



Minutes

PdNWC Executive Committee Meeting
4 June - 3:00 – 5:00 pm
Best Western Mesilla Valley Inn
901 Avenida de Mesilla
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88005
Santa Maria Room

Christopher Brown, Chair
Jennifer Montoya, Secretary

Sue Watts, Vice Chair
Ari Michelsen, Treasurer

Introductions:

Ari Michelsen
Michael Fies
Alfredo Granados
Bobby Creel
Zhuping Sheng
Christopher Brown
Conrad Keyes, Jr.
Wayne Belzer
Kevin Bixby
Barbara Kauffman
Sue Watts

Girisha Ganjgunte
Peter Bennett
Hilary Brinegar
Beth Bardwell
Julie Maitland
Carol McCall
Vanessa Loughheed
Woody Irving
Carlos A. Rincon
Mike Landis

1-Approval of the agenda – (All): Amended to include a presentation by Kevin Bixby, Executive Committee member and Director of the Southwest Environmental Center.

2- Approval of minutes from April Meeting (All): Minutes will be approved via email at a later date.

3-City of Las Cruces (CLC) projects dealing with the Rio Grande River (Carol McCall, CLC Community Development Department): The River Ecosystem Corridor Project for the City of Las Cruces has been underway since 2000 when the City obtained an EPA grant for \$250,000. With additional contributions from partners, up to \$450,000 has been spent on the development of trails and the Picacho Wetland (within the Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park).

Carol provided background and history of how the project was implemented, through public meetings and plan development. There were many recommendations by the public, such as preserving open space and agricultural lands, restoring riparian species, creating a multi-use trail system, increasing ecotourism, expanding recreational opportunities and educating the public

about the Rio Grande. Many of these ideas are still just sitting on the shelf and have not been picked up by the City for implementation. The Council discussed the importance of linking this process into the current Vision 2040 planning effort underway between the City and the County. With the current City Council make-up, there are opportunities now for promoting specific elements of the plan. PdNWC EC Chair Brown expressed an interest in working with Carol on these future steps, perhaps as a thesis topic in the NMSU Department of Geography.

4-Update on Rio Grande Canalization Collaborative Project (Beth Bardwell, WWF Las Cruces): In 2004, the final EIS for the Canalization Project was unpopular with many stakeholders. A process was developed by WWF and others to create an alternative that addressed the concerns of farmers, the irrigation district, conservation groups, and recreation interests. The Army Corps of Engineers was contracted to develop the alternative and to host three collaborative stakeholder meetings. Two of those meetings have been held.

The Corps is writing a Conceptual Restoration Plan, which will be the new alternative, based on the interests expressed at the first two meetings. Features in the plan to date are: 30 sites selected for restoration in the 105 mile canalization stretch, a water budget, and modified grazing and mowing practices. Increases in evaporation caused by an increase in surface area in the open water habitats, increases in overbank flooding, and evapotranspiration by plants are factors being considered in the water budget.

WWF is developing a strategy for obtaining water rights to be applied to the restoration sites, such as donations by flatraters, leasing water, waterbanks, and the ISC waterbank. The Council members were extremely interested in the process and Beth suggested that the Council could engage in this issue by providing direction in overcoming the various legal and institutional obstacles of obtaining the water for restoration as well as providing environmental flows to sites in Texas.

There was also a broad discussion on the changes in the local water market and recent transactions that affect the price of water. Bobby Creel mentioned that Frank Ward is embarking on a study of the forces influencing water prices in the area.

5-Update on the Coordinated Database Project and activities of the Technical Committee (Zhuping Sheng): The Phase IV Technical Report has been finished. This will be a joint report peer reviewed by NM Water Resources Research Institute and the Texas A&M AgriLife Center. This phase of work involved the inclusion of groundwater objects to examine surface water and ground water interactions, and the results of the work are promising. Parties interested in learning more can contact Zhuping Sheng at the Texas A&M Agrilife Center (z-sheng@tamu.edu).

6-Update on IBWC representation and discussion of Rio Grande Citizen's Forum agenda for their June 4th meeting (Sally Speener, IBWC & Chris Brown): Chris will be sending a letter to Commissioner Carlos Marin requesting IBWC representation on the Council to fill in the gap left by Steve Smullen, who has moved to the IBWC office in San Diego. Sally indicated that

the IBWC intends to continue its participation in the Council. The agenda for the IBWC Citizen's Forum, to be held in the same room later that day, was presented.

7-River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative project with EBID, PdNWC, La Union SWC District, and NMSU (Julie Maitland, NMDA): Julie, Chris Canavan of NMED and Dr. Phil King, consultant to EBID, recently discussed the funding available for river ecosystem funding and potential collaboration among our entities on improving water quality with these funds. Julie requested a letter of support the EBID's proposal submission RER initiative. EBID has restored habitat within the Selden Drain with funding from the previous year's RER initiative and would like to continue the work by installing water quality monitoring stations above the restored site and below the restored site to monitor E. coli levels.

A long discussion ensued regarding our process and criteria for supporting non-Council projects.

8-Discussion of funding for Watershed Coordinator Position – All: This topic was lightly covered in agenda item 8 so we skipped to the next item.

9-Other issues – Kevin Bixby presented his RER proposal for the La Mancha wetlands. SWEC has received three acres adjacent to the IBWC levee as a gift and they intend to create a wetland on it. The site is on the west side of the river, off Fairacres Road, south of I-10. The goal of the wetland is to provide riparian habitat, serve as a model for wetland restoration, and to provide educational opportunities. Partners include the Town of Mesilla, IBWC, Alma d'Arte High School, NMSU Fisheries and Wildlife, NMSU Scientifically Connected Communities, Community Volunteers. The request to NMED RER initiative is \$100,000.

Sue Watts moved to have the Council officers draft endorsement letters to the proponents of the La Mancha Wetland and to the proponents of Selden Canyon, in support of their proposals to RER, stating they are good projects, and in line with the goals of the Council. Zhuping Sheng seconded the motion. The motion was carried on a vote of 11 to 1.

10-Treasurers Report: Ari Michelsen.

11-Location and date of next meeting: July 22nd, 2 p.m., El Paso. Place TBD.