



International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section



For immediate release
January 9, 2012

RIO GRANDE WATER QUALITY, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION, AND FLOOD CONTROL ON AGENDA FOR JANUARY 19 PUBLIC MEETING IN LAS CRUCES

Efforts to improve water quality, habitat, and flood control infrastructure along the Rio Grande will be discussed at the next public meeting of the Rio Grande Citizens Forum sponsored by the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC). The meeting will take place on Thursday, January 19, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Elephant Butte Irrigation District Board Room, 530 S. Melendres Street, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Brian Hanson and Chris Canavan with the State of New Mexico will give an update on efforts to address *E. coli* bacteria in the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico. *E. coli* pollution is associated with human and/or animal waste. The Paso del Norte Watershed Council received a grant from the New Mexico Environment Department in late 2009 to fund water quality sampling, bacterial source tracking, data analysis, and community outreach and education. This stakeholder-driven process is intended to develop a Watershed Based Plan to reduce pathogenic-based pollution in the river. Water quality samples have been examined to determine *E. coli* concentrations and the species associated with the *E. coli* sample. Analysis of data is ongoing and the Watershed Based Plan is being written.

In other business, USIBWC Natural Resources Specialist Daniel Borunda will discuss river restoration activities in southern New Mexico. In 2009, the USIBWC issued a Record of Decision (ROD) governing future management of the USIBWC's Rio Grande Canalization Project, which covers over 100 river miles between Percha Dam, New Mexico and El Paso, Texas. To implement the ROD, the USIBWC has begun planning for five habitat restoration sites along the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico. Planning work has included a biological survey of threatened and endangered species, cultural resources

surveys, soil surveys to develop site-specific plans for plant species, and work to establish assurances for environmental water rights. Environmental enhancements include restoration of native vegetation, erosion control, and reconfiguration of the river channel to enhance aquatic habitat.

USIBWC Civil Engineer Andrea Glover will give an update on Rio Grande levee construction in El Paso County, Texas and in Hatch, the Mesilla Valley, and Sunland Park, New Mexico. The work is intended to comply with levee standards established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Communities protected by levee systems accredited by FEMA benefit not only from the enhanced flood protection but from better rates on flood insurance. Property owners with federally-backed mortgages in areas not protected by accredited levees could face a mandate to purchase flood insurance. The work is being carried out with funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The purpose of the Recovery Act is to create and save jobs, promote economic recovery, and invest in infrastructure that will provide long-term economic benefits. USIBWC Recovery Act expenditures in New Mexico and Texas have already created or preserved an estimated 2320 jobs.

The Rio Grande Citizens Forum was established by the USIBWC in 1999 to facilitate the exchange of information regarding USIBWC activities on the Rio Grande between Percha Dam, New Mexico and Fort Quitman, Texas. It is designed to bring together community members, enabling the early and continued two-way flow of information, concerns, values, and needs between USIBWC and the general public, environmentalists, irrigation districts, municipalities, and others interested in the river. A complete meeting agenda follows.

For more information:

Sally Spener
915-832-4175
sally.spener@ibwc.gov

RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM
Thursday, January 19, 6:30 - 8:30 P.M.
Elephant Butte Irrigation District Board Room
530 S. Melendres Street
Las Cruces, NM 88005

AGENDA

- Welcome and Introductions – Conrad Keyes, Jr., Citizens Forum Co-Chair
- Update on Water Quality in the Lower Rio Grande in New Mexico – Brian Hanson, Watershed Coordinator, 319 (h) Grant, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, New Mexico State University, and Chris Canavan, New Mexico Environment Department
- Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project: River Restoration Implementation – Daniel Borunda, Natural Resources Specialist, USIBWC
- Upper Rio Grande Flood Control Projects – Andrea Glover, Civil Engineer, USIBWC
- Public Comment
- Board Discussion
- Suggested Future Agenda Items

If you have a disability that you wish to self-identify confidentially that requires accommodation, please advise us ahead of time. For more information, call 915-832-4175 or e-mail sally.spener@ibwc.gov