

DRAFT MINUTES

Paso del Norte Watershed Council Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, September 15, 2005

1:00 - 4:00 pm

New Mexico Water Resource Research Institute
NMSU Campus, Las Cruces, NM



Attending:

Kevin Bixby, Southwest Environmental Center
Cesar Boisselier, USIBWC
Christopher Brown, New Mexico State University
Bobby Creel, NM WRRI
Mike Fahy, El Paso Water Utilities
Juan Pedro Flores-Marguez, UACJ
Brian Hanson, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Woody Irving, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Conrad Keyes, Consultant to the USACE
Elizabeth Kristin, University of Oxford
Julie Maitland, NM Department of Agriculture, Co-Chair
Ari Michelsen, TAES-TAMU, Treasurer
Jennifer Montoya, WWF
Carlos Rincon, Environmental Defense
Zhuping Sheng, TAES-TAMU
Tim Smith, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
Steven Smullen, USIBWC
Sue Watts, Chair

1. Convening the meeting

Sue Watts convened the meeting at approximately ____ pm.

2. Introductions

Those attending introduced themselves.

3. Approval of minutes from June 3, 2005

Approval of the minutes was postponed until there was a quorum.

4. Filling the Council Secretary position

Sue informed the Council that Valerie had been rotated into a new position at EPWU and won't be able to attend Council meetings anymore. Sue asked for volunteers, Jennifer offered to do the job. Sue suggested that the job be rotated until the Program Coordinator position was filled.

5. Friends of the Rio Grande, new Council web site

Bobby informed the Council that Nancy had contracted with gkg.net to design the new web page. He asked the Council members to provide him with updates or corrections to the web site. Jennifer volunteered to be the point of contact for the Council (pdnwc@pdnwc.org). Sue asked Bobby to send the url to the Council so that it can edit it (river.nmsu.edu/pdnwc). Sue also announced that Steven Smullen would be representing the IBWC, replacing Berna Olague, who has left the IBWC.

6. Budget and Filling the Program Coordinator position

Ari informed the Council that as of September 1, 2005, the position of Program Coordinator was open. He explained the finances involved in funding the position. CERM and Rio Grande COG could not do the NMED proposal, but could provide office space if properly funded. He mentioned that Environmental Defense is shutting down its offices in El Paso and Irene Tejada is looking for an office space. She could work part-time as the Coordinator, but there might be a conflict in her representation at meetings.

Sue asked if the Council was obligated to do a full search. Ari said that as a part-time position they could hire someone for a short period without going through a full process. Julie asked about the cost of fringe benefits and indirect costs and Ari told her what he knew about UTEP and the Rio Grande COG. He suggested that the problems with the Coordinator position were tied to "supervision by committee." He also suggested subcontracting with Irene for a short-term contract

for ¼ time. Julie suggested that a subcommittee make the decision. Chris wondered if a graduate student might be able to do the job. Ari suggested something be done for administrative support on a temporary basis, and soon. Sue asked if the Council could hire Irene for until the end of the year. Ari suggested that the Council hire Irene until March 2006.

7. NMED proposal

Julie distributed copies of the proposal to those present and announced that NMDA is offering to be the fiscal agent. Chris and Ari were concerned that the proposal does not provide the substance needed, but felt that it should be sent in anyway. There was a discussion about the extent of the watershed that the Council was offering to manage. Julie needed an endorsement of the proposal from those present. Jennifer moved that the Executive Committee approved the submission of the proposal as it will be corrected that afternoon. Ping seconded and the proposal passed unanimously.

8. Discussion of IBWC five-year plan

Cesar Boisselier and Steven Smullen presented information on the IBWC's two-year nationwide permit for the Rio Grande Five-Year Channel Management Plan. The IBWC has not done any channel maintenance in the river since 1994 and sites usually require maintenance every 3-4 years. The main purpose of channel maintenance is to keep an efficient water delivery system for U.S. irrigation districts and municipalities. The reaches are divided into high, medium, and low priority status, selected by visual inspection. They propose to start in November, after the irrigation system is over. They have coordinated with U.S. Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Mexico and Texas State Historic Preservation Offices. The Corps has issued a nation-wide permit (No. 31), which requires a five-year plan. This nation-wide permit overrides the Canalization EIS, thus enabling them to work without a Record of Decision (ROD), going back to the Corps every two years.

Ari stated that this appeared to be a way to circumvent the Canalization EIS process. Steven stated that U.S. Fish & Wildlife had written a letter recommending that the IBWC implement some of the Best Management Practices that were part of their report based on the Canalization EIS and the permit requires that they be implemented. He said they were in the process of trying to get an agreement with stakeholders, such as EBID. Ari asked if anything further would be done with the Canalization EIS. Steve said that it was in place and they are hoping to sign the ROD sometime. Ari suggested that they notify stakeholders about this permit, because he didn't recall seeing a list of projects like this [plan]. He recommended IBWC take positive steps for receiving input from stakeholders.

Brian asked if there was a chronology of projects. He said the IBWC had actually taken a step backwards from 10 years ago regarding the Canalization project. He said the decisions to dredge and mow appeared to be arbitrary. Kevin stated that SWEC had an MOU with the IBWC that would look at alternatives to dredging and mowing, and that has not been done. Brian read the practices that concerned him. Sue offered the Council's help to determine mitigation projects. Kevin asked if he could get a copy of the permit. Cesar said they would meet with stakeholders while they were implementing the projects. Kevin asked if there was a dual interest in dredging, for flood control and delivery. Cesar said it was only for delivery.

Sue asked if it would help for the Council to write a letter to the Commissioner offering to help convene the stakeholders to encourage their involvement in mitigation. Conrad stated that the IBWC was going to begin work in November 2005, so the Council needs to act soon. Kevin moved that the Council send a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers requesting that the nationwide permit issued to the IBWC be converted to an individual permit with an opportunity for public input due to the high level of public interest in the project. Ari suggested that the Council cc the IBWC on the letter. Conrad suggested that all those cc'd on the Council's earlier letter to the IBWC be cc'd on this letter. Jennifer seconded the motion. Kevin volunteered to write the letter.

Brian suggested instead that the letter request be sent to the IBWC recommending that it receive public input without changing the permit. Ari suggested that the Council send a letter to the Commissioner recommending that public meetings be announced and held with the stakeholders and that the Council is willing to assist in that process. To accommodate that suggestion, Kevin

withdrew his motion. Brian moved that the Council send a letter to the IBWC suggesting that the actions that were presented in this meeting be delayed until the stakeholders have a chance to comment because of significant public interest. Kevin seconded. The vote was unanimous to write the letter. Brian and Kevin will work on drafting the letter by Monday, September 19, 2005.

9. Other Business

Carlos introduced Juan Pedro Flores Margez in the Biology Department of UACJ, and suggested he be made a member of the Executive Committee. Sue asked that he fill out a membership form.

Regarding the proposal to the New Mexico Environment Department, Julie reported that the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission voted to not support it. She suggested that those who wished to work on the proposal move to her office. The meeting was ended at that point.

Note: I could not find evidence that the minutes from June 3 were ever approved. Also, the next (annual) meeting date needs to be set.

Respectfully submitted by Nancy N. Hanks