

**Minutes
Executive Committee
Paso del Norte Watershed Council**

**New Mexico Department of Agriculture
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico
10:00 am – 12:30 pm, Friday, March 28, 2003**

In attendance: Conrad G. Keyes, Jr., Chair
Sue Watts, Assistant Chair
Ari Michelsen, Treasurer
Nancy Hanks, Program Coordinator
Christopher Brown, Geography, New Mexico State University
Mariana Chow, Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition
Bobby Creel, New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute
Tim Darden, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Doug Echlin, US Section, International Boundary and Water Commission
Inga Groff, League of Women Voters
Joe Groff, Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue
Mike Landis, El Paso Office, US Bureau of Reclamation
Julie Maitland, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Jennifer Montoya, World Wildlife Fund
Valerie Provencio, El Paso Water Utilities
Dan Santantonio, City of Las Cruces
Zhuping Sheng, TAMU, Agricultural Research & Extension Center
Rosemary Staley, City of El Paso
Beatriz Vera, Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition

1. February 7, 2003, Meeting Minutes approval (Ed Fierro)

Conrad called the meeting to order, explaining that Ed Fierro could not attend. The minutes from the February 7, 2003, meeting were approved as written. A brief discussion of putting the agenda and minutes on the web site concluded with Ari asking Valerie and Nancy to send the minutes and the agenda to Bobby Creel to be posted. Bobby encouraged everyone to look at the site and send him hard copies of changes or other information. Sue asked about the future of Spanish translations of the material and Bobby replied that he has it but has had no time to post it yet. Bobby said he had scanned in the older minutes and if he is missing something, to let him know.

2. Introduction of the new Watershed Council Coordinator (Ari Michelsen)

Ari introduced Dr. Nancy Hanks as the new Program Coordinator for the Paso del Norte Watershed Council, starting March 27, 2003. Ari extended his welcome and briefly provided Nancy's credentials: a doctorate in Geography from the University of Oklahoma, a Master's in Industrial and Labor Relations from Cornell University, and a Bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of Texas at Austin. Nancy is currently living in Wyoming and will be moving to El Paso within the next month. Her

vita was circulated to Council members. Nancy thanked the Committee and commented that she is glad to be working in El Paso and with water resources. She added that she is also happy to join her husband, who recently began work in El Paso.

3. Council funding status (Ari Michelsen)

a. World Wildlife Fund (WWF) grant extension

Ari stated that an extension was given for the WWF grant through July 31, 2003. Those funds are for educational/outreach materials, primarily brochures. Ari distributed a prototype of the brochure and informed Nancy that there are electronic copies and he wanted to incorporate the final logo and send it to Ed Fierro. Approximately \$4,000 remains in the WWF fund. Part of the funding was used for translation of the strategic plan and other materials. Ari wants to ensure that the brochure is printed and invoiced by the end of July.

b. El Paso Water Utilities (EPWU) funding

Ari said the Council is continuing to operate on funds from the EPWU, they have an extension with River Network through September 30, 2003, and he needs to coordinate with Ed Fierro regarding which EPWU funds expire in April. Copies of the current budget were distributed, showing sufficient funds for Nancy to work 19 hours a week under the current billing through December 2003, but that we would be applying for an extension to increase that to $\frac{3}{4}$ time in the second year funding, which would start in May or June. Ari also would like to have Nancy participate in writing a work plan for the next year as part of the extension. Although the EPWU has not asked for any deliverables, they do want the location of monitoring sites. Ari added that we have funding from the previous year, but he wants to get the application in while the budget is there. The motion to do so passed unanimously.

c. Corps/Council Coordinated Database funding through the El Paso Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)

Ari said that there is some funding available through the BOR that may ultimately come from the Corps of Engineers. Mike Landis thought that the money that the Corps gave to the BOR should be able to pass through in the form of a grant, with no strings attached. He said that government contracting is usually either done through a contract, a cooperative agreement, or a grant. He said most funding is through cooperative agreements in which the government and the agreeing party are both going to benefit from the activity by spending money on something like a watershed council. He asked if Conrad has to have all the money actually spent by the end of the fiscal year (September 30, 2003) and Conrad emphasized that they need to spend the \$50,000 that was allocated by Congress to the Corps before September 30 or it will not be allocated next year. He noted that Christopher Brown, Bobby Creel, Phil King, Zhuping Sheng are on the committee for that project.

Ari stated that he and Mike were going to talk to the BOR in Salt Lake City on Monday. If that doesn't have a positive outcome, then they will talk to Gail and to Becky Griffith in the Corps' Dallas/Ft. Worth Office. Sue wondered if the money would be sent to the district office. Conrad thought it would be an interagency exchange.

Mike said he had thought it would be easier coming through the BOR because they already have a contract, but they have different administrative rules. Mike said that he could add another \$10,000 this year from the El Paso office, which just recently got

FFYO3 funds which they are obligated to spend before the end of the fiscal year. Bobby said he had current contracts with the BOR in Salt Lake City, but they are cost-sharing, citing as an example the study of Elephant Butte. Ari stated that for the funding of the Database project, a subcontract with UTEP and with Mexico has been sent and that funds run through August. Conrad urged that we add this to the grant sheet, even though most of it is pass-through.

d. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Watershed Initiative proposal

Ari was contacted by the Texas Governor's Office regarding the EPA Watershed Initiative. Program funding was half of that anticipated and the EPA has not yet selected projects. The proposal is for a total of \$1.2 million.

4. Update on the Paso del Norte Watershed Council Logo (Dan Santantonio)

Dan displayed the new and final logo, which was received with enthusiasm by the committee. The electronic versions have already been sent out to Ed and Conrad as jpeg files, which will be easier to work with. Dan explained that printer variation will affect the colors, and that whoever uses it will have to use some sort of color verification. Conrad asked Valerie if the logo has been incorporated into a letterhead. She replied she has not seen the updated logo but will attend to it. Chris mentioned his brother-in-law is a graphic designer who assisted in putting the original logo concept into an electronic format.

5. Update on the status of the Watershed Council brochure (English and Spanish versions, Ari Michelsen)

Ari brought a sample of draft brochures, some of which were in Spanish. The brochure still needs editing, the addition of the logo, and the PdNWC website address. Everyone should examine the language and send comments to Nancy. Chris would like a higher quality jpeg for the map. Ari replied that Jose from the EPWU is working on the colors since the previous map was in blue and did not reflect the desert image they wanted. Valerie will check with Jose. Bobby said the image for the map was bitmap and didn't allow us to adjust colors.

Ari recommended that the Council objectives be included in the brochure and suggested a larger, 8.5" x 14" brochure so another panel could be added. Jennifer asked if the committee wanted to print the names of Council members on the brochure. Sue said they did not due to lack of space. Conrad noted that the back page needed updating as well. A discussion followed concerning the format of the layout. Ari identified those on the brochure committee and suggested the addition of Jennifer Montoya. Valerie suggested having support groups listed on the back page so that readers could contact them. Sue requested an electronic copy of the map with larger photos. Additional or alternative photos are needed to better reflect issues. Sue wants photos sent to her and Bobby stressed they be high quality photos.

There was a discussion of web sites. Conrad suggested the IT Committee register a domain name for the website. Bobby stated that he could run a proxy server with any domain name. Ari wanted to be sure that people can find us if they type in other things, such as pdnwc.org instead of www.pdnwc.org. Nancy said she would investigate domain name registration.

6. Update on North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant (Kevin Bixby)

Kevin Bixby did not attend today's meeting, so Valerie volunteered a brief statement on the NAWCA grant. The program provides matching grants to private or public organizations or to individuals who have developed partnerships to create wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The Southwest Environmental Center (SWEC) submitted a two-year, \$1 million proposal for habitat acquisition and enhancement for 5 wetlands projects (Rio Bosque and Keystone in Texas and the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park, Leasburg State Park, and Perch State Park in New Mexico). Valerie said that the proposal was submitted on March 7, 2003, and was signed by Ed Archuleta of the EPWU, who promised \$2,041,234 in matching funds. Other partners include UTEP, Keystone, the Trust for Public Land, and New Mexico State Parks. SWEC will be the grant administrator.

Bobby Creel said that there was a related study by Phil King on the acquisition of water for environmental purposes from irrigation districts. Jennifer explained that one goal of Phil's report is to help learn how to work with irrigation districts and that the WWF is buying meters for some districts. Jennifer will make hard copies of Phil's report for the Council and make sure there is a link to it on the web site. She said it is a very exciting paper regarding water conservation.

There was a discussion of a bill presented to the New Mexico legislature involving the creation of a bank for environmental water users, allowing water to stay in a channel or be applied to conservation purposes. Jennifer said that Beth Bardwell is planning to work with the interim committees this summer. Mike stated that the BOR requires water be used only for "beneficial use." Jennifer urged clarification of the term, "beneficial use." Ari added that most western states recognize instream flows for beneficial use, but a proposed Texas law would make instream use non-beneficial. Conrad thought it needed to be codified. Sue thought it would include water diverted into a wetland. Conrad said only as long as it is a designated diversion in the districts. Bobby suggested having the authors make a presentation to the Council, which everyone thought was a good idea.

Conrad asked why the Council had not been approached to support the grant application. Valerie stated that they had only had 5 days to submit it. Sue stated that matching funds were needed, not letters of support. Ari commented that the Council is designed to act as a coordinating forum, that it was probably a failure to communicate. Jennifer thought that communication could be improved with SWEC and suggested that Nancy be directed to make that happen. Mike asked if the wetlands must be on a riverbank. Sue stated that this was a project to expand the wetland acreages along the Rio Grande and that it could be on branches of the river. Mike said that he had talked to Gary Arnold, Gary Esslinger, and Edd Fifer, and they think it is acceptable under the guidelines to create a wetland instead of a farm.

7. Proposed changes to Biological Management Plan (Kevin Bixby/Jennifer Montoya)

Jennifer said that Brian Hanson had given his presentation at the December 2002 Council meeting and that there had been a meeting at SWEC in January 2003. Jennifer said that she, Denise Fort, and Mike and Patty Banke met with New Mexico Sen. Jeff

Bingaman in Washington, DC, and he said he wanted a watershed program in New Mexico that would bring people together. Jennifer thought that the Bosque del Apache was successful because it had a very specific plan. Jennifer said that Brian's proposal is more of a literature review in a way, but it could be the basis for restoration. Julie Maitland explained that Brian's plan was written to get people talking, that Fish & Wildlife was just the catalyst, and that he chose words like "Biological Management Plan" as a starting point.

Zhuping thought that the goal should be to get data regarding the current status. Jennifer asked if the Council could set the stage for using money to coordinate restoration projects. Bobby stated that there was a need to prioritize and to identify the scope, cost, and benefits. Sue stated that we need a framework to know what the overall plan is. Jennifer was concerned about the way the proposal was written, wondering if it was an initiative or a planning exercise. Money would go to technical and socio-economic needs. Julie said the plan should be more than just river-oriented.

Doug said that the roadblock was the alternative re-formulation report, that they needed to get funds for that to be produced within the next three months. Dan said that when this first came up we talked about the Middle Rio Grande biological plan and what we thought was appropriate was that it would establish a base of information that could be an inventory and an assessment of the facts. He added that what he was hearing today was for a management plan to do something in the future. He thought that there was a need to establish a common base of facts that everyone could agree on.

Zhuping said that initially we had looked at planning only, but the feedback from Congress was that they wanted to see the restoration project. Jennifer said that she is comfortable with what the Council wants to do with the money, but that the way the plan is too general. She offered to visit with Mike Conner, Senator Bingaman's staff person, to discuss the possible funding of the plan. Conrad said we could expand the scope but we should be sure there are people who can do it. Chris said there are NMSU people in wildlife and biology who are interested in the project. Jennifer suggested an NMSU endowed chair and recruitment for someone who has the right background, and Conrad asked Sue and Jennifer to go forward with the idea of an endowed chair.

8. Discussion on status of Business Plan (Sue Watts)

Sue agreed to send the Business Plan to the Executive Committee for comments within the next two weeks, and that comments should be sent to Conrad. She suggested we do more to get ourselves recognized by congressional parties, such as developing some informative brochures to give to them to tell them who we are and what we are doing. Ari suggested adding projects and objectives. Earlier in the meeting, Dan Santantonio moved that the officers review the Council's Objectives and Strategic Plan and Julie Maitland seconded. Nancy was designated to send the draft plan to the Council by email.

9. Coordinated Database GIS Project Update (Chris Brown, Zhuping Sheng)

Chris reported that Stage 1 of the project is going well and that they need to do two runs of the map. He thanked Phil Diaz with the EBID for coming through with data. One set of maps will be ready by May 15, 2003, and will be demonstrated at the next Paso del Norte Water Task Force meeting on May 16. Then they go over it again to

create maps by mid-June. The final prototype will be ready by mid-July, and final reports go to funders and a technical paper to the Council. He said that they have to identify the new monitoring sites. Ari stated that if the Corps funds come in, then perhaps a graduate student of Phil King's could be brought in. Mike asked if they could do a view of Elephant Butte reservoir as full and as where it is right now. Chris said that they could do it as an ancillary deliverable. They will be prototyping this system in the NMSU Geography Department and will migrate that to the WRRRI server. Chris said the next demonstration would be at May Council meeting. Bobby suggested that Council members review what Chris has. Chris stated that he has asked institutions to identify their data repositories.

10. New business

Carlos Rincon will be invited to discuss efforts to gain Mexican participation and should be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

Ari announced that he sent Council members an EPA RFP and comments are needed from the Executive Committee by March 31 or April 1.

The URGWOM meeting will be April 10 in Albuquerque at the Corps of Engineers' office.

Jennifer asked if the WWF could get on the Executive Committee. Conrad said just fill out application, that forms might be on web site. (They are not.)

The Alliance for Rio Grande Heritage will be invited to present information at the next meeting.

Jennifer said that the WWF is trying to get national recognition for the watershed and perhaps New Mexico Governor Richardson could get Texas Governor Perry to establish a stakeholder committee to manage the river. Ari stated that Karl Wood and Jose Garcia have met with Richardson, who is looking at a border organization tying it to water commissions.

Ari distributed copies of the Spring 2003 issue of Texas A&M "Lifescapes" magazine, with an article on research on reclaimed water at the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station in El Paso.

Sue asked for comments on the PdNWC brochure comments to be sent to her.

11. Next meeting of the Executive Committee:

International Boundary and Water Commission
4171 N. Mesa, Building C, First Floor Conference Room
El Paso, Texas 79902

9:30 am, Friday, May 9, 2003 (this was subsequently changed to 10am)

Minutes recorded and written by Valerie Provencio and Nancy N. Hanks