



## Minutes of the Annual meeting of the Paso del Norte Watershed Council (PdNWC)

1 November 2019 – New Mexico State University (NMSU)  
8:30-11:30 am

Meeting Convened at 8:33 am

### Updated Tentative Agenda items:

1. Introductions & Determination of Quorum for PdNWC Executive Committee (EC) – Keyes, et al.
2. Reports by PdNWC Committees – Co-chairs in attendance as needed
3. Status of International Boundary and Water Commission – U.S. Section (USIBWC) Environmental Assessments for the Rio Grande Canalization Project (RGCP) (Aquatic Habitat and River Management Plan) – Liz Verdecchia
4. Roundtable discussion about any proposed projects to be approved by PdNWC EC for 2019
  - a) Update on TX 319 project by Texas A&M University (TAMU) representatives
  - b) PdNWC relations with sister watershed organizations in NM and TX
    - MOUs or Agreements?
  - c) U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) Request for Proposal (RFP) – Cooperative Watershed Management Program, Phase I
    - Fiscal agent/proposal lead?
5. Review of By-laws, Strategic Plan, and Work Plan of PdNWC thru 2022 – Keyes, et al.
6. Approval of any new members of PdNWC and/or the Executive Committee – Keyes
7. Adjournment

#### **Officers:**

Chair & Acting Secretary  
Conrad Keyes, Jr  
*Retired, NMSU and USIBWC*

Treasurer  
Zhuping Sheng, Director  
*Texas A&M AgriLife Research Center*

Secretary  
Delbert Humberson

#### **Executive Committee**

##### **Member Organizations:**

*City of Las Cruces*

*High Desert Native Plants, LLC*

*Sierra Club*

*New Mexico State University,  
Department of Geography*

*Texas A&M AgriLife Research Center*

*Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juarez*

*U.S. Bureau of Land Management*

*U.S. Bureau of Reclamation*

*U.S. Section, International Boundary and Water Commission*

*Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología*

*Other Federal, State, and Local involved agencies with PdNWC*

*Other Private Citizens*

Paso del Norte Watershed Council  
Texas A&M AgriLife Research Center  
1380 A&M Circle  
El Paso, TX 79927-5020

Website: [www.pdnwc.org](http://www.pdnwc.org)

### **Attendees (see sign in sheets for details)**

- Davena Crosley – New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)
- Abe Franklin – NMED
- Woodrow Irving– USBR
- Conrad Keyes – private citizen and consultant
- Liz Verdecchia - USIBWC (via Zoom)
- Gil Sorg – City of Las Cruces (CLC)
- Zhuping Sheng – TAMU Agrilife (via Zoom)
- Christopher Brown – NMSU
- Kurt Anderson – Sierra Club
- Saurav Kumar - TAMU Agrilife
- Zach Libbin – Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) (via Zoom)

### **Environmental Committee Update (Gil Sorg)**

- Gil reported that he attended a site tour on Oct 30 of USIBWC's proposed Las Cruces Effluent wetland/aquatic habitat project. This is from the aquatic habitat Environmental Assessment (EA that Liz would discuss later. There is an option of expanding the site northward. USIBWC anticipates having a final design by February 2020. The local Audubon is requesting a grant for bird monitoring before construction.

### **NMED funding opportunity – Davena Crosley is the NMED person replacing Chris Canavan for NMED in Las Cruces, Abe Franklin is the Watershed Protection Section Program Manager based out of Santa Fe, and they presented an NMED funding opportunity.**

- NMED Funding opportunity is in play that is open to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public agencies, private land owners, and firms. Funding is to support watershed-based plans similar to what the PdNWC has had in the past. \$900 k is available, more could be coming forward, and this is a statewide effort. NMED would like to see projects from southern NM, specifically for projects that reduce E. coli loading in the impaired sections. Match = 40% of total project costs and can include cost shares, time contributed, and foregone indirect costs (IDC). Call will go out in mid-December, with proposals due in mid-February.
- Liz asked about the EBID trash-in-drains outreach 319 grant proposal that the Council supported several years ago? EBID did get a grant for tire cleanup that was successful. Discussion of a future outreach project that prevents manure or pet waste from getting into drains. Abe suggested the Council get on the email newsletter list if we're not already.
- Ping asked if NMED can cooperate with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) on surface water standards/nonpoint source projects. This makes sense and should be possible, and Ping will provide a referral to someone at TCEQ to Davena for her to pursue. Committee supported the idea, and we ask that Davena provide an update as discussions unfold. Discussion of whether funding could be used to impact project areas on the other side of the state line. Abe said that it should benefit water quality in waters where NM has jurisdiction, but that could be eligible.

### **Liz Verdecchia, USIBWC, briefed the Council on the USIBWC work on environmental assessment (EA) for the RGCP**

- Liz provided an extensive presentation on a range of USIBWC activities related to two EAs for the RGCP, and this included detail on EA alternatives. First is the EA for the Continuation of the River Management Plan, which is anticipated to be final in November 2019, which will replace the 2009 Record of Decision. USIBWC anticipates the preferred alternative to be the combination. The second EA is for Aquatic Habitat Restoration in the Rio Grande Canalization Project. USIBWC evaluated some of the projects proposed by the Southwest Environmental Center (SWEC) study funded by the Council a couple of years ago. USIBWC is reviewing the final EA and anticipates posting the Notice of Availability later in 2019; USIBWC anticipates selecting four sites for implementation. These are very interesting projects with much benefit to the region, and her presentation includes design drawings and photographs that clearly detail the alternatives. Brown will see that this presentation is posted to the USIBWC Website.

- Ping asked about trails, and these would need to be under USIBWC's lease program. Discussion can happen with the City of El Paso (CEP) or CLC. NM State legislation called for these trails to be part of the statewide Rio Grande trail network.
- Conrad asked if the Council would be part of implementation committee. USIBWC will ensure that stakeholders are engaged.
- Special thanks to Liz for her good work on the EA and the briefing.

### **Discussion of quorum, subject to changes in membership**

- Peter Bennett and Brian Hanson are stepping off the PdNWC Executive Committee (EC), but will continue on the Environmental Committee.
- Add Kurt to Environmental Committee.
- Kevin Bixby is stepping off the EC; he MAY continue on the environmental committee.
- We also asked Liz, Ping, and Woody to review their commitment through 2022 – they did, and this was approved unanimously.
- This leaves us with 5 openings, but Saurav Kumar is interested in joining the EC. We will handle this at a future meeting, but Saurav is welcome to join the Council, and we are happy to have him in the group.
- Possible new members
  - Brown noted that Hugo Rojas Villalobos from Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) has completed his PhD and is interested in joining us. The EC supported Brown inviting him to join us and share the membership.
  - Brown also noted the connection with Ana Cordova at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF)/Ciudad Juarez and her project on the constructed wetlands in Juarez. Again, the committee supported extending the invitation to her to join the group and present her project.
  - Ping also noted that Carlos Rincon is still in the area and interested in environmental work in the region, and he would be a good addition to the EC.
- Liz noted that the Council should continue with efforts to have virtual methods or conference call capability to participate in meetings for those who cannot attend in person.
- We did vote to accept the resignations of Peter, Brian, and Kevin, and this reduced active membership to n=15, allowing us to make quorum (8 people are in attendance).

### **Roundtable discussion on proposed projects**

- Ping provided an update on the TX 319 project, making a very detailed presentation on current and proposed activities. Brown will see that these slides are posted to the PdNWC Website. Proposal submitted in July 2019, and word on funding is expected in October, *any day now*.
- Thanks to Debra Brinkman, Gregory Torrell, Saurav Kumar, Lucas Gregory (TAMU) and contact with El Paso County (Jose Landeros, Planning & Development Department Director) for their work.

- Other RFPs - WaterSmart (USBR) on drought resiliency, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Environmental Ed grant opportunity. Discussion of Stormwater Coalition Cooperative Watershed grant. They may be requesting a letter of support for their grant. Zack briefly went over the grant proposal for the Coalition. It's a \$100k grant. Task 1 will be for them to get organized, improve website, and get a 501c. Task 2 will be to write a watershed plan for the NM portion. Task 3 will be predesign of projects like Rincon, La Union that are solutions to sediment, E. coli and other watershed issued, but primarily sediment. Slow water down, let it infiltrate. Will want to request a support letter from the Council. New plan will incorporate the Council's watershed-based plan.
- Discussion of the Coalition's previous USBR awards/proposals. They received the implementation but not the drought contingency grant with City of Las Cruces. Coalition is improving flow measurement such as an advance warning; WRRRI is helping.

### **Connections to other groups in the region**

- **Audubon** – Beth Bardwell was active in the past and is not getting email messages from Conrad, and we may want to reach out to her to rejoin the group.
- **Paso del Norte Health Foundation (PdNHF)** – Ping has a proposal in play with them, and he asks if it would be worthwhile to learn more about their work and how it might dovetail with what we are doing, and possibly ask them to join the EC. Conrad suggests inviting them to our next meeting and ask them to make a presentation on the trails, and Ping will reach out to them.
- Conrad (Debra, not attending) suggests we work up a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to connect to these groups – Brown offers that our current informal process of working with people may be the best use of our time. Ping counters that the NMSU/New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute (WRRRI)/Agrilife MOU is key to move funds between the groups, and we should keep this in force. This has expired, and Ping will work with Brown and Sam Fernald to put this back in force. Ping also leans towards an MOU template, as this can be very helpful in establishing formal relationships that grant proposals like the WaterSmart project requires.
- Brown withdraws his suggestion that we NOT do these formal MOUs, and Brown supports the development and deployment of an MOU template soon, so these can be in place prior to when proposals may require these. Ping and Debra will draft the MOU template and distribute it for the EC to review.

### **Council Admin**

- Conrad indicated that the bylaws require 30 days advance distribution prior to any changes. The bylaws state that the Council can work with other agencies and on projects. The Council is not a 501c nonprofit, therefore the fiscal agent is the Treasurer. Can Conrad sign the support letter for these grants? He offers that the Council may need to solidify the bylaws.
- Strategic Plan was last update in 2018. Conrad requested that Council members please look over it.

### **Next meeting**

Officers will set the date for the meeting, but Brown noted that we want to invite Ana Cordova to present and possibly join the group very soon. We also discussed inviting PdNHF and Carlos Rincon, and we will make this happen at the next meeting.

**Meeting adjourned at 11:08 am**