

Meeting Summary

Paso del Norte (PdN) Watershed Council Meeting

January 22, 2002, 9:00am – Las Cruces Joint Utilities Building

Attendees:

Sue Watts, Ari Michelson, Zhuping Sheng, Doug Echlin, Inga Groff, Joe Groff, Dan Santantonio, Ed Fierro, Christopher Brown, Julie Maitland, Kevin Bixby, Conrad Keyes, Brian Hanson.

Conrad Keyes opened the meeting and requested that the following agenda items be added:

14(a) Information on upcoming Texas Master Naturalist Course (Inga Goff).

14(b) Report on the Rio Grande Corridor Project (Conrad).

14(c) URGWOPS Public Meetings (Conrad)

14(d) Information on NM Draft 305(b) Reports and the State Water Quality Management Plan.

1) November 16, 2001 Meeting Summary (sent by email) approval – Ed Fierro

Ed distributed e-mail copies of the November 16th draft minutes with all comments to date included. Conrad stated he had submitted some last-minute revisions and requested that Fierro re-distribute after final revisions. Fierro agreed to do so. The minutes from the November 16th meeting were approved subject to final revisions suggested by Keyes.

2) Council Membership

a) Addition of Councilors to Membership – Ed Fierro

Ed advised that he had not received any additional requests for membership. Sue stated that she had received a request from Jorge Castillo to become a member of the EC. She will e-mail Mr. Castillo an application. Sue said that Mr. Castillo is currently a general member of the council and has attended previous meetings. Conrad requested that an agenda item be added for the next meeting to consider approval of this application.

b) By-laws changes of Term Limits and addition of duties of Treasurer (see the Executive Committee suggested revisions to By-laws) – Jim Stefanov

The councilors present approved by unanimous vote the proposed changes to the By-laws calling for a change in the term limits to 2 years and the addition of duties to the Treasurer position.

3) Half-time Coordinator Position (agreements signed by Conrad, etal) – Ari Michelsen

Ari discussed the status of the Coordinator Position. Current funding is for a $\frac{3}{4}$ time position. He placed an ad in the El Paso Times this past Sunday at a cost of \$965. Cost for a 3-day ad running Friday through Sunday was \$1,700. He suggested that the Ad be distributed to the MAC/SC membership, and also by all Council members internally within their agencies. Kevin Bixby stated that he could arrange to place the ad in the High Country News, a Colorado paper. Other distribution avenues were discussed. Ari will check on placing the ad in the Las Cruces Sun

News also, which should be much less expensive than the Times. Chris stated that it would be distributed by him to people at NMSU.

4) Watershed Assistance Grant signed (added a quarter time to Half-time Coordinator Position)
– Sue Watts/Ari Michelsen

Sue has updated the WAG application to show the $\frac{3}{4}$ time position, and included \$5,000 for design and maintenance of a Watershed Council website. She submitted a revised budget for the WAG. The salary for the $\frac{3}{4}$ time position is estimated at \$29,000 per year. A mid-year report on Council activities is due in mid-September, assuming the Coordinator position is filled in March. Ari stated that the Cooperative Agreement with EPWU would become effective when the position is filled. On the WAG, Sue signed as Assistant Chair, Ari as the fiscal agent.

5) World Wildlife Fund Grant Proposal - Sue Watts

Sue stated that the World Wildlife Fund has not yet finished reviewing the applications. They should have an answer on grant awardees by March 2002.

6) Coordinated Data Management Committee report – Ed Fierro, etal

Fierro stated that Raed Al-Douri had committed to having a first draft of the Coordinated Database/Website Proposal (Proposal) by the time of this meeting, and that he had hoped he would attend this meeting and distribute the Proposal. Fierro will check with Aldouri when he returns to his office on the status of the Proposal. Conrad stated he would need a copy of the Proposal to him by tomorrow afternoon if he is to update the MAC/SC on this topic. Fierro said he would do so and also distribute the Proposal to the Technical Committee as well for review, and will try to set up a second meeting of the Committee next week to review the Proposal. Chris mentioned other on-going projects that are doing related efforts, such as the \$600,000 Paso Del Norte Mapa Project and the Hewlett funded Project. The Mapa project seeks to develop a web based GIS clearinghouse for the border area, including Mexico. He said Bob Gray at NMSU should have the web site up and running soon. Conrad suggested that the Coordinated Database Proposal include a requirement to perform a search of related projects which may have coverage or data that can be used by the Project, and to also require that the Technical Committee coordinate activities with representatives from those projects to avoid duplication of work. In a related discussion, Conrad and Ari recommended that other water planning groups in the region, such as the Paso del Norte Water Planning Taskforce and the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Project, be identified and invited to present information about their project and related GIS/database work at the March or April 2002 MAC/SC meeting. Other possible presenters mentioned were Clay Mathers of the COE for URGWOPS and Eileen Deitrich of SAIC. Conrad directed the Technical Committee to draft a list of common questions that the Council would like to have addressed at these presentations.

7) Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to Department of Justice (DOJ) on curtailment of extending URGWOM from Elephant Butte to Fort Quitman

Conrad stated he had talked to Bert Cortez a couple of times about this issue, but that so far had received no information from federal agencies. He suggested drafting a letter to DOJ asking for available data in this section of the river under the FOIA. Kevin mentioned that Ken Maxie, Reclamation Area Supervisor for the Albuquerque region, had sent a letter to the Alliance for Rio Grande Heritage asking for a list of questions that they would like answered. Kevin added that a response letter had been drafted but he wasn't sure if it had been finalized and mailed yet. Conrad advised that one possible question that could have been asked in the response letter was why URGWOM couldn't be extended to include the Lower Rio Grande Region. Brian stated that he had talked to Maxie before and that he seemed to be an open and honest individual. Brian recommended that the Council draft a letter to Maxie to invite him to the next Council meeting and have him talk about the Bureau's activities and plans for the region. Brian agreed to draft this letter for review by the Council via e-mail. He stated that having Maxie talk to the Council could be a better avenue to informally obtain desired information, as opposed to a FOI request.

8) Coordination with other groups doing similar work and draft guidelines - Christopher Brown, Chair of Subcommittee, and Ed Hamlyn's Directory mailing list.

Chris stated that he had mailed Ari a list of the five achievements of the Watershed Council that he planned to share with Paso del Norte Water Task Force (Task Force) at their next meeting scheduled for this Friday. He will also give a review of the history of the Council to the Task Force. Ari briefly advised the Council about the Task Force's history and stated the Task Force was currently considering what project to pursue next. These would be the main topics of this Friday's meeting. Conrad suggested that Ari provide the Task Force with a copy of the New Mexico State Water Quality Management Plan, and also with copies of the Council's Statement of Purpose and the Council's Bylaws. A discussion followed concerning how the Council should interface with the Task Force.

9) IBWC's Canalization Project EIS – Doug Echlin

Doug advised that a preliminary draft of the Canalization EIS had not been released yet, contrary to the predicted schedule presented at the last Council meeting. Scheduled revisions by the consultant will be due soon. He added that he had nothing else to say except that the EIS is being worked on and that the Biological Assessment will be sent to Fish & Wildlife for their review. Doug also stated that IBWC had held public meetings on the EIS with farmers in the Mesilla Valley. IBWC informed the farmers of the alternatives being considered and advised them that further analysis of the alternatives was anticipated. Doug said that the farmers' main concern expressed at the meeting was their fear of the government taking their water, but that he had assured them that this would not happen – they were advised that any water required in the alternatives would be purchased legally and on a voluntary basis. He said 50-70 farmers had attended the meeting.

10) Corps proposal for Potential Involvement within the Rio Grande Basin – suggestions on providing input?

Conrad read the letter sent by the COE to various planning groups and water suppliers in the region. He added that he after talking to Kris Schafer, his understanding is that all respondents has to do is to ask for money and find projects to spend it on. Conrad suggested that this initiative by the COE could be a way for them to expand their role in the region without upsetting the DOJ. Doug stated that he had met with Fritz Blake of the COE and 8 or 9 other COE representatives to discuss the City's corridor project. They also discussed ideas dealing with floodway management and coordination with City projects. Kevin advised that the Alliance for Rio Grande Heritage had responded to the COE letter advising them of the project that the COE could help with. Conrad mentioned that there are ways to use Abiquiu Reservoir to store water, and that it's basically a matter of finding ways to pay for it. The Council would have to show the COE how it can benefit from this storage – mainly that of reduced evaporation losses. Kevin mentioned the possibility of getting funding from the COE for a Biological Management Plan, which could be an element of the Council's Strategic Plan. This would be a baseline biological inventory type of plan. Conrad stated that 15~20% of the river riparian areas are on private lands, where it would be easier to do restoration activities.

11) Next NM/TX MAC & Sustainable Project Steering Committee meeting – January 24, 2001 – Ari/Conrad

Conrad and Ari are scheduled to be on the agenda for the meeting at the EPWU at 9 am on January 24, 2001. Conrad is to report on the activities of the Council at this meeting.

12) Next PdN Watershed Council or Executive Committee meeting – suggestions from potential hosts?

Conrad suggested that the Council have a joint meeting in March 2002 with the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission MAC/SC and the PdN Task Force, and to have the presentations on current GIS projects at this meeting. Possible presentations mentioned: the Hewlett project, Border Health Institute Mapa project; NMSU Mesilla Aquifer modeling project; COE URGWOPS project. Clay Mathews is the contact person for the COE project. The Council could also present their Strategic Plan at this meeting if its ready by this time. The council members agreed that this was a good idea – Conrad will make necessary arrangements.

The next Council EC meeting was set for February 22, at 2:00 pm at the EPWU third floor conference room.

13) Updating Draft Strategic Plan (Subcommittee handout provided) – Conrad/Hanson

Brain stated that the subcommittee had met and had come up with lots of good ideas, but didn't draft a formal plan because they weren't sure of priorities and also because the Committee had decided they needed the full Council to have input on the ideas drafted so far. Doug mentioned that he had done some research on the web and found lot of strategic plans out there, and thought that the full Council should explore some of the ideas in these plans in detail. Sue read out the list of objectives the Committee had developed. Julie stated that she thought a Biological Management Plan funded with COE money could be a good objective for a strategic plan. Brain mentioned some possible short and long-term goals for the Strategic Plan, and stated that he

thought the goals should be revised on an annual basis based on changing priorities of the Council. Julie stated that the Strategic Plan needed not only goals, but also a detail plan for “how to get there”. Conrad listed on a chalkboard what he envisioned should be the elements of the Strategic Plan:

Vision

Mission

Goals & Objectives

Actions

Evaluation of Actions

Sue suggested that the statement on the Council’s letterhead could be used as the Vision for the Strategic Plan. Also, the Council’s existing Mission and Goals could be used. The remaining task would then be to develop the Actions and Evaluation of Actions. Some of Sue’s list of objectives can be the Actions for the plan. Conrad asked Brian and Sue to develop the Actions and Evaluation of Actions and distribute via e-mail or fax to the Council membership for their review prior to the next Council meeting on February 22nd.

14) Other Business

a) Ms. Goff distributed pamphlets for the Texas Master Naturalist course, which starts February 6th and lasts 6 weeks. She went over the information in the pamphlet.

b) Rio Grande Corridor Project: Conrad gave details of the project. Three meetings are being scheduled at local elementary schools in Las Cruces. The project covers an 11-mile section of the Rio Grande between Shalem and Mesilla Dam. Dan added that the Project has no authority to make changes, but is just a framework to identify possible projects. All the major stakeholders in the region are involved in the project.

c) Public meetings were scheduled for URGWOPS on January 15 and 16 in Las Cruces and El Paso, and on February 6 in Socorro. The website for URGWOPS is www.spa.usace.army.mil/urgwops/.

d) The NM Draft 305b Report is available on the NM EIS website. The NM Water Quality Management Plan is also available at this site.