



International Boundary and Water Commission United States and Mexico

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COMMISSION MARKS 120TH ANNIVERSARY

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC) marks its 120th anniversary in March. The Commission was originally established as the International Boundary Commission in the Treaty of March 1, 1889, “Convention between the United States of America and the United States of Mexico to Facilitate the Carrying Out of the Principles Contained in the Treaty of November 12, 1884, and to Avoid the Difficulties Occasioned by Reason of the Changes which Take Place in the Beds of the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers.” At that time, the Commission’s main responsibility was to resolve issues that arose regarding the location of the international boundary when the two rivers that form part of the boundary changed course.

The 1944 Water Treaty expanded the Commission’s mission and changed its name to the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, to reflect a greater role in such issues as distribution of the waters of the Rio Grande and Colorado River between the two countries, flood control, and sanitation. During the 20th century, the Commission evolved into an influential agency that addressed myriad water infrastructure challenges along the U.S.-Mexico border.

“The Commission has demonstrated how two countries can resolve water issues peacefully,” said U.S. Commissioner C.W. “Bill” Ruth. “Managers from international river basins around the world turn to us to learn how they can better manage their systems.”

“Over its 120-year history, the Commission has become a model for other international commissions worldwide,” said Interim Mexican Commissioner Luis Antonio Rascon. “Being an organization headed by engineers allows Commission issues to be addressed from a technical perspective, making it possible for practical engineering-based solutions to be presented to the two governments.” He noted that the Commission also guarantees the safety of border communities by addressing infrastructure development, dam maintenance, flood control, etc.

The IBWC is responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties between the two countries and settling differences that arise in their application. As part of its responsibilities, the IBWC has a number of important water projects in the region, including Amistad and Falcon Dams, two international storage reservoirs on the Rio Grande that provide a reliable water supply, flood control, and hydroelectric power to benefit users in both countries. The IBWC also established extensive international flood control projects for the Rio Grande, Colorado River, and Tijuana River as well as international wastewater treatment plants in San Diego, California; Nogales, Arizona; and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas.

As part of its commitment to border communities, the IBWC has provided technical assistance for other sanitation projects to obtain certification through the Border Environment Cooperation Commission and financing from the North American Development Bank. True to its original mission, the IBWC continues to demarcate the international land boundary and resolve boundary disputes that arise due to changes in the river channels.

Currently, the IBWC is working with authorities from both countries on projects and planning for the Rio Grande and Colorado River to ensure that water supplies and infrastructure in these basins are able to meet the needs of both nations well into the future. The IBWC will continue to maintain and upgrade its border water infrastructure, strengthening its position as a premier border institution in service to the United States and Mexico.

The U.S. Section of the Commission has its Headquarters in El Paso, Texas while the Mexican Section Headquarters is across the Rio Grande in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. Both Sections maintain field offices at various locations in the border states including San Diego, CA-Tijuana, BC; Yuma, AZ-Mexicali, BC; Nogales, AZ-Nogales, Son.; Las Cruces, NM; El Paso, TX; Fort Hancock, TX; Presidio, TX-Ojinaga, Chih.; Del Rio, TX-Ciudad Acuña, Coah.; Nuevo Laredo, Tamps.; Falcon Heights, TX-Nueva Ciudad Guerrero, Tamps.; Mercedes, TX-Reynosa, Tamps.

The IBWC will commemorate the 120th anniversary with events this month in both El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.

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