

Spring 2013

Issue 7

A Message from U.S. Commissioner Drusina



The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, continues to make good progress in implementing Minute No. 319, the landmark Commission agreement signed last November that enhances U.S.-Mexico cooperation on the Colorado River in many areas. I appreciate the efforts of the Commission staff and stakeholders from throughout the Colorado River basin in the United States and Mexico who are providing key support and expertise on the binational work groups tasked with implementation. Work is progressing on a habitat restoration project in the international reach of the river and we have made advances in planning other water infrastructure projects identified in the Minute.

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In spite of successes like Minute No. 319, the Commission faces difficult challenges this year as the region faces drought in both the Colorado River and Rio Grande basins. According to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the projected April-July 2013 unregulated inflow to Lake Powell on the Colorado River is just 42% of average. The Colorado River reservoirs are at just 53% of full, down from 63% last year.

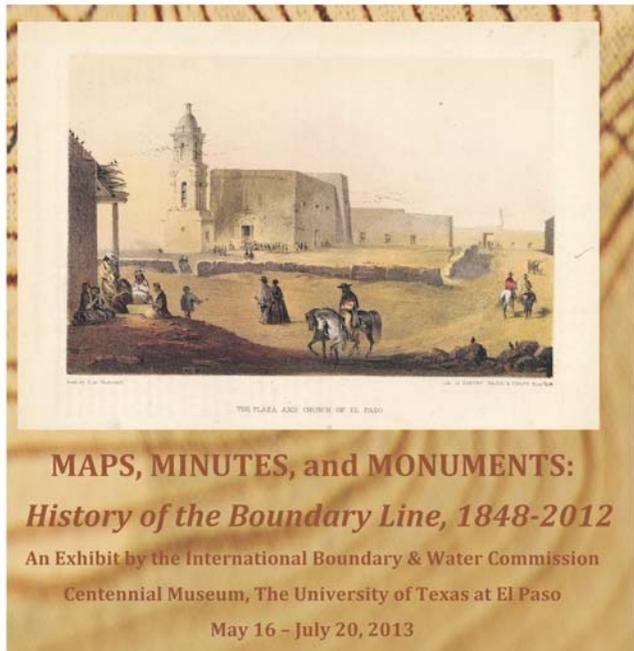
On the Rio Grande, conditions are even worse. For the Rio Grande Project, which provides water to southern New Mexico and the greater El Paso, Texas-Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua region, irrigators are likely to receive a tiny fraction of their normal water allotments in 2013 in what is shaping up to be the worst water year in a century. Elephant Butte Dam in New Mexico is at just 11% of conservation capacity. During a normal irrigation season, water releases last seven months or more. This year, the irrigation season is likely to last only about six weeks. To address the shortages, the Commission has been conducting monthly binational meetings with the affected irrigation districts and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to coordinate water delivery schedules for users in both countries. The U.S. Section is also spearheading a water budget study to help stakeholders manage single or multiple water release timings and volumes during years of water scarcity.

Farther downstream, the Commission's international reservoirs at Amistad and Falcon Dams have also been affected. Lake Amistad is at its lowest elevation ever at just 24% of conservation capacity while Falcon is at 17%. It amazes me how quickly these reservoirs have dropped following flood conditions in 2010 when Falcon Reservoir reached a record high. Complicating the situation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley is Mexico's deficit in water deliveries to the United States under the 1944 Water Treaty, a matter we have been working tirelessly to resolve. Some Texas irrigation districts have run out of water, causing a hardship to cities that rely on irrigation districts to deliver municipal water to them. This is the first time those Texas cities have had to look elsewhere to purchase so-called "push water" to secure delivery of their municipal supplies.

As we confront these challenges, we rely on the hard work and experience of our dedicated staff. The Commission has overcome many challenges in the past and with the efforts of our team we will continue to do so into the future.

IBWC Exhibit at UTEP

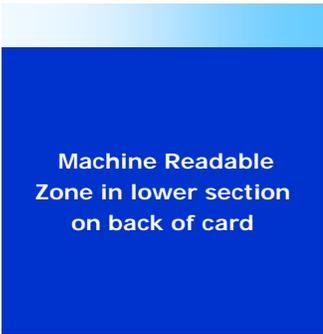
MAPS, MINUTES, and MONUMENTS: History of the Boundary Line, 1848-2012, an Exhibit by the International Boundary & Water Commission will be displayed at the Centennial Museum at The University of Texas at El Paso from May 16 to July 20, 2013. Museum hours of operation are from 10:00 am to 4:30 pm, and the exhibit is open to the public, free of charge.



New Commission Identification Cards

The International Boundary and Water Commission is developing new IBWC identification cards which include a Machine Readable Zone compatible with Customs and Border Protection's current card readers. This improvement will enhance the security of the card, as well as increase ease of access at Customs and Border Protection checkpoints.

Additionally, the U.S. Section is updating the internal controls it currently uses to process ID cards, in an effort to further increase the safety of this border crossing document.



MRZ →



Minute 319 Implementation Activities

With the signing of Minute No. 319, entitled “**Interim International Cooperative Measures in the Colorado River Basin through 2017 and Extension of Minute 318 Cooperative Measures to Address the Continued Effects of the April 2010 Earthquake in the Mexicali Valley, Baja California**” on November 20, 2012, Commission staff have been working diligently over the past 5 months to implement the numerous provisions of the Minute. These include a wide range of topics such as cooperative measures under low and high reservoir conditions, water storage in the form of Intentionally Created Mexican Allocation (ICMA), an extension of the cooperative measures established in Minute No. 318, the exchange of ICMA to U.S. Intentionally Created Surplus (ICS), Water for the Environment, and several International Infrastructure and Environmental Projects



Hunter's Hole restoration site on the Colorado River in US across the river from the Miguel Aleman/Minute 319 site in Mexico. (L)

The Colorado River Delta (R)

One important aspect of Minute No. 319, is a series of environmentally focused efforts in the Lower Colorado River Basin to provide water for the environment and develop several environmental restoration sites within Mexico. Furthermore, 158,088 acre-feet of water for the environment has been identified with the support of the U.S., Mexico and a binational coalition of non-governmental organizations for the delivery of base flow and pulse flow to the Colorado River starting as early as 2014.

Another project currently moving forward quickly is the All-American Canal (AAC) Turnout which would allow for Mexico to use the U.S. owned and operated infrastructure to take emergency water deliveries near Mexicali, B.C.

Moving forward the Environmental Flow Team will continue to meet to develop the draft delivery and monitoring plan and have a series of consultation meetings with scientists and experts scheduled over the next several months to answer any technical questions that will help refine the final documents. In addition to these meetings several other binational teams still need to be kicked off and are expected to be brought together in the near future to work towards remaining commitments of Minute No. 319.

Contributor: Adrian Cortez-IBWC Hydrologist

Regional Commission Meeting held in Yuma, AZ on March 12, 2013

The International Boundary and Water Commission continued with the regional Commission meetings this year by hosting a Yuma meeting in early March. The meeting focused on the implementation of Minute 319, including the development of a matrix of all of the requirements for the Minute. The establishment of work-groups; as well as a strategy to get positive publicity for the sitio CILA/Laguna Grande restoration. Also covered in the meeting was a reduction in the water requested by the Mexican Section for the 2013 Water Delivery Schedule for the period of March-May 2013 under the terms of Minute 319. Continuing with water deliveries, the Mexican Section noted the importance of meeting daily Colorado River water delivery targets during the critical months of March and April.

The Commission
meets in Yuma (L)

Monument 207 near
Andrade, CA-Los
Algodones, BC (R)



The Commission then discussed a 2011 "Binational study regarding the technical methods and joint monitoring of the salinity in the Colorado River for the fulfillment of International Boundary and Water Commission Minute No. 242 between the United States and Mexico conducted from January 2006 to December 2007." This report included 4 recommendations, which have been agreed to by all involved parties. Mexico also reported that Conagua will create a specific Mexican discharge standard for the New River. Boundary issues were also covered, a Colorado River Boundary Map, Boundary Monument maintenance, and proposed fiber optic lines that cross the international boundary.

Regional Commission meeting of the Upper Rio Grande on April 4, 2013

The IBWC held a Regional Commission Meeting in Cd. Juárez, Chih. on April 4, 2013 to review Commission issues in the area between Agua Prieta, Sonora and Ojinaga, Chihuahua. The Commission discussed updating Water Accounting and water deliveries to Mexico under the Convention of 1906, where it was noted that given that current storage at Elephant Butte and Caballo Dams releases may not begin until the month of June.

This Commission meeting also included a visit to restoration sites in the upper part of the Rio Grande, as well as the Sunland Park -Anapra area to evaluate the status of the boundary markers installed in that area.



Rio Bosque Wetland Park, El Paso, from the Commission's field trip

Lower Rio Grande Water Quality workshop held in Austin

The Lower Rio Grande Water Quality Initiative held a workshop in Austin February 28– March 1. The workshop was attended by personnel from the U.S. and Mexico to learn about water quality modeling and to plan for a binational sampling to populate the water quality model. The model will be used to better understand the impacts to water quality on both sides of the border and to determine what recommendations will best improve the Rio Grande. The initiative is studying the area from below Falcon Dam to the Gulf of Mexico.

The workshop was followed up by a binational meeting on April 25th that was attended by stakeholders from both sides of the border in the Lower Rio Grande and was led by Principal Engineers Antonio Rascon and John Merino. The group discussed the development of Terms of Reference and a proposal that will form the commitment from both countries to assess the water quality in the Lower Rio Grande and provide support and resources.

Other plans discussed at the meeting include a coordinated sampling schedule that will involve an intensive binational sampling event at over 60 sites in the Lower Rio Grande to populate the model. Additionally, the committee will coordinate an inventory of all outfalls and intakes to the Lower Rio Grande starting with major urban areas.

Another workshop is planned for late June in Austin to provide advanced training in the water quality model using historical data for the area and to finalize the sampling plans for the project.

International Visitors

The USIBWC Foreign Affairs Office periodically receives visitors who are invited to the United States under the auspices of the Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program. Their program is arranged by the Institute of International Education (IIE). Locally these groups are coordinated by the El Paso Council for International Visitors.

Egypt

On February 11, the IBWC received a group of visitors from Egypt, included were managers from irrigation districts, the Ministry of Water Recourse and Irrigation, as well as the Ministry of Water Resources all interested in viewing the IBWC's successful history of water distribution with Mexico.



USIBWC
Commissioner Edward
Drusina greeting the
Egyptian delegation

Mexico

On March 21, we received a visit from the Chief of Improvement of Soils and Technical Assistance Department, from the National Forestry Commission of Mexico who was interested in various aspects of soil management and environmental restoration with a special emphasis on arid rangeland and grassland ecosystems.

Algeria

Finally, on April 11, a contingent from Algeria visited the Commission under a Department of State sponsored Water Management/Bio Tech Program. This group was interested to learn how the Commission functions in a way that benefits the social and economic welfare of the peoples on the two sides of the boundary and improves relations between the two countries.

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