

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE NEW MEXICO/TEXAS WATER COMMISSION
MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MAC) AND
THE REGIONAL SUSTAINABLE WATER PROJECT
STEERING COMMITTEE (SC)
EL PASO WATER UTILITIES-PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD
1154 HAWKINS
EL PASO, TEXAS 79961
March 27, 2003
2:00 P.M.

Welcome

Mike P. Fahy chaired and opened the meeting on behalf of Mr. Archuleta, who was not able to attend. A copy of the sign-in sheet is attached as **Exhibit "A"**. Those members attending from the Commission's MAC/SC were as follows:

Karl Wood – NMSU	Mike P. Fahy – EPWU, for Ed Archuleta
Ari Michelsen – Texas A&M	Doug Echlin – IBWC
Conrad Keyes – PdNWC	Gary Esslinger - EBID
Dan Santantonio – City of Las Cruces, for Jorge Garcia	

I. Review and Approval of Minutes from MAC/SC Meeting on 2/21/03 (MAC/SC).

Mike Fahy asked if anyone had comments on the on the February 21 MAC/SC meeting minutes. No one had comments and the minutes were approved as written.

**II. Progress Report by the Paso del Norte Watershed Council
(Conrad Keyes, Watershed Council Chair)**

* Conrad Keyes referred the attendees to Item II of February 21 MAC/SC minutes, which summarizes Sue Watt's comments on Watershed Council activities as of that date. He stated that the Council's next meeting is tomorrow morning, and so there is not much new information on the Council's activities. Mr. Keyes introduced Ms. Nancy Hanks (Phd), as the new Watershed Council Coordinator, and noted that Ms. Hanks is currently working in Wyoming for the Historical Preservation Office. Ms. Hanks has also worked in New Mexico in a similar position, and has also worked in the Chicago area on some environmental projects. Ms. Hanks will soon be moving to El Paso and will start working as the Coordinator for the Council on a part time basis starting today.

* Mr. Keyes stated that work continues to progress on the Coordinated Database/GIS Project. The Council has not yet received the funds from the COE participation in the project, but work will continue in the next few weeks to get this funding started.

* Ari Michelsen stated that the EPA is starting to review the grant proposals submitted for the EPA Watershed Initiative Program. EPA's target is to fund 15 projects. The selection of the projects that will receive funding was delayed because of the delays in the passing of the Federal Budget. The Watershed Council's project submittal is for \$1.2 million to work on improving water quality, particularly salinity, in the lower Rio Grande. Ari added that Ms. Hanks will be commuting from Wyoming over the next month or so while she makes relocations arrangements, but by the beginning

of May she should be living in El Paso. Ms. Hanks will be given an e-mail address soon.

III. Designations of Representatives Who Will Be on the Information Transfer (IT) Committee (MAC/SC)

Bobby Creel advised that he is the designated representative from NMWRRI and EPWU has designated Juan Gabriel Jaime to work with him. IBWC has designated Mr. Mora. Other representative may still be designated later.

Mr. Michelsen asked whether the MAC/SC link was visible on the NMWRRI website. Mr. Creel replied that it was not visible yet, it is accessed by typing in the address. He added that he can add a button on the WRRRI website, and suggested that EPWU and any of the other MAC member agencies may want to add this type of link to their websites. This is the type of thing that the IT Committee can work on, because there are a lot of the cross linking type activities required. The MAC web page currently has electronic versions of past MAC meeting minutes and also a listing of all the reports from the El Paso-Las Cruces Regional Sustainable Water Project (SWP). It has been suggested that the actual reports themselves be made available on this web page, probably in Adobe Acrobat pdf format. The Commission owns these reports, so there should not be any question concerning copyright infringements. The IBWC has a copy of the SWP EIS on their website, but does not have copies of other earlier technical reports produced for the Commission by Boyle Engineering and others. Mr. Michelsen made a motion to add a link to the MAC/SC web page on the NMWRRI website and from the websites of any of the other MAC/SC member agencies. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The IT Committee will be charged with implementing this motion.

IV. Update on Rio Grande Project 2003 Water Supply/Allocation Forecast (Wayne Treers, BuRec)

Wayne Treers distributed handouts to go with his presentation (copy attached as **Exhibit "B"**). Following are highlights of his presentation:

* During the last couple of weeks, the upper part of the basin received an appreciable amount of snow. It was not a huge amount of snow, but enough to improve some of the basins in the upper portion of the basin and Rio Chama area up to 85 to 90 percent of normal snowpack. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains received the most snow, and this area is up to about 110% of normal. The Jemez Basin snowpack is up about 10 or 15% to about 80% of normal. The NRCS stated at a presentation yesterday at USBR's office that the snowpack is peaking out right now. One reason for this analysis is that the El Nino effect is starting to disappear, with not much of a trend, either wet to dry, being forecast for the next few months. The winds we've been getting the last couple of weeks have not been helping either. Winds result in a sublimation process which decreases the snowpack run-off.

* There has been a strong start to the run-off already. The Jemez Basin gauge has already shown an increase to above average runoff in the last week and a half, which is right on schedule for the Jemez Basin. Also, on the Rio Chama Basin, runoff flows jumped up over 270 cfs in one day. However, with the type of Spring we are having (warming up quickly) we are probably not going to see much more snowpack accumulation.

* On the Spring Runoff Forecast, Mr. Treers advised he just received the March 15 forecast yesterday. However, he advised that the forecast for March 15 came up about 4%. On March 1 it was at 53%, it is now at 57% of normal.

* At their presentation to USBR yesterday, for the 12 month forecast, the National Weather Service

advised that they are looking for next Winter and next spring to be dry and well above normal temperatures. What this means is that we are definitely in a severe drought mode, with a pattern emerging that is similar to the drought of the 1950's.

* Based on the March 1 forecast, the regulated forecast is at 44% of normal. The forecast calls for Elephant Butte to peak out at the end of May at about 457,000 AF. The low point will be in mid-September at about 258,000 AF, which is about 25,000 AF less than the low point last October. Estimated releases from Caballo are 439,00 AF. Over three quarters of the water in storage is credit waters. This morning, there was about 147,000 AF of usable water in storage at both Elephant Butte and Caballo reservoirs. Concerning the credits, all that is know at this point is that New Mexico has made an offer to Texas to relinquish some credits.

* The most probable projection for this year's allotment is that the final allotment will be defined somewhere between the end of June and end of August. Therefore, the final allotment may end up between 41 and 48 percent of normal. The final allotment will probably be set in July.

* Mr. Treers reviewed the handout of the release schedule for the Districts and Mexico. It shows two block releases for the year. A discussion followed concerning the impact that a large credit relinquishment would have on the allotment and release schedule. Conrad Keyes asked whether a special meeting of the Compact Commission would be required to implement a relinquishment of credits. The consensus was that a special meeting would not be required. Another discussion followed concerning the incentives New Mexico or Colorado may have to relinquish credits. One of the incentives mentioned was the saving to these states on evaporation losses on their credit waters, in addition to enabling the upper states to store an equivalent amount of water in upstream reservoirs. However, any credit relinquishment will have to be decided on soon, while most of the runoff is occurring.

At the end of the discussion, Ari Michelsen mentioned their monthly "Drought Watch" publication, which is a cooperative effort between TAMU and Reclamation. Mr. Creel suggested that this one page publication could be made available on the MAC web page.

V. Update on EPWU's Stage II Drought Response Measures (EPWU)

Dave Brosman gave a PowerPoint presentation on EPWU's projected water supply and demand situation during this year's drought and the stage II drought response measures (copy attached as **Exhibit "C"**). After showing the last slide, Mr. Brosman made some key points:

* He hopes that by late May, the allotment will have increased sufficiently so that the Districts will start ordering enough water to allow him to start diverting into his water plants. If he can start diversions on May 21 or so and start producing water from the water plants by May 27, then maybe by June 6 EPWU can go back to Stage I drought restrictions.

* He would like for the Districts to continue ordering water until September 30, but if releases continue to at least September 15, if he can get adequate quality water, and if his ponds are full, he thinks he can get by for the last week or two in September and be OK, without reverting back to Stage II restrictions.

* By mid-May, he believes the projections will be sufficiently accurate to where he can order his water based on USBR's projections. He thinks he can get by during the summer with an allotment between 1.6 to 2.0 AF/acre. However, he positively needs to know by mid-July what the cut-off date for the releases will be in order to be able to fully utilize his allotment. He plans to operate his water plants at a high rate early in the summer season starting in June, and the cut-back if necessary late in

the season. He main worry is that demand will be very high once the Stage II restrictions are lifted, possibly hitting up to 200 mgd. Also, once the City goes off Stage II, EPWU cannot easily decide to temporarily go back to Stage II because of high demands. Mr. Brosman is concerned that the water quality may pose problems in June and July and that he will have to continue diverting low quality water. The water quality could reach 1,200 to 1,300 ppm TDS, and even though he has an exemption from the State to provide up to 1,500 TDS water, he anticipates customer taste complaints.

Mike Landis stated that he knows of some people that are willing to not water their turf at all and let it just die out. He asked whether EPWU had any program to give these landowners recognition. Mr. Brosman replied that he didn't know of any such program, and added that these owners should instead take advantage of the turf replacement rebate program. He advised that participation in the turf rebate program had increased recently and that landscape companies were in high demand, leading to an increase in pricing.

VI. Presentation on EBID's Drought Management Plan (Gary Esslinger, General Manger, EBID)

Mr. Gary Esslinger gave a PowerPoint presentation of EBID Drought Management Plan (copy attached as **Exhibit "D"**). Mr. Esslinger's focus in his presentation was their metering program, which is the cornerstone of their conservation program. EBID currently meters all of their canals and drains, and they are working on installing additional meters on both groundwater wells pumping into their system and on irrigation ditch head gates. EBID's engineer, Henry Magallanez, had designed and tested a simple and inexpensive metering device, called a "Mag Tube", for metering groundwater pumping. These meters can also be equipped with telemetry and data loggers, at additional expense, for remote access and totalizing of water flow readings. EBID will try to meter all farm irrigations this year, as opposed to using standard water charge tables. They have installed meters on close to 100 farm turnouts. Of those pumps that are pumping into EBID's system, 70 pumps are metered. Most of the farm delivery metering will done by the ditch riders using a portable metering device. Gary also explained in one of his slides how EBID used their 1978 water release and delivery schedule as a guide to project their release schedule for this year. 1978 had a final allocation of 9". Small tract farmers are being allowed one irrigation during the initial block release. EBID has used EPCWID #1 small tract program as a template for their own program. Starting this year, water ordered by farmers but not diverted will still be charged to the farmer, unless someone else picks up the water.

After the presentation, Zhuping Sheng asked whether EBID farmers had any limit to how much groundwater they could pump. Mr. Esslinger answered that groundwater pumping had not been adjudicated yet, but the farmers would have no reason to pump more than would be required to satisfy their crop demands. Due to high energy costs, groundwater pumping can be expensive. Also, to refurbish a well that has not been used for a long time can cost in the vicinity of \$85,000.

VII. Old/New Business

No new business items were brought up. Ari Michelsen and Mike Fahy suggested the following agenda items for the next MAC/SC meeting:

- 1) Update on the Paso del Norte Watershed Council activities.
- 2) Update on Rio Grande Project 2003 Water Supply/Allocation Forecast by Wayne Treers, including an update on the relinquishment of credits.
- 2) Status Report from the IT Committee.
- 4) A Report by EPWU on the recently released USGS Hueco Bolson Modeling report.

5) Presentation on the Forgotten River by Karen Chapman, Environmental Defense.

VIII. Schedule Next Meeting/Location

The next MAC/SC meeting was scheduled for 9:00 am April 25, 2003. The location was tentatively set for the City of Las Cruces offices.