

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

**Monday, January 26, 2004
Southwest Environmental Center, 275 N. Downtown Mall
Las Cruces, NM**

In Attendance:

Sue Watts, Chair	Julie Maitland, Assistant Chair
Valerie Provencio, Secretary	Nancy Hanks, Program Coordinator
Kevin Bixby, Southwest Environmental Center	
Christopher Brown, Department of Geography, New Mexico State University	
Inga Groff, League of Women Voters	
Joe Groff, Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue	
Conrad Keyes, Consultant	
Mike Landis, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation	
Dan Santantonio, City of Las Cruces	
Zuping Sheng, Texas A&M University	
Rosemary Staley, City of El Paso	
Beatriz Vera, Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition	

1. Convene Meeting

Sue Watts convened the meeting at 1:10 pm. There were no changes to the agenda.

2. Approval of Minutes from December 8, 2003

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved as written; Julie made the motion, Christopher seconded, the vote was unanimous. [Later in the meeting it was determined that there had been no quorum at this point in time, so the minutes were re-approved by the Executive Committee after a majority had been achieved.]

3. Canalization Draft EIS comments

Kevin Bixby reported that the comment period had been extended to March 1, 2004. Sue asked that Kevin convene the committee assigned to prepare the Council's review comments. Valerie asked if the IBWC was dredging a narrow river corridor or lining the river with concrete. Kevin said the IBWC had no plans to line it with concrete. Sue asked that all comments on the Draft EIS be sent to the committee.

Inga recalled that in the past there had been a preferred alternative. Kevin said the IBWC had a preferred alternative in the beginning, but it was dropped when it was suggested that a preferred alternative was prejudicial. He said he thought that now the IBWC was waiting until after the Record of Decision. He added that he thought that the preferred alternative had to be in the Final EIS. Sue was concerned about the IBWC's timing of the announcement of its preferred alternative. Clarification of the timing should be requested at the public meeting to be held tomorrow night (January 27). Sue said that the PdNWC was named in the document (page ES-5) as the organization that will help select environmental measures, so it needs to determine whether it will be involved in commenting or not. Christopher said the Council's involvement should extend to making comments on the Draft EIS. Beatriz and Valerie said that they will be at the January 27 meeting and will ask for procedure to be clarified.

Kevin said that he had asked the IBWC about sending someone to an informal meeting in Las Cruces. That meeting is tentatively scheduled to be held at SWEC on February 11, 2004, in the evening.

Conrad asked what portion of this Draft EIS could be used by URGWOM (e.g. data, language, preferred alternative) for its Upper Rio Grande EIS for flood control. He said that the

Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Review Draft EIS will be coming out in June and will include flood control projects from Elephant Butte to Fort Quitman.

Inga asked if the comments of the PdNWC on the Draft EIS should be brought before the MAC. Sue said it was possible to email the comments to MAC members.

Kevin asked if the Committee had copies of the response from the IBWC regarding the FLO-2D modeling in the canalization project. There was some confusion until it was established that there were actually two letters from the IBWC (Dec. 16, 2003, and Jan. 16, 2004), and that only Kevin and Julie had received the second letter. The second letter states that the IBWC will use the FLO-2D model in the canalization project after all, although they may not incorporate the results into the canalization EIS. Kevin said that the letter also said they would be hiring the developer of the model. Conrad said that the model has to be developed using the data in this area, as long as the amount was approved in the federal budget.

Sue stated that she was at the IBWC's Rio Grande Citizens' Forum last week (January 21) and, after listening to questions about the proposed development of Resler Arroyo, she thinks the Council should provide information on the different ways water can be acquired for restoration purposes. She would like to see the Council develop a repertoire of mechanisms for conservation efforts. Ari asked about the result of the meeting. Sue said they just presented their case, with no formal declaration. Inga said she read that other issues were being raised, including archaeology. Sue said that, because the arroyo was in a 100-year flood plain, there was an issue of getting a variance from the City of El Paso.

4. Council Activities

New Members. There were no new members to report. Nancy noted that at this point in the meeting there was not a majority of Executive Committee. It was suggested that the members present "take action subject to ratification by the full Executive Committee."

Update on Website. Council members' names are now on the Council's website (pdnwc.org), with asterisks designating those on the Executive Committee.

MAC/SC Meeting. Nancy reported on her presentation at the December 18, 2003, MAC/SC meeting. The MAC approved submission of the two Border 2012 proposals.

Water Monitoring on the Rio Grande. Nancy has volunteered on behalf of the Council to participate in the EPA project "Water Monitoring on the Rio Grande." Sue agreed that education about conducting water quality monitoring was part of the Council's mission. Nancy stated that the EPA was trying to organize a map of water quality monitoring sites and that she had forwarded that information to Matt Rich at NMSU. Christopher suggested that this project might connect to Project del Rio; Beatriz said she would call Lisa. Kevin said that he had heard that New Mexico was about to launch a water monitoring program in this part of the state. Nancy has contacted Michele Mykris, Public Outreach Coordinator in the Surface Water Quality Bureau of the New Mexico State Environment Department, who will send a copy of the public notice when sampling commences. Sue reminded Nancy about Albert Ortiz, the elementary teacher at Desert View Elementary School in Sunland Park, New Mexico, who had contacted the Council in 2003. Nancy agreed to let him know about the EPA water monitoring project.

Grant Proposals Status

River Network. At the end of December 2003, Nancy sent in the interim report to River Network that she learned had been due in September 2002. She is completing the final report, which will be due by the end of the grant period, March 15, 2004. She has submitted the Council's project, the GIS/Database, as a "River Success Story," which should appear on their Website soon.

Border 2012. The two Border 2012 grant proposals (approved at the December 8, 2003, meeting) went in on time and are awaiting EPA review. Applicants should be notified by mail in February.

Phase II of the Coordinated Database. The Phase II proposal was submitted to EPWU last week; Sue's signature will be needed later. The USACE funding is still in place.

EPWU Cooperative Grant. Ari reported that there was a special waiver with EPWU for Indirect Costs of 15 percent. There was a discussion about the requirement imposed by vote of the Executive Committee at the last meeting that there be a \$50,000 minimum for this grant. Conrad suggested that Nancy go to public meetings regarding URGWOM.

Integrated Watershed Management Plan. Nancy reported that she sent out 52 letters with this plan in December 2003 to various governmental representatives at the local, state, and federal level. She reported that she has received a phone call from Rebecca Rizutti, Field Representative for Sen. Bingaman in Las Cruces, asking for a one-page overview of the proposal. She offered to compose a letter and send it to a committee. Sue asked that a committee be formed to help compose the letter.

5. Budget

Ari reported that most of the Council funding was fully expended. Out of the approximate \$223,000 that the Council has obtained to date, there is about \$28,000 left, and some of that is already committed. Conrad asked about the status of the report and new Scope of Work for the USACE. Ari responded that Phil King is completing a report on the first tasks and that Gail Stockton has been informed.

Ari asked about the status of the joint NMWRRI-TWRI coordinated database technical report. Christopher reported that it is being done in house and may be ready in February.

6. Meetings Recently Attended

Conrad attended the December 11, 2003, meeting of URGWOM. He reported that they want to move ahead and set priorities for the rest of the year. He said that people need to be trained to use the planning and forecast (MMS) models that URGWOM has prepared (RiverWare), and that the IBWC and the USBR will begin using. He said these models can be run on a PC now and that the new version can be used without a license.

Sue attended the IBWC Rio Grande Citizens' Forum on January 21, as mentioned earlier.

7. Upcoming Meetings that Will be Attended

Ari announced that a Texas State Senate Select Committee on Water Policy will meet February 3 at UTEP. Inga asks how much is known about various aquifers. Ari responded that not much was known--some are porous volcanic rock, some are sedimentary.

There was a short discussion of the project that Senator Bingaman is sponsoring, Senate Bill 1957, the United States-Mexico Transboundary Aquifer Assessment Act, which will authorize the Secretary of the Interior to cooperate with the states on the border with Mexico and other appropriate entities in conducting a hydrogeologic characterization, mapping, and modeling program for priority transboundary aquifers and for other purposes. There was also a short discussion of a 10-year project by the USGS, Sandia Labs, and WRRI, working with Mexico to validate and obtain information for water modeling. Ari announced that next Wednesday, there would be another candidate seminar for a faculty position in Urban Landscape Water Conservation at the Texas A&M University Research Center.

Conrad reported that, since the New Mexico State Water Plan has been accepted by the Governor, some of the regional water planning groups are having workshops on parts of the plan. At a workshop presented by the Jemez y Sangre Water Planning Council last Thursday and Friday (January 22 and 23), about 100 people attended a workshop for cloud seeding, which is also being discussed in Southeast New Mexico and Far West Texas. He said that if there had cloud seeding in this past week's snow in the Sangres, there might have been more than the 4 inches that did fall.

Sue asked Mike Landis to summarize what he had learned about snow pack in regards to the southern portion of the Rio Grande basin. He said there is now 250,000 acre feet of water stored in Elephant Butte and Caballo reservoirs, due to good runoff at the San Marcial gauge. This is the last year of credit water stored in Elephant Butte and as a result there will be about 55 percent of normal delivery to the farmers, so Elephant Butte will go down to about 30,000 acre feet. He said they are tentatively scheduled to start releasing water from Elephant Butte on February 11. There is no date yet to start the irrigation season. The City of El Paso and El Paso County Water District #1 have asked the Bureau to look at the effect that groundwater pumping has had on the distribution system. He said they have been offered assistance from Texas A&M University. He said they were looking at how much of the recharge is being sucked up by the irrigation wells that are pumping now. He added that he thought that the City of El Paso's Canutillo well field is the only place in Texas where groundwater is not just held by the Rule of Capture, which gives each landowner the right to capture an unlimited amount of groundwater by tapping into the underlying aquifer. In Canutillo, the water wells are part of the Rio Grande Project. Mike added that, if the weather continues as it has, next year will be the really dry year, not this year. It would take 35 years of normal runoffs to get up to regular delivery. Conrad mentioned a UNM professor, David Gutzler, has a web site with information on this.

Conrad reported that the engineer advisors to the Rio Grande Compact Commission will meet the third week of February in Colorado, but he does not know exactly when or where. Sue determined that Tim Darden was going to the URGWOM meeting on February 12 [subsequently cancelled]. Sue announced that SCERP is having their annual meeting in Laredo. Beatriz announced that a regional Texas Water Summit is meeting on February 21. The Rio Grande Water Conference will be held in Albuquerque on February 5 and 6. Mike Landis reported that Bob Curry from UTEP CERM is floating an idea for a "desal consortium" and that TAMU, NMSU, and NMIMT might be involved. The group would be organized along lines of SCERP, so as to pool efforts to study for desal projects. Ari said there is an MOU being discussed between NMSU, TAMU, and UTEP based on the NMSU-WRRI and Texas A&M University El Paso Research Center water resources research agreement.

8. Date and location of the next Executive Committee Meeting.

The next meeting will be on Monday, March 22, 2004, in El Paso. [Later it was determined that it will be held at the Isleta del Sur Pueblo Tribal Judicial Community Center.]

9. Other Business

No other business was mentioned. Nancy noted that there was a now a quorum, so the group voted to accept the minutes from the last meeting.

10. Adjournment

Beatriz moved that the meeting be adjourned, Julie seconded, and the vote was unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 2:50 pm.