

Biology Committee Meeting, Paso del Norte Watershed Council

March 2, 2015 10:00 AM Final

Biology Committee, PDNWC, Kevin Bixby Chair; Brian Hanson CoChair

at Southwest Environmental Center at 275 North Downtown Mall Las Cruces 88001

Attendees – Brian Hanson, Kevin Bixby, Conrad Keyes, Jan Kirwan, Gill Sorg, Ken Stinnett, Peter Bennett, Elizabeth Verdecchia

We discussed all the agenda items below.

1. Old proposals (limited discussion, so conclusions on what to do)

a) Blue Earth 2005 proposal (\$60,000 - \$75,000)

b) Watershed mgmt plan 2003 (budget \$600,000)

c) Integrated Plan from Watershed Council proposal yr 2010 (at least \$50,000)

The above plans covers 200 miles of the Rio Grande watershed. Would include – Intro, Existing Condition, Description of stressors, restoration goals, identification and prioritization of strategies, development of restoration tasks, timeline and milestones, implementation and administration, regional stakeholder involvement, literature cited.

2. Ideas for watershed improvement -

a. conferences,

b. field trips,

c. local watershed restoration success stories meetings or brochures,

d. informative series of meetings for the public about wildlife in the area,

e. put together informative brochures on watershed health,

f. more PDNWC website information,

g. put together a biology book of the Las Cruces area or perhaps the El Paso area that would address common species. No such book exists today.

3. Wetland development of the LC Utilities waste water discharge at the Rio Grande. Gill Sorg submitted this. Las Cruces is concerned if a large flow between the levees occurs, it may wipe out the sewage treatment discharge. They are interested in exploring putting in a wetland.

4. Major recent environmental documents include:

A. Biological Data Survey for Paseo del Norte Watershed Restoration Action Strategy NM Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, USGS, NMSU, Las Cruces Sept 2007

B. Conceptual Restoration Plan and Cumulative Effects Analysis, Rio Grande – Caballo Dam to American Dam, New Mexico and Texas USIBWC March 2009

5. Discussion Points –

- Brian started by stating that to protect watersheds, the public needs to be informed about biology including the young; and a good way to do that is to get them out in nature. All agreed.
- Conrad mentioned that BLM is talking about helping with the many flood control dams in the watershed. They are exploring taking sediment out of dams to relieve pressure on some of the unsafe dams. We discussed how we could do this and settled on looking at

providing principles perhaps or be a clearing house for information (website). Brian volunteered to visit with BLM.

- Kevin mentioned a recent magazine that discusses ecological restoration called – Ecological Restoration in the U.S. – Mexico Border Region, December 2014. Perhaps this would help guide us.
www.epa.gov/ofacmo/gneb/gneb16threport/English-GNEB-16th-report.pdf
- We talked about public forums and perhaps hosting a conference. It was mentioned that volunteering for activities in the PDNWC was very poor and perhaps we should consider setting up a booth at local events instead. We continued the discussion and it was clear that we would have to define our audience to be successful. For example, would a conference gather the latest technology in restoration, a technical conference? or Aimed at the general public? Aimed at students? Aimed at telling the public about the PDNWC? Conrad mentioned that a conference could be funded by BR funds. Everybody seemed in favor of hosting a conference. Kevin volunteered to put together a statement of work and circulate it in the committee for review.

After the meeting I, Brian, discussed dams with BLM's Rusty Stovall at his office. (575-525-4411; rstovall@blm.gov) Chief of Operations for Las Cruces District.

As you can expect, dams are a complicated issue. I guess there are about 50 flood control dams; 20 are BLM's and the other 30 have right-a-ways from BLM. Most BLM dams are away from communities so aren't a big problem. BLM is modifying some of the dams with drop structures.

- A. One solution is to remove the sediment in the dams so they function and are safe. The issue here is where to put the sediment?
- B. Remove the unsafe dam. Issue is what to do with the sediment behind the dam. A big problem.
- C. BLM is addressing some dams by putting drop structures (gabions) at the dam face to allow flood waters to flow over.
- D. Some dams are doing just fine. He mentioned most EBID dams are good.

I mentioned to Rusty that consideration should include improving the watershed above the dam to reduce flows. I also mentioned that removing the dam could result in normal, healthy runoff. Arroyos could be improved by establishing vegetation. The dam pool area could be good wildlife habitat. I told Rusty that PDNWC could support measures that protected or improved watershed health. He mentioned he was looking at grants and working with the Stormwater Coalition.

Since this is such a complicated issue, I suggested a field trip with our committee and he said he could do it. I will try to arrange a field trip. Maybe our next Biology Committee meeting could be at BLM and then go on a field trip.

After the meeting, Jan provided the below comments concerning a wetland by the LC Utilities March 4, 2015 email to Biology Committee

Hey Brian,

Just to reiterate, currently the reclaim water downstream of the outfall supports a myriad of wildlife all along it's stretch which depending of conditions has longer or shorter reaches. Wildlife from the riparian areas utilize the reclaim water as their primary and mostly only water

source. The current regime allows for wildlife off all sorts (both predators and prey species) to space themselves, access water without an abundance congestion, competition and/or predation. Wildlife viewing along the river/reclaim water stream is a large part of the visitor experience to the park. The probability exists that the construction of a wetland upstream from the park would impact the amount, flow and or duration of reclaim water we see along the eastern boundary of the state park, dependent of the size and structure of the proposed wetland. I appreciate that there are numerous permitting and other legal details that the City will have to address before planning for this project can move forward but wanted to again voice my concern to the committee. Brian can you please amend the meeting notes to reflect my comments? Appreciate it!

Thank you,

Jan

Janet A. Kirwan, Superintendent
Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park

You can reach me, Brian, - email bhanson5@comcast.net
on my cell at 505-235-0427 or home in Albuquerque at 505-856-1386