

**MINUTES**

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

**Texas A&M Research and Extension Center  
1380 A&M Circle  
El Paso, TX 79927**

**June 13, 2003  
9:00 A.M.**

**Welcome**

Ari Michelsen 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 – NMWRRI

Jerry Leyendecker - Dona Ana County

Dr. Ari Michelsen – Texas A&M

Gary Esslinger- EBID

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 6/13/03 (MAC/SC).**

Karl Wood asked if anyone had comments on the April 25<sup>th</sup> 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 (PdNWC)  
(Nancy Hanks, Watershed Council Coordinator)**

Activities of the PdNWC that took place on June 13 at the Texas A&M Research and Extension Center included:

- Nancy announced the new PdNWC business cards incorporating the new logo
- The new logo is on the website with the recent minutes, old and new business plans along with the agenda for the next watershed meeting, and an update on the Rio Bosque and the Keystone Wetlands for the next meeting
- Nancy stated there was a need for two brochures; one for the general public and one for the more knowledgeable community. Both are printed in-house using a new 7300 Xerox copier.

- An agreement is needed with the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) for their funding for the development of the coordinated water resources database. This effort will be performed under an MOA between Texas A&M and the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute.
- A conference call was held on June 4<sup>th</sup> with Gail Stockton of the COE. This call also included Phil King, Chris Brown of NMSU, Ari, Conrad and Nancy. The purpose of the meeting was to determine who was to be assigned certain tasks for completion by what date. Nancy will be attending to the URGWOM meeting on July 10<sup>th</sup> in Albuquerque.
- Finally, the proposal for the Conceptual Integrated Watershed Plan for the Paso del Norte Region, **Exhibit "B"** was assembled by several members of the Watershed Council to develop a biological inventory of the Paso del Norte Watershed. Other members of the Watershed Council were also writing a restoration plan for the watershed. On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, these groups converged and decided how to merge these two proposals. This meeting resulted in the Conceptual Integrated Watershed Plan which was presented to Mike Conner, who is on staff for Senator Jeff Bingaman. Mr. Conner thought the representation on the Watershed Council was an excellent array of stakeholders in the region. Mr. Conner offered the following suggestions:
  1. The proposal could go to Senator Bingaman's "wish list" for 2004, but he thought it may be a little late for that.
  2. It could be offered to an agency already working on watershed initiatives, such as the EPA.
  3. The House Natural Resources Committee would be the one to make the proposal if the council wanted to attain funding similar to the Bosque initiative in the Middle Rio Grande.

Mr. Conner encouraged the Council to submit the proposal for the Integrated Watershed Plan for the Paso del Norte Region. At this point, Nancy asked that everyone consider the one page Watershed plan and concluded by asking for input and requested an endorsement.

Dan Santantonio asked if this kind of funding will require matching funding and Brian replied the project does not require a match funding. There are sufficient funds available for this project.

Brian stated that for \$8 million, he would like to see a summary of just what is present in the watershed, decide what kind of actions would be best suited to the watershed, coordinate with the public, and develop actual watershed restorations. A significant component should be a pilot project to reveal the manner in which the watershed could be improved.

Karl expressed his concerns for the proposal. He stated that the historical perspective and the pre-settlement conditions should not be assumed to be perfect nor desirable for today.

Karl assured the Council that the changes were made intentionally over a hundred year period with the best technology possible, and with the best intentions to serve individuals in the region.

Concerning the Project Purpose, which states: "Identify opportunities for integrated watershed management to better meet the needs of agriculture, communities, and nature." Karl remarked that this implied that nature is a stakeholder in the watershed. He mentioned that at the first meeting he attended three years ago, a member of the audience wanted to give the river a seat on the Council (MAC). This action implied that the river is a stakeholder. The river, is not a stakeholder, nor is nature. The term "Watershed health" is used throughout the proposal. He also mentions that "watershed health" is a political term, not a scientific, nor a water management term. Karl went on to add that the relationship between the Watershed Council and the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission is not mentioned anywhere in the proposal, and pointed out that the Watershed Council is a subset of the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission. Joe Groff disagreed with Karl's comment that the river is not a stakeholder in the watershed process.

Karl also asked why a healthier watershed is needed. He states that the Rio Grande Project participants have done their best for 100 years to develop the project as it is now, and wonders why it should be changed. He questions the need for \$8 million. The information can now be found in several published reports. Karl says \$80 thousand is more than adequate for the job.

Karl also questioned why EBID, EPCWID #1, and the Juarez Irrigation District are missing in this plan. He states that these entities own most of the watershed, as well as the BLM, Distrito de Riego #009, and they are not included in the plan either. He accused outsiders of trying to take "a piece of the watershed".

As a last item, Karl examined the credentials of the council members and the objectives of the Council. He noted there are no soil scientists, restoration ecologists, or any wildlife managers specifically incorporated into the proposal. Karl insisted that they be included. He mentioned that NMSU is one academic institution that has the ability to do most of this type of work. Karl emphasized that the players need to be expanded.

Gary Esslinger responded to Karl's concerns and stated that the topic of restoration generally frightens the farming industry. He is concerned about the duplication of effort in a project like this. He said that data gaps have already been identified. Gary is concerned about legal entanglements and the ramifications which could result from trying to extract information from the parties that are in litigation and would make the project impossible to accomplish. EBID has worked closely with the environmental community in New Mexico and Gary believes the money should be spent on projects that can be proven and demonstrated, such as the Bosque Park in Mesilla. He says the money should be spent on projects which can be beneficial to the watershed and that are "on-the-ground and working projects," rather than on studies which will sit on a shelf somewhere. Gary suggested a radio telemetry project that measures water quality and quantity and includes a flood alarm warning system for arroyo flows entering the valley from the various flood control dams.

Such a project would be valuable to many because it would first give indication of a flood event, second it would alert the districts of extra water to use below Caballo Dam, and third it could alert the PSB of a higher sediment load that would be hitting their treatment plants. IBWC could also use this information to assist with their responsibilities. A project like this could determine areas in the watershed that could use improvement in terms of silt load, potential water contamination or flood control.

Nancy replied that the proposal has to be on one page only. Conrad suggested that to the Executive Committee reconvene to develop a redraft. Gary strongly recommended that they focus on specific projects, not generic projects.

Ari requested that the Council rewrite the proposal addressing both Gary's and Carl's comments, and that the revision be prepared for the next MAC/SC meeting.

Further discussion included Brian Hanson's concerns. Brian said the proposal needs more public and agency input. The expertise of the local agencies should be included. He emphasized that the irrigation districts are very cautious and want to make sure that no existing users are damaged. Brian mentioned that the Watershed Council needs a scientific document to refer to as a guide when evaluating watershed improvements. The proposal should include extensive coordination with communities in the watershed, collection of existing biological data, collection of additional data where information is lacking, propose multiple pilot projects (perhaps one upstream and another downstream of El Paso), and ensure that biological management principles are appropriate for the region.

Conrad announced that the next meeting of Watershed Council is on June 30<sup>th</sup>. The Council will identify when the next annual meeting will be held. Ari cited that one of the main goals of the Watershed Council is to develop educational materials. He related that if anyone had further input, to please contact Nancy or Conrad.

### **III. Status Report from the IT Committee & Coordinated Database Project (Bobby Creel, NMWRRI).**

Bobby Creel followed up on the request from the prior meeting to post materials on the Commission Web Page that had been developed for the Commission as part of the Sustainable Water Project, so that they can be accessible on-line. Eighty reports from the 1990's and early 2000's were assembled in the form of a bibliography. With help from Ed Fierro and Doug Echlin, Bobby was able to assemble 20 more documents which are currently available on line. A suggestion offered by Conrad was to have a separate Commission URL, and he questioned how much it would cost a year. Seventy-five dollars a year was the answer provided. Mike Fahy will check into whether EPWU can fund it and will talk to Mr. Archuleta about it.

Zhuping reported on the Coordinated Database for Chris. He reported that the website is divided into different tiles, extending all the way to Ft Quitman. They have all the tiles established along with USGS and IBWC gauging station data. The database will be linked to the original site. Right now, they have a subcontract with UTEP and the

University of Juarez. On June 10<sup>th</sup>, a technical meeting was held for the scope of work for the next phase. Zhuping and Chris Brown will have the draft report completed by the end of July and the final report at the end of August. The workshop will be scheduled to coincide with the August MAC/SC meeting to provide operating instructions for the database.

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

Wayne Treers provided a Power Point presentation (attached as **Exhibit “C”**). Following are some major highlights from his presentation:

- All of the snow pack has melted out by now. The snow pack numbers were better than last year, but other factors have contributed to a similar runoff as last year. Mr. Treers described the snow water equivalent charts and some examples of the runoff hydrographs for some representative Snotel Sites, plotted against the 30 year average.
- Mr. Treers just receive the June 1 runoff forecast and it was somewhat of a surprise in that it showed a 10% increase in runoff at San Marcial from 38% to 48%. Mr. Treers is not sure how that 10% increase was estimated, and he plans to look at it closer to determine why it went up so much.
- The table showing the present discharge flow rate on June 12 at selected gauging stations, and the percentage of that discharge as compared to the 30 year average indicates that most stations are flowing at significantly lower rates than the 30 year average. Of special significance is the flow at San Marcial, which was at 3.3% of the 30 year average. The hydrographs for these same stations, taken from the USGS website, show runoff at these station well below the 30 year average, except for the gauge at Rio Chama, which is generally in conformance with it.
- The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook now shows that all of the Rio Grande Project Watershed is in the “Drought to Persist or Intensify” region. The 90-day forecast shows equal chances of above or below normal precipitation conditions. The temperature forecast shows 0 to 10% chance of above normal temperatures in our region.
- A chart comparing 2003 against 2002 monthly cumulative runoff totals at the San Marcial station shows very similar numbers for both years, with 2003 runoffs only slightly higher than last year’s. Mr. Treers advised that the reason he does not think that the 10% increase in the runoff projection is going to materialize is that starting next week, the flow releases for the Silvery minnow will start. However, the location for the required minimum flows of 100 cfs has been moved up from the San Marcial gauge to the Albuquerque gauge. As a result, those flows will be likely be diverted by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) for irrigation use and therefore it will not show up at Elephant Butte Reservoir.
- After adjusting for current and expected upstream storage and diversion, total inflows into Elephant Butte this year are projected to be at 12% of normal for the year. The minimum storage content at Elephant Butte Reservoir this year is projected to be about 161,000 AF on September 10. The reservoir hasn’t been that low since September of 1978. Caballo Reservoir will also bottom out in September at 10,000 AF.

- By March of next year, New Mexico will relinquish the remainder of its credit water, and Colorado will have under-delivered whatever remains of its credit water. Therefore, in March of 2004, all water in storage will be available for allocation. Mr. Treers forecasts that, even with a 100% of average runoff next year, only 76% of that runoff will show us an inflow to Elephant Butte, based on his projections for water storage in 2004 by both States.
- The worksheet for the current status of credit waters shows New Mexico with 123,232 AF and Colorado with 39,823 AF. Approximately 7,825 AF of Rio Chama water remains in storage.
- Mr. Treers reviewed the end of May allocation computation worksheet. He presented a table showing the river efficiency figures for the months of March through April. The average efficiency for these three months is about 91%, and this efficiency was used to compute the end of May allocation. He also compared these to the monthly river efficiencies for 1978 and 1977. Mr. Treers believes that this year's final efficiency will end up somewhere between those two years. He also pointed out that the efficiency losses more than offset any net inflows into Elephant Butte over the last month. Therefore, Reclamation was not able to increase the allocation this month.
- In the "Summary Table of Projected Allotments for 2003", Reclamation is still projecting a slight increase in the allocation for the end of June, to 32.7% of a full supply, even assuming continued losses of 9%. The end of August projection is 36.6% of a full supply. If the 10% increase in runoff projected by the NRCS actually shows up at Elephant Butte, Reclamation would likely increase the allocation by about 8%.
- Dave Brosman asked whether the end of June allocation would be the final allocation for the year, or whether the Districts and Reclamation may extend the allocation season to include end of July inflows. Mr. Treers replied that it depends on the actual inflows that are projected for July and whether the Districts feel they need the additional water. Right now it is difficult to say what the decision will be.
- Mr. Treers presented the Tentative Release Schedule for the Project. Gary Esslinger advised that current plans are for EBID to discontinue its orders on July 7 and resume orders on August 1. However, if the additional 10% NRCS projected inflows show up at the reservoir, EBID may not shut off at all during July.

**V. Presentation on the Fort Bliss/EPWU Joint Desalination Project (Jim Steele, CDM).**

Jim Steele of CDM provided a Power Point presentation (attached as **Exhibit "D"**) on the Joint Desalination Facilities (JDF) Project by Fort Bliss and EPWU. The presentation included the following topics:

- 12-15 MGD Desalination Plant
- Rehabilitate the 15 existing Wells
- 12 MGD of new well supply with and estimated 16 wells
- Brine disposal Facilities
- Pipelines
- Water Resources Learning Center

Jim estimates a \$67 million capital budget, if deep well disposal is used. The design of the well improvements was completed in May. Jim anticipates that the design for the desalination plant will be completed in July. Future milestones include completion of testing for deep-well injection of waste brine along with NEPA studies

## **VI. Other Business**

Ari announced the National Water Security conference which will be held in Washington, DC, July 30<sup>th</sup> through August 1, 2003.

Items for the next MAC agenda will include:

1. EPWU's new Wellhead R. O. Program for Lower Valley Wells.
2. Update on Rio Grande Project 2003 Water supply and Allocation Forecast (Wayne Treers, BuRec)
3. Report on the Conceptual Integrated Watershed Proposal for the Paso Del Norte Region.
4. Discussion of the Merits of the Multi-Salinity Coalition Initiative (Ed Archuleta, EPWU).
5. JMAS ground water modeling presentation.

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

The next MAC/SC meeting will be scheduled for July 18<sup>th</sup> at UTEP, depending on the progress of the Watershed Council in revising the grant proposal. The alternate date will be August 15, also at UTEP. The meeting adjourned at 11:30.