

Rio Grande Citizens Forum Meeting
USIBWC Headquarters
El Paso, TX
January 14, 2014

Tentative Meeting Notes*

Board Members in Attendance:

John Balliew, El Paso Water Utilities
Daniel Chavez, Hudspeth County Conservation & Reclamation
John Cornell, Doña Ana County Associated Sportsman
Travis Johnson, Travis Johnson Law Firm
Conrad Keyes, Jr., Paso del Norte Watershed Council
Carlos Leon, County of El Paso Texas - Commissioner
Zack Libbin, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
Austin Marshall, University of Texas at El Paso
Sal Masoud, Del Rio Engineering, Inc.
Dale Reinhardt, Town of Clint, Texas
Gill Sorg, City of Las Cruces
Miguel Teran, CPME, L.L.C.
Olga Pedroza (Alternate) – City of Las Cruces

USIBWC Staff in Attendance:

Carlos Peña, IBWC – US
Sally Spener, IBWC – US
Tony Solo, IBWC – US
Shellie Muñoz, IBWC – US
Enrique Muñoz, IBWC- Mexico

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judy Ackerman, Friends of Rio Bosque	Jaime Iglesias, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
Brian Bader, SWCA Env. Cons.	Annabelle Johnson, Citizen
Brenda Barnes, AMEC	Robert Kimpel, El Paso & Hudspeth County
Mary Barnes, Citizen	Sam Legate, Property Owner
Chris Canavan, New Mexico Environment Department	Lacy Levine, NM Dept. of Agriculture
Yesena Castro, City of El Paso	Ron Parks, SUNDT
Kareem Dallo, City of El Paso	Maria Robles, GRVIES
Andres Dura, Office of Sen. Jose Rodriguez	John Sparks, ARCADIS
Joe Fernandez, Citizen	Dwaine Solana, City of Sunland Park
Olga Fernandez, Citizen	Gilbert Trejo, ARCADIS - US
Ed Guerrero, Bureau of Land Management- Las Cruces	Alberto Urueta, Zia Engineering
Bill Hoover, Texas Master Naturalists	Albert Velasquez, GRV
	Ryan Ward, NM Department of Agriculture

New Citizens Forum board members introduced themselves and described their interests and background.

Overview of Commission History, Mission, and Projects

Sally Spener, USIBWC Secretary, gave a presentation of this topic, available at:
http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_Mission_011414.pdf

She noted the mission of the Commission is to apply the boundary and water treaties between the two countries and settle differences that arise in their application. The Commission has two Sections – a U.S. Section that is part of the U.S. federal government and a Mexican Section that is part of Mexico’s federal government.

She provided an overview of the treaties, going back to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848 at the end of the Mexican-American War that established a new boundary between the countries, the Gadsden Treaty of 1853 by which the US purchased additional territory from Mexico, and treaties to determine the location of the boundary when the Rio Grande and Colorado River channels shift. The Convention of 1933 stabilized the international river boundary at El Paso-Juarez while the Chamizal Convention of 1963 established a new international border at those cities to settle a longstanding boundary dispute caused when the Rio Grande changed course. The 1970 Boundary Treaty prevents construction of works in the rivers that would obstruct or deflect the rivers’ flow so as to minimize any potential changes to the international boundary.

In terms of water treaties, the Convention of 1906 allots Rio Grande water to Mexico at Ciudad Juarez. Drought conditions have caused periodic reductions in those deliveries, consistent with the treaty. Under the 1944 Water Treaty, Mexico delivers water to the US from its Rio Grande tributaries, affecting Texas in areas downstream from El Paso. Two international storage dams on the Rio Grande store water for both countries. The 1944 Treaty also provided for the US to deliver Colorado River water to Mexico. It also authorized construction of flood control works and authorized the Commission to address border sanitation problems.

Per the 1944 Treaty, decisions of the Commission are recorded in the form of Minutes. Many Minutes have been concluded to implement various aspects of the treaties.

To carry out its responsibilities, the Commission has various offices along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Upper Rio Grande Flood Control Project

USIBWC Area Operations Manager Tony Solo gave a presentation (available at: http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_FCP_011414.pdf) about the focus of USIBWC operations in the El Paso-Las Cruces Region, known as the Upper Rio Grande Flood Control Project.

The USIBWC has three field offices in the region at El Paso, Las Cruces, and Fort Hancock. These offices are responsible for the Rio Grande Canalization Project (water delivery and flood control along the Rio Grande in Southern New Mexico and West El Paso County), American Diversion Dam (diverts water into U.S. irrigation canal at El Paso), American Canal (conveys U.S. water at El Paso), International Diversion Dam (diverts water into Mexico's irrigation canal at Ciudad Juarez), Rio Grande American Canal Extension (part of the U.S. irrigation canal), Chamizal Project (concrete-lined Rio Grande channel through central El Paso-Juarez), and Rio Grande Rectification Project (Rio Grande flood control levees and river channel in the El Paso-Juarez region).

Maintenance activities include such things as mowing, grading, and resurfacing levees, floodway mowing, sediment removal, and maintenance of the two diversion dams. There is also maintenance of the American Canal and some of the international bridges. The office also undertakes water measurements of Rio Grande flow. The presentation included photos of the infrastructure maintained by the local field office.

Board Member Orientation

Sally Spener then continued with orientation for the new board members, available at http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/CF_URG_Orientation_011414.pdf .

The purpose of the Citizens Forum is to promote the exchange of information between the USIBWC and the public about Commission projects and related activities in the greater El Paso – Las Cruces region, along the Rio Grande from Percha Dam, NM to Ft. Quitman, TX. Meetings are held in El Paso or Las Cruces approximately four times per year. Board members are expected to attend meetings and be available to share information with USIBWC and the community. They may be called upon to review and comment on documents and activities, present information on related activities, discuss plans and issues related to Commission activities.

The purpose is to exchange information; it is not a federal advisory committee. Board members serve as volunteers. Meetings are open to the public and meeting information and presentations are posted on the USIBWC web page at: http://www.ibwc.gov/Citizens_Forums/CF_URG.html

There are two co-chairs – USIBWC Principal Engineer Carlos Peña and a community co-chair selected by the board from its members.

The USIBWC established the Rio Grande Citizens Forum in 1999. There are four other USIBWC Citizens Forum boards in other communities.

Board Discussion

The board decided that Conrad Keyes, Jr. will serve as co-chair for the first year and Miguel Teran the second year.

Meetings should be held at USIBWC Headquarters in El Paso or the Elephant Butte Irrigation District Board Room in Las Cruces unless agenda items suggest the need for a larger meeting room.

Meetings will be held the 4th Thursday every 3 months, 6:30-8:30 p.m. as follows:

April 24 in Las Cruces

July 24 in El Paso

October 23 in Las Cruces

A field trip of IBWC facilities in the El Paso area will be held Feb. 27, 9-11 am. Meet in the lobby of USIBWC Headquarters.

Austin Marshall requested a one-page summary of construction projects and dollar amounts (this was emailed to the board on 1/22/14)

Suggested Future Agenda Items

Masoud - Update on Canalization Project levee construction

Cornell – update on hunting policy on USIBWC lands

Keyes – USIBWC River Management Plan

Joe Fernandez – Country Club Bridge gates, FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Mapping process (USIBWC agreed to post Country Club Bridge floodgate noise study on the agency web site, available at: http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Noise_Study_CanutilloBridge_120513.pdf. Carlos Peña suggested a separate meeting on the floodgate issue)

Peña – interior drainage issues for next El Paso meeting. USDA salt cedar beetle program. (Jaime Iglesias, Texas A & M AgriLife Extension, can recommend a speaker on this topic)

Suggestion - American Dam soil remediation related to Asarco smelter contamination

Masoud – Sunland Park levee segment status for next El Paso meeting

Zack Libbin – River channel maintenance, channel efficiencies during drought, water supply update from Reclamation

Danny Chavez – Channel maintenance in the area of San Elizario, Clint, the downstream areas (Balliew of EPWU stated that EPWU can help with debris removal)

Peña – River maintenance plan

Balliew – LIDAR investigation downstream of El Paso.

Public Comment

Bill Hoover, member of the public, made a comment about the fire risk of dead salt cedar. Jaime Iglesias – Salt cedar beetle is killing the trees and they will need to be replaced with another species in 4-6 years.

*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.