



# THE BOUNDARY MARKER

The newsletter of the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission

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## IBWC, PARTNERS ESTABLISH FIRST BINATIONAL FLOOD WARNING SYSTEM

Officials from the United States and Mexico signed an agreement on May 15 in Imperial Beach, California for an Integrated Binational Flood Warning System in the Tijuana River Watershed. The purpose of the project is to provide real-time rainfall and stream flow information to emergency officials on both sides of the border to enable effective decision-making during floods in the Tijuana River Watershed. The flood warning system is the first of its kind along the United States-Mexico border.

Deputy Commissioner Debra Little represented the U.S. Section at the signing ceremony. The ceremony marked a significant milestone in the project, which started in June 2000

when agencies in the San Diego, Tijuana, Tecate region signed a Declaration of Intent to pursue the development of the system. Since that time, a binational technical advisory committee has completed design and installation of the flood warning system for high-risk areas in the watershed.

Several automatic rain gauges and river level gauges donated by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric's National Weather Service have been installed and are generating real-time data. Specialized communications software has been

purchased and installed within key emergency agencies to enable access to the Binational Flood Warning System for the communication and exchange of real-time data on precipitation and river levels.

The international project is a vital link in the region's flood warning system. The Tijuana River

Watershed, which covers more than 1700 square miles, has been affected by floods over the years, resulting in loss of life and the destruction of homes and other property.

Officials from the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) and nine other agencies in the U.S. and Mexico signed a Declaration of Intent to continue operations, maintenance, and coordination of the new

flood warning system. Pursuant to the new agreement, the agencies will continue to participate in future binational technical meetings facilitated by the IBWC to coordinate data sharing, gauge maintenance and other issues.

At the May 15 event, three USIBWC staff received public recognition for their work on the project. Environmental Protection Specialist Charles Fischer received a plaque for his efforts. Certificates were awarded to Civil Engineering Technician Scott Melvin and Language Specialist Rene Valenzuela.



*Installation of rain gauge at Rancho Tecate*



## USIBWC APPOINTS CITIZENS' FORUM BOARD MEMBERS

USIBWC Commissioner Carlos M. Ramirez has appointed 23 border residents to serve on two new Citizens' Forum Boards established by the Commission. The purpose of the Citizens' Forums is to facilitate the exchange of information between the USIBWC and the community regarding Commission projects and related issues.

The USIBWC's Lower Rio Grande Citizens' Forum covers Hidalgo and Cameron Counties in Texas. In that area, the USIBWC operates a large flood control project, among other activities.

Lower Rio Grande Citizens' Forum Board members are:

- George Bejarano - Internal Service Director, City of Weslaco
- John Bruciak - General Manager and CEO, Brownsville Public Utilities Board
- Mary Lou Campbell - Sierra Club, Frontera Audubon Society, Lower Laguna Madre Foundation
- Joseph Coulter - President, Lower Rio Grande Water Committee, Inc.
- Jerry Freeman - South Texas Community College
- Neil Haman - Project Coordinator, Texas Water Development Board
- Ray Prewett - Executive Vice-President, Texas Citrus Mutual and Texas Vegetable Association
- Donnie Valdez - Minority Agriculture Producers, Inc.
- Jo Jo White - Manager, Hidalgo and Cameron Counties Irrigation Dist. #9
- John Wood - Commissioner, Cameron County



*Deputy Commissioner Carlos Marin (l) with board members Paul McAleese and Evelyn Mosley of Yuma*

In announcing the appointments, Commissioner Ramirez said, "These board members represent diverse views on regional water issues yet they all share a commitment to working for the betterment of their communities. I know the Commission will benefit from their insights on regional water issues."

The USIBWC also recently established the Colorado River Citizens' Forum, which covers Imperial County, California and Yuma County, Arizona. In that region, the USIBWC delivers Colorado River water to Mexico in accordance with the 1944 Water Treaty. Flood control and water quality issues are also important aspects of the Commission's work in that region. The board members are:

- Marie Barrett, Citizens Congressional Task Force on New River
- James V. Davey - engineer serving local irrigation districts
- Roger Gingrich - City of Yuma Public Works
- Richard Harmon - Field Representative, Office of California State Assemblywoman Bonnie Garcia
- Mary Hernandez Kaffer - served on Yuma Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Adjustment
- Dennis Laybourn - Coalition of Labor, Agriculture, and Business of Imperial County, California Mining Association
- Paul McAleese - International Desalination Association, retired U.S. Bureau of Reclamation engineer
- Brian McNeece - educator, member of the Surf Rider Association
- Rodney Martin - Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs, Yuma Co. FEMA Board
- Cary Meister - Yuma Audubon Society
- Evelyn Mosley - active in river and lake clean-up projects
- Wade Noble - irrigation district consultant
- Jesse Silva - General Manager, Imperial Irrigation District

The Citizens' Forum Boards conduct quarterly public meetings in their communities. The USIBWC previously established boards in Southeast Arizona, Las Cruces, NM/El Paso, TX, and San Diego, CA.



## USIBWC CELEBRATES WOMEN'S HISTORY

Headquarters staff at the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) commemorated Women's History Month with a variety of well-attended activities in March.

On March 12, staff welcomed Sarah John, nationally-recognized historian and author, who spoke about "Selected Personalities in the 'Her-story' (History) of El Paso." Her presentation was full of interesting facts about notable women who shaped El Paso.

For example, Herlinda Wong Chew (whose descendants remain prominent in El Paso) was a business owner, an authority on immigration law, and the honorary Chinese consul in El Paso. Olga Bernstein Kohlberg established the first free public kindergarten in Texas.

Also on the program was USIBWC engineer Gabriel Duran who told the story of a fascinating woman in boundary history. Inez Gonzales was a 15-year old Mexican girl kidnapped in a bloody ambush by Apache Indians in the mid-1800s. Later, a party led by U.S. Boundary Commissioner John Bartlett rescued her. The Commissioner vowed to return Inez to her home in Sonora, Mexico. After

a grueling journey during which the party nearly starved, Inez arrived home to the joy and surprise of her family.

Throughout the month, Cecilia Rubio and Yvette Hernandez of the Commission's EEO Office set up displays with information about notable women in American history. Additional material was posted on the Commission's internet.

Employees were also encouraged to write essays about significant women in their lives. Some chose historical figures, some professional mentors, and others their mothers. Three noteworthy essays by Margie Garay, Ofelia Bolaños, and Linda Wilfred were read during a special program on March 27.

Commissioner Carlos M. Ramirez opened the program by sharing President Bush's Women's History Month Proclamation with staff. In the proclamation, Bush stated, "American women from all backgrounds continue to break barriers and fulfill their personal and professional potential. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women have more choices than ever before." Ramirez noted that President Bush had called upon Americans to undertake activities to celebrate the many contributions of American women. The Commissioner stated that he was proud of the U.S. Section's efforts to commemorate Women's History Month.

Also featured on the program was Deputy Commissioner/Principal Engineer Debra Little -- the first woman

to serve as Principal Engineer in the history of the International Boundary and Water Commission. Little spoke about how her previous employer, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, had encouraged her to participate in leadership training. Later, after being passed over for promotion at the Corps, she went to work for the USIBWC, rising through the ranks until she was appointed Principal Engineer in 1997. Last year, Commissioner Ramirez gave Little and fellow Principal Engineer Carlos

Marin the additional title of Deputy Commissioner, reflecting their current responsibilities.

In her presentation, Little remarked that she is often called upon to speak to other groups about her experience as a female executive in a nontraditional field but it was the first time she had the opportunity to share her story with her colleagues at the Commission.

In concluding the program, Administrative Services Clerk Linda Wilfred read an inspirational poem by Maya Angelou, "Phenomenal Woman."

Special thanks to the organizing committee: Chairperson Fred Graf, Debra Little, Jackie Nuñez, Robert Ortega, Cecilia Rubio, Sally Spener, and Linda Wilfred.



*Women's History Month presenters (l to r) Debra Little, Gabriel Duran (with picture of Inez Gonzales), Sarah John, and Com. Ramirez*

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