

**Lower Rio Grande Citizens Forum
Via Microsoft Teams
March 15, 2023
Tentative Meeting Notes***

Board Members in Attendance:

Carlos Sanchez
Eric Davila
Raul Sesin
Melisa Gonzalez
Diane Goldsberry
Kim Poyer

USIBWC Staff in Attendance:

Maria-Elena Giner, Commissioner
Sally Spener, U.S. Secretary
Leslie Grijalva, Acting Public Affairs Specialist
Lisa Torres, Environmental Protection Specialist
Francisco Martinez, Assistant Area Operations Manager
Jennifer Peña, Chief Legal Counsel
Esther Cortez, Public Affairs Assistant
Ramon Macias, Principal Engineer, Engineering Department
Isela Canava, Principal Engineer, Operations Department

Members of the Public in Attendance:

There were approximately 33 members of the public in attendance.

Welcoming and Introduction Remarks:

At 3:05 CDT, Carlos Sanchez, Co-Chair, convened the meeting and called the meeting to order.

Remarks from USIBWC Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner:

Commissioner Giner opened the meeting by acknowledging the hard work of the IBWC staff and the agency's success in achieving several goals in the past year, including the replacement of outdated equipment, improvements in water management, and various construction projects. She highlighted the agency's replacement program for vehicles and equipment, noting that the agency had recently purchased new trucks and machinery to replace outdated models. She also discussed the agency's goals for the future, including plans to continue improving water management and increasing collaboration with Mexican counterparts. Commissioner Giner also mentioned several upcoming infrastructure projects, including work on the Amistad Dam, and emphasized the importance of building trust and transparency between the US and Mexico to ensure successful cooperation in the management of the Rio Grande.

Presentation 1: [Texas Clean Rivers Program Rio Grande Basin Update, Water Quality Monitoring Results, and Related Matters](#)

Presenter: Lisa Torres, Environmental Protection Specialist, Texas Clean Rivers Program for the Rio Grande Basin, USIBWC

Lisa Torres spoke about the Texas Clean Rivers Program and their monitoring of water quality in the Lower Rio Grande. The state-funded program collects water quality samples from the Rio Grande on a monthly or quarterly basis at 94 sites along the river. The data collected is then standardized and analyzed to ensure data quality. The presentation also covered the types of data collected, such as nutrients, salts, bacteria, TDS, organics, and metals, and the process of comparing the data to standards to determine impairment or concerns. The main concerns in the Lower Rio Grande were identified as high levels of *E coli* bacteria, with non-point sources such as stormwater runoff and agricultural runoff likely contributing to the issue. The presentation also touched on the Lower Rio Grande Water Quality Initiative, which aims to establish a group of stakeholders to explore border sanitation and water quality management, improve salinity management for return flows, and address current and future water quality issues in the area, among others.

Questions/Answers:

Question/Comment: The total dissolved solids (TDS) readings at a pumping plant diversion site downstream of Anzalduas Dam are currently getting readings of 500 to 550 parts per million, which is lower than the readings of 800 to 900 parts per million from a year ago. Is there an explanation or theory for the difference?

Answer: USIBWC did not have an immediate answer, but Lisa Torres will look into it.

Presentation 2: [The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Water Deliveries under the 1944 Water Treaty: A Compendium of Ideas \(New USIBWC White Paper\)](#)

Presenters: Jennifer Peña, Legal Advisor, USIBWC, and Kathy Robb, Robb Water Partners LLC

Jennifer Peña, Legal Advisor at USIBWC, and Kathy Robb, the author of *The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Water Deliveries under the 1944 Water Treaty: A Compendium of Ideas* [white paper](#) gave a presentation on the takeaways from the new white paper. The paper summarizes the many projects and possibilities that have been suggested over the years to improve the Rio Grande. It is a resource for stakeholders to broaden their knowledge as the USIBWC considers during the Minute development process how best to further reliable, predictable water deliveries, rather than a recommendation for any particular course of action.

Questions/Answers:

Question: Has this paper been shared with your counterparts on the Mexican side, and what has been their reaction to the paper?

Answer: They are working to translate the paper into Spanish, Jennifer Peña provided a briefing to their Mexican counterparts before it was published.

Board Discussion/Suggested Future Agenda Items:

The last board meeting before board terms end will be held in-person at the USIBWC Mercedes Field Office on July 19, from 3 to 5 p.m. CDT. USIBWC will post the application on their website to appoint the new Lower Rio Grande Citizens Forum Board.

Public Comment

Bobby Janecka, Commissioner of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, expressed his appreciation for Commissioner Giner's work in addressing the challenges and problems faced by IBWC across various regions. He thanked her for her attention to the needs of the Valley and other Texas communities as the end river users. Janecka is optimistic that there is room for agreement between the US and Mexico, and with new investments in water savings and new water sources in Mexico, specific commitments can be made. He looks forward to further discussions on this matter during the negotiations.

During public comment, a reporter asked Commissioner Giner about the progress of rehabilitating the seepage issues at Amistad Dam and the funding for the project. Commissioner Giner stated that they are negotiating with Mexico for a permanent solution and are in the final steps of getting an agreement between the two countries. The first step is to put in a grout curtain to determine the quality of the soil and the depth of the bedrock. The cost of the project is estimated to range from \$80 million to \$280 million, depending on whether they have to go down to the bedrock or not. The Department of State has been alerted of the need for additional funding, and the U.S. would be responsible for funding 56% of the project while Mexico would be responsible for the remaining 44%.

*Meeting notes are tentative and summarize in draft the contents and discussion of Citizens Forum meetings. While these notes are intended to provide a general overview of Citizens Forum meetings, they may not necessarily be accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions.