for Avian Hunting in the Rio Grande Canalization Project

Co-chair Carlos Peña introduced 3rd Presenter Elizabeth Verdecchia

3rd presentation – Final Environmental Assessment for Avian Hunting in the Rio Grande Canalization Project – Elizabeth Verdecchia, Natural Resource Specialist, USIBWC --- (Presentation posted on website at: http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_EA_Avian_Hunting_072414.pdf)

USIBWC began allowing bird hunting along the Rio Grande in parts of El Paso and Hudspeth Counties, Texas several years ago but hunting has not been allowed along the Rio Grande in New Mexico. New Mexico Game and Fish approached USIBWC to consider allowing hunting along the Rio Grande in New Mexico as well. USIBWC began to evaluate this via a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) in 2013. The draft EA contemplated two alternatives: leave current hunting prohibition or allow avian hunting in 3 designated areas totaling 55 miles. The agency evaluated potential impacts and determined that allowing hunting would have only minimal impacts such as increased noise, areas used less often for non-hunting recreation, possible looting or trampling of archaeological sites.

The EA was put out for a 30-day public comment period in 2013. About 200 comments were received, including strong views both in favor of and against hunting. A final decision was delayed to allow time to fully consider the comments.

To address public concerns, USIBWC modified the hunting alternative to remove some areas that are more populated (Hatch, Mesilla, Shalem Colony, and Vado) from the permitted hunting zone. The Final EA will authorize 30 miles of hunting in 3 designated areas. This is considered a compromise that balances public concerns. Hunters must abide by all state and federal hunting regulations. Agencies will enforce hunting laws on USIBWC lands. The Final EA will be published shortly and will take effect 30 days thereafter. Hunters are reminded to avoid hunting near buildings, to keep a safe distance, to pick up spent shells and trash, and other courtesies. For more information, call 915-832-4764.

No Questions

Comment (Carlos Peña): USIBWC has done a lot to get to the point where we are now, we are hoping that the hunters will be very responsible, safe, and behave properly. We know that with everyone doing their part, hunting will be successful in the designated areas.

Public Comment:

Annual Meeting for New Mexico, West Texas & Chihuahua Border 2020 (the US-Mexico environmental program) on August 5, 2014 from 4pm until 7pm located at the new complex the city built in Anthony, New Mexico.

Board Discussion:

- Would like to receive an update from IBWC on levee certification status

Suggested Agenda items:

- None

Next meeting in 3 months, not sure of exact date, notifications will go out.

Meeting adjourned at 7:48pm

* 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.