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News Flash

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Office of Public Affairs

USIBWC HOLDS LOWER RIO GRANDE STAKEHOLDERS CONFERENCE



Federal and state representatives met with USIBWC Commissioner Dr. Maria-Elena Giner during the agency's stakeholders conference.

Growers, irrigators, ranchers, and other special-interest groups from as far as Austin and College Station came to the Lower Rio Grande Valley recently to attend a conference by the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) offering information on federal and state water programs.

The July 19, 2023, event at the Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Weslaco featured presentations from USIBWC, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development and Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB).

It was the second consecutive year the USIBWC had organized this conference in South Texas.

“The reason I hold these stakeholder meetings is because it gives me the opportunity not only to interact with stakeholders

but to also bring my federal partners who have great programs that are able to offer assistance to our communities,” USIBWC Commissioner Dr. Maria-Elena Giner told an audience of more than 60 people.

The intent, Commissioner Giner stressed, “is to motivate you to apply for the water programs from our federal partners and access the unprecedented resources available.”

During her presentation, Commissioner Giner outlined how the USIBWC and its partners are working to negotiate a new agreement with Mexico that will bring predictability and reliability to water deliveries, advance science in the Rio Grande watershed, and improve communications with Mexico.

She highlighted the work of the Minute Negotiating Team, consisting of the IBWC U.S. and Mexican sections; USBR; Texas Commission on Environmental Quality; Texas Secretary of State’s Office; Conagua, Mexico’s National Water Commission; and Mexico’s Foreign Affairs Office.



Commissioner Giner participated in a panel discussion during the conference.

The goal, Commissioner Giner said, was to sign a new Minute by the end of the year, which she admitted was “an aggressive schedule.”

She also provided an update on planned repairs to Amistad Dam, which hopefully will start with a contract being awarded this year.

Both the United States and Mexico, the dam’s co-owners, have the funding for the first phase of the project.

Commissioner Giner also mentioned USIBWC was busy with lots of levee repair projects and heavy equipment purchases.

“We are small but mighty,” she said, adding the agency has been fortunate to receive budget increases from Congress that allowed her to cut the USIBWC vacancy rate from 25 percent to 9 percent during her tenure so far.

The additional staff reduces deferred maintenance and is more responsive to the needs of the region.



Mercedes Field Office Assistant Area Operations Manager Francisco Martinez briefs Commissioner Giner and USBR officials during their visit to the office.

“So, we are very grateful to all of the stakeholders who continue to inform decision-makers of the value of our work,” Commissioner Giner said.

She was joined at the conference by David Palumbo, USBR Deputy Commissioner of Operations; Gloria Montaña Greene, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation; Lillian Salerno, USDA Rural Development State Director; L’Oreal Stepney, TWDB Board member; and representatives from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Before the conference, Commissioner Giner, Mercedes Field Office supervisors, and USIBWC public affairs staff took

Deputy Commissioner Palumbo on a tour of the LRG Flood Control Project and Anzalduas and Retamal dams.

She also accompanied him to a regional irrigators meeting in San Benito and met with growers in Harlingen.

The Commissioner wanted to listen to these key stakeholders and update them on the progress of Minute negotiations.



Commissioner Giner spoke at a Regional Irrigators meeting at the Cameron County Irrigation District #2 in San Benito.



Commissioner Giner and USIBWC Chief Legal Counsel Jennifer Peña joined Bureau of Reclamation Deputy Commissioner David Palumbo at a meeting with growers in Harlingen.

Following the conference, local reporters interviewed Commissioner Giner about the time and effort going into the new Minute to help communities on both sides of the border.

The goal of the negotiations, she emphasized several times to the journalists, is to bring “predictability and reliability to the river.”

A press release about the USIBWC stakeholders conference as well as the presentations are available on the Press Releases section of the USIBWC website.