

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE NEW MEXICO/TEXAS WATER COMMISSION
MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MAC) AND
THE REGIONAL SUSTAINABLE WATER PROJECT
STEERING COMMITTEE (SC)

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
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April 25, 2003
9:00 A.M.

Welcome

Karl Wood opened and chaired the meeting. Mr. Archuleta 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 – NMWRRRI
Dr. Ari Michelsen – Texas A&M
Conrad Keyes - PdNWC
A. Tarquin – UTEP
Mike P. Fahy – EPWU
Dan Santantonio – City of Las Cruces

I. Review and Approval of Minutes from MAC/SC Meeting on 3/27/03 (MAC/SC).

Karl Wood asked if anyone had comments on the March 27th MAC/SC meeting minutes. No one had comments and the minutes were approved as written. Copies of last months MAC/SC minutes were available for review.

II. Progress Report by the Paso del Norte Watershed Council (PdNWC)
(Nancy Hanks, Watershed Council Coordinator)

Nancy Hanks re-introduced herself to the MAC/SC and to the members of the audience who may not have met the new Watershed council coordinator. She has a background in environmental research and had previously worked as a research associate with the University of Oklahoma, and was also an assistant professor affiliated with the University of Western Illinois. She has a Doctorate in Geography, a Masters Degree in Industrial and Labor Relations, and finally, a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration. She will be a great asset to the Watershed council

Activities of the Watershed Council that took place on March 28th at the NM Dept. of Agriculture included:

- Updating the brochure with new wording, photos, enlarging the size of the brochure and including a Spanish translation.
- The finalized **PdNWC** logo was displayed and accepted with enthusiasm.

- Senator Bingaman of New Mexico had expressed an interest in the draft enhancement plan proposal for the Rio Grande Project watershed.
- The EPA will be announcing its selections for its watershed initiative on May 1st. (The PdNWC was not selected).
- The council prepared a scope of work for approval by the Corps of Engineers for the Coordinated Database, submitted a budget, and should have negotiations concluded within the next two weeks. Work will involve TAMU, NMSU, WRI and the Technical Committee for the Coordinated Database.
- The next Watershed Council meeting is on May 9th at 10 am at the IBWC office at 4171 N. Mesa in El Paso.

III. Up date on Rio Grande Project 2003 Water Supply and Allocation Forecast (Wayne Treers, BuRec)

Wayne Treers distributed handouts to go with his presentation (copy attached as **Exhibit "B"**). Mr. Treers began by referring to the first two pages of the handout which depict the snow pack graphs at each basin. Mr. Treers mentioned that we have had cool weather off and on for the last month. There has been a series of low pressure cells that have moved across the upper part of the basin which have resulted in some high winds, but they have also brought some snow to this part of the basin. These storms were not enough to boost the snow pack, but they did contribute enough snow to at least keep up with the average. Mr. Treers reviewed the snow pack and precipitation charts and spring runoff forecast. The April 15 forecast for March to July for the Rio Grande at San Marcial gauge is 50% of average, down from 53% of average for the April 1 forecast. This is much better than the forecast this time last year, which was only 2% of normal. The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook forecast handout (through July) shows that the central New Mexico region has shifted from a "Drought Likely to Improve" to a "Drought Ongoing" forecast, so there has been some worsening in the short term drought outlook. The National Weather Service 3 and 12 month forecasts indicate a 50-50 chance of precipitation being above or below normal on both forecasts.

Mr. Treers explained the credit relinquishment situation. After some back and forth negotiations between New Mexico and Texas, New Mexico finally agreed to accept Texas' counter offer of 122,500 AF of credit water relinquishment. New Mexico is now allowed to store up to 122,500 AF of water upstream of Elephant Butte reservoir. Reclamation anticipates New Mexico will store 10,000 AF of water at El Vado Reservoir for the Pueblos, and another 77,000 for New Mexico Rio Grande Conservancy District (NMRGCD) or for the Minnow, however New Mexico works it out internally. There is a possibility that New Mexico could store 16,000 AF at Abiqui Reservoir for the Minnow, and maybe another 5,000 AF at Jemez Canyon. However, based what is left of the runoff, they may not be able to store these entire amounts. In addition, Sante Fe may store 2,500 AF. Colorado has publicly indicated that they intend to under-deliver this year. That decreases the runoff forecast by another 42,000 AF. New Mexico also predicts about 20,000 AF of depletions by the MRGCD this year. When you add all those numbers up, it comes out to 162,000 AF that Reclamation will have to take off from the runoff forecast at San Marcial. This amounts to inflows of 22% of normal into Elephant Butte reservoir. Based on this inflow and the credit relinquishment, Reclamation expects to release 424,000 AF from Caballo Dam. New Mexico will also be relinquishing the remainder of their credit water by March 1 of next year.

The Summary Table of Projected Allotments for 2003 shows only one scenario each, with and without the credit relinquishment. The end of April forecast is now at 31.5% of a full supply with the relinquishment, vs 19.2% without the relinquishment. However, the runoff forecast at San Marcial decreases from 35% without the relinquishment to 22% with the relinquishment.

IV. Status Report from the IT Committee (Juan Jaime, EPWU)

Juan Jaime provided an update of the IT Committee's progress. Currently all meeting minutes and exhibits are posted on the Commissions web page, including a link posted on EPWU's website. They are working on getting the meeting handouts scanned in and converted to a PDF file so they are able to post them on the web sites. Juan requested that each member on the IT committee receive a password and a user name so they can log onto the server.

V. Report on the USGS Hueco Bolson Model (Bill Hutchison, EPWU)

Bill Hutchison provided an informative Power Point presentation (**Exhibit "C"**) on the USGS Hueco Bolson groundwater model. His presentation covered a description of the groundwater model and its interpretations of past and current groundwater flows and impacts along with predictions of future conditions. Next he demonstrated EPWU's pumping from the Hueco Bolson since the 1940's how it peaked in 1989, then how it dropped to 39,000 AF/yr by 2002, thereby stabilizing groundwater levels in some areas. Next, Bill demonstrated how a new desalination plant will reduce fresh water pumping and how storage declines in fresh areas will be reduced. He provided a realistic simulation which depicted how the location of certain wells within the bolson could create a trough that will prevent brackish groundwater migration towards fresh wells. Finally, he proposed a more contemporary concept of the "life" of the Hueco Bolson by introducing the question of whether the wells and operation of the wells could yield water without an unfavorable effect for approximately 50 years. Some of the undesirable effects could include excessive drawdown and excessive salinity increases. Bill's preliminary conclusion is that under certain conditions, the wells could operate for 50 years without such undesirable effects. Finally in a continuing effort to update and enhance the model during the next 3 years, EPWU will pursue the following:

- Participation in a National Science Foundation Study (NSF)
- Obtain data from new test holes and wells
- Update the flow model based on the new data
- Update the solute transport model based on the updated flow model.

The Mayor of Las Cruces, William Mattiace was in attendance and was impressed by Bill's presentation.

VI. Presentation on the Forgotten River (Karen Chapman, Environmental Defense)

Karen Chapman presented a power point on the "Forgotten River" segment of the Rio Grande which stretches from Ft. Quitman to Amistad Dam. She presented an environmental perspective. Karen explained that Environmental Defense is a national organization with 150,000 members all over the United States and she works out of the Austin, Texas office. The organization has a focus on environmental issues from a scientific and economic background. Karen has been working with the Forgotten River Action Committee since 1991. She mentioned Dr. Carlos Rincon who has been very active in Paso del Norte air and watershed issues, and has been an asset to the organization.

Karen displayed slides of selected sections of the Rio Grande River choked with salt cedar. She pointed out the importance of the river for tourism, farming, ranching, as well as the wildlife dependant on the river.

The construction of upstream dams in New Mexico has changed the river ecology for 1,000 miles

downstream, and has particularly impacted the area between Ft. Quitman and Amastad Dam where there are approximately 150 miles of continuous Salt Cedar. In some areas the river course is obliterated entirely by salt cedar. The salt cedar had been introduced since the 1940's and has taken advantage of the situation created by the lack of flood flows that would have established the kind of habitat that would have supported cottonwoods, and has rendered the course of the river undistinguishable in some stretches. Ranchers cannot often tell where their property boundaries are, or where the channel actually lies, and IBWC cannot often locate the border, which also creates difficulty for drug enforcement agencies. Karen mentioned that the salt cedar uses twice the amount of water as cotton- wood trees use and she related an estimate of 7.7 acre feet of water a year for salt cedar use.

Karen went on to explain the reasons why the Forgotten River is important. Big Bend National Park sponsors rafting/tourism, and there is farming of alfalfa, pecans melons, and onions, as well as ranching in Presidio and other areas along the Rio Grande. The Presidio area has been affected a lot for the last 5 to 10 years by lack of flow in both the Rio Grande and the Rio Conchos. The local farmers want to bring back onion and melon farming, which they no longer produce. They have not been able to exercise their water rights to the full extent and as a result, these farmers have gone out of business.

What have the Forgotten River Action Committee members been doing about it? They have been doing research and having workshops. They have been talking to farmers, ranchers and landowners who have been affected by the same problems and, as an environmental organization; they want to protect in-stream flows not only for aquatic habitat, but also for the people. They want to work together with ranchers and use them as resource. Economic and cultural benefits are the main targets of Karen's group. Conrad remarked that the density of the salt cedar has increased from 60% in 1967 to 100% today. Conrad projected a cost of \$3 to 4 million a year to remove all the salt cedar.

VII. Other Business

Items for the next MAC agenda will include:

1. Review and Approval of Minutes from April 25th, 2003, MAC/SC
2. Progress Report by the Paso del Norte Water Shed Council (Nancy Hanks, Watershed Council Coordinator)
3. Update on Rio Grande Project 2003 Water Supply and Allocation Forecast (Wayne Treers, BuRec)
4. IT committee up date and Coordinated database (Bobby Creel)
5. Update on Multi-state Salinity Coalition (possibly by Ed Archuleta)
6. Jim Steel's (CDM) presentation on the Ft Bliss/EPWU Joint Desalination Project.

VIII. Schedule Next Meeting/Location

The next MAC/SC meeting will be scheduled for Friday, June 13, 2003 at the Texas A&M Extension Center in El Paso at 9:00 am. The meeting adjourned at 11:30.