

**MINUTES (Revised May15, 2002)**  
**MEETING OF THE NEW MEXICO/TEXAS WATER COMMISSION**  
**MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MAC) AND**  
**THE REGIONAL SUSTAINABLE WATER PROJECT**  
**STEERING COMMITTEE (SC)**  
**CITY OF LAS CRUCES UTILITY CENTER**  
**MARCH 14, 2002 - 8:30 am**

**Welcome**

Karl Wood welcomed all attendees. A copy of the sign-in sheet is attached as **Exhibit “A”**. Those members attending from the Commission’s MAC/SC were as follows:

Ed Archuleta – EPWU	Karl Wood – NMSU
Doug Echlin – IBWC	Ari Michelsen – Texas A&M
Anthony Tarquin – UTEP	Gary Esslinger – EBID
Dan Santantonio for Jorge Garcia–City of Las Cruces	

**I. Review and Approval of Minutes from MAC/SC Meeting on January 24, 2002**

Karl Wood asked if anyone had any suggested changes to the January 24<sup>th</sup> MAC/SC Meeting Minutes which were included in the handouts. No one had any suggested changes. The minutes were approved as written by unanimous vote

**II. Update on the Paso del Norte Watershed Council (Council)**

Sue Watts stated that Council was in the process of reviewing the applications received for the Watershed Council Coordinator position. Thirty-two applications were received. Four finalist were selected for interviews by the selection Committee, which is comprised of Conrad Keyes, Ari Michelsen, Ed Fierro, and herself. The Coordinator will have an office at the Texas A&M Agricultural Extension building. The WAG grant and the funding from EPWU will each cover about half of the total cost of the Coordinator’s position for the current year, which is estimated to be \$60,000 including salary, benefits, office space and supplies, etc. The Council’s application for a \$5,000 grant from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has been forwarded to the WWF’s national office for final approval. The funds from this grant will be targeted towards costs associated with printing of outreach materials and Spanish translation of these materials. Sue concluded by saying that Chris Brown would talk about the status of the Coordinated Database Project and Doug Echlin would cover the status of the Canalization EIS. Sue also advised that the Council was working on developing a Strategic Plan, with Brian Hanson heading up a committee appointed for this purpose. Once the Committee has completed a draft of the Strategic Plan, it will be distributed to the general membership of the Council for review. The hope is to have a draft Strategic Plan in place by the time the Coordinator comes on-board. The Council has also applied for a funding from the USBR.

Echlin gave a brief update on the schedule for the Canalization EIS. Brian Hanson added that the Council was also looking at obtaining some funding from the Bureau of Reclamation. Mike Landis will help with this application. Ari Michelsen added that, in addition to the WAG Grant funding, EPWU will be providing funds for the Coordinator position. The Coordinator position will be a three-quarter time position with full benefits. Ari stated that four candidates are scheduled to be interviewed tomorrow.

Chris Brown updated the MAC on the status of the Council’s Coordinated Database Project. The purpose of the project is to develop a regional water flow and water quality GIS database which can be accessed

through a dedicated website. Chris summarized that the three main thrusts of the database program are to develop the water resources maps, to create the needed database architecture, and finally, to bring in the support of the local irrigation districts. A Council subcommittee was formed to develop the proposal for this project. Chris named the committee members and mentioned that Raed Aldouri had agreed to draft the initial proposal. Chris went on to describe the technical aspects of the project and the alternative data access technologies being considered for the setting up the website. The details of his discussion are covered in the meeting summaries from the first two Coordinated Database Committee meeting. These meeting summaries were provided as handouts and are attached as **Exhibit "B"**. Chris advised that the Committee has not yet decided on the data access technology that will be used. However, the goal is to complete an outline for the next draft of the proposal by the next Watershed Council meeting on April 5<sup>th</sup>. Chris also mentioned that EPWU has offered to provide 5 years of funding to the Council for this and other projects. John Burkstaller stated that UTEP's PACES facility already has extensive hardware, software, and expertise to support this type of effort. He added that he wants to make sure that other stakeholders are involved in the financial support to the Coordinated Database Project – EPWU should not be the sole supporter.

### **III. Announcement of Members of the Paso del Norte Water Task Force Attending Today's MAC/SC Meeting, and Comments from the Task Force Chairman**

Carlos Rincon stated that Mr. Dan Sisbarro, the Task Force Coordinator, was out of town and that he was attending in his place. Carlos stated the Task Force' purpose and goals, and made some comments concerning Task Force objectives and past activities. The Task Force will complete its third year of existence effective this April, and is currently in the process of identifying a second project to implement, which Mr. Rincon emphasized would be a good opportunity so determine how the Task Force can complement the work of other water groups. IBWC/CILA were the convenors for the first project. He continued by describing the composition of the Task Force and its support team, and subsequently introduced each of the Task Force members present at the meeting. Each member that was introduced made some brief comments concerning their participation in the Task Force and the progress made by the Task Force. Many of the comments and subsequent discussions concerned the need to coordinate the activities of the Task Force, the MAC/SC, the Paso Del Norte Watershed Council, and the Tri-Regional Planning Group (TRPG) to establish common goals and avoid duplication of effort. This coordination may result in identifying possibilities for the Task Force's second project. An example given of a possible coordination activity was to post the minutes from all the groups meetings on a common web site. Chris Brown added that the sphere of influence of the newly-coordinated group could actually be much larger than the agencies now realize. Another example was coordinating the Watershed Council's Coordinated Database Project with the Hewlett Foundation Regional GIS project.

### **IV. Presentation of Runoff Conditions and Surface Water Availability for Rio Grande Project for the 2002 Irrigation Season**

Javier Grajeda made a PowerPoint Presentation on the Rio Grande Project current water supply conditions and run-off forecast for the upcoming year. A copy of his presentation is attached as **Exhibit "C"**. After the presentation, Carlos Rincon asked if the USBR had decided on the allocation for next year (2003). Javier replied that next year's initial allocation will not be established until December of this year. Also, next year's allocation will very likely be less than a full allocation. However, the extent of the allocation reduction will depend not only on precipitation levels for the remainder of the year, but also on how much water is ordered by the Districts. Ed Archuleta asked whether there was a possibility that the USBR would lower this year's allocation later in the year. Gary Esslinger replied that he wasn't aware of any year when this had occurred. Javier agreed that a lowering of the allocation after the beginning of the irrigation season would be very unlikely. Mr. Archuleta then asked what the forecast for next year's allocation would be with below average precipitation. Javier answered in that event the allocation would

probably be below 2 acre-feet/acre. However, it may end up being above 2 acre-feet/acre if a strong El Nino kicks-in this fall. Should next year's allocation be less than 2 acre-feet per acre, Mr. Esslinger stated that the irrigation districts were talking about delaying of start of the irrigation season until April, and pulsing the rivers flows during the irrigation season. He added that it would be a real challenge to determine the best way to operate the river under these conditions. Javier added that at normal precipitation levels, it would still require approximately 25 years to refill Elephant Butte Reservoir.

## **V. Latest Developments of the Tri-Regional Water Planning Group**

Paul Gorder of CDM gave a presentation on the status of the Tri-Regional Planning Group (TRPG) Feasibility Study. A copy of the presentation is attached as **Exhibit "D"**. After the presentation, Ari Michelsen opened by stating that he was delighted that the TRPG was coordinating their work with the MAC/SC and Paso Del Norte Water Task Force, and welcomed the development of some "out-of-the-box" water supply alternatives. However, Ari added that it was not clear to him from Paul Gorder's presentation what water supply, hydrologic, and funding benefits would accrue to El Paso as a result of implementing the project. He suggested that a matrix form be developed outlining the benefits derived by each TRPG entity from each alternative, and that this matrix be used to better justify a preferred alternative. Paul Gorder stated that this type of analysis had been undertaken during the process of selecting a preferred alternative. Concerning the issue of the benefits derived by El Paso, this gets back to the basic question of "Why are we doing this?" What stimulated the whole process was the problem being faced by Juarez of the depletion of fresh water reserves and deteriorating groundwater quality. The question was then asked: How can El Paso and Dona Ana County assist Juarez? Mr. Gorder agreed with Ari that the benefits to El Paso need to be clearly identified in order to get funding for the project. NADBANK needs to see a need for this project, which is basically to remedy the critical water supply situation in Juarez. A discussion followed concerning the funding options for the TRPG, bi-national project and the benefits which El Paso could or should derive from this project. For example, one of the options discussed was that JMAS could build its own plant, but then it may not be able to get BECC funding.

Someone asked if mutual groundwater supply alternatives had been considered for implementation in the first phase. Paul replied that JMAS had not wanted to consider groundwater options at this point in time, because they still don't know enough about the aquifer to evaluate bi-national groundwater sharing alternatives. Therefore, the focus on the first phase was to look at surface water alternatives only. The only short term source of surface water is Mexico's allocation of Rio Grande Project water, so this had become the focus of the TRPG Feasibility Study.

Jurgen Schmandt stated that implementation of the alternatives assumed that taking the water from Juarez farmers is politically possible. Paul answered that the JMAS has said that is it possible. Also, there is no intention of simply "taking" the water from the farmers. The water would be replaced with effluent, or farmland would be retired and farmers compensated by granting them development permits.

Tony Tarquin stated that it appeared to him that the benefit that El Paso plans to derive from Phase I of the project is a "free" water treatment plant. However, assuming 100% grant funding for Phase I of the Upper Valley Water Treatment Plant (UVWTP) was a huge assumption in view of the fact that BEIF has only \$75 million this year allotted for the entire border region. Getting this level of funding will require huge political and institutional buy-in, yet in his opinion there has been insufficient planning done to obtain the necessary buy-in. Mr. Archuleta explained that El Paso would benefit from the project because it would be able to readily expand the UVTWP later on when it could acquire the necessary water rights, and also by using the plant for Arsenic treatment of Mesilla aquifer groundwater. Mr. Archuleta added that he also sees the supply of treated surface water to Juarez as a humanitarian issue, and that his Board is committed to solving bi-national water issues.

Carlos Rincon stated that one benefit not yet mentioned was that the project would reduce Hueco Bolson pumping by Juarez. Another is the fact the border communities form one metropolitan area which is socially and economically inter-related. Therefore, the benefits derived are related to developing a healthy bin-national community.

An audience member asked for some background information concerning the members of the TRPG. Paul Gorder replied that the RPG members were EPWU, JMAS, and the Lower Rio Grande Water Users Organization. Ed Archuleta added that CDM will be preparing a report on the TRPG Feasibility Study, which will include an Executive Summary. This will include all the background information about the TRPG and the committees formed by the group. Ed Archuleta asked Paul to add some introductory background slides to his presentation about the TRPG prior to distribution with the MAC/SC minutes. Paul agreed to do so.

Ed Archuleta suggested that the next MAC/SC meeting be dedicated to a discussion about how the water groups can coordinate their activities with each other and added that this may also be a good time to talk about including the State of Chihuahua in the meetings. Tony Tarquin stated that he saw two main issues that needed to be discussed – coordination among the groups and the type of relationships that are to exist among them.

The representative from Congressman Reyes' office pointed out that there is an incorrect perception in Washington that El Paso is running out of water. This issue normally arises every four years when the military Basic Realignment and Closure (BRAC) evaluations are required. Congressman Reyes has offered his assistance to address the issue and minimize negative publicity resulting from this perception. A discussion followed concerning the reasons behind this negative perception and possible actions that could be taken to minimize or eliminate it.

Bobby Creel suggested that Ed Archuleta and Tony Tarquin work together to come up with an agenda for the next MAC/SC meeting, and that they insure that representatives from the appropriate water groups and selected Mexican agencies would be able to attend.

## **VI. Description of EPWU's Documentation Manual for the EPWU-USGS Hueco Ground Water Flow Model**

Bill Hutchinson stated that the U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) has been working on a groundwater flow model for the Hueco Bolson for some time. That effort is now complete and a draft report on the model has been submitted by USGS to EPWU. However, he pointed out that the model itself was not very accessible, and the USGS draft report was not very descriptive. Also, over time different versions of the model have been developed and used by various entities. Therefore, he has developed a Documentation Manual that describes the EPWU model and that documents the input files used by the model. The computer model and documentation manual are available to anyone who requests them. Interested individuals can contact him personally or via e-mail for copies.

David Allen asked how the 5-year estimate for Cd. Juarez' remaining fresh water reserves was determined. Bill replied that the Hueco model was not used to determine this estimate. Instead, a more direct computation method was used based on a rough estimate of the volume of recoverable freshwater remaining in Mexico's portion of the Hueco Bolson, and also on the current groundwater pumping by Cd. Juarez.

Tony Tarquin stated that the perception that El Paso is running out of water is very inaccurate. He asserted that El Paso is only running out of water at a certain price, and noted as an example that if EPWU

were allowed to double its rates, it could secure access to more than enough additional water supplies to enable it to supply the City for the foreseeable future. He reiterated the concept that El Paso is only running out of water at the current price.

#### **VII. Presentation on the Impacts of Waterborne Pathogens in the Paso del Norte Region**

Dr. Kevin Oshima of the NMSU Biology Department gave a PowerPoint presentation on their ongoing survey study of water-borne pathogens in the Rio Grande. A copy of the presentation is attached as **Exhibit "E"**. Dr. George De-Giovanni's section of the presentation was canceled because many of the attendees had to leave early to attend a Regional Planning Group meeting (Senate Bill 2) in El Paso.

#### **VIII. Other Business**

No additional business was brought out for discussion.

#### **IX. Schedule Next Meeting/Location**

The next meeting was scheduled for April 25<sup>th</sup>, at 9:00a.m., at the EPWU Main Office Boardroom.