

DRAFT MINUTES
Paso del Norte Watershed Council
Executive Committee Meeting
Friday, April 1, 2005, 1:30pm
Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
Tribal Judicial Community Center
9241 Socorro Road, El Paso, TX



Attending:
Gilbert Anaya, US IBWC
Christopher Brown, New Mexico State University
Rafael Corral, Ft. Bliss
Bobby Creel, NM WRRRI
Mike Fahy, El Paso Water Utilities
Inga Groff, League of Women Voters
Joe Groff, Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue
Ed Hamlyn, UTEP
Nancy Hanks, PdNWC Program Coordinator
Jaime Iglesias, Texas Cooperative Extension
Conrad Keyes, Consultant to the USACE
Romy Ledesma, Texas Cooperative Extension
Jose Lopez, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
Jacob Massoud, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
Mike Mecke, TWRI
Ari Michelsen, TAES-TAMU
Jesus "Chuy" Reyes, EPCWID# 1
Ruben Saldana, Texas Cooperative Extension
Zhuping Sheng, TAES-TAMU
Sue Watts, Chair

1. Convening the Meeting

Sue Watts convened the meeting at approximately 1:40 pm.

2. Approval of minutes from February 28, 2005

Ping moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as written. Joe seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Introductions

Those attending introduced themselves.

4. Report on the 2005 Irrigation Season from EPCWID#1

Chuy Reyes, as a guest from El Paso County Water District #1 ("District") reported that the District ordered water on March 9, 2005, and by March 14 it had arrived at the American Canal. He stated that the allocation from the Bureau of Reclamation allowed the District's Board of Directors to begin their allocation at 22 inches this year, compared to 8 inches at the beginning of last year.

The District started their irrigation season by using water from their 62 wells but once the Project water started arriving it shut down the wells and doesn't plan to restart them again this year. The District is hoping for a full allocation of water in El Paso County, which is 4 feet; last year the District received an allocation of only 33 inches at the end of the season which was achieved primarily by mixing water from wells with the Project water and the treated wastewater it gets from the City of El Paso. Mr. Reyes explained that the water users in the Lower Valley get poorer quality water than those in the Upper Valley because in the Lower Valley they blend water from the river with water from their wells and the Upper Valley uses only water from the river (Project water), which is better quality.

The water storage level at Elephant Butte Reservoir is projected to reach 20 percent capacity in May, which is good news. Last year the District left some water in the reservoir so they would be in a better position this year. Since there is no way of knowing if the drought is over, the

District doesn't intend to raise allocations until after the May Board meeting, so it should know what the total 2005 allocation will be by June 1. The District prefers a continuous release of water which helps the Public Service Board (PSB) know how much water is available for the City. Mr. Reyes reported that the problems between the PSB and the District have been resolved, thus avoiding lawsuits and saving the District an estimated \$2 million.

Mr. Reyes estimates that since March 9, 2005, the District has irrigated about 30,000 acres of land, so the farmers are well on their way to preparing for the 2005 growing season. In other news, the District has been working with the Ysleta Independent School District (YISD) by placing part of the Southside Canal underground for safety reasons (its proximity to South Loop Elementary School) and selling overlying land to the YISD for a bus drop-off location. He is also working with the YISD on a similar project regarding the drain behind the Ysleta High School. Also, there is a small parcel of land that he is working with Mayor Wardy and Paul Escobar to turn it into a park for the neighborhood.

Joe Groff asked about the bill to change the District elections for its Board members. Mr. Reyes stated that currently there are approximately 170,000 people qualified to vote in District elections and they don't have to pay taxes to the District to vote. The proposed bill would reduce that number to about 70,000-75,000 people. Joe asked about the depth of the water wells in the Lower Valley. Mr. Reyes stated that they were about 100 feet deep, and that the quality is poor. He said that the well water could be mixed with project water or treated wastewater. He stated that the District has been working with the Rio Bosque regarding its water needs by providing it with water and by having a well drilled. The Rio Bosque is working to install a pump and motor.

Mr. Reyes distributed the most recent "Drought Watch" to the group. Conrad Keyes suggested that a similar illustration be done for water levels in the upstream reservoirs and that the information be posted on the Council's web site. Water will not be stored upstream of Elephant Butte Reservoir until it reaches 20 percent capacity (400,000 acre feet).

Sue asked about the salt accumulation in agricultural land in the Lower Valley. Mr. Reyes stated that the wells were originally drilled to remove salt from the land but that since they have been using well water to irrigate the farmers have seen a salt build-up. The crop production, especially pecans, was down last year, particularly in areas of heavy clay soil. Ari Michelsen reported that Dr. Sheng and Dr. Miyamoto from the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station are working on this. Sue asked that one of them give a short report on their findings at a future meeting.

Zhuping Sheng asked about canal lining. Mr. Reyes stated that the District was hoping to acquire funds to line canals, beginning with the Riverside Canal which is located in front of the Jonathan Rogers Wastewater Treatment Plant. The Rio Bosque is concerned that they will lose the seepage that exists now. District engineer Dr. Al Blair is working to help them.

Mr. Reyes stated that he has also applied for money to prevent dumping into the District irrigation canals and drains. This year there were five 55-gallon drums of oil dropped into the canals and that was costly to clean up.

Ari Michelsen asked about progress in third-party leasing agreements. Mr. Reyes stated that the District has worked out a short-term forbearance contract with the PSB for farmers to be able to lease their water rights (in the short-term) to the PSB. To date, none have taken advantage of it, but they are working on a permanent forbearance contract and they hope to be finished with it by 2006. Because of the improved water situation this year, EPWU has received some benefit from the District wells.

Mike Mecke asked about the possibility of funding from the North American Development Bank (NADBank). Mr. Reyes reported that the District wants to apply for it but that it doesn't want to take funding away from other projects along the lower Rio Grande. The Council invited Mr. Reyes to send a representative from the District to Council meetings.

5. Council Activities

▪ Report on March 10 URGWOM presentation and March 11 Coordinated Database/GIS Workshop comments

Ping reported that on March 10, 2005, he, Conrad, and Nancy attended the URGWOM Steering Committee meeting in Albuquerque. Ping made a presentation in which he tried to show how the Coordinated Database/GIS can link to URGWOM. The March 11 presentation was given by Christopher Brown, his students, and Ping. Both workshops went well. Ping offered preliminary reports to those who have not received it and copies of the PowerPoint presentation.

Ari reported that the Technical Committee had met before this meeting and is continuing to work on Phases 3 and 4 for additional funding and on some tasks included in the Challenge Grant Program. The USACE funding runs through June 2005. Chris reported on a meeting yesterday in Las Cruces designed to brief Sen. Jeff Bingaman at the NM WRRRI. At that meeting, Karl Wood presented information on WRRRI programs, Chris on Council programs, and Erin Ward on SCERP and Border 2012 programs, all stressing the value of partnerships, especially in relation to Senate Bill 214. Ping thanked the members of the Technical Committee members for their work.

▪ Report on URGWOM support letter

Mike Fahy said that the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission was in the process of composing a letter to congressional representatives to support extending URGWOM into the Paso del Norte watershed area. Conrad reported that the FY 2006 budget for the Corps is \$1.055 million for the URGWOPS review and EIS, and that it is a line item for the first time. He urged the Council to ask for additional write-in support for this region. Right now, only about \$55,000 is allocated for the updating of URGWOM from the Middle Rio Grande Valley down to this area; there is no money for the Rio Grande Project area at this time.

Sue stated she would entertain a motion to write a letter to our Congressional delegation and to the USACE recommending that URGWOM be used to model our section of the Rio Grande, in addition to the money allotted for upstream modeling. Ari suggested that the Council letter identify the connection between URGWOM and the importance of having the water flow and quality information. The Council has taken the lead in developing a coordinated water resources database in support of these efforts, and it requests additional funds be allocated to the Watershed Council for the purpose of developing this information. Conrad mentioned that some of the 2005 funding is now being used by the IBWC to support the FLO2D modeling. The Council's letter should be presented as information to the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission. Chris asked Mike to provide template to Sue, who will work with Conrad on revising it.

▪ Visit by Middle East Delegation, April 15-21

Ed Hamlyn reported that UTEP has received a grant from the State Department to bring in delegations from Palestine, Israel, and Jordan as part of a planning study of 11 communities that lie along the Green Line. They will be in El Paso from April 14 to 21, concluding with a video teleconference to DC and Tel Aviv. Ed will be approaching some Council members and asked if the Council wants to send its officers to meet with them. Chris suggested that the history of the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission would be informative, as well as that of the Sustainable Water Project, out of which the database developed. Conrad suggested Valerie's presentation would be appropriate. Ed said he would find some time blocks for the meeting. Nancy was instructed to give Ed the Council mailing list and to convey those times to the officers.

▪ Discussion of Proposed Letter to Stakeholders

Brian reported that last year the IBWC conducted meetings of invited stakeholders regarding the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Rio Grande Canalization Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Gov. Richardson and Sen. Bingaman requested a one-year extension. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) will be sending out a report on the canalization project, recommending that the IBWC coordinate with the Council on bringing the stakeholders together. The FWS reviewed the NEPA document and had a different preferred alternative than the IBWC. Brian suggested that the Council send a letter to those stakeholders identified in the other letters, to try to get them to meet. Bobby Creel asked if the IBWC has asked the Council to assist in this matter and Sue

reported that Commissioner Duran had asked. Bobby asked if there was any letter of notification from the IBWC. Sue remembered that the IBWC halted the EIS, pending further stakeholder resolution, and that Doug Echlin had verbally asked stakeholders to come forward in November 2004. Brian's letter proposes that stakeholder groups meet. Ari stated that, under NEPA, the IBWC cannot ask the stakeholders to meet in this manner. The EBID attorneys say a ROD needs to come out before EBID can oppose it. Gilbert reported that the IBWC is waiting for a legal opinion to see if they can hold that type of meeting with these specific groups or whether it must allow all other groups to participate. Ari suggested we ask the IBWC to clarify how the input should be provided and remind stakeholders of this; since the Governor asked for a one-year extension, we need the clarification shortly. He suggested giving the IBWC four weeks to respond. Sue asked if the letter should go to the IBWC but copy all mentioned. Ari said we need clarification in writing from IBWC.

It was determined that Sue will take Brian's letter and rework it, circulate it, then send it out to the Executive Committee and present it to the MAC. The Council can only refer to the two letters it has, since it doesn't know who else wrote letters, and these two letters are the reason the ROD was delayed. Ari suggested wording the letter to refer to these two letters, "as well as additional letters," without going into details about who they were. There was concern about the Programmatic EIS going forward without a ROD for the EIS. Conrad remembered a public announcement at a Citizens Forum that the ROD would be delayed.

- **Proposal to Stagger Executive Committee Terms**

Nancy reported that, in order to provide the Executive Committee with staggered terms (to insure continuity), some members would have to volunteer to come up for re-election in 2006. Ed Hamlyn and Joe Groff volunteered. Thus the current terms for the 16 Executive Committee members are the following:

Bixby	Fall 2007
Brown	Volunteered 2006
Darden	Fall 2005
Granados	Volunteered 2006
Groff I.	Volunteered 2006
Groff J.	Fall 2007
Hamlyn	Volunteered 2006
Hanson	Fall 2007
Maitland	Fall 2005
Michelsen	Fall 2005
Montoya	Fall 2005
Olague	Fall 2007
Provencio	Volunteered 2006
Rincon	Fall 2007
Sheng	Fall 2007
Watts	Fall 2005

6. Review of Work Plan

Nancy suggested the Committee look at the Work Plan that was developed six months ago. Conrad asked about the Biological Group's proposal. Brian reported that Jennifer is issuing a contract from the World Wildlife Fund to hire a consultant to develop a scope of work for a biological management plan. Sue noted that each of the working groups needs to bring their particular documentation up-to-date. Ari pointed out that the Technical Working Group reviewed its work plan today and made some adjustments. Conrad suggested that the Biological Group review the Upper Rio Grande EIS and attend those meetings in El Paso, as well as URGWOPS. Brian will find out if the public meetings will be in June.

7. Budget

Ari reported that there was not much change from the previous budget. Ping is wrapping up Phase 2 of the EPWU Coordinated Database/GIS. A no-cost extension was submitted and accepted for EPWU Organizational Support funding.

8. Meetings Recently Attended

Nancy reported that she had attended Rio Grande Day on March 9 at the New Mexico State Capitol. She had also attended a meeting of the Saltcedar Biological Control Consortium on March 29-30 in El Paso. Rafael Corral expressed concern about releasing non-native species for this purpose.

9. Upcoming Meetings that will be Attended

Ari reported on the upcoming Joint Rio Grande Basin Initiatives Annual Conference to be held in Alpine on April 12-14 and the 2005 River and Lake Restoration meeting to be held in Portland, Maine, on July 12-14. He will provide the information to Nancy for distribution. Mike provided a report, "Source Water Protection Alliances Between Watershed Groups and Agricultural Operations."

10. Other Business

Joe thanked the IBWC for providing funding to upgrade the web site. He also asked for members to volunteer to give presentations at meetings. He suggested electing Rafael Corral to the Executive Committee; Rafael promised he would check with Ft. Bliss regarding this. Joe also suggested representatives attending from the Texas Cooperative Extension be elected to the Executive Committee. Nancy promised to send information to all who were attending but who were not members. Also, Mike Mecke has provided the Council with a copy of a video, "Texas: The State of Water."

Mike Fahy asked about a pre-proposal to the Water Reuse Foundation with a mid-May due date. It was agreed to circulate it among the officers and Executive Committee. He also announced that May 1-7 is Drinking Water Week.

11. Date and Location of the next Executive Committee Meeting

The next Paso del Norte Watershed Council meeting will be on May 23, 2005, at 1:30 pm in Las Cruces at NM WRRI. [Subsequently, the date was changed to June 3, 2005, at 9:00 am in Las Cruces at NMDA.]

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Nancy N. Hanks