

Executive Committee Paso del Norte Watershed Council Meeting Minutes

**Great American Land and Cattle Restaurant
600 Valley Chile Road
Vinton, Texas 79821
Monday, December 9, 2002
11:00 AM – 1:00 PM**

Chair – Conrad G. Keyes, Jr.

Sue Watts called the meeting to order at 11:30AM. Present were: Jim Stefanov, Zhuping Sheng, Doug Echlin, Brian Hanson, Mike Mecke, Ed Fierro, Valerie Provencio, Mike Landis, Inga Groff, Marilyn Taylor, Christopher Brown, Bobby Creel, Ari Michelsen, Julie Maitland, Joe Groff, Dan Santantonio, Gail Stockton, Jennifer Montoya, and Rosemary Staley

- 1) October 29, 2002 Meeting Minutes Summary by Ed Kosak – Meeting Summary approved with no additional changes.
- 2) 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 today's meeting minutes.
- 3) Valerie Provencio gave a Power point presentation entitled "Paso del Norte Watershed Council: A Cooperative Approach To Regional Watershed Management." The presentation is offered as a separate attachment to 12-9-02 meeting minutes. This paper will be presented at the AWWA conference on January 22, 2003.

Bobby Creel suggested inserting addition local photos and the Council's Web site information into the presentation.

Sue Watts requested that comments and suggestions regarding Valerie's presentation be forwarded to Valerie.

- 4) Ari Michelsen provided an overview of the USDA Rio Grande Water Conservation and Irrigation Efficiency Initiative program. The Initiative is a joint program between Texas A&M and NMSU. The program originally began about 1 ½ years ago, with funding totaling \$3.1 million per year. NMSU received approximately one-third of the funding support. The remaining two-thirds are divided between research and outreach programs of TAMU.

The purpose of the Initiative is to increase or improve water conservation in irrigation in agricultural an urban areas. There are nine program areas that are included in this project. The program areas include: irrigation district studies; irrigation education and training; institutional incentives for efficient water use; on-farm irrigation system management; urban water conservation; environment, ecology, and water quality protection; saline and wastewater management; basin-wide hydrology, salinity, modeling and technology; and communications/oversight/biometric support/accountability. The project is being administered by Bill Harris of the Texas Water Resources Institute at Texas

A&M and by Craig Runyan of the Water Task Force located at NMSU. An annual meeting was held last April here in El Paso. The meeting for 2003 will be held in Weslaco. The 2004 meeting is scheduled to take place in Las Cruces. Ari concluded by stating that those interested in attending the meetings are welcome.

Sue Watts asked Ari Michelsen how long funding was established for the Initiative. Ari responded by stating that Congress approved the program for 3 years. Currently, the project is approximately half completed.

Sue also asked Ari who ultimately will be the recipient of the information gained from the project. Ari replied that the recipients include irrigation districts, municipalities, ranchers, and farmers.

- 5) Brian Hanson gave an overview of the Biological Management Plan (BMP) meetings held on December 2, 2002 in Albuquerque, and December 9, 2002, in Las Cruces.

Participants at the Albuquerque meeting included the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Rio Grande Restoration Project, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other organizations. Currently, there are two fish biologists from the Albuquerque office involved in project planning. A representative from the New Mexico Environment Department provided information on current water quality and their plans to conduct extensive sampling during the upcoming year. The second meeting on the BMP, held this morning in Las Cruces, was very similar to the first meeting. Both meetings were designed to bring ideas together on how best to proceed with this proposed project. The conclusion drawn from these first two meetings was that further dialogue is required to organize the concept of the BMP. Also, a strong need exists to include the participation of the irrigation districts. Brian recommended proceeding cautiously and to focus on a “grass-roots” approach by gaining the involvement, feedback, and support of other agencies and organizations.

Brian finished his report by stating that he would like to proceed with the BMP by organizing a subcommittee to approach the proposed project from two angles. First, with considerable input, a determination needs to be made regarding what information is actually required in the BMP. Second, due to the complex undertaking of the BMP, it is important to let the public help guide the direction of the BMP. Brian added that this facet is important to insure the support of those who have an interest in the Watershed. Brian also added that it is possible that this project will need to be approached incrementally – funding separate portions individually. Brian requested that anyone interested in participating please contribute their ideas. The hope is to combine the experience of Council members to establish an effective BMP.

Sue Watts commented that there is the need to have an idea of what data already exists and what data is needed for restoration projects. Sue added that there is also the need to work with the irrigation districts to produce mechanisms for acquiring and holding water rights.

Sue asked if there were any questions or comments. She also asked if anyone who attended the first two BMP meetings had anything to add.

Zhuping Sheng asked Brian Hanson if flow information would be a part of the BMP. Brian responded yes, the BMP is dependent on the landscape – and because the landscape is dependent on flows, geology, hydrology, and climate, all would certainly be an important part of the BMP. Zhuping expressed his interest in joining in the BMP technical committee.

- 6) Christopher Brown provided a report on the New Mexico portion of the Coordinated Database/GIS project. Chris began by stating that a technical meeting was held approximately 2 months ago in order to discuss the specific tasks of the project. Those contributing to the early direction of the technical committee were Ed Fierro and Jose Granillo of El Paso Water Utilities (EPWU). Other individuals on the technical committee for the Database/GIS project include Zhuping Sheng, Chris Brown, Bobby Creel, and Ari Michelsen.

Chris continued his report by stated that there was also a very important conference call which evolved from technical committee discussions which lead to the determination to make surface water projects the primary focus of the GIS project. Matt Rich is currently working towards developing the ArcIMS. There have been discussions with regional data providers such as the City of Las Cruces and Elephant Butte Irrigation District. We are moving forward on further development of a work plan to ensure the success of this project.

Zhuping Sheng provided an update on the Texas portion of the Coordinated Database/GIS project. Zhuping began by stating that contact has been made with the El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1, EPWU and IBWC to discuss what data is available and how the data will be shared. Currently, the EPCWID #1 was provided with the information on the project and is considering its participation in this project. . The hope is to eventually gain real-time data which can be shared. TNRIS is interested in sharing their information with the Group. Zhuping also suggested that the Hudspeth Water Conservation District should be included in the project.

Sue Watts asked Chris what the timeline is for the project. Chris stated that the project extends from September 1, 2003 until August 31, 2004. Chris added that the work plan is scheduled to be complete in May, 2003. Chris also added that during the summer months, with the help of Ed Fierro and Jose Granillo of EPWU, expanded procedural steps can be outline. Chris added that a functioning web-based product will be completed by May, 2003, with the latter stage of the project involving documentation, addition of real time data, and discussions of further funding sources and related work.

Ari Michelsen thanked EPWU for providing \$50,000 as seed money to support the Coordinated Database/GIS project. Ari added that, since the last Executive Committee meeting was held, a re-write was necessary to be more consistent for potential funding.

- 7) Sue Watts provided an update on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Watershed Initiative. Sue began by stating that a proposal was submitted to both the Texas and New Mexico Governors offices. During review by Rick Perry's office, the EPA Initiative Proposal Committee received word that Elephant Butte Irrigation District would not be able to endorse the proposal as it was written. Sue stated that Bobby Creel was largely responsible for the re-write of the proposal. The re-write took place over a weekend - prior to re-submitting a revised version by the established deadline.

The next step of the process is for the Governors to submit the proposal to the EPA. Sue explained that each state governor was granted two intrastate projects to be submitted through their respective offices. Because this project is considered an interstate (inter-jurisdictional) project, the proposal submitted by the Paso del Norte Watershed Council will not count against either state's limit of two projects. Texas had an existing review process in place and the review panel awarded 37 points to the project out of a possible 45 points. A regional review will likely follow the initial review process.

Sue concluded by stating that a proposed budget of just over \$800,000 has been requested with match funding totaling \$140,000. The total requested for the EPA Initiative projects is \$1.2 million.

- 8) Dan Santantonio distributed hard copies of the revised PdNWC logo. Dan also provided comments on behalf of the logo committee. Dan stated that a logo showing the geographical location of the watershed is needed. For this is the reason the proposed design was chosen. Further touch up may be required by a graphic artist to reduce some of the “white space.”

The main idea was to create a logo showing the river and the watershed. Dan directed everyone’s attention to the revised logo and stated that the design shows the river, state boundaries, and generalized watershed boundaries. Dan also stated that the intent of the revised design was to show who we are, where we are located, what our concerns are, and who our stakeholders are. Dan added that the example provided for today’s meeting serves as something concrete for the Executive Committee to compare to, making it easier to make minor changes. Dan concluded by saying that a logo such as the one presented today could be taken to a printer or designer and be modified to better suit the Council’s needs.

Bobby Creel asked if the Council could consider a motion at this time to accept the overall concept of the new logo. A brief impromptu discussion took place between attendees of today’s meeting regarding the acceptance of the logo. Sue requested that a member of the Council make a motion to accept the concept of the new logo. A motion was made to accept the logo by Dan Santantonio and was second by Ari Michelsen. The motion passed.

Chris Brown suggested that members of the Council forward comments and suggestions to help finalize the new logo.

- 9) The Business Plan discussion was postponed. The Officers will meet and discuss the Business Plan at a later date.
- 10) Under other business, Mike Landis asked if there was any consideration given regarding the Biological Management Plan and the talks about the re-introduction of the silvery minnow along the Rio Grande below Caballo Dam without altering the operations of the Rio Grande Project. Brian responded by stating that the BMP committee would first like to begin conducting a biological inventory as part of the BMP. This inventory would likely be an important step in establishing a baseline prior to implementation of later phases of the project.
- 11) The next Paso del Norte Watershed Council Executive Committee Meeting is scheduled for 10:00 AM, Friday, February 7, 2003 at the International Boundary and Water Commission offices in El Paso, Texas.