

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

Monday August 11, 2003, 9:00 am

**New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute
Stucky Hall, 3170 S. Espina St.
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, NM 88003**

In attendance: Conrad G. Keyes, Jr., Chair Sue Watts, Assistant Chair
 Ari Michelsen, Treasurer Nancy Hanks, Program Coordinator
Stacy Bellavia, U.S. International Boundary & Water Commission
Kevin Bixby, Southwest Environmental Center
Christopher Brown, Geography, New Mexico State University
Doug Echlin, U. S. Section International Boundary & Water Commission
Alfredo O. Granados, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez
Inga Groff, League of Women Voters
Joe Groff, Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue
Brian Hanson, U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Julie Maitland, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Jennifer Montoya, World Wildlife Fund
Valerie Provencio, El Paso Water Utilities
Carlos A. Rincon, Environmental Defense Fund
Zhuping Sheng, TAMU, Agricultural Research & Extension Center
Rosemary Staley, City of El Paso
Jim Stefanov, U. S. Section International Boundary & Water Commission
Marylin Taylor, Citizen
Beatriz Vera, Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition

1. Convene Executive Committee Meeting (Conrad Keyes)

The Executive Committee convened at 9:05 am. Each member provided their introduction. Jim Stefanov introduced Stacy Bellavia as the new GIS person at the IBWC.

2. Approval of Minutes from May 9, 2003 (Nancy Hanks)

Conrad went over the list of action items as performed. The minutes of June 30, 2003, were approved as written, moved by Julie and seconded by ZhuPing.

3. Reports and Updates

• Council Activities (Nancy Hanks)

New Member Applications. Beatriz Vera from the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basic Coalition was announced as a new member.

American Heritage River Initiative (AHRI/EPA)—Nancy distributed information about the program and asked Beatriz to inform the Executive Committee of the ongoing plans for the fall AHRI meeting at UTEP on November 3 and 4, since the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition is co-sponsoring the event. Beatriz described the EPA's program, inviting the Council to participate. Ari suggested that Valerie present her PowerPoint talk at the conference and Valerie agreed to do so. Beatriz added that if the brochure was ready by then, 300 copies could be distributed at the conference. Rosemary agreed to email EPA and let them know of the Council's offer to participate.

URGWOM Steering Committee—Nancy stated that she had attended the July 10, 2003, URGWOM meeting. Chris stated that he will give the report on the Coordinated Database at the August 14, 2003, meeting. Nancy

agreed to email him the project's status report.

New Domain names for website. Nancy distributed the new domain names for the web site. The main name will be www.pdnwc.org. The secondary name will be pdnwatershed.org. Both names now point to the web site, which is still located at NMSU.

Request from the City of Las Cruces for assistance. Nancy distributed a July 17, 2003, email request she received from Carol McCall of the City of Las Cruces Community Development Department, asking for comments on the city's Rio Grande Corridor Project. The Project encompasses a distance of eleven linear miles, from the Shalem Colony Bridge to the Mesilla Dam, and is envisioned for both the western and eastern banks of the southern Rio Grande. Nancy offered to email the details of the city's Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives to Council members who were interested.

Keystone Heritage Park learning project. Nancy distributed a July 29, 2003, email request she received from Albert Ortiz, a fifth-grade teacher at Desert View Elementary School in Sunland Park, New Mexico. For the past two years, he has been part of a program called "Engaged Learning," in which his students have performed water analysis at Keystone Heritage Park.

Request from Bernie Sargent. Nancy distributed an August 7, 2003, email request she received from Bernie Sargent of Keystone Heritage Park regarding the proposed development of Resler Arroyo in El Paso. This was attached to a July 25, 2003, news story from www.elpasotimes.com that Nancy had downloaded for details of the project. Doug Echlin spoke to the Committee as one of the neighbors to this proposed project. He said that the arroyo is within the 100-year floodplain. Rosemary asked if anyone knew of a source of funds to buy out the property. Anthony Cobos is the City Council representative for that part of El Paso. Ari asked if the Council wanted to address this, since originally land issues weren't part of the Council's charge. Brian stated that these drainages are part of the ecosystem and thus part of the watershed. Jennifer said that the Council needed a plan that discussed the watershed as a whole and that it was too early for the Council to speak as a body. Sue thought that the Council could simply state that the arroyo helps support the Keystone wetlands, and that if the development occurs it would affect the community and this valuable resource, and that the Council could just ask the developer to consider this.

Jennifer suggested that the Council could show the long-cost of building in floodplains. Kevin thought there would be an opportunity to comment later on the 404 permit application, but that it would be powerful if the Council sent a letter to the city to voice its concerns. Carlos stated that he liked Sue's phraseology. Ari said that we could stress the importance of these riparian areas and ask the City to take into account these other factors before final approval. Brian asked to whom the letter should be addressed and Rosemary stated that the City Plan Commission was the appropriate party. Carlos moved that the Committee draft a letter to the Commission and Inga seconded. Julie suggested the Committee send a copy to the developer. Jennifer added that a copy should also go to Keystone. Brian stated that he would prefer a more phased approach, beginning with sending a general letter to the City Planning Department regarding riparian areas and floodplains coming into the Rio Grande and not highlighting the Resler situation. Conrad suggested the motion be tabled until we get past the Integrated Watershed Planning item. Inga moved to lay the question on the table and the Committee agreed to do so.

- **Budget (Ari Michelsen)**

Ari stated that supplies are in place for the brochure. He added that the position of Program Coordinator is now funded by the USACE Coordinated Database project, and then in September her funding will revert to EPWU and River Network, both of which expire on December 31, 2003. The Bureau of Reclamation has provided about \$20,000, some of which will be used to pay her salary after that. He stated that EPWU has indicated it will continue its support at an undetermined level. He added that the Scope of Work for EPWU should be written with the Program Coordinator's input, perhaps after the annual meeting, around the end of September. Jim Stefanov state that the NRCS has a farm bill with lots of watershed issues and he would like to give them this information by October. Ari stated that he will write a letter to Mike Fahy regarding a no-cost extension of the Coordinated Database funds through October.

- **Brochure (Sue Watts)**

Nancy distributed copies of the last version of the older 4-column brochure that she had created and the new 3-
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column brochure that Dan had created. Sue asked the Council members to decide what parts of each they want to keep. Suggestions included the following:

- ✓ Background: the watershed map is good, but the caption for the City of El Paso should be more prominent.
- ✓ Put the logo on the front section.
- ✓ Revised mission/motto/vision: Brian wants to keep the word, "health"--"Promoting healthy ecosystems and economic viability in the Paso del Norte Watershed."
- ✓ Move up "norte" to one of the lines above on front page.
- ✓ Slash to indicate Rio Grande/Rio Bravo is the same river.
- ✓ "Supports more than 2 million people and irrigates approximately 200,000 acres."
- ✓ "Rio Grande/Rio Bravo (U. S./Mexico)."
- ✓ "Water supply for the Paso del Norte watershed...." Precipitation averages about 8 inches per year."
- ✓ "The Council provides a forum for discussing a wide range of issues....." Move this to the beginning of paragraph.
- ✓ Don't want to say "planning for population growth..."
- ✓ Separate organizations need to be bulleted.

Conrad was concerned that the changes in the brochure were indicative of changes in the strategic plan. Ari suggested delegating the topic to a subcommittee. Stacy stated that the brochure wasn't readable, and volunteered to provide a fresh eye to read it. Julie and Marylin also offered to help. Conrad stated that he hoped there would be a document to hand out at the annual meeting. It was determined that Sue and Julie would meet next week and complete the brochure, so that all comments should go to them by August 18.

- **Integrated Watershed Planning Project (Brian Hanson)**

Copies were distributed of the following sections of the plan:

- ❖ Draft Proposal for Integrated Watershed Planning Submitted by the Paso del Norte Watershed Council
- ❖ Comprehensive Biological Management Plan for the Rio Grande Watershed Downstream of Elephant Butte Dam, New Mexico, to Fort Quitman, Texas, including Mexico
- ❖ Gauging System for Flood Control Dams Downstream of Elephant Butte Dam
- ❖ Integrated Watershed Management—Outreach, Communication, and Education
- ❖ Rio Bosque Wetlands Park
- ❖ Mesilla Valley Bosque Park

Revisions were made to the Draft Proposal. Julie volunteered to edit the final document and make the revisions and get it back to Brian and the group. Jennifer offered to help Julie double-check that the final versions are really final. Kevin and Sue were instructed to revise their individual pages; Tim's and Brian's pages needed no correction. All of the pages and the proposal should be emailed to Nancy who will then reformat them all and email to the MAC/SC members (and Council members) as soon as possible before the meeting on Friday. Conrad informed the Council that the proposal on the gauging system for flood control was on the agenda for the Wednesday, August 13 EBID board meeting.

- **Report on meeting with Bingaman staff (Ari Michelsen)**

Ari reported that it was a good meeting and that there were many task force members there. The senator and his staff were very interested in the enhanced watershed plan and he told them we would get it to them as soon as we could. Brian and Jennifer were concerned about the language regarding the matching watershed assistance grant and also about the final packaging of the plan. It was agreed that the plan was too late for a line item in the 2004 budget, but that it would lay the groundwork for the following year's budget.

Ari discussed the Executive Officers' response to the report, "Hope for a Living River." He stated that one of the major recommendations in the report is to create another watershed organization and he was concerned about the Council appearing to endorse that action. Jennifer said she thought that recommendation was a reaction to the need for some greater authority that could span the current institutional and political boundaries and officially administer water and receive federal money and be sanctioned by the states. She stated that the geographic scope of the document goes all the way to Colorado and that the recommendations were intended to be used as a starting point for discussion by citizens of the Rio Grande Basin. Conrad thought

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that the new Integrated Watershed Plan would use information in this document. Conrad suggested that the Council buy 10 more copies for Council members. Ari said that the Council could use BOR money. Nancy was instructed to check on cost of reproducing 100 CDs. Jennifer said that there was also a need for a website to host the document on the Internet. Beatriz offered the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition website. It was suggested that the Paso del Norte Watershed Council provide a link to the document on its website.

Jennifer suggested that Nancy print out copies of the report. Ari suggested buying 20-25 copies. Brian wants hard copies to distribute at the annual meeting. Conrad wanted to buy 35 more copies and distribute to Council members who don't have it (and aren't in the back of the book). Inga moved that the Council acquire 35 hard copies of the report, Brian seconded. Ari suggested also producing 50-100 CD copies. Kevin stated that he thought it was an important report because it looks at the whole river, that it was complementary to the Council's work.

- **USEPA/SCERP grant (Christopher Brown)**

Chris reported on his project, "Vulnerability of Borderland Water Resources: Developing Indicators for Selected Watersheds on the U.S.-Mexico Border--the Paso del Norte Region" and described SCERP (Southwest Center for Environmental Research and Policy), the US EPA program that is funding it. SCERP is a consortium of five U. S. and five Mexican universities which serves U. S.-Mexican border residents by applying research information, insights, and innovations to environmental challenges in the region. Chris is working on the U. S. portion of the project and Alfredo Granados is the Mexican director. There are two main aspects of the project:

1. An expert's workshop in late October to determine indicators to use.
2. GIS discussions in mid-September to determine the study area.

He stated that the project used a lot of GIS, which will be employed to assess watershed vulnerability in the area of investigation. Chris thanked Ari, Kevin, Conrad, Karl, and Brian for their letters, which were submitted with his proposal.

4. Details of Annual Meeting (and next Executive Committee meeting)

The annual meeting will be held on September 15, 2003 at UTEP. Conrad informed the Council that he and Ed Fierro would no longer be serving on the Executive Committee. He said that there would be a list of nominees at the annual meeting and that there was a five-person Nominating Committee. Sue suggested there be a minimum number of meetings required for Executive Committee members to attend and Rosemary agreed. Nancy promised to send the Nominating Committee a list of the current Executive Committee members and whether they are willing to serve. Conrad reminded the Committee that the Executive Committee selects their own officers.

5. Other Business

There was none.

6. Adjournment

The motion for the Committee to respond to the proposed development of Resler Arroyo was taken from the table and the original motion was amended to establish a letter committee consisting of Doug, Kevin, Brian, Jennifer, and Sue and to let them decide on the response. Julie seconded and the amended motion passed. Kevin was assigned to be chair of letter committee. Jim moved for adjournment and Sue seconded. The Committee was adjourned at 12:25 pm.