



Draft Minutes

Paso del Norte Watershed Council Executive Committee
New Mexico WRRRI
Stucky Hall, 3170 S. Espina St
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, NM 88003
April 9, 2007

In Attendance:

Hilary Brinegar
Zhuping Sheng
Girisha Ganjengunte
Conrad Keyes
Stan Ellis
Bobby Creel
Peter Bennett
Gerry Quisenberry

Ray Lister
Cynthia Campo
Joe Groff
Vanessa Lougheed
Inga Groff
Chris Brown
Brian Hanson
Deb Hibbard

Kevin Bixby
Sue Watts, Chair
Julie Maitland, Asst Chair
Jennifer Montoya,
Secretary
Ari Michelsen, Treasurer

1. Convene meeting 9:00 a.m.-Meeting called to order by Sue Watts.

2. Introduction: Those present introduced themselves. New to the Council are Dr. Lougheed, Stan Ellis, and Peter Bennett. Dr. Lougheed will replace Bob Currey from CERM at UTEP. She is active in wetland research and restoration along the Rio Grande. Stan Ellis is the superintendent of the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park, a water-based park, and is looking forward to identifying areas for mutual support with the Council. Peter Bennett is representing the City of Las Cruces, and specifically is working on its storm water management plan.

3. Minutes: Approval of minutes from Feb 1, 2007. Delayed. Minutes to be distributed electronically for review and later approval.

4. Integrated Watershed Management: Deb Hibbard, contractor for the Army Corps of Engineers spoke about integrated management of the Rio Grande in a watershed context. The Corps has a directive to develop a strategy and a plan for integrated management of the river from border to border in New Mexico. Deb has been looking at Kissimmee, Upper San Pedro, Murray, Everglades, Klamath, and Upper Mississippi watersheds to get ideas about the management of the Rio Grande. She also has been conducting extensive interviews with a diversity of individuals along the Rio Grande in New Mexico, and the immediate border areas in Colorado and Texas, to gather their ideas and input.

Several elements are necessary, foremost participation of the Tribes. The Corps will facilitate the development of a common set of goals for river management based on the many plans that

already exist, such as Hope for a Living River and Middle Rio Grande plans, as well as existing regional water plans. A regional approach provides for local input as well as the opportunity to address the unique issues, opportunities, and challenges of that region. It also enables the participation of a broad range of entities, from local landowners to international agencies. Through both the interview process and her research, Deb has discovered that water managers and river restoration people are speaking different languages. In the Middle Valley there is an ecosystem approach and a single species approach to management that need to be reconciled. The Corps approach recognizes that regional and local groups can have a more immediate and effective impact on local policy, addressing such issues as housing development in floodplains.

The research, to date, has identified certain ingredients fundamental to the development of an integrated management plan: 1. Need for a common vision. 2. Identification of vital participants and establishment of dialogue. 3. Adequate time to develop relationships and build trust. 4. Inventory of existing plans. 5. Development of some sort of clearinghouse. 6. GIS database. 7. Technical teams. 8. A process for periodic outside evaluation.

Incorporating elements of regional water plans will be integral to each region's integrated management planning process.

The Corps is not intending to impose a program on people. They simply want to empower and support the already existing regional efforts in the development of an integrated management plan for their regions, to be joined into an overall plan for the Rio Grande, from border to border. Funding and implementation of the regional plans would link into a basinwide effort. This could be a good opportunity for PdNWC to develop a budget for what is needed to develop a watershed plan for this region. Deb would like to come back in a couple of months for further discussion. Deb's email is rioheart@rt66.com.

5. Watershed Restoration on BLM Lands (Ray Lister) Powerpoint Presentation

Las Cruces District of the Bureau of Land Management has 5.5 million acres in 6 counties in two land use plans: White Sands and Mimbres Resource Management Plans (RMP). There are 12 watershed management plans prioritized in the two documents but they are 17 years old and need updating. The BLM is presently revising those RMPs and establishing prioritization criteria. BLM will assess public land health standards through watershed assessment versus individual activity plans. BLM has 600 allotments and those permits must be renewed by 2009. The Lower Rio Grande Watershed alone has 70 total allotments.

Upland ecological sites must be in a productive and sustainable condition within the capability of the site. Ecological processes must support productive biotic communities. Riparian areas must be properly functioning within the capability of the site. Federal programs drive the funding of the BLM "Restore NM" initiative such as the NRCS Federal EQIP Program, and the Federal Clean Water Act 319 Program. BLM "Restore NM" has five million extra dollars for BLM NM to support the NRCS EQIP program. Priority projects are associated with oil field reclamation and prairie chicken habitat. Las Cruces District received \$700,000 for EQIP projects. An example of its use: A rancher may suggest brush control, fencing or pipelines to improve grazing practices and his funds are matched with EQIP funds. Producer is ranked higher if they propose

several different kinds of projects. It's a matching program, sometimes 50/50, sometimes 70/30. BLM is writing a WRAS for the Tularosa Watershed, under the 319 program.

The Priority Watersheds for the Las Cruces office are the Gila, Mimbres, Playas, Jornada, Tularosa, and Salt Basin. The Lower Rio Grande is not a priority because allotments are small and there are few EQIP applications.

Since the floods of late July 2006, new priorities are emerging in the Rio Grande watershed. An inventory of dams in the region is needed. Many dams under BLM's responsibility are in need of redesign or repair. Many are completely silted-in. All are state-permitted facilities. Detention dams are designed to let water out slowly through a pipe and many outlets are covered up.

Main issues of concern for the BLM at present are safety and liability. They are utilizing LIDAR photography purchased by Dona Ana County and Arc Hydro to predict where excessive flows may occur. Preliminary results demonstrate that subdivisions are diverting water in drainages. Final results will be included in the RMP. The draft RMP is to be completed by October 2007 with the plan finalized by October of 2008

6. 319 grant update (Geri and Julie) Communications Materials were passed out. Two fact sheets are completed: one about the Coordinated Database and one about the 319 project. A new display was shown (created specifically for Rio Grande Day at the Roundhouse) and Geri has also produced a banner for outdoor display. .

- Several meetings are scheduled in the coming month (City of Las Cruces, Dona Ana County, Rio Grande Citizens Forum) which will update stakeholders about the progress of the 319 grant. The stakeholder field trip through the watershed is scheduled for Saturday May 5th (8 to 3). WWF is sponsoring the luncheon at Chopes. The Stakeholder Best Management Practices meeting is scheduled for Thursday May 17th at 6 pm.
- Geri's contract ends on May 31st. She has joined the Peace Corps and will be departing July 1. She recommends we seek funding to keep a Coordinator on contract.

7. Technical Committee update (Zhuping/Chris/Conrad)

Two projects Corps project- Mac Fies attend March 19 meeting to provide info on URGWOM and URGWOPS. The technical committee's recommended revisions to the contract have been . On May 10, there will be a signing ceremony for cooperators and steering committee. The Council is a cooperator and will be invited to the meeting. In the budget for the new fiscal year budget, the PdNWC project would be included. So we need to prepare a scope of work for coming year. The project involves surface water/ground water interaction for Rio Grande flows from Elephant Butte to Fort Quitman. Chris is working on the enhancement of data-sharing for database and the Riverware model. Ping is still working on the Phase 3 technical report and then it will be reviewed by WRI and Texas Water Institute. Phase 2 is published. You can request a hardcopy from Bobby Creel.

EBID is installing several water quality monitoring stations that will be added to the coordinated database. There might be up to 50 sites that will be added. Chris Brown is finishing Microsoft enhancement query. This project scheduled to end at the end of July. We will host a users' workshop at NMSU in early June.

8. Treasurer's report (Ari)

See attached.

9. Other updates

- SWEC reported that Memorial 13, which recognizes the importance of restoring the Rio Grande, was passed by NM legislature. The Senate passed memorial unanimously.
- WWF: WWF in Chihuahua City is hosting an Environmental Flows Conference June 6&7. The Governor of New Mexico has provided \$3 million for the Land, Water and Clean Energy Program to be administered through the Department of Minerals, Energy and Natural Resources. He has also committed an additional \$3 million for a statewide River Ecosystem Restoration Program to be administered through the Environment Department. WWF hosted a discussion on a potential North American Wetlands Conservation Act proposal to be submitted in 2008.
- Ari handed out the Western States Water Council Bulletin and Drought Watch.
- PdN Water Task Force- Several PdN members were in attendance. It has an associate member category, non-voting. Because Ari and Chris are on the support team we may have adequate representation. The Water Task Force has a grant from a Border Health initiative for education programs with reclaimed water.

10. New business

- In an effort to keep the PdN strategic plans current, it was decided that each subcommittee will review their strategic plans and report back in two meetings.
- Upcoming projects/issues: Inga said that reports of estrogens in the water supply are troubling and she would like to ask for a statement of position from El Paso Water Utility.
- EP#1 Concrete Lining at Riverside Canal and its impact on Rio Bosque Wetlands Park was discussed.
- Memorial passed by NM legislature to be put on the website.
- Brian: Middle Rio Grande Bosque Initiative is not going to be a write-in program this year and may be zeroed out. PdN Watershed council could send a letter of support to try to become part of the congressional add-on that is done every year. PdN could send the letter to USFWS. Some agencies should have some discretionary funding.

11. Next Meeting.

Next meeting: Friday June 1, Wooten Hall or Thomas Hall 9:00-10:30. Business meeting will follow GIS demonstration meeting.

- Target audience would be people who would want to use it, funders and staff of the agencies that participated.