



INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

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USIBWC BREAKS GROUND ON AMERICAN CANAL LOWER REACH PROJECT

The U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC), joined by its government, water management, and construction partners, broke ground to refurbish a critical component of the El Paso region's drinking and irrigation water supply.

The \$90,352,323 contract, awarded to Odin Environmental Solutions, Inc., of Roseville, Calif., will replace deteriorated portions of the American Canal Lower Reach with 2,518 feet of 24-foot-wide arch culverts and 511 feet of a U-channel 24 feet wide and 15 feet deep.

The Lower Reach is part of the 2.1-mile concrete American Canal, first put into service on June 2, 1938, to divert Rio Grande water for El Paso area farmers and the City of El Paso, and to ensure the equitable division of Rio Grande water with Mexico.

Since then, the canal has deteriorated significantly, requiring removal and replacement for continued serviceability.

American Canal is the vehicle by which the El Paso County Water Improvement District #1 (EPCWID) gets irrigation water for their constituents to farm more than 58,130 acres in the El Paso Valley.

Additionally, El Paso Water treats up to 70,000 acre-feet of Rio Grande surface water from the American Canal for El Paso's potable water supply.

American Canal is also essential to meeting water deliveries under the U.S. Treaty of 1906 with Mexico.

Dr. Maria-Elena Giner, P.E., USIBWC Commissioner, hosted a ceremony at the Lower Reach project on Friday, September 13, 2024. She was joined by U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar; El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser; John E. Balliew, President and CEO, El Paso Water; Robert Rios, EPCWID Water Master; Louay Owaidat, Odin President and CEO; and Rafael Foley, U.S. Consul General, Ciudad Juarez.

"The American Canal has served the El Paso community since Franklin Roosevelt was president," said **Commissioner Giner**. "The IBWC takes its responsibility seriously to maintain this vital infrastructure and appreciates the public's support for these important repairs. Working together, we will ensure this waterway continues to be a vital partner in this area's growth and success."

Rep. Escobar said: "From the water that fuels our farmlands to the drinking water in many of our homes, the IBWC's American Canal is a largely invisible, but hugely important part of El Paso. I'm proud to join Commissioner Giner and the IBWC as they break ground on sustainable, innovative, and much needed infrastructure for our community. Back in Washington, I will continue to fight for much needed federal funds for the IBWC to support critical projects like the Canal refurbishment."

Mayor Leeser said: "For generations, the IBWC's American Canal has been an integral part of El Paso's drinking water supply, helping our city grow and thrive. We are proud to support this timely effort to refurbish a critical stretch of the canal and appreciate the leadership of Commissioner Giner as well as the hard work of everyone involved."

EPWater President/CEO Balliew said: "Congratulations to IBWC on this important project milestone. Recognizing the importance of the American Canal Extension Project in the 1990s, the Public Service Board funded the local match for the project. Now, the infrastructure improvements to this channel will further reduce water loss as it is conveyed through the channel to farmers and our water treatment plants. This project essentially helps safeguard river water, which we

treasure as a key component to our long-term water sustainability. Thank you, Commissioner Giner, on continuing the legacy of excellence.”

EPCWID General Manager Ornelas said: “The American Canal is a vital component for the irrigation district’s operation and delivery of Rio Grande Project water. The canal is the main artery used to convey and deliver project water from central El Paso to thousands of acres of farmland in the lower valley of El Paso County, including various El Paso Water treatment plants, to convert to potable water. The American Canal also plays an essential role in the City of El Paso’s flood mitigation effort as well. This is a great project for all, thanks to USIBWC.”

Odin President/CEO Owaidat said: “We are honored and proud to partner with the IBWC and project sponsors to construct this important project. We look forward to implementing the highest standards of safety and quality, and to collaborate with all stakeholders and the community to bring the American Canal project to a successful conclusion.”

The Lower Reach project includes two ramps for IBWC operations and maintenance personnel to enter the canal; safety ladders and cables; and 1,600 feet of handrails. The estimated completion date is June 2027.

The Lower Reach extends from Paisano Drive to the Rio Grande American Canal Extension past International Dam.

Replacement of the American Canal Upper Reach was completed in 2020. The \$21,030,944 contract to Meridian Contracting Inc., of Tucson, Ariz., and Albuquerque, N.M., consisted of replacing 2,269 feet of concrete lining and replacement of more than 17,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil from the American Smelting and Refining Co. (ASARCO).

The new canal in the Upper Reach has four sets of safety ladders, two safety cables, handrails, and vehicular guard-railing along both sides of the waterway.

The Upper Reach is located adjacent to USIBWC’s Carlos Marin Field Office on Paisano Drive across from ASARCO.

The 3,092-foot Middle Reach has not yet been reconstructed. Once USIBWC has funds available, this project will be put out for bid.

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, is responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties between the two countries and settling differences that arise in the application of the treaties.



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