

Rio Grande Citizens Forum
El Paso, Texas
October 23, 2014
*** Tentative Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:

Danny Chavez, Hudspeth County Conservation and Reclamation
Travis Johnson, Travis Johnson Law Firm
Conrad Keyes, Paso del Norte Watershed Council
Zack Libbin, Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID)
Austin Marshall, University of Texas at El Paso
Dale T. Reinhardt, Town of Clint Texas
Gill Sorg, City of Las Cruces, Council
Miguel Teran, El Paso County Water Improvement District #1, Rosadales Neighborhood Association

USIBWC Staff in attendance:

Edward Drusina, Commissioner
Ceasar, Boisslier, Assistant Area Operations Manager
Carlos Peña, Co-Chair IBWC, Principal Engineer - Operations
Padinare Unnikrishna, Lead Hydraulic Engineer
Shellie Muñoz, Public Affairs Assistant

23 Members of the public in attendance:

Barney and Ruth Sugarman, Mesilla Hills home owners
Carlos Rincon, USEPA
Carol McCall, City of Las Cruces
David DuBois, New Mexico State University (NMSU)
David Morris, Resident
Dorian Alcantar, City of Las Cruces
Dwayne Solana, City of Sunland Park
George Abertnathy, resident
J.D. Padilla, City of Las Cruces
Joan Woodward,
John P. Cordova, Jobe Materials
John Gwynne, Doña Ana County Flood Commission
Karen Perez, Arcadis
Mike Landis, Bureau of Reclamation
Peter Bennett, City of Las Cruces
Rene Blizzard, Resident
Robert Kimpel, Hudspeth County Farmers
Sam Irrinki, URS
Stanley Engle, NM Climate Center (NMSU)
Steve Ainsa, URS
Tony Trevino, LLC PW/PD
William Little, LL Enterprises
Woody Irving, Bureau of Reclamation

Welcoming Remarks:

At 6:30 PM Citizens Forum Co-Chair Conrad Keyes convened meeting. He welcomed group, introduced present board members and let audience introduce themselves.

Carlos Peña read out loud “Drought Conditions Affect Transboundary Water Resources” Notice that has been distributed at all Citizens Forums along the United States/Mexico border as requested by Commissioner Drusina. (“Drought Conditions Affect Transboundary Water Resources” attached)

Commissioner Drusina made a short statement saying that he has requested to have this notice provided at each of the Citizens Forums from San Diego to Brownsville. He would like the public to know that the IBWC knows and is aware of drought conditions and that the Commission is doing what can be done. He then turned the meeting over to the first presenter.

Presentation One – Arroyo Management Plan - Carol McCall, City of Las Cruces

Carol McCall presented the City of Las Cruces Arroyo Management Plan and how it addressed the arroyos within the city limits. Ms. McCall identified the plan’s purpose as providing policy guidelines for the following: regional approach to stormwater management; improve flood control and drainage; protect arroyos in their natural state; protect native vegetation and wildlife habitat; help protect private property; encourage responsible and profitable development; accommodate and protect essential utility installation and maintenance; and provide additional recreational opportunities.

Ms. McCall emphasized the difference between Policy and Code. She explained that Policy is not binding, unlike Code. She explained that the Arroyo Plan is Policy and that work needs to be done to turn the plan into Code.

Ms. McCall also informed the public that the plan is building upon what the Corps of Engineers has, and that going further upstream as the city grows will be helpful.

Ms. McCall’s presentation provided a 3D view of the flood zones based on the Arroyo Modeling for the audience’s reference and the meeting was opened to questions.

Question – Is this recent?

Answer – Yes, within the last few years.

Question – Was the BLM invited to this meeting? Concerned because the dam used to have open drainage down to the river but now the new water treatment plant is pumping water to the golf course and a new park that is being developed with non-native vegetation. How are the decisions made to spend millions of dollars for the park with non-native plants?

Answer - From board member Conrad Keyes – Yes, the BLM is on the IBWC mailing list and they were invited. Likely, the city council made the approvals since that is probably a City of Las Cruces or Corps of Engineers park and not part of the IBWC.

Answer – The BLM reviewed the plan and made a few general comments.

Question – What is the plan on the west mesa?

Answer – The Corps of Engineers conducts sediment and drainage studies. The plan points out that escarpment is the main concern. As development along the west mesa continues, more studies will be conducted.

Question – Is there a law that can make property owners fix anything on their property that may be causing flooding to their neighbors?

Answer – That would be something for the civil courts.

With the questions answered, Ms. McCall's presentation was completed and the meeting was turned over to John D. Gwynne of the Doña Ana County Flood Commission.

Presentation Two –Flood Warning System - John D. Gwynne, Dona Ana County Flood Commission

Mr. Gwynne provided a presentation that informed how the current manner in which flooding is reported is primarily after the fact. Presently, residents and citizens call in to report flooding and at that point flood warnings are broadcast which may be too general in nature. The generalized flood warning area may be so broad that citizens don't heed the warning. Mr. Gwynne's presentation provided information demonstrating how the flood warning system can quickly interpret the large amounts of data provided from numerous data collection sites and disseminate warning alerts and messages. Since the information is more detailed, specific areas can be identified as flooding or having the potential to flood due to rain upstream. Examples of what the system can do is send messages and alerts to emergency responders, broadcast (TV and Radio), Sirens, Social Message Boards, FEMA's integrated Public Alert Warning System, and Reverse 911. Mr. Gwynne informed that there has been large inter-agency collaboration with agencies such as Doña Ana County Flood Commission, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, City of Las Cruces, National Weather Service, and New Mexico State University. Additionally, a consultant has been hired to plan out the system, logistics and maintenance of the system.

Mr. Gwynne completed his presentation and the meeting was open for questions.

Question - What about the Extra-Territorial Zoning Commission area? Many of them are farmers.

Answer – We are working with the political jurisdictions. The Flood Commission will warehouse the different entities' information so that the commission can then send the alarm. Such entities include the USGS, Irrigation District, airports, university, weather station and others will be included in the next 30 days. The infrastructure needs to be put into place in order to gather accurate data.

Question from citizen - How do you keep up with moving target? Example, once city of Las Cruces does work on erosion?

Answer – Maintenance. They will need to keep up as much as possible. As the years pass it will get better. These are beginning stepping stones, so this is not a short term process. All arroyos will need to be calibrated.

With the questions answered, John D. Gwynne's presentation was completed and the meeting was turned over to Cesar Boisselier of the USIBWC's Upper Rio Grande field office.

Presentation Three - Sediment Control Dams – Cesar Boisselier, International Boundary and Water Commission

Mr. Boisselier presented some of the background of sediment control dams, how they function and photos of the various dams that are part of the Rio Grande Canalization Project. He informed those present that

in 1960 the USIBWC requested the Soil Conservation Service (now Natural Resources Conservation Service) to provide studies on controlling sediment inflow into the Rio Grande. As a result, the NRCS recommended erecting dams at eleven arroyos which were constructed between 1969 and 1977 under the Watershed Protection and Flood Preservation Act P.L. 566. Five of the dams erected were the Green Arroyo, Berrenda Creek, Jaralosa Creek, Crow Canyon and the Broad Canyon. An illustration of a typical sediment control dam was presented and Mr. Boisselier explained that they are designed to capture 100 years' worth of sediment. At this time they are at about 30 percent of capacity. A member of the audience asked if the IBWC is considered a sponsor. Mr. Boisselier responded that the NRCS is the owner and that the IBWC conducts the maintenance. Some of the maintenance involved includes road grading, mowing of down and upstream slopes, removal of woody vegetation, monitoring and controlling rodent activity by baiting and setting traps, and conducting erosion, concrete and fencing repairs. Additionally, Mr. Boisselier informed of the Safety of Dams Inspections which check for the foundation's stability by checking for deformations along the slopes, cracks in the dam, erosion, animal burrows and foundation seepage. Mr. Boisselier's presentation concluded with photos illustrating the various dams, spillways, risers, and areas mowed.

Mr. Boisselier completed his presentation and the meeting was open for questions.

Question – Broad Dam is in a designated National Monument. Will it be difficult to work on without motorized vehicles?

Answer – Motorized vehicles are allowed for maintenance so it doesn't affect the ability to work on the dam. Also, maintenance to the dam is exempt from any restrictions imposed to the areas designated as a National Monument.

Question – Does the USIBWC have any plans to build more sediment retention dams along the Rio Grande?

Answer – The agency has had internal discussions about constructing additional dams, however, we have not taken steps to move forward with formal planning.

The presentation was finished and the meeting was opened for public comment and board discussion and suggested agenda items for the next Rio Grande Citizens Forum. There was no public comment.

Suggestion agenda items included the following:

- Country Club Bridge – Soundproofing of flood gate
- FEMA Levee Certifications update
- Budget update

With the presentations concluded, questions and feedback addressed, and suggestions on topics for the following Citizens Forum completed, the meeting was closed.

*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.



International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section

DROUGHT CONDITIONS AFFECT TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCES

October 2014

Upper Rio Grande – Under the Convention of 1906, the United States delivers Rio Grande water to Mexico at Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. This water, which originates as snowmelt runoff from the Rocky Mountains, is stored in Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs in New Mexico as part of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Rio Grande Project. Snowmelt runoff arriving at Elephant Butte Reservoir has been only 58% of average in the last ten years and 26% of average in the last 5 years. In 2014, due to drought in the upper Rio Grande basin, water allocations were only 30% of a full supply, resulting in a shortfall of more than 600,000 acre-feet of water for farmers in New Mexico, Texas, and Chihuahua, and the City of El Paso, Texas. In 2013, the worst drought in the history of the Rio Grande Project, allocations were only 6% of a full supply. In 2012, allocations were 39% and in 2011, they were 43%. At the end of the 2014 irrigation season, storage in Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs was less than 10% of conservation capacity. Regional water users have relied heavily on ground water pumping to offset the loss of surface water and the long-term impact on this underground reserve source has yet to be fully determined.

Lower Rio Grande – In the Lower Rio Grande region below El Paso, Texas to the Gulf of Mexico, Mexico delivers water to the United States from Mexican tributaries of the Rio Grande, in accordance with the 1944 Water Treaty. The treaty requires Mexico to deliver an annual average of 350,000 acre-feet in cycles of five years except in the event of extraordinary drought. During the current five-year cycle, which began October 25, 2010, Mexico is behind in its deliveries by more than 300,000 acre-feet. This deficit affects municipalities, industry and farmers in South Texas and has resulted in a serious economic impact to the region.

Colorado River – The Colorado River supplies water to seven states in the United States and two in Mexico. Under the 1944 Water Treaty, the United States delivers 1.5 million acre-feet of water per year to Mexico, an obligation it has always met. The period from 2000-2013 was the driest 14-year period in over 100 years of historical record. Colorado River Basin storage reservoirs, which were essentially full in 1999, have dropped to half of their capacity. Lake Mead, the reservoir at Hoover Dam that supplies water to Nevada, Arizona, California, and Mexico, reached a record low elevation in 2014. Forecasts indicate that beginning in 2016, there is a possibility that Lake Mead could drop so low that the reservoir's water users in the United States and Mexico would face reduced water deliveries for the first time in history, totaling 383,000 acre-feet.

For more information:

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