



LOWER RIO GRANDE CITIZENS FORUM

Tuesday, September 27, 2011

4:00 – 6:00 P.M.

International Boundary and Water Commission

325 Golf Course Road

Mercedes, TX 78570

Meeting Notes*

Welcome – Mr. Bill Lewis, Lower Rio Grande Citizens Forum (LRGCF), Co-Chair.

Mr. Lewis opened the forum for introductions of the attendees. He also explained that IBWC was looking for new members for the Lower Rio Grande Citizens Forum and applications would be distributed to interested attendees.

Introduction of Board Members and Attendees

Members and attendees briefly introduced themselves.

Status of Mexican Sanitation Projects in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Mr. Carlos Acevedo, Project Engineer for the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) introduced himself and extended his thanks on being invited to speak at the Lower Rio Grande Citizens Forum. Mr. Acevedo briefly explained the BECC was created after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The goal of the BECC is to preserve and protect the US and Mexico Border region by identifying, developing, implementing, and overseeing environmental infrastructure projects. The partner of the BECC is the North American Development Banks (NADB). BECC has one board of directors and it is formed by the Mexican and US corresponding agencies (Department of the Treasury, Department of State, US EPA, representatives from border states, and a policy member from the border region). Mr. Acevedo utilizes PowerPoint slides as part of his presentation.

Public Question/Comment:

- Citizen Question/Comment: When you say service coverage, does that mean that 82% of the population of a given area has service to their homes or what does it mean? What does service coverage mean? Does that cover from Tijuana to Matamoros?
- Answer: Let's say you have 100 homes in any particular area; the service sewer collection system serves 88 homes. So this is the coverage of sewer collection system. The coverage for wastewater treatment is, if you are generating 100 liters of waste water 82 are being treated by wastewater treatment plants. It includes Matamoros, Tijuana, it includes the whole border.
- Citizen Question/Comment (Sheryl Franklin, USIBWC): Just to get clarification, you have a current project to connect all of those remaining unconnected portions of Nuevo Laredo to the Nuevo Laredo....

- Answer: Wastewater collection system, yes. We are planning to certify it this next year at the latest.
- Citizen Question/Comment: Is there long-term commitment to these projects? Are they 10-year, 20-year projects or just initiation projects?
 - Answer: As part of the criteria of BECC we have one of sustainability. A financial study was prepared and this financial study includes the O&M cost and all of the replacement costs. So any project that BECC certifies is planned to be working for 10, 20, or 30 years.
 - Follow up comment provided by Carlos Peña, USIBWC: BECC just provides the capital cost and then the regular O&M is up to the utility or the owner.
- Citizen Question/Comment: Is there any capacity for BECC to have long-term sustainability funding for some of these projects?
 - Answer provided by Mr. Acevedo: No, the only program that is not Bank offered is the transitional assistance and at the beginning of the project. Let's say you need to increase your rates to the customer then the Bank offers transitional funds to do the study of the increase. We now have a program in BECC that is to have a project closed out one year after the construction of the project is completed. We need to review if all the conditions are being met.

Update on Levee Construction Projects

Mr. Tom Garduno, PE, Civil Engineer for USIBWC, introduced himself. He briefly explains that he will be discussing an update on the Lower Rio Grande Levee Construction Projects. He is responsible for three projects. The first one is the Rehabilitation of the Hidalgo Protective Levee Phase 1 and 2. Phase 1 is pretty much completed and USIBWC is currently working on the Phase 2 Project. He is also working on the Edinburg Pump Levee Relocation and Channel Crossing, and the Mission Levee. At the Mission Levee Project they were closing three gaps at Bentsen Palm, the United Irrigation Canal, and the Penitas Railroad Crossing. Mr. Garduno briefly touched on projects being handled by Mr. Wehbe of USIBWC. Levees need to be certified per FEMA's standards. Mr. Garduno utilizes PowerPoint slides as part of his presentation.

Public Question/Comment:

- Citizen Question/Comment: What does rehabilitation involve? What kind of improvements/assessment damage does it involve?
 - Answer: In some cases the levee is not high enough to meet the 1% chance flood, also known as the 100-year flood. Some of the levees are too narrow at the top so they may need to be rehabilitated. Some of them are too low because they won't meet the 1% flood criteria. So we are adding material to make the levee higher. So that is what I rehabilitation may entail.
- Citizen Question/Comment: Any damage repair being done because of the flood due to the hurricane?
 - Answer (provided by Mr. Rodolfo Montero, USIBWC Area Operations Manager): Very little. The rehabilitation is not all the levees but where the levee

doesn't meet the FEMA criteria. So that is where it is being raised. Also, there are a lot of structures in between that convey irrigation and drainage water and those structures may need to be rehabilitated. They have to be fixed so that the levee can be properly sealed to prevent escape of water during the flood.

- Citizen Question/Comment: Are there any levees on the southeast part of Brownsville?
 - Answer (provided by Mr. Montero): Yes
- Citizen Question/Comment: How much of the dike system do you need to rehabilitate after these projects? Are there more rehabilitation projects for next year?
 - Answer (provided by Mr. Montero): There are some projected. From Donna to Brownsville we have 4 other reaches. We also have the Arroyo Colorado South Levee and the North Floodway. We are doing the design of the North Floodway from the ARRA Projects and to the Gulf.
 - Answer (provided by Carlos Peña, USIBWC Principal Engineer): We had a 20-year plan to rehabilitate the floodway down here. Of course with the Recovery Act we received about \$120 million. So that caught us up for several years but the remaining balance will be done as a normal budget request. So we will do some, not all of them at one time like we did but we will do the priority areas. We are doing the design and whenever we do get a budget for FY12, it will specify so much for levees and then the following year we will do the same.
- Citizen Question/Comment: Do you have an estimate yet of funding balances needed?
 - Answer (provided by C. Peña): Yes, actually once we are finished with the design, we will have a better idea. I don't have that but I'm pretty sure we have some estimates but right now I don't have those estimates.
- Citizen Question/Comment: Rodolfo, back in the last flood, there were some issues on the North Floodway where it makes that curve, is that area being included in this current project?
 - Answer (provided by R. Montero): Where it goes East? We didn't have any structural issues. There may be some encroachment, very little. There may have been some seepage, very little, but no real issues.
- Citizen Question/Comment: A lot of these projects that you listed as 62 or 63 percent complete but you still have the projected date set as December 2011. Most projects were started in February of 2010. That is almost 2 years with 62 or 63 percent and we have 3 months to go, how will you complete the projects to meet projected deadlines? Are we going to try to get 100%?
 - Answer (provided by Tom Garduno): There was the 2010 flood that disrupted construction.
 - Answer (provided by C. Peña): What we do on those projects that have 60% completion and there is only one month left, as we get closer to the end we do a modification. They won't change it now because there could be some other changes so we understand with the hurricane and other issues, we will extend that as necessary.
 - Answer (provided by T. Garduno): If you remember two of my projects, I had February/March of 2012. They might even be extended now until April or May because there are some issues there but those are pretty realistic dates. Now they are back on track following Hurricane Alex and resolving problems with contract modifications.

- Citizen Question/Comment: What is the ratio for the side slopes on the levee? 3:1?
- Answer (provided by R. Montero): There may be some small areas, 2.5:1 that we may allow it. If it's less than that, we have to have rip rap on the slope.
- Citizen Question/Comment: All the drains along the levee, are they in good shape?
 - Answer (provided by R. Montero): We are doing some desilting if that is what you are talking about. There are some drains that are not up to par. So we are desilting them. The regular drains, I believe you are talking about the irrigation canals, they have more problems. But the regular drainage, most of them are working.

Update on the Vegetation Management on the Arroyo Colorado to reduce flood risk

Mr. Carlos Peña, USIBWC Principal Engineer, introduces himself and explains that he will be giving an update on the Arroyo Colorado and the post flood clean-up. He understands this is an issue that is of interest to everyone. He will let them know where IBWC is in reference to the clean-up and answer some questions. Mr. Peña utilizes PowerPoint slides as part of his presentation.

Public Comment:

- Citizen Question/Comment: What is the first thing you look at when looking at hydraulic deficiencies?
 - Answer: One of the first things to look at is what is the design and even before that we have an agreement with Mexico that says that if we do have a storm event this is how we are going to divide the flows between the two countries. So once we identify the amount of water needed to be carried on the US side, we look at the width, elevation, and depth of the channel to see if we can take that.
 - Answer (provided by Sheryl Franklin, USIBWC): There could be one or two bottlenecks that are backing up the whole system. So we want to concentrate on those areas and improve the flow to those areas. So we can increase the whole capacity. Those are the types of alternatives we are looking at.
- Citizen Question/Comment: What have you done so far? How much have you affected the flow? Have you increased the flow 5%, 10%?
 - Answer: The real test would come when we have another Hurricane Alex which I don't think anyone would want. To answer that as to how much percentage, I'm not sure.
- Citizen Question/Comment: If that area right there is so important, why hasn't a hydraulic analysis been done?
- Answer: When you do a hydraulic analysis you have to look at starting point and end point. You can do some basic calculations of analysis in certain areas but it will not tell you how the whole system evaluated. If the slope in this area is such that it can back up the water, you can do a calculation here and it could be off because you don't have the whole picture.

- Citizen Question/Comment: Are you suggesting we need a hydraulic analysis for a larger area in our region to know exactly how much water would go down the river channel, down the North and Main Floodway? Is that what you are saying we need to do?
 - Answer: Well, if I understand your question, what we did; what we are doing now is we are using the HECRAS, the latest modeling software that Corps of Engineers and other agencies use. So with the precision, that will get us better information than we had 40, 50 years ago when we did a 2-dimensional model. We are doing something more sophisticated. That will answer those questions and also answer if we have alternatives. What if we raise this 5 feet? What does it do to the hydraulic capacity? We will be able to get all of those alternatives and all those proposals to people. It's going to give us 100% better information.
- Citizen Question/Comment: This study will be completed next spring, is that only the Arroyo or the total project?
 - Answer: It's the whole section including Falcon Dam. (Mr. Peña pointed at a map on one of the slides). It includes the Arroyo Colorado, North Floodway, Main Floodway, and even the Rio Grande. As it was mentioned, we have been raising the levees in certain areas. That new model will let us know if we have met the requirement. When we did the LIDAR survey, we started in Falcon Dam. We did notify Mexico and they actually paid for their section of their floodway. We are not only going to have the US side but also the Mexican side. So we will have the complete picture. Mexico will be taking that information to their authorities and seeing what they need to do to improve their levees.
- Citizen Question/Comment: When do you expect to know where these bottlenecks are at?
 - Answer: We just did the cross sections at the key points of the floodway system. We have done the LIDAR. So now it is getting all that information and doing the number crunching. So it will take us 2 or 3 months.
- Citizen Question/Comment: Some chokepoints were identified during the flood.
 - Answer (provided by R. Montero): Especially around McKelvey Park. The condition of the flow of the brush line was pretty bad. Before removal of the dead stuff, that used to be a chokepoint. There used to be a big brush line with a lot of debris and dead matter. We removed it and now we can see that the water can actually flow through there. So that is one of the biggest chokepoints. You can see now that the vegetation is growing back but it is just grass. This is at the east end of McKelvey.
- Citizen Question/Comment: So is the clean up basically done?
 - Answer (provided by R. Montero): Well no, not really. We are currently working with Fish and Wildlife on how we are going to reach certain areas so continue clearing while minimizing the impact of our activities.
- Citizen Question/Comment: So when will it be done?
 - Answer (S. Franklin/R. Montero): We have the environmental monitor through the end of the year. We expect to be finished by the end of the year. If we can't, then we will have to extend that environmental monitor contract maybe 2-3 more months. We have gotten to everything we can get to without disturbing additional vegetation.
- Citizen Question/Comment: What is the percentage of completion?

- Answer (R. Montero): Right now maybe 60%. The stuff we have to get to now is hard to reach so it is a slow process.
- Citizen Question/Comment: What criteria do you use to decide what to clean up?
 - Answer (R. Montero/S. Franklin): The criteria right now is just dead matter. Only up to the 100-year flood elevation. We are also trimming live trees up to 6 feet.
- Citizen Question/Comment: What is happening with section O-1 and O-2 upriver on the border fence that is being built on the floodplain? You said there are still ongoing discussions referring to a new model design. I hope to know more about that now. I hope that information is made public.
 - Answer: DHS did some update on that O-1 to O-2 area. They just completed that. It's from Falcon to Peñitas.
- Citizen Question/Comment: How much water will be moved one way or the other?
 - Answer: That is why these O-1, O-2, O-3 areas are quite a big project and we are making sure we analyze all the information before a decision is made.
- Citizen Question/Comment: But we will have public comments and report decisions on which model is correct and how much deflection on the floodplain?
 - Answer: The US and Mexico determine if there is going to be deflection. One of the treaty requirements is that both countries have to determine if there is or not a deflection. I don't know if we are going to have a public discussion on that. We haven't determined how that is going to be handled because Mexico has their own process.

Recognition of Board Members:

Mr. Montero presented framed certificates of appreciation to outgoing board members.

Suggested Agenda Topics for next Citizens Forum:

Quality of Dams
Sections O-1 and O-2

*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.