

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

**International Boundary and Water Commission
4171 N. Mesa, Building C, First Floor Conference Room
El Paso, Texas 79902
10:00 am, Friday, May 9, 2003**

In attendance: Conrad G. Keyes, Jr., Chair Sue Watts, Assistant Chair
 Ari Michelsen, Treasurer Ed Fierro, Secretary
 Nancy Hanks, Program Coordinator

Beth Bardwell, World Wildlife Fund
Kevin Bixby, Southwest Environmental Center
Christopher Brown, Geography, New Mexico State University
Bobby Creel, New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute
Tim Darden, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Doug Echlin, U.S. International Boundary & Water Commission
Miguel A. Flores Ortiz, INIFAP
Inga Groff, League of Women Voters
Joe Groff, Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue
Brian Hanson, U. S. Fish & Wildlife
Steve Harris, Rio Grande Restoration
Mike Landis, El Paso Office, US Bureau of Reclamation
Keith Landreth, U. S. Army, Fort Bliss
Julie Maitland, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Jennifer Montoya, World Wildlife Fund
Valerie Provencio, El Paso Water Utilities
Carlos Rincon, Environmental Defense
Carlos Rivera, El Paso Office, EPA
Dan Santantonio, City of Las Cruces
Zhuping Sheng, TAMU, Agricultural Research & Extension Center
Rosemary Staley, City of El Paso
Jim Stefano, U.S. IBWC
Barnet Sugarman, Private Citizen
Marylin Taylor, Private Citizen

1. Convene Meeting (Conrad Keyes)

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 am. The Chair asked each member to introduce themselves to the group.

2. Approval of Minutes from March 28, 2003 (Nancy Hanks)

The minutes from the March 28, 2003, meeting were amended, with a few minor corrections. Julie Maitland moved to approve them as corrected and Ed Fierro seconded; the motion passed unanimously.

3. New Member Applications (Nancy Hanks)

There was a question about how members join the Council, whether by organization or by person. The Chair pointed out that the letterhead contained each person's name and organization, so membership was specifically assigned to a person. The Treasurer added that the Council's by-laws were written so as to insure an equitable representation of the different stakeholder groups on the Executive Committee, but that general membership on the Council was open to anyone. Copies of the by-laws were distributed. The Program Coordinator stated that there was a 2001 version of the by-laws on the Council's web site but that she had in her

files a more recent 8/7/02 version. She was assured that the 2002 version was the most recent.

Returning to the discussion of new membership, there was a question about the difference between being on the Executive Committee and being a general Council member. The Program Coordinator said that, aside from the responsibilities described in the by-laws, certain mailings only go to the Executive Committee, which acts as a steering committee for the group. The Executive Committee examined the representation of stakeholders on the Executive Committee and determined that there could be a slot for the World Wildlife Fund. It was decided that Jennifer Atchley Montoya would represent the WWF on the Executive Committee, provided she was approved by the Council membership.

The Treasurer asked that Jennifer tell the group why the WWF wants to be on the Executive Committee. She stated that the WWF had been active in forming the Council, has provided a grant to the Council, has goals that include river management, and sees the Council as critical to this action.

Because the by-laws state that it is the Council as a whole that elects members to the Executive Committee, it was agreed that a Council meeting could be convened within this Executive Committee meeting. After determining that there was a quorum of the Council present, the Treasurer made the motion that the Council be convened, Brian Hanson seconded, and it was voted to do so unanimously. The Treasurer then nominated Jennifer to the Executive Committee, with Joe Groff seconding, and she was voted on unanimously. The Council as a whole was then adjourned and the Executive Committee meeting reconvened.

New applications for Watershed Council membership (not the Executive Committee) were Carlos Rivera (EPA), Miguel Flores Ortiz (INIFAP), Steve Harris (Rio Grande Restoration), and Barney Sugarman (private citizen). All of these new members were in attendance and welcomed to the Council.

4. Update on Recent Proposal Activities (Nancy Hanks)

ERS/USDA (Invasive Species Competitive Grants Program)

Nancy presented information on this possible source for funding of research and decision support system development projects (www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/InvasiveSpecies/preism.htm). Jim Stefanov presented samples of boards made out of salt cedar, and suggested that a marketing initiative be developed for the product. He said it would cost the forest service about \$25,000 to \$30,000 to do that, and he hoped that the Council would pursue this as a way to offset the cost of removal of salt cedar and provide jobs. There was a discussion about what type of organization would be appropriate to apply. Jim Stefanov noted that the State of Texas already knew how many acres of salt cedar it had, but that perhaps New Mexico did not. Ari offered to contact the ERS to ask if this is the type of research they want and he also suggested that the Watershed Council could simply endorse some other group's research.

New Mexico Water Trust Board (Water Project Fund)

Nancy presented information on the Board's request for letters of interest for financial assistance for long-term water projects. There was a question about how a New Mexico entity would view a proposal that included part of Texas, as the Watershed does. It was suggested that if a New Mexico group such as the EBID proposed to request funds from the Board for projects such as enhancing EBID's data collection equipment, then it would be appropriate for the Council to support them. Ari moved to explore the possibilities of Council support and Ed seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Bobby agreed to find out if the EBID was indeed going to apply for money from the Board.

U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Coordinated Database)

Nancy stated that the Council had received a scope of work from the Corps and submitted a budget. The agreement has been signed by the Corps and Texas A&M and they await a task order from NMSU.

Other Potential Projects by the PdNWC

In response to a question regarding the EPA funding, Nancy said that the EPA had made their decision for the Watershed Initiative, and that the Council did not get the funding. Ari explained that the EPA proposal had been to look at market mechanisms to acquire land and take it out of agricultural production. Nancy said that Adele Cardenas de Malott, River Navigator for the Rio Grande, had called to introduce herself and to say that the EPA is interested in extending the Rio Grande American Heritage River Program into New Mexico.

5. Council Funding Report (Ari Michelsen)

The Treasurer presented the updated budget for the Committee's review. He provided more details on the

\$70,000 Corps grant, "Development of a Coordinated Database and GIS for Water Related Resources in the Rio Grande Watershed." The scope of work was drafted between the Galveston District Office of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station of the Texas A&M University System. It involves four tasks: (1) survey available water resource data sources; (2) obtain copies of the identified archival data in Task (1); (3) establish relationships with originating data agencies and organizations; and (4) attend quarterly and other meetings with Corps staff and/or regular URGWOM Steering Committee meetings. Some funding will go to EBID to acquire the data, about half is going to the WRRI, some money is going to Chris Brown under contract, and some is funding the Council's Program Coordinator position. The Treasurer stated that the scope of work was written so that in the future they could add tasks to this project.

The Treasurer reminded the Committee that the budget's figures are approximately 30 days old. He explained the format of the budget and how the grants impacted the salary of the Program Coordinator. He thanked the WWF for approval to purchase a color laser printer for the brochures.

6. Update on Brochure (Sue Watts)

Nancy reported that work on the Council's brochure is still underway, and that there would be a final version in both English and Spanish. Sue reported that there would be a meeting on the brochure next week. She thanked Tim for the chile photos and Beatriz for her offer to do a Spanish translation. She suggested that one brochure would not serve all audiences, so that more than one brochure may need to be created. Brian Hanson needs a copy of the brochure to take to Washington, DC, and Nancy will provide him with a copy of the old brochure. Bobby suggested that they put the prototype brochure on the web site. It was agreed that Nancy would notify members when it is there.

7. Update on Business Plan (Conrad Keyes)

There was a discussion of whether to put both the November 2002 and the April 9, 2003, business plans on the web site. The November 2002 version is currently on the web site, but it has been updated. Sue said the task under the River Network funding was to develop a strategic plan and an annual business plan, and that it would be good to have the old and new business plans on the web site, so that they would serve that annual purpose. She suggested that there be some notation on each plan to show when a task was accomplished. Conrad asked for the Executive Committee to send him comments and feedback on the plan.

Kevin asked how the business plan matched the strategic plan. Conrad explained that the strategic plan lists what the Council will do in the future and the business plan is a more detailed explanation of how it gets done. He said that not all the items in the strategic plan are in the business plan, since the Council has not determined how it will do them all. Chris moved for approval of the April 9, 2003, business plan, Julie seconded, and the vote was unanimous for approval, putting it on the web site, and updating as needed.

8. Update on Proposal for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Funding for the Paso del Norte Wetlands Project (Kevin Bixby, Southwest Environmental Center [SWEC])

Kevin Bixby reported on the NAWCA proposal to implement bird and wetland conservation plans, including the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Partners in Flight, the U. S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the U. S. Waterbird Conservation Plan. SWEC is the grantee, with 17 project partners within a \$5.9 million project. SWEC requested \$989,497. The match is \$3.2 million; the non-match is \$1.68 million. The project is to restore 921 acres of wetlands and associated uplands at 6 sites located along 120 miles of the river (Rio Bosque, Keystone Wetlands, the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park, Caballo State Park, Leasburg State Park, and Percha State Park). Kevin agreed to write a summary and Nancy will email out. He noted that the reason SWEC did not ask the Council for its support because the proposal did not require letters of support. Only letters from matching partners were included.

They expect to hear in July, but if they don't get the money then, they are put into the next grant cycle. The New Mexico legislature provided \$284,000 to fund a project at the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park, primarily to buy an easement on private land and \$50,000 is to do a master plan to create the park. New Mexico State Parks is doing the master plan, and it is expected that Mesilla Valley Bosque Park will become a state park. In the middle of that park, SWEC, City of Las Cruces, EBID, IBWC, NM Dept. of Game and Fish, and the BOR, are going forward with a wetlands project called the Picacho Wetlands. They estimate that two ponds will be supplied with water from the Picacho Drain, and they are replacing salt cedar with native species.

SWEC is a partner in another NAWCA application, this one with the Heritage Ranch Institute, which is a non-profit group working for riparian restoration on the ranch of Jim Winder in southern New Mexico. [Note: they have a participant forum on their web site, www.heritageranchinstitute.org.] Winder's land is all within the Paso del Norte watershed. Conrad offered Kevin the Council's support on that proposal. Kevin stated that the proposal will be submitted July 19 and he will keep the Council informed about how can help. Kevin said that Jim is planning on applying the price of his conservation easement as a match. Chris mentioned that a few of John Wright's geography students at NMSU just did their theses on this property, and that Kevin may want to contact them soon. Valerie asked if John Sproul and Bernie Sargent could be invited to talk about the Keystone Bosque and the Rio Bosque. Dan proposed a field trip to a bosque at the next meeting. Kevin agreed to work with Nancy to set up a field trip to the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park. Rosemary stated that there will be a groundbreaking for the new river park in northwest El Paso in late May or early June.

9. Proposed Biological Management Plan/Conceptual Restoration Plan/Funding Proposal, and Distribution of Phil King's report (Beth Bardwell, WWF)

Regarding the Biological Management Plan, Beth reported that it began as a proposal by Brian Hanson for a biological inventory. She said that at the same time, the WWF and SWEC were also working on a restoration plan. On April 23, 2003, a group (including several people on the Council) met at the WWF offices to determine how to merge the proposals. This resulted in a one-page proposal prepared by Brian and Beth, which she presented to Mike Connor, a staffer for Sen. Bingaman with duties related to Bingaman's position as Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Connor was encouraging and he thought that the representation on the Watershed Council was an excellent array of stakeholders in the region. He had several ideas about how to proceed. First, the proposal could go on Bingaman's wish list for 2004, but the timing was a little late for that. Second, he recommended that the \$8 million be handled through an agency already working on watershed initiatives. Third, Connor thought that if the Council wanted to obtain funding in a manner similar to the bosque initiative in the Middle Rio Grande, then the House Resource committee would be the one to make the proposal and that the funding would go through U. S. Fish & Wildlife.

There was an extended discussion about the revised proposal and its terminology. Julie suggested rewording the proposal in a more active tense. Ari thanked Beth and Brian for their work on this one-page proposal. There was a discussion about the best method of reporting the proposal to the New Mexico/Texas Water Commission Management Advisory Committee (MAC) and the Regional Sustainable Water Project Steering Committee (SC). It was determined that it would be appropriate for the Watershed Council to include the proposal in its update to the MAC/SC. Beth will get comments from Brian, Steve, Kevin, and Julie and then send it to Nancy and she will send it to the Executive Committee with a final draft by Friday, May 16, 2003.

Regarding Phil King's report, Beth said she is waiting for a final version, which will be a pdf file available on the web, and that Nancy would distribute its announcement to Council members when it arrives. Ari added later that some of the funding from the WWF could be used to provide Council members with hard copies. Conrad suggested just providing the Council with a CD and Nancy could make copies.

10. Reauthorization of the Rio Grande Project (Beth Bardwell, WWF)

This item was postponed to the June 30, 2003, meeting.

11. Activities of the Alliance for the Rio Grande Heritage (Jennifer Montoya and Steve Harris)

Jennifer distributed the brochure for the Alliance and read the group's mission. She said it had been active about 4 years, has had a paid staff for 2 years, and SWEC is a member of the Alliance. Its Executive Committee meets every Friday and its steering committee meets several times a year to do planning. Its goals are to create non-partisan alliances with stakeholders, to protect the river, and to establish a federal program for restoration of the upper basin. WWF has a grant to work with them on that. There will be a national campaign to show that, technically, the river can improve, perhaps in a smaller way, and that stakeholders from Candelaria to Colorado will be called upon to determine how to do this. She stated that the Alliance wants to work with the Watershed Council through conversation, roundtables, and conferences.

Steve Harris, vice-chair of the Rio Grande Conservation committee, added that there was a three-year campaign to get funding for Rio Grande restoration on the national radar screen. He said they are working in

the San Luis Valley on the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project, in the Middle Rio Grande on the Endangered Species Act Collaborative Program, and the Bosque Restoration Project in Albuquerque. They are also working on Gina Della Russo's "San Acacia South" program and he agreed to provide the Council with information on the upcoming May 13, 2003, meeting at the Servilleta National Wildlife Park regarding that plan (the Bosque Conceptual Restoration Plan for an Active Floodplain of the Rio Grande from San Acacia to San Marcial, NM). Beth added that Gina promised to give the Council a binder with the different phases of restoration they are recommending.

The Alliance is also active on the Forgotten River Advisory Committee to try to keep local programs going and to resolve our various philosophies so that we can learn from each other. Steve said the role of the Alliance is to bind people together and get support for a national effort for Rio Grande restoration.

12. Update on Mexican Participation (Carlos Rincon, Environmental Defense Fund)

Carlos reported that he had been talking to interest groups in Mexico to bring them into the Council. He introduced Miguel Flores from INIFAP and suggested that he be considered for membership on the Executive Committee. He also said that Dr. Alfredo Granados from UACJ, who could not be here today, would also like to serve on the Executive Committee. Dr. Granados is one of the three authors of the Paso del Norte Water Task Force GIS publication. It was determined that Nancy would circulate Dr. Flores statement of interest to the Executive Committee.

13. Coordinated Database GIS Project Demonstration (Christopher Brown)

This item was postponed to the June 30, 2003, meeting.

14. Other Business

Paso del Norte Water Task Force Meeting, Cd. Juárez, May 16, 2003 (Carlos Rincon, Environmental Defense Fund)

Carlos reported that the agenda for this meeting would go on web site today. He said that the Junta Municipal de Agua y Sanea Miento de Ciudad Juarez was presenting an update on its water plan, that El Paso Water Utilities was presenting information on groundwater conditions in the El Paso portion of the Hueco Bolson, and that Chris Brown would be presenting the Coordinated Database. Ari added that David Eaton from the University of Texas at Austin has been working with the U. S. State Department to bring Palestinians and Israelis together, but that the recent bombing had closed the Gaza Strip and all visas were being held. He said the meeting was rescheduled for August.

Rio Grand Basin Irrigation Efficiency Initiative, Weslaco, TX, May 27-30, 2003 (Ari Michelsen)

Ari reported that this group is a joint effort by the Texas A&M University Agriculture Program and the New Mexico State University College of Agriculture and Home Economics to implement strategies for meeting present and future water demand in the Rio Grande Basin. If members are interested, the registration is on the web. He listed the nine task areas that would be discussed at that meeting.

Valerie reported that she had 2 manuals for Riverware Software from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and that the Council may want to get permission to use it. Bobby thought that the BOR had a version that any Council member could use.

15. Date and Place of Next Meeting

Monday June 30, 2003, 9:00 am-3:00 pm
Southwest Environmental Center, 275 N. Downtown Mall
Las Cruces, NM 88001

9:00am to 3:00pm: field trip to the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park and presentations in the morning, meeting in the afternoon

16. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:10pm with a motion by Mike, a second by Dan, and a unanimous vote. Minutes recorded and written by Nancy N. Hanks