

Executive Committee Paso del Norte Watershed Council Meeting Minutes

**Southwest Environmental Center
275 North Downtown Mall
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88001
1:30 PM to 3:00 PM, October 29, 2002**

Chair **B** Conrad G. Keyes, Jr.

Conrad Keyes called the meeting to order at 1:38PM. Present were: Jim Stefanov, Zhuping Sheng, Kevin Bixby, Doug Echlin, Bruce Thompson, Rosemary Staley, Brian Hanson, Cindie Abeyta, Don Caccamise, Cliff Crawford, Sue Watts, Ed Fierro, Valerie Provencio, Inga Groff, Marilyn Taylor, Zhuping Sheng, Christopher Brown, Bobby Creel, Ari Michelsen, Julie Maitland, Joe Groff, and Dan Santantonio

- 1) September 28, 2002 Annual Meeting Minutes Summary by Ed Kosak – Meeting Summary approved with no additional changes.
- 2) Cliff Crawford (UNM retired) and Cindie Abeyta (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) conducted a power point presentation on the Bosque Biological Management Plan. The plan was put together by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1994 and is known as the Middle Rio Grande Bosque Initiative. The program is currently being guided by the Bosque Improvement Group led by Cindie Abeyta who is the Coordinator for the Bosque Initiative. There are currently 52 projects being funded. The complete presentation is provided as a separate attachment. Brian Hanson agreed to take the lead on investigating the potential of putting together a Biological Management Plan for the Paso del Norte Watershed Council (PdNWC) along our reach of the Rio Grande.

Brian requested that ideas be forwarded to him so a brief report can be presented at the next Executive Committee (EC) meeting. He also requested that anyone wishing to participate as a Management Plan sub-committee member contact him.

- 3) Zhuping Sheng of the Texas A&M Research and Extension Center (El Paso Center) was nominated for the Executive Committee of the PdNWC by Jim Stefanov. The motion was second by Sue Watts. Zhuping Sheng was unanimously voted in as a member of the Executive Committee.
- 4) Ed Kosak provided a brief update on the Program Coordinator's Work in Progress.

A bulleted summary of the Work in Progress is provided as a separate attachment to the 10-29-02 meeting minutes.

Ed also furnished a brief synopsis of four funding sources that he has found for the Watershed Council to pursue for grant funding. Ed thanked those who forwarded their ideas for potential funding sources. Sources include: The Ford Foundation, The Homeland Foundation, The Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service. The Watershed Council elected to move forward with a proposal to The Homeland Foundation. The remaining potential funding sources named above will also be pursued as timelines dictate.

- 5) Christopher Brown gave a brief Power point presentation on the Coordinated Database Agreement/GIS. The first order of business for the sub-committee was to develop a work plan. The next step was to examine existing websites to find data that would support a protocol to build from. A structure was required to determine the basic layout and how to access datasets through a web interface. Those individuals who helped put this project together included himself, Bobby Creel, John Kennedy, Ari Michelsen, Zhuping Sheng, Matt Rich, Ed Fierro, and Dr. Srinivasan of Texas A&M. The presentation is offered as a separate attachment to 10-29-02 meeting minutes.

Ari Michelsen provided a review of the changes to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) Coordinated Database proposal. The proposal originally was tailored to specifically fit 729 projects. The proposal currently requests funding for continuation and further development of the Coordinated Database project and for technical support. The USACOE held a stakeholders' meeting, and priorities were identified for a coordinated database. Funding has been requested through the Watershed Council, the Water Resources Research Institute at New Mexico State University, Texas A&M University, and other organizations. Ari would like to make the modifications necessary to reflect these changes to help ensure project funding. The deliverables (page seven of proposal) reflect the earlier direction of the proposal. Changes are required in the overall budget. Ari asked the chair of the Watershed Council (Conrad Keyes) if he would like the sub-committee to provide a separate letter for his signature to endorse the proposal. Conrad agreed that the letter was appropriate and necessary. Ari Michelsen requested that input from the EC be submitted to Zhuping Sheng or Bobby Creel. Zhuping Sheng was then asked by Ari Michelsen to forward an electronic version of the draft letter for Conrad to sign.

- 6) Sue Watts provided the EC with an overview of the EPA Watershed Initiative proposal. The goal of this project is to address degraded water quality due to increased salinity. Specific areas targeted include the Montoya Drain and the East Drain. The plan is to identify land with high salinity levels and then remove or retire them from agricultural use or remove irrigation, thereby reducing soil salinity and the resultant discharge of saline drain water into the river. The project will determine problem areas through examination of satellite imagery, which includes spectral analyses (mainly through reflectance). Soil samples would be forwarded to Jon Hendryxx at the New Mexico Tech to determine soil salinity on a field level scale. When final determinations are made, Market Mechanisms will then be developed to remove those saline areas from production. This can be accomplished by actual land purchases or annexation by the city, or conservation easements to restore habitat. Sue referred to the pilot project proposed by Kevin Bixby which describes a habitat restoration project. The EPA Initiative proposal not only includes spectral analysis and ground-

truthing, but also includes the installation of additional monitoring wells along the drain to determine effects on water quality before and after irrigation ceases on a land parcel. Portions of the proposal dealing with the location and costs associated with water and soil analyses require completion.

Ari Michelsen stated that the total award being sought is \$500,000. Kevin Bixby added that the estimated budget for the habitat restoration pilot project would be about \$193,000. Ari continued by saying that, as stated earlier, the project budget includes spectral analysis and water quality monitoring. Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) has had 25 monitoring sites installed at a cost of \$4,000 each – for a total of \$100,000. EBID would provide in-kind labor and installation services and for data logging. Also allocated is \$100,000 earmarked for the Coordinated Database Project. Details of the Hendryxx or equivalent contract need finalizing. Those who have contributed their time and effort include Phil King, Bobby Creel, John Kennedy, and Seiichi Miyamoto.

Conrad requested that someone from the EPA Initiative proposal committee e-mail Betty Rivera (cabinet secretary for the New Mexico Natural Resources and Conservation Department) an electronic version of the proposal for her review. Ari added that he would re-initiate contact with the Texas Governor's office to solicit support. Conrad recommended having the proposal forwarded to EBID by November 11, 2002. This would allow time for their board to grant Gary Esslinger authority to sign a letter of support.

- 7) The three Business Plan letterhead choices provided by Ed Kosak were offered for consideration by the EC. After deliberation, it was determined by some EC members that the logo may need further modifications. Changes altering the present theme from the southwestern/mimbres motif were recommended by Dan Santantonio. Sue Watts reminded the EC that the original theme was chosen because of the three major stakeholders i.e. environment, urban, and agricultural. A new logo committee was established as a result of the dialogue exchanged at today's meeting. Those forming the new logo committee are Dan Santantonio (chair), Jim Stefanov, Bobby Creel, Julie Maitland, and Ari Michelsen.

Conrad Keyes requested comments and suggestions for the text of the Business Plan be forwarded by to him by November 15, 2002.

- 8) It was determined during today's meeting that elections of officers was not necessary due to all incumbent officer's willingness to remain on their respective posts.
- 9) Bobby Creel provided an overview of the Paso del Norte Watershed Council's Website. Detailed in Bobby's demonstration were examples of the general layout, how to maneuver around the site, and links to the web page. Bobby asked that members of the EC explore the site and provide him with comments for improvements or revision.
- 10) Other business included an announcement by Conrad Keyes of the upcoming New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission meeting November 12-13, 2002 in Santa Fe.

An announcement of the next New Mexico-Texas Water Commission meeting was made. Ed Fierro stated that the next meeting is to be held at 10:00 AM, on November 15, 2002, at the Texas A&M Research and Extension Center.

- 11) The next Paso del Norte Watershed Council Executive Committee Meeting is scheduled for 11:00 AM, December 9, 2002 at the Cattleman's Restaurant located in Anthony, Texas.