

**Minutes of the Executive Committee
Paso del Norte Watershed Council
9:30 am to Noon, Wednesday, October 29, 2003
New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Las Cruces, New Mexico**

In Attendance:

Sue Watts, Chair	Julie Maitland, Assistant Chair
Valerie Provencio, Secretary	Ari Michelsen, Treasurer
Nancy Hanks, Program Coordinator	
Kevin Bixby, Southwest Environmental Center	
Christopher Brown, Geography, New Mexico State University	
Tim Darden, New Mexico Department of Agriculture	
Ed Fierro, El Paso Water Utilities	
Inga Groff, League of Women Voters	
Joe Groff, Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue	
Conrad Keyes, Consultant	
Julie Maitland, New Mexico Department of Agriculture	
Jacob Massoud, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo	
Jennifer Montoya, World Wildlife Fund	
Lori Rivera, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo	
Zuping Sheng, Texas A&M University	
Barnett Sugarman, Private Citizen	

1. Convene Meeting

Chair Sue Watts convened the meeting at 9:40 am.

2. Approval of Minutes

With minor corrections, the minutes from the Annual Meeting and the Executive Committee meeting on September 15, 2003, were approved; motion for approval by Chris, seconded by Tim, unanimous vote.

3. City of Las Cruces Rio Grande Corridor Project

Carol McCall, City Planner with the City of Las Cruces, provided a PowerPoint presentation (hard copy attached) regarding the Rio Grande Riparian Ecological Corridor Project, supported by the EPA Sustainable Development Challenge Grant. Formal partners with the City of Las Cruces in the project are the Southwest Environmental Center, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, the International Boundary and Water Commission, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and the Bureau of Reclamation. The project encompasses an 11-mile corridor that extends south from the Shalem Colony Bridge (Black's Bridge) to the Mesilla Dam.

Carol passed around a sample of one of the paving materials that may be used for the paths along the river and described in detail the 1.1 mile trail from La Llorona Park that is the pilot project. She also described the Wetland Pilot Project to restore part of the Picacho Bosque. She discussed the ramifications of the change in the use of the Rio Grande Corridor from agricultural to residential. The goals of the project were determined to be the following: (1) preserve, enhance, and restore native habitat diversity; (2) preserve open space; (3) create a multi-use trail system; (4) increase ecotourism; (5) expand recreational opportunities; and (6) educate the public.

Jennifer asked about links to El Paso's River Park development and Carol said that Paul Cusumano, NPS Rivers and Trails coordinator in New Mexico, was working on that idea. Jennifer asked if New Mexico State Parks was interested in the Mesilla Valley Bosque Park, and Kevin said that money had been appropriated by the State for that purpose. Carol asked if the Council would like to champion funding for enhancement projects. Carol said that there are currently five sites that may become projects, with the USCOE and IBWC are each considering a site.

At the end of Carol's presentation, she was invited to join the Council. She deferred that decision pending a discussion with her supervisor.

4. Council Activities

Nancy used a PowerPoint presentation (hard copy attached) to review the terms of the current Executive Committee. She also requested direction from the Executive Committee regarding listing their names on the Council's web site. The decision was to create a prototype list and send it out to the Executive Committee for approval.

5. Recent Meetings Attended

URGWOM: Conrad reported on the October 9, 2003, meeting of the Upper Rio Grande Water Organization Model. He stated that the next meeting would be on November 13, and that Ping and Tim will be there (so Phil King does not need to go). Conrad said that six federal agencies (USCOE, BOR, FWS, IBWC, USGS, and BIA) are the most active regarding the URGWOM database. He said that URGWOM was moving down the river and that EBID is helping to expand the database (e.g., number of diversion points). All of the information that is being gathered will be available and the question will be whether folks can start running the model below Elephant Butte, except for flood operations.

Chris asked the Committee whether the Coordinated Database Technical Committee should create a focused scope of work to be ready for future projects. After a brief discussion, Sue directed the Technical Committee to meet, draw up a scope of work, set some priorities, and be ready for funding opportunities. Ari suggested that the Technical Committee create a flexible document that could be altered to fit several projects.

Rio Grande Citizen's Forum, October 27, 2003: Sue reported that the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission has set up a water banking system for the Pecos River and that the supply of water for the foreseeable future is decreasing.

Rio Grande River Trail: Nancy reported on the Task Force meeting, asking for more information from others who were there, including Inga and Joe, Valerie, and Jacob. The new path along the river at Chamizal National Monument was discussed. Inga said she was disappointed with the paving method being used. Joe said that ultimately the River Trail would go from the Texas state line at Anthony to Hudspeth County line. Valerie said that she was contacting the group developing the Mexico side of the river trail. She said that November 6 there would be a meeting of the Texas Master Naturalists at the Zoo that would give more information about this.

Kevin expressed a concern that several different projects were going on along the river, but that no group (except perhaps the IBWC) was looking at the cumulative effects. He advocated a dynamic river channel that could move between levees on its own, given a certain amount of water, and that every time a permanent structure is placed in the floodplain it affects that movement. Sue said that was one reason the Council needed to hear what the El Paso River Trail group was doing. She suggested that she and Kevin talk to Doug to see how the oversight was being done.

MAC/SC meeting, October 23, 2003: Nancy reported on the meeting of the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission and presented the agenda via PowerPoint (hard copy attached). She briefly discussed each item and the group's new Web site, www.nm-txwatercomm.org. She said they scheduled their next meeting on December 18, 2003, solely to review any proposals that the Council might present.

El Paso Water Meeting: Ari reported briefly on the Annual State of Water meeting in El Paso that he just attended.

Other Meetings:

Jennifer attended an October 3, 2003, meeting convened by Gov. Richardson to discuss the silvery minnow issue. She said it was a productive conversation.

Ari reported on the Southern Region Water Quality meeting in Ruidoso and he distributed copies of the National Newsletter of Volunteer Water Monitoring, suggesting that the Council make connections with that group.

Inga, Sue, and Valerie attended a recent meeting held by the Bureau of Reclamation regarding the Rio Bosque. The BOR wants to line canals to reduce seepage losses.

Chris attended a recent SCERP workshop which asked experts about water resource vulnerability, indicators, and data sets for the Rio Grande. He said that there would be a short summary released soon and a longer version later, and that the Council will get a copy.

Ari was part of a recent meeting of water institute directors in Juarez, that the University of Juarez is considering starting its own water resources institute.

6. Upcoming Meetings that will be Attended

American Heritage River Initiative (EPA), El Paso, Nov. 3 and 4: Nancy invited Council members to attend; Valerie will be giving a presentation about the Council. Valerie will report on the results of this meeting at the next Executive Committee meeting.

New Mexico Water Planning 2003 Conference (WRRI), Albuquerque, Nov. 5 and 6: Nancy will be attending, in addition to Ari, Julie, and Tim. Nancy will report on the results of this meeting at the next Executive Committee meeting.

Ground Water Management in the West (Western States Water Council), Amarillo, Dec. 3 and 4: Ari will be attending and will report on it Executive Committee meeting.

Other Meetings:

Valerie mentioned the Groundwater Institute for Teachers to be held on Nov. 21-22 and will report on it at the next Executive Committee meeting.

Ari mentioned the following meetings: the American Water Resources Association annual meeting will be in San Diego on Nov. 3-6; the Texas Water Summit will be in Austin on Nov. 5-6; the Far West Texas Management Group meeting will be in Van Horn on Nov. 20; the Texas Water Development Board meeting will also be in Van Horn on Nov. 20. He will report on these meetings.

Jennifer had planned to attend the Association of Wetland Managers meeting in Socorro in mid-November, but won't.

7. Outreach

Sue reported on the two meetings held by the Outreach Committee to develop materials. Nancy discussed the methods used to survey approximately 800 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students that attended the Water Festival 2003 on October 22. She reported on the preliminary findings and promised a more complete report at the next meeting.

Chris suggested looking at the Groundwater Education Program. Jennifer stated that the Rio Grande Heritage Alliance had just done a public opinion survey along the river, and promised to get the results to the Council. Ari suggested the WET (Water Education for Teachers) program to develop a K-6 curriculum for students. Sue said the next Outreach/Education meeting would try to figure out the best way to get information out to the public and that the Committee would be notified when the next meeting would be. Kevin recommended that we talk to Project Del Rio. Conrad asked if Project Del Rio could be invited to join the Council and Kevin said he would ask.

8. Budget

Ari distributed the Project Summary budget (as of 9/30/03; hard copy attached). He discussed the presentation that EPWU is preparing for Mr. Archuleta. Conrad asked if any other cities or counties had been approached for funding of the Council and suggested that Las Cruces and the LRGWUO be asked for funding. Ari added that other groups may fall under the Sustainable Water Development Project EIS and therefore might have funding for the Council.

9. Border 2012 Proposal

Sue reported that the Border 2012 Proposal is tied to water quality standards, but that there is funding for environmental stewardship and that the education committee was discussing a proposal for this program.

10. EPA Watershed Initiative Proposal

Sue reported that this year's RFP for the EPA Watershed Initiative was focused on short-term projects and on market-based incentives. She reminded the Committee that our proposal to the EPA last year involving salinity issues in the watershed had some flaws and that it was not advisable to resubmit that same proposal. She asked the Committee for feedback on whether the Council should submit another EPA proposal. It was determined by the Committee that it was too late to submit a proposal to the EPA Watershed Initiative for FY2004. Ari asked Nancy to pull up the list of last year's successful proposals and track the proposals awarded this time so that we would be more prepared for FY2005.

Jennifer asked for a meeting of the subcommittee that was working on the Integrated Watershed Management Plan so that it would be ready for submission.

Nancy reminded the Committee that the only item on the agenda for the next MAC/SC meeting was review of any possible proposal that the Council may have.

11. Request for Council Letter of Support

Kevin updated the Committee on a meeting that the Alliance for the Rio Grande Heritage had with IBWC Acting Commissioner Debra Little, requesting that the issuance of the draft EIS be delayed until additional modeling can be done. He discussed the need to mimic the natural seasonal variation in flow in the river, particularly the late spring peak flow, and that this was related to the IBWC's management of the floodway. He said that the IBWC needed more exact knowledge about flood control than the one-dimensional model they currently used. He said the Alliance had requested that the IBWC delay issuing the draft EIS until better modeling could be acquired, and that the Alliance had offered to help the IBWC find funding for it.

Chris remembered a discussion by the Executive Committee at its last meeting when it agreed to support the need for better modeling in a general way, perhaps using methods similar to those of URGWOM. Sue asked the Technical Committee to discuss this and make recommendations.

12. Date and Location of the next Executive Committee meeting

The next meeting of the Executive Committee was determined to be at 1pm, Monday, December 8, 2003 International Boundary and Water Commission, 4171 N. Mesa, Building C, First Floor Conference Room, in El Paso.

13. Other Business

Ari discussed the possible availability of money to buy Nancy a new computer.

14. Adjournment

Chris moved for adjournment and Jennifer seconded, the vote was unanimous. The Committee was adjourned at 12:40 pm.