

**Lower Rio Grande Citizens Forum Meeting**  
**USIBWC Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project Field Office**  
**325 Golf Course Road**  
**Mercedes, Texas**  
**July 15, 2009**

\*Tentative Meeting Notes

**Board Members in Attendance**

Joseph Coulter  
Kika de la Garza  
Carl Boyd  
Glenn Jarvis  
William Lewis  
Bradly Nibert  
Philip Waldron

**Board Members Absent**

Laura DeLa Garza  
Mary Lou Campbell

**USIBWC Staff in Attendance**

Patrick J. Daize  
Rodolfo Montero  
Francisco Martinez  
Roderick Dunlap  
Luther Sargent  
Elizabeth Verdecchia  
Leslie Grijalva  
Belinda Ibarra  
MaryAnn Hutchinson

**Members of the Public in Attendance**

Brunilda Fuentes Capozello  
Jesse Silva  
William "Bill" Keltner  
Ann Williams Cass  
Erasmio Yarrito, Jr.  
Kelly Keel  
Kathy Olivarez  
Jaime Flores  
Antonio Castillo  
Steve Niemeyer  
Denisha Thompson  
Chris Hathcock

## **Mexican Section Staff in Attendance**

Engineer Alfonso Carmona

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Citizens Forum Co-Chair Patrick Daize began the meeting with self-introductions. He then announced his transfer from the IBWC to another agency. He expressed his deepest appreciation for the opportunity to be involved with all the critical projects along the border and with the agency.

## **Clean Rivers Program Annual Update and Rio Grande Basin Advisory Committee Meeting**

Continuing with the Citizens Forum, Mr. Daize introduced two employees of the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission's (USIBWC) Texas Clean Rivers Program for the Rio Grande, Elizabeth Verdecchia and Leslie Grijalva.

Ms. Verdecchia gave background information on the Clean Rivers Program (CRP) and introduced individuals from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) from Austin who were present in the Forum. She then introduced Leslie Grijalva from CRP in El Paso.

Ms. Grijalva then began her presentation titled "Update on Water Quality for the Rio Grande and the Clean Rivers Program" which consisted of the following:

### **Texas Clean Rivers Program History**

- 1991 Texas Clean Rivers Act
- 1998 TCEQ-USIBWC partnership (USIBWC operates the CRP for the Rio Grande under contract with the State of Texas)
- 2009 monitoring sites on Rio Grande:
  - CRP – 48 sites
  - TCEQ – 38 sites

### **What is the Clean Rivers Program**

- A state fee-funded program
- A group of federal, state and local organizations that have an interest in the health of our states streams, rivers and lakes.
- The USIBWC Clean Rivers Program collects water quality data from the Rio Grande and Pecos Rivers.
- We then use that data to:
  - identify and evaluate water quality issues
  - establish priorities for corrective actions
  - work to implement those actions.

## **CRP Activities**

- Water Quality Monitoring
  - Routine monitoring
  - Special studies
- Water Quality Assessment
- Publications
  - Annual Basin Highlight Report
  - 5-year Basin Summary Report
- Outreach and Education
- Public Participation

## **CRP Accomplishments**

- Submitted all data through Nov 2008 for TCEQ 2010 Assessment
- Laboratory accredited for bacteria
- More outreach activities
- Participation in projects such as Big Bend workshops & saltcedar biological control meetings
- Funded 5 water quality/education projects
- CRP in charge of USIBWC Adopt-a-River Program
- Fully staffed

## **Funded Projects in the Lower Rio Grande Valley**

- City of Weslaco
  - **VALLEY CONSTRUCTION SEPA TRAINING PROGRAM** (“Soil Erosion Pollution Awareness”)
  - Develop and Implement a Soil Erosion Management Plan at Construction Sites
  - Print training manuals
- 8 partners in the Lower Rio Grande help monitor, collect, & analyze samples:
  - USIBWC Field Offices at Mercedes and Falcon
  - Sabal Palm Audubon Center & Sanctuary
  - University of Texas at Brownsville
  - TCEQ Harlingen Field Office
  - TCEQ Continuous Water Quality Monitoring
  - Brownsville Public Utilities Board (PUB)
  - Texas Parks & Wildlife (2009)
  - U.S. Geological Survey (through 2007)
- Use TCEQ sampling procedures and an accredited laboratory for analysis

## **2009 Monitoring Sites**

13 Lower RG Sites:  
10 - IBWC CRP  
3 - TCEQ  
1 - Brownsville PUB

### **2009 LRG Monitoring Sites**

The Lower Rio Grande is made up of 2 segments: 2302 (from below Falcon to station 13177 in Brownsville) and segment 2301, which extends 49 miles of the tidal portion and terminates at the mouth of the river. IBWC and our partners collect 10 sites, and the new site from Brownsville PUB is not on this map yet. That station is in between stations 13179 and 13177. TCEQ collects 3, including some months at 13177.

### **Water Quality Uses and Standards**

- TCEQ uses these standards to assess the river and determine if any segments are impaired (303d List)
- Bacteria Indicators :
  - 2301 Tidal – enterococcus
  - 2302 – e coli

### **Impairments on the 2009 Texas Water Quality Inventory and 303(d) List**

There is only one impairment in the Lower Rio Grande, and that is for bacteria in a short sub-segment in the Brownsville/Matamoros area.

### **Concerns on the 2008 Texas Water Quality Inventory and 303(d) List**

There are a number of concerns as well. The entire segment 2302 has a concern for mercury in fish tissue. This data was collected by TCEQ, as CRP does not collect routine fish samples. You can see the other concerns on the map.

### **Brownsville Bacteria Study**

- University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) partnership to address bacteria impairment in Brownsville
- Identify source and nature of bacteria contamination
- Phase I will begin Fall semester 2009
- Phase II will begin Summer 2010

There are many challenges to addressing the contamination on the Rio Grande, including the binational nature of the river. USIBWC-CRP is collaborating with UTB and TCEQ to conduct a special study in order to identify the possible bacteria sources and characterize the nature of the contamination. We talked about this study at last year's meeting. There is a lot of public and

media interest--even the Brownsville media was enthusiastic. The study will be conducted by UTB students and will start this fall.

### **Pesticides Study**

- Pesticides/Organics in sediment analyzed from 2007 to 2009 semiannually at all CRP stations
- 23 chemicals tested
- Most stations did not detect any organics
- Lower Rio Grande had 2 stations that detected DDE/DDT (Rio Grande City and Hidalgo) in 2008

### **Lower Rio Grande Water Quality Initiative**

- TCEQ / EPA sponsored binational project
- Federal and state US and Mexican agencies, universities and organizations
- Address impairments on Rio Grande
- Focus first on lower Rio Grande
- Technical, policy, steering committees

### **How to find IBWC-CRP Website**

Ms. Grijalva stated that the USIBWC-CRP website can be found by going to [www.ibwc.gov](http://www.ibwc.gov) and then selecting Mission Operations on the left blue menu panel, and proceed to the Texas Clean Rivers. Those who had the old page bookmarked should update their bookmarks to the new page.

### **For Questions Contact**

USIBWC - CRP  
Elizabeth Verdecchia, 915-832-4701  
[elizabethverdecchia@ibwc.gov](mailto:elizabethverdecchia@ibwc.gov)  
Leslie Grijalva, 915-832-4770  
[legrijal@ibwc.gov](mailto:legrijal@ibwc.gov)  
CRP Website  
[www.ibwc.gov/CRP/Index.htm](http://www.ibwc.gov/CRP/Index.htm)

Question: Is there a salinity problem in El Paso?

Response: Yes, in El Paso, it's a combination of things underground. There are high salinity levels in the drains. There have been recent studies that show this.

Question: Is there a big salinity problem here in the Valley?

Response: The Rio Grande in El Paso does not have as much water as the Lower Rio Grande; therefore, it is much more of an issue in El Paso.

Comment: There is currently an undergoing study with UTB, how long do you expect the study to continue?

Response: Until 2011 or longer.

Question: What is the affect of the salinity?

Response: It is more expensive to treat the water. It affects aquatic communities downstream of Big Bend. A group from TCEQ is doing the analysis.

Question: Is the overall quality of water improving or is it stabilizing?

Response: In many sections it's improved and stable. There is a lot more awareness and a lot more wastewater infrastructure. For example, studies show improved water quality since a wastewater treatment plant was built in Nuevo Laredo in the 1990s. The report shows trends and information.

If you have any questions, you can place your questions on the questionnaire we have provided and we will get back to you with those answers.

### **Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project Levee Improvements**

USIBWC Civil Engineer Rod Dunlap mentioned his efforts on inspections, pre-bids and many meetings involving the levee work.

His presentation consisted of the following:

- Why Perform Levee Improvements?

- FEMA is updating flood insurance rate maps
- FEMA requires levees to contain the 100-year flood with 3 ft. freeboard
- USIBWC notified FEMA in 2006 that it could not certify all levees as meeting this requirement

- Map depicting American Recovery and Reinvestment (ARRA) Act Projects (also known as the Economic Stimulus Projects)

- The map showed planned Stimulus Construction Projects and the pink consisted of Stimulus Design – Out year work

- Map depicting proposed and completed levee enhancement projects

- Red shaded area – Levee enhancement – Lateral A to Retamal Dam and upper part of Hidalgo
- Yellow shaded area – Proposed Levee enhancement – Baseline Road to Hidalgo County line
- Black shaded area – Proposed Levee enhancement – FM 1015 to Baseline Road
- Green shaded area – Proposed Levee enhancement – 23<sup>rd</sup> Street to FM 1015
- Brown shaded area – Proposed Levee enhancement – North Levee to Arroyo Colorado
- Light Pink shaded area – Completed Levee enhancement – Donna Pump to River Mile 28
- Dark Pink shaded area – Completed Levee enhancement – Mission Levee
- Dark Blue shaded area – Proposed Levee enhancement – City of Granjeno to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street
- Mustard shaded area – Completed Levee enhancement – Common Levee and Lower Part of Hidalgo Phase I

- Levee Rehabilitation Projects

- Banker Floodway North Levee

- Granjeno to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street
- Project Length 3.0 mi.
- Pre-bid solicitation held in April 2009
- Award Contract in August 2009
- Work to begin in September 2009
- Proposed Completion, March 2010.

**>> Project Update: Design and Scope of work complete. Pre-bid meeting with site visit was conducted on June 19, 2009.**

- Main Floodway Levees (N&S)

- 23<sup>rd</sup> Street to FM 1015
- Project Length 43.2 mi.
- Pre-bid solicitation held in May 2009
- Award Contract in August 2009
- Work scheduled to begin in October 2009
- Work proposed completion, October 2010

**>> Project Update: Design and Scope of work complete. Pre-bid meeting with site visit was conducted on July 15, 2009.**

- North Floodway

- FM 1015 to Baseline Road
- Project Length 14.0 mi.
- Pre-bid solicitation held in May 2009
- Award Contract in September 2009

- Work scheduled to begin in October 2009
- Work proposed completion, October 2010

**>< Project Update: Project currently in final design phase. Pre-solicitation notice complete.**

■ Arroyo Colorado North Levee

- FM 1015 to Willacy Canal
- Project Length 6.7 mi.
- Pre-bid solicitation held in May 2009
- Award Contract in September 2009
- Work scheduled to begin in October 2009
- Proposed Completion, March 2010

**>< Project Update: Project currently in final design phase. Pre-solicitation notice complete.**

Question: Is Cameron County complete?

Response: Much of that portion was completed in prior months by Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project personnel.

Question: I know that former Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff declared Hidalgo County a flood zone? Have they changed the flood insurance?

Response: I have not heard anything on that.

Question: Do you know if FEMA is going to certify the levees or will we just have higher flood insurance costs?

Response: FEMA will be the one certifying. In response to the insurance, we don't have that answer.

Question: What sort of work entails the levee rehab, what if you create new vulnerabilities while doing this work?

Response: We are adding to what's already there. We are increasing the height. Much of the areas under the Recovery Act are already at the FEMA standard. As far as vulnerabilities, all contractors are required to maintain a state of readiness in case of a hurricane.

Question: Is Mexico doing something similar?

Response: Eng. Carmona advised that Mexico is in the study phase. He advised that he would keep the Forum abreast of study results and/or project developments.

Question: Does the area in Hidalgo County meet FEMA standards?

Response: Yes; however, certifications have not been completed.

Co-Chair Patrick Daize then addressed the process of levee designs and works. He then expressed that he was very confident in IBWC's personnel serving as those responsible for the project. He then added that Mr. Dunlap and Mr. Sargent were very diligent in ensuring the proper specifications were followed.

Question: What is the monetary amount for the levees?

Response: \$120 million for the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Asking for further questions and receiving no answer, Mr. Dunlap concluded his presentation.

### **Recognition of Board Members**

After Mr. Dunlap's presentation, Co-Chair Patrick Daize recognized all the Board Members for their 2 year contributions to the Lower Rio Grande Citizens Forum. Those recognized included:

- Dr. Joseph Coulter
- Mr. Kika de la Garza
- Mr. Carl Boyd
- Mr. Glen Jarvis
- Mr. William Lewis
- Mr. Bradley Nibert
- Mr. Philip Waldron
- Both Mrs. Laura De La Garza and Mrs. Mary Lou Campbell were unable to attend.

### **Public Comment/Board Discussion/Suggested Future Agenda Items**

After recognition certificates, Co-chair Patrick Daize asked if there was anything anyone wanted to add. Receiving no feedback, he asked for topics of discussion for the next meeting. One suggestion was an update on the current status of the inlets.

After the topics suggestion, a Citizens Forum attendee asked Co-Chair Daize if he could elaborate on the structures that go through the levees and if IBWC was receiving cooperation from the entities involved in operating and maintaining some of the structures. He advised the Forum that letters had been mailed to the irrigation and drainage districts and those with licensed structures and that IBWC was working closely with them to ensure their structures were brought into compliance with FEMA requirements. He then advised that although IBWC was working with the levees, the structures too were a high priority. He continued to state that at first the

structure licensees were a bit perplexed that IBWC was asking them to maintain their structures. However, they all began to cooperate to ensure the structures were properly maintained.

Question: How many structures have been researched? Several hundred?

Response: Yes

Co-Chair Daize then advised that IBWC's Civil Engineering Tech., Mr. Joel Saldivar, was working with the structure issue. He advised that Mr. Saldivar was attending meetings and that IBWC had received interest from the districts in supporting and getting their structures up to par.

Question: Have you found any abandoned or plugged structures yet?

Response: Not yet.

Receiving no further questions, Co-Chair Daize asked for a suggested date for the next meeting. The Forum suggested October 21<sup>st</sup>.

Concluding the meeting, Co-Chair Daize reiterated that it was his last Citizens Forum. He then expressed a thank you to everyone for the wonderful opportunity to be a part of progress. He advised that he had a wonderful stay and that it had been very busy. Concluding his final farewell, he reiterated his appreciation and stated that he felt extremely privileged.

\*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.