

# Paso del Norte Watershed Council

## Executive Committee Meeting

### Minutes

July 1, 2002, Water Resources Research Institute

New Mexico State University

Chair – Conrad G. Keyes, Jr.

Conrad Keyes called the meeting to order at 1:32 PM. Members present were: Sue Watts, Ed Fierro, Inga Groff, Marilyn Taylor, Zhuping Sheng, Christopher Brown, Bobby Creel, Ari Michelsen, Julie Maitland, Joe Groff, Dan Santantonio, Carlos Ricon, Mike Landis, Doug Echlin, Jeff Steinborn, Rosemary Staley, Edd Fifer, Tina Mayagoitia, and Albert Moehlig.

- 1) May 16, 2002 Meeting Minutes Summary by Ed Kosak – Meeting Summary approved with no additional changes.
- 2) Ari Michelsen provided a quick overview of the four grants awarded that the Watershed Council is acting as fiscal agent for. These grants currently fund the activities of the Program Coordinator position. Conrad Keyes recommended that a brief budget report be presented quarterly. Ed Kosak followed with a brief summary of the program coordinator's work-in-progress. Included in his report were suggestions for field trips and possible dates. Suggestions included a recommendation for a trip beyond the river – river valley to an area within the actual watershed (examples unique to the uplands of lower Rio Grande) eg. Geomorphologist to explain historical v.s. current movement of the river. A 2-day field trip of restoration sites and problem areas was suggested for November. If two days is not possible, maybe a ½ day meeting followed by a short field trip. Presentation suggestions included a talk describing how and why water salinity varies so immensely in the Rio Grande valley. Also suggested was a presentation covering restoration projects – and an offer was made by Brian Hanson to ask Greg Cunningham from Natural Resources and Conservation Service in Albuquerque to conduct this talk. He is knowledgeable in river dynamics and reviews projects from several states.
- 3) Conrad Keyes referred to the Paso del Norte Watershed Council (Council) by-laws and announced that according to protocol set forth by the by-laws, the Executive Committee could call a brief meeting of the entire Council to nominate additions to the Executive Committee. Mike Landis moved that the Executive Committee hold a short Council meeting for the expressed purpose of voting in new members to the Executive Committee after which time the Executive Committee meeting be adjourned to resume the Council meeting. Motion was second by Julie Maitland and subsequently passed. Conrad Keyes announced that the Council meeting is open for and ready to accept nominations to the Executive Committee. Nominations to the Paso del Norte Watershed Council Executive Committee included Marilyn Taylor (nominated by Sue Watts) and Carlos Rincon (nominated by Ed Fierro). Conrad Keyes asked the Council if there is a motion to accept the two new members by acclamation. The nominations were accepted unanimously and the Council subsequently voted to adjourn the meeting of the entire Council. The Executive Committee resumed the agenda for the rest of the afternoon.
- 4) An update of the IBWC's Canalization Project/GIS was given by Doug Echlin. Doug stated that the IBWC is preparing an EIS for management of the Rio Grande Canalization Project. The information collected through studies are being compiled. A target date for publication and distribution is between November 12<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup>. It will be out for a 45 day public review, which will end on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Public meetings are to be held between December 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. If things proceed as planned, a final draft will be ready for publication and distribution March 31, 2002. A 30-day period has been slated between final publication and a Record of Decision. Signature of the Record of Decision would then be on April 30<sup>th</sup>. The updated

schedule presented is based on a meeting with the Southwest Environmental Center (SWEC). SWEC has requested a meeting with Commissioner Ramirez, which is to take place on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Assuming that the meeting answers the questions that SWEC has regarding the EIS development, the proposed schedule will remain valid. If the schedule is set back as a result of the meeting, Doug said that he would provide an update at the next Executive Committee meeting. Ari Michelsen asked if there was any indication of potential opposition. Doug Echlin answered no; just that SWEC has concerns about alternatives that are being carried forward into the EIS analysis. SWEC merely would like clarification on some of the points brought out in their earlier meetings dealing with alternative development. The July 9<sup>th</sup> meeting was requested with Commissioner Ramirez to honor the request of SWEC. Conrad Keyes asked Mr. Echlin if there is any way for the Executive Committee to review the draft officially as the Steering Committee had originally suggested. Doug stated that he will ensure that, as chair of the Executive Committee, Conrad will receive a copy of the draft and added that he can add Ed Kosak to the mailing list as well. Mr. Echlin added that the EIS should be available electronically since this is the format many agencies are using to ensure wider distribution and that when the EIS becomes available will be posted on their web site. Conrad suggested that Ed K. is added to Doug's mailing list to present the opportunity for response from entire organizations so that those groups could comment. Carlos Rincon asked if there was an alternative selected yet. Doug stated there was a preferred alternative identified 1 1/2 to 2 years ago, but they received such a negative response that it was not being pursued. Doug also said that he would ensure that all identified alternatives "on the board" for consideration – everything from what is called a no action alternative to the ultimate alternative of targeted river restoration. The decision will be made at the time the Record of Decision is signed. It may be determined that there are some actions that are analyzed in the targeted river restoration that can be included in the integrated river management. Also, there are four alternatives. Alternative three basically identifies what can be done within our right-of-way within the flood plain and actions that we feel we can take along that particular right-of-way limitations, and limitations of whether or not water is available. There currently are many individuals that want no action to be taken and just continue what has always been done along the river in the past. Unfortunately, of course, following that plan we don't correct problems that exist. Doug finished by stating that some answers would have to be determined when the draft EIS comes out. Zhuping Sheng clarified that the structure of the EIS is prepared for additions outside of the original authorization.

- 5) Ed Fierro provided an update for the Coordinated Database Agreement/GIS Committee. Ed began by stating that Raed was pulling out entirely from the project. Raed cited budget problems in regards to funding for a full-time graduate student for a full year. He was also concerned with the time frame already involved in the project – from the original concept to where it is now. Ari Michelsen commented that this project has been a lengthy process. After several stalls as this project proceeded through the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), a draft was finally received mid-week last week. Minor revisions were suggested with similar recommendations from the Technical Committee. The proposal is to proceed quickly. Work can begin this summer with Texas A&M and UTEP working together – with a proposal for housing the project server and assignment of a computer science student to set up the website under the direction of Bobby Creel. the server located at New Mexico State University (NMSU). Ari added the confirmation that NMSU is taking the lead with a computer science student. Bobby Creel stated that the Water Resources Research Institute (WRI) could underwrite this project for a while. The effort can be pursued without initially purchasing hardware by making use of the excess capacity on one of their current servers. There can possibly be some cost sharing involved, but eventually there may be the need to purchase additional hard drives. Bobby further suggested getting the project underway by getting people involved and commented on the current involvement of John Kennedy and Christopher Brown. Ari continued the discussion by adding that the Committee has devoted an extensive amount of work on both the Cooperative Agreement and on using it as the

boilerplate for the Scope of Work. His hope is that in the next couple of weeks there can be something presented to the Council – ready for consideration by the El Paso Water Utilities. Ed Fierro added that Christopher has previously sent him comments on the Agreement and Scope of Work concerning how we are actually going to carry out the work, what architecture we're going to use, and the variables involved. In reply to Chris's comments, he stated that the technical details and specifics on how the data will be obtained should not have to be included in the Scope of Work – these issues can be resolved later once the project is started. Bobby Creel asked if all of this would be going through the Watershed Council. Conrad Keyes said that the project had to go through a fiscal agent and that it might be easier to proceed through only one entity. Ari Michelsen stated that it was made clear that the approval for a zero Indirect Cost (IDC) he was able to attain was a one-time offer. Conrad Keyes then asked the committee members if someone could work with the San Francisco Regional Army Corps of Engineers to get them to join as a cost share source. Conrad said that he had been working directly with Kris Schafer, but he needs others to join in the effort. He further added that if a focus were made on water quality, New Mexico senators would appropriate funding. Ari said that he would work with Bobby Creel on the Database Agreement. Conrad requested that a motion be made to give authority to the Coordinated Database Committee to proceed with efforts in getting the Agreement completed and signed. A motion was made by Carlos Rincon and was second by Julie Maitland. The motion passed by a unanimous vote.

- 6) Bobby Creel furnished copies of Water Task Force Mapping Project (Hewlett Map) to all meeting attendees. The project was undertaken by WRRI, the Geographical Information Center, Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juarez (UACJ), and UTEP. The objective was to combine GIS data for the state of Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico into one map. The scope of work focused on "framework data" along with water resources data. Basic framework data includes topography, relief, roads, streams, etc. Bobby proceeded to outline layouts contained within the project booklet. Also included in the back of the booklet is ARC Explorer software in compact disk form. The disk can be downloaded with proper software allowing the user to create their own maps. Bobby then explained that, on the CD, a user could find more detail on the techniques they used to put their maps together. He closed his report by stating that the project was a one-year venture completed on time and under budget. Ari Michelsen suggested the discussion of funding opportunities for translation of the Hewlett Map Project into Spanish at the upcoming Management Advisory Committee/Steering Committee meeting July 11<sup>th</sup>.
- 7) Ari Michelsen presented an update for the proposed Wetlands Project. He began by saying that the project is being proposed by four different groups who are pursuing funds from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for wetland development and land acquisition. Despite the Council's vote to support the over all project objectives, it has been determined after numerous conference calls and electronic correspondence that the required proposal materials had not been complied. Also, the budget involved approximately \$1 million of which only about \$23,000 was designated for project management and IDC which wasn't enough for the time required for the program coordinator Ed Kosak to track these projects, to handle subcontracts, monthly invoices and reports. Ari also expressed concern regarding attaining water rights and liabilities of the grantee. Furthermore, the proposal was being presented as four separate proposals not as one thereby requiring extensive work to satisfy USFWS requirements. It was determined that with the fast approaching deadline of July 26<sup>th</sup>, necessary work had not been completed prior to approaching the Council as a potential grantee. It appears that the groups leading these projects may attempt a second submittal period in March 2003.

The Wetlands Project discussion prompted a question from Sue Watts regarding the pursuit of 501(c)(3) status by the Paso del Norte Watershed Council. A brief discussion followed covering details and ideas to possibly gain this status. The major concern was the amount of time required

of an individual assigned this task. Members of the Executive Committee were asked for their input and support to enable Ed Kosak to present a short report on attaining 501(c)(3) status at the Council's upcoming annual meeting. Carlos Rincon offered his assistance to Ed in the pursuit of information. Ed K. thanked those who could provide input and assistance in putting this together.

- 8) Ed Kosak provided input he received from Committee members during the program coordinator's work in progress (agenda item #2). No further suggestions were made.
- 9) Sue Watts took the lead in presenting a progress report for the Brochure Committee. The direction the Committee is taking involved the concept of producing two separate brochures. One would target the legislative community; the second would be directed at reaching the general public. Sue requested input from Jeff Steinborn regarding the idea of producing two brochures. Jeff stated that it wasn't necessary and added that if information is presented well (in a professional manner) that our credibility would speak for itself. Sue, Inga and Ed K. also presented ideas for a brochure logo. Conrad Keyes suggested that a design contest be held for the logo and a location on the draft brochure be set aside. He further recommended designating language in the brochure indicating the winning logo would be placed there. Also, the contest was suggested to be part of the Paso del Norte Water Task Force events. Ari Michelsen clarified the purpose of the brochure by saying its primary purpose is to educate people about our organization rather than the watershed itself. Bobby Creel added that a web site could have more of this type of information. Ari suggested the brochure committee concentrate on a draft in English, and then take advantage of the funds awarded by the World Wildlife Fund for translation. Christopher Brown added a suggestion to producing a separate insert that can be placed inside the brochure. The insert would provide contact information for those interested in contributing. Christopher added that the web page discussed earlier could facilitate some dissemination of information with general topic items. Animation could possibly be added to the web page. He also stated that this was an excellent first start and once details are pointed in the right direction ideas expressed might be an area to consider. Sue requested that any Executive Committee members that have file photos to suggest for the brochure to please forward them. Possible themes might be a healthy v.s. an unhealthy watershed or what type of activities have been conducted in our region.
- 10) It was announced that the next New Mexico – Texas Water Commission/Management Advisory Committee meeting would be held July 11<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 am at Texas A&M Research and Extension Center El Paso, Texas.
- 11) Conrad Keyes stated that the Watershed Council should consider a mode to bring in sponsorship from other organizations at the annual Meeting. Ari Michelsen suggested that the overall theme of the annual meeting be either educational – about our organization, or descriptive – projects that we are involved with. Carlos Rincon offered his assistance to help Ed Kosak with details for the annual meeting. Carlos said it would certainly be a “win/win” situation. Conrad also commented that the Watershed Council could have a brief presentation from our organization and set aside 30 minutes for election of officers to the Executive Committee. The Annual Meeting is scheduled for August 28<sup>th</sup>.
- 12) Other business included the announcement by Conrad Keyes that the final EIS for the Bureau of Reclamation (BoR)/Elephant Butte Resource Management Plan is out and that there are about 2 weeks for input on the final EIS. He continued by saying that two documents make up the EIS: the EIS itself and the appendix. Copies can be obtained through Rosemary Sandoval. She was the Public Affairs Officer out of Santa Fe (contractor for BoR) who handled information on the project. The basic premise is to privatize some of the lease land surrounding Elephant Butte. They also plan the development of recreational facilities along the lake.

The EIS is complete on the Silvery minnow, said Conrad Keyes. Meetings were held last Wednesday in Albuquerque and the night before in Socorro. Mike Landis informed the Executive Committee that currently the BoR is out of compliance to provide water for the Silvery minnow. The four areas of critical habitat being considered are; along the international border, the Big Bend area, an area along the Pecos River, and below Caballo Dam at American Dam. Doug Echlin stated that the EIS for this project is available on the Internet at [www/fws.gov](http://www/fws.gov). Conrad concluded other Executive Committee business by saying the Council may want to consider having someone speak on the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Review and the EIS process. The Steering Committee had a lot of input to effectively put this together. Conrad asked if Gail Stockton could get someone to do this. Steve Kock was highly recommended by Conrad to do the presentation. Conrad Keyes asked for volunteers for the two days of the Water Festival to be held in Las Cruces October 15<sup>th</sup>, and in El Paso on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. Volunteers are needed to assist in various activities such as setting up, assisting with registration, and providing recommendations as panelists and for presentations. Conrad suggested asking John Kennedy to prepare a short demonstration from WRRI. Inga Groff informed the Executive Committee that historically the Water Festival has been conducted in two parts. Observers gather for presentations make up the first part after which the observers disperse to the exhibits.

Ari Michelsen announced forthcoming water related meetings being held including the National Water Policy Summit being held in Washington D.C., September 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup>. The U.S./Mexico Water Conference will be September 19<sup>th</sup> in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Carlos Rincon provided a brief description of the Mission Possible organization. The organization was started by the League of Women Voters and is currently in its 6<sup>th</sup> year. They will be having an annual conference September 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. Last year's theme was air quality. This year the theme will be water issues as they relate to health. Carlos has been chair of Mission Possible for the last two years. Inga Groff, Executive Committee member of the Paso del Norte Watershed Council is also involved. Other individuals and groups include Joe Groff, Tina Mayagoitia, IBWC, EPA, Environmental Defense, El Paso County Health and Environmental District, Paso del Norte Health Foundation, and UTEP. He would like to see the Paso del Norte Watershed Council and Mission Possible collaborate by combining efforts of their annual conference and the Watershed Council's annual meeting. Inga Groff made a motion for the Paso del Norte Watershed Council to co-sponsor the Mission Possible Annual Conference. The motion passed unanimously. Sue Watts asked Carlos and Inga what they needed from the Watershed Council. Inga replied saying mainly they would like to have a combine effort and suggestions to accomplish this were welcome. They are currently seeking a speaker to act as a magnet – drawing participation and interest. Carlos concluded by mentioning the poster contest to be conducted during the Mission Possible Conference. Local schools will screen entries and final winners will receive a financial reward for their effort. Carlos also thought this would be an excellent idea for the Watershed Council to consider for finding a suitable logo for their brochure.

- 13) The next meeting of the Executive Committee of the Paso del Norte Watershed Council will be held at the Texas A&M Research and Extension Center on August 16, 2002 at 10:00 am.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:01pm.