

Colorado River Citizens' Forum
Yuma, Arizona
November 14, 2006
***Tentative Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:

Brian McNeece
Marie Barrett
Roger Gingrich
Wade Noble
James Davey
Paul McAleese

Board Members absent:

Tracy Register
Eric Reyes
Pablo Orozco

USIBWC Staff in attendance:

Al Goff
John Turner
Anna Morales

MXIBWC Staff in attendance:

Alfredo De La Cerda

Approximately 25 other members of the public were in attendance.

Welcome and Introductions

Brian McNeece welcomed the attendees and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Salton Sea Authority Plan for the Restoration and Revitalization of the Salton Sea - Larry Grogan, Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors.

The Salton Sea Authority was created in 1993. A joint agreement with counties of Riverside and Imperial; Imperial Irrigation District; Coachella Valley Water District, and the Torres Martinez Tribe.

The Salton Sea was formed in 1905 when a levee break along the Colorado River caused flows from the river to enter the basin for about 18 months. Since the 1950s, an average inflow of 1.1 to 1.5 million acre-feet (MAF) has flowed continuously into the Sea.

With the Quantification Settlement Agreement signed in 2003, it will transfer 300,000 acre-feet per year (AF/Y) of the Colorado River water that flows into the Sea to other water users. This will impact the Sea significantly. With the agreement, 950,000 AF will go to the Salton Sea. Approximately 160,000 AF comes out of Mexico, which over the next 75 years will be less because of Mexicali plans to recycle for their use. With that, the Sea is trying to design a plan to address about 800,000 AF/Y inflows.

The Department of Water Resource wants to design a plan for 600,000 AF to adapt with any plan that will be adopted for any climatic conditions. That was acceptable initially but there was a second part to the design plan that said – “and to accommodate future water transfers.” This is what concerns the Salton Sea Authority -- what are the future transfers.

The Sea is a closed system. The salt concentration of the sea is rising and is currently approximately 44 grams per liter. This is 25% saltier than the ocean water. With the salt concentration increasing, within the next 11 years, this will eliminate fish if something isn't done. The surface area of the Salton Sea is 376 sq. miles, elevation -227 and 51 ft deep at its shallowest. The Sea is still a valuable asset to the county. Over 400 species utilize the sea and act as a food source for over 200 million fish for the fish-eating birds. The Sea's habitats support up to 40% of the entire US population of the threatened Yuma clapper rail, 90% of the American white pelican and eared grebe. The sea is the richest bird habitat in the world.

Q: Are your plans only for the 600,000 AF of the Sea?

A: The state has settled with 717,000 AF.

Objectives:

1. Restore the Sea as an important wildlife refuge
2. Maintain the Sea as a vital link along the international Pacific flyway
3. Preserving local tribal heritage associated with the sea
4. Reduce odor and water/air quality problems
5. Re-establish the Sea for tourist and recreational use
6. Revitalizing the Sea for local economic development

The plan is to have a large lake with a dike across the middle. This lake will be the second largest lake in California. (See attached [SaltonSeaPlan.pdf](#))

Salton Sea revitalization project will be second and fifth largest lakes and recreational playgrounds in the State of California.

Air Quality:

Owens Lake (which is dry) in California is roughly 1/5 the size of the Sea, currently is largest single source of particle matter air pollution in the nation. The Salton Sea potentially exposes 3 to 5 times more than Owens Lake. Currently Imperial Valley has the highest child asthma rate in the nation.

The Sea could potentially have 200 sq. miles of dusty lake bottom that would be exposed. Some lake bottom contains heavy selenium, could be hazardous.

Q: Has this plan been accepted?

A: Has been accepted by the Salton Sea Authority. The State of California is studying ten alternatives. Of the ten, the Authority's plan is one of them.

Department of Water Resources issued an EIR, which is out for comment. Comments are due February 19th.

Issue: Several Environmental communities have accommodated the future water transfers, instead of using the Salton Sea to save as much water for habitat.

Q: What is the cost for this plan?

A: \$2 billion for the whole program.

Q: What is the evaporation rate?

A: Previous years the flow was 1.1 to 1.3 steady, that would be about 5 ft evaporation over the year. Currently, every acre-foot that comes in, 3 tons of salt builds up.

Q: Where is funding coming from?

A: The project will be constructed in phases over the next 20 years. Funds will come from Federal, State and local Sources. Significant portions of the costs of a locally supported Plan can be locally financed through the funding mechanisms applied within the Authority's 300,000 acre planning and financing district around the Sea.

Include forming tax increment financing and benefit assessment districts; public land acquisitions, transfers and sales; developer payments and impact fees; use of public-private partnership for the construction and operation of the treatment plants.

<http://www.salttonsea.ca.gov>

Lower Gila River Flood Protection and Habitat Restoration Project – Wade Noble, General Counsel, North Gila Valley Irrigation and Drainage District

This is a preliminary/early project. The Gila River travels from Painted Rock Dam to the confluence of the Colorado River. Painted Rock Reservoir and Painted Rock Dam are flood protection facilities not designed to store water but designed to store water long enough to release it. In the mid 90's, Painted Rock Reservoir filled and the release of water caused flooding in our area.

The flooding occurred just at the end of a 10-year period when the Wellton Mohawk Irrigation Drainage District (WMIDD) was completing a channel project along the Gila River. The flood caused a lot of damage. As part of the rebuilding of the project after the floods, they created a good system along the Gila River starting at the east end of the Wellton Mohawk project continuing to west end. System includes some levee, 250 ft channel that has been cleared, 7 grade control structures about \$1 million each. The project is about 40 miles long and ends on the westerly edge of the WMIDD. After this point, there is no levee on other side for about 7 miles downstream to the confluence.

North Gila Valley Irrigation District is on the north side of the Gila River. The south side, referred to by the USBR as the South Gila unit of the Gila Project, but it is really the Yuma Irrigation District; they have a nice levee along the Gila River throughout the entire district. So they are very well protected. The north side does not have a levee and the area residents are not protected. With the condition of the channel, residents are concerned about future flooding damage. The 7th Avenue bridge is the only access into the North Gila Valley. If the bridge would become inaccessible, there will not be any access in or out of the Gila Valley.

Jim Cherry of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) suggested including the environmentalists in the discussions for this project. This project would not only provide flood protection but habitat restoration. A meeting was held with representatives from all sides to look at the issue. Representatives included the City of Yuma, USBR, Corps of Engineers, WMIDD, Yuma Irrigation District, Yuma County Flood Control District, and North Gila Valley Irrigation District.

A 200 ft channel would not be an option because in certain areas there is not 200 ft within the banks.

The Gila Monster Lake was created by the flood and is maintained by drainage. This provides wonderful habitat and wetlands; this is one of the areas the project is looking to enhance.

Corps of Engineers has agreed to assist and the USBR has agreed to be lead agency on the project.

Attempted to get initial survey and study funds for the next budget year, still unknown if available due to the project starting so late in the year.

Q: The area the North Gila Valley Irrigation District represents, is the 6,500 acres the entire district?

A: There are 7,500 in the North Gila Valley but not all is farmable.

Q: How many landowners?

A: Approximately 10-15.

Q: Is the current channel mostly private land, state, or government ownership?

A: Not sure how much is privately owned, state owned or under federal control. North Gila Valley agreed to work out land acquisition, haven't gotten into full detail of the land ownership yet.

Q: The only flood control is channelization, no other levee system?

A: No levee system anticipated.

Q: How many people live there?

A: There is one subdivision -- roughly 200-300 people.

Q: Is the floodplain mostly salt cedar?

A: Before the flood, there was about 5 acres where it was clear and sandy. Now it is covered with cottonwood, salt cedar, and arrow weed.

Lower Colorado River Boundary and Capacity Project – Al Goff, Project Manager, U.S. Section, International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) – Yuma Office

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is currently on hold due to concerns with the 140,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) flow design of the project. The USBR, Denver Technical Office, is currently calculating flow to come up with a 100-year flood to answer any questions or concerns from the environmental community regarding flood frequency issues. When peer review is completed, IBWC will need to discuss it and if the design flood needs to be changed, then a new Minute will be required to formalize the change. Based on the current survey preliminary calculations from Northerly International Boundary (NIB) to 2.1 miles downstream, the limitrophe will carry 75,000 cfs, which is the top of the levee.

Roger Gingrich directed comments to the county supervisors that were present of the concern that if the carrying capacity isn't increased, the levee will overtop. The 1993 Gila River raised the bottom of the Colorado River sediment.

USBR has dredged from above Morelos Dam to the Cocopah bend (\pm 2 miles) and removed 1.2 million cubic yards (mcy) of sediment. From the confluence of the Gila River to Morelos Dam is about 12 miles and there is about 1 million cubic yards (mcy) per mile, so from the confluence to Cocopah bend there is approximately 9 mcy of material to be removed. Sediment does not just settle, it will move and be transported downstream.

Q: Has the area gotten bigger with the vegetation?

A: Yes, we have what is called accretion. We contracted a registered land surveyor who has surveyed the area and, because of the sediment build up, accretion has occurred on the left bank, immediately above the dam.

Roger Gingrich commented that the City of Yuma Council has passed a resolution that basically says that it needs a way to tell where the border is in the Colorado River for Border Patrol purposes and also to increase the carrying capacity due to the threat it poses to the City and County when the levee is overtopped.

There is a project USIBWC is working on that is separate from the above project. 1.35 MAF of Colorado River water is delivered at the Morelos Dam diversion structure and this water is used in the States of Sonora and Baja California. It is delivered thru their aqueduct system to Tijuana and Ensenada. It's the lifeline for the State of Baja California. Since the other project is on hold, we have responsibility to protect this structure if there are any high flows. The project is to allow the water to pass the diversion/flood control structure the way it was built. The integrity of the area is in jeopardy due to the sediment/vegetation build up.

Photos were shown of Morelos Dam when constructed in 1948 and current photos. There is about 38 acres that is under IBWC responsibility. Under Minute 197, the area above Morelos Dam was to be cleared annually to assure safe passage of any and all high river flows. 1992 was the last year this activity was accomplished. Currently, 10 of the 20 river gates have reduced flow capacity due to the dense vegetation growth above the gate inlets plus the 600 foot overflow weir at the east side of the gate structure is covered by 3 feet of sediment due to the 1993 Gila River flows.

USIBWC has conducted consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a letter has been provided to us from them that will go to Marjorie Blaine of the Corps of Engineers and hopefully within 30 days we will have a response from them. We are proposing to remove $\pm 200,000$ cy of material to get it down to 107.6 feet (crest of overflow weir). Soil tests have been conducted and there are no wetlands in the area. Some vegetation will be removed as well.

Under the Biological Opinion, IBWC will have to purchase 17 acres of land from somewhere for mitigation purposes. This land will have to be purchased within 3 ½ years from the time the Biological Opinion is signed.

Q: When growth is back, are you going to have to buy another 17 acres of land again?

A: No, O&M program will be in the agreement.

Q: How much material are you removing?

A: +/- 200,000 cubic yards.

Q: Where are you depositing the sediment?

A: In Mexico. The USBR under an MOU will provide equipment/personnel. Material will be transported into trucks from Mexico and deposited in their landfill.

Brief background of the project:

- Initial Safety of Dam
 - Binational Joint Inspection March 6-7, 2001
 - Follow-up binational inspection conducted April 5-6, 2006
- Initial consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) August 8, 2001 letter. Involved Lower Colorado River Boundary and Channel Capacity Project.
- Morelos Dam Project letter to USF&WS on September 22, 2005
- Final Biological Opinion letter received from USF&WS on August 23, 2006
- Currently, discussion with US Corps of Engineers for final permitting process

Description of Proposed Action:

- The proposed action is located on the Colorado River immediately upstream and downstream of the existing Morelos Diversion Dam at river mile 22.1. The project area is in Yuma County, Arizona; however, some activities involving disposal of dredge spoil will occur on the Mexican side of the Colorado River in Baja California North.
- The proposed action involves the clearing of 38.4 acres of brush and trees in two areas (Site A above the Dam and Site B below the dam) and excavation of 3.4 feet of sediment from Site A and 2.4 feet of sediment from Site B to drop the surface elevation of the sites to 107.6 feet mean sea level.
- The third phase of the project would remove additional sediment overlying existing bank protection to areas at the eastern side of the dam along the length of the spillway. All vegetation in these areas would be removed. Sediment would be removed to 103.0 feet mean sea level in the five-acre area shown in the BA as sites A1 and B1.
- The proposed action area extends from the upper end of the project area at approx. river mile 23 to river mile 21.

Q: How will you get the sediment across the river?

A: We will be putting in a culvert in the river channel below Morelos Dam.

Q: What kind of environmental document are you planning on doing EIR, EIS, or a QSA?

A: I can put you in contact with Steve Fox in El Paso; he would be the one filing the documents.

Suggested Future Agenda Items

All American Canal lining

NADBank presentation

Mexicali Sanitation test run

Calexico New River Committee

USBR Desalting Plant

If there are other issues/projects you would like to hear, please email the Yuma IBWC office at annamorales@ibwc.state.gov

Next meeting scheduled for February 20, 2007 from 4-6pm at Imperial Valley College.

Thank you to all the presenters for their presentations.

*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.