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

14 February 2020 – USIBWC Headquarters
9:30-12:00 pm

Updated Tentative Agenda items:

1. Introductions & Determination of Quorum for PdNWC Executive Committee (EC) – Keyes, et al.
2. Approval or adjustment of Agenda
3. A Proposal for Sister Wetlands in Paso del Norte - Córdova
4. USGS Activities in the Paso del Norte Region - Wilson
5. Application for FY 2021 Clean Water Act 319(h) Grant - Crosley
6. Reports by PdNWC Committee co-chairs
    a. Technical Committee
    b. Environmental Committee
    c. Website Committee
    d. Financial Committee
    e. PdNWC Executive Council and Committee Membership
7. Adjournment

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

Website: www.pdnwc.org

Attendees

In Person:

- Jennifer Wilson – U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)
- Greg Stanton - USGS
- Leslie Grijalva – U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC)
- Davena Crosley – New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)
- Zhuping Sheng – Texas A&M Agrilife (TAMU)
- Mike Gaglio – Frontera Land Alliance/ High Desert Native Plants)
- Ana Cordova – El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (El COLEF)
- Delbert Humbersion – USIBWC
- Samantha Stiffler – USIBWC

Via Skype:

- Conrad Keyes, Jr. – Retired, NMSU and USIBWC
- Luzma Nava – Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT)
- Connie Maxwell – New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute (NMWRRI)
- Liz Verdecchia – USIBWC (via Zoom)
- Christopher Brown – New Mexico State University (NMSU)
- Saurav Kumar - TAMU

1. Introductions & Determination of Quorum for PdNWC Executive Committee (EC) – Keyes, et al.

Quorum was not achieved. A total of 7 voting members of the EC were identified as present when the meeting started:

In-Person:

- Zhuping Sheng
- Mike Gaglio

- Conrad Keyes, Jr.
- Connie Maxwell
- Liz Verdecchia
- Christopher Brown
- Luzma Nava

Via Skype:

2. Approval or adjustment of Agenda

Agenda was approved without adjustment.

3. A Proposal for Sister Wetlands in Paso del Norte – Córdova

Dr. Ana Córdova presented a proposal for a binational wetland are in the El Paso/Cd. Juárez area. Historically, the Rio Grande valley in the Paso del Norte area consisted of a dynamic mosaic of habitat types. This landscape has been altered by anthropogenic activities (e.g. permanent farming and irrigation), including heavy urbanization and river rectification in the 20th century.

During discussion, it was suggested that Ana Córdova get in touch with organizers of the Two Nations, One Water Summit; the next Two Nations, One Water Summit will be April 14-15 in Cd. Juárez. The North American Development Bank (NADBank) was also suggested as a possible avenue of support. Questions arose regarding potential issues with joint management of the wetland across borders, but it was clarified that joint management was not the goal. However, common goals could be identified on both sides of the border. TAMU may be interested in participating in this project and will follow up with Ana Córdova.

At the conclusion of the presentation, it was proposed that the PdNWC Environmental Committee work with Ana Córdova to draft a letter of support for the project.

4. USGS Activities in the Paso del Norte Region – Wilson

Jennifer Wilson presented on USGS activities in the Paso del Norte region, particularly activities conducted out of the Oklahoma-Texas and New Mexico Water Science Centers. Described activities include:

- **Routine Continuous Data Collection**
  - USGS collects continuous data all over the nation, and data in Texas can be viewed on the Texas Water Dashboard (https://txpub.usgs.gov/txwaterdashboard/). The dashboard includes three sites in the El Paso area: (1) rainfall near Cornudas, (2) groundwater level near Vinton, and streamflow/water quality in El Paso (streamflow provided by IBWC). The dashboard presents data visualizations in the form of interactive plots over time.

- **Routine Discrete Data Collection**
  - The New Mexico Water Science Center has been collecting suspended sediment data on the Rio Grande between Las Cruces and El Paso since the 1970s. Data are available at https://cida.usgs.gov/sediment/ , but the site will be decommissioned on May 29, 2020. After the site is decommissioned, data will still be accessible via NWIS Web (https://waterdata.usgs.gov).

- **Hydrologic Investigations**
  - The *Transboundary Aquifer Assessment Program* (TAAP) is a binational effort to improve understanding of priority binational aquifers. Originally authorized by Congress in 2006, TAAP is a collaborative effort between USGS, Water Resources Research Institutes, and IBWC. TAAP focuses on the Mesilla and Hueco Bolson aquifers in the El Paso area. Ongoing USGS TAAP activities include groundwater quality and geophysics studies in the Hueco Bolson; the geophysics study is looking to define the freshwater/saline-water transition zone. While publications on these studies are forthcoming, USGS also published a geophysical/geochemical assessment of the Mesilla Basin in 2017 under the TAAP program. More information on TAAP, including project partners and publications (state, federal and binational), can be found at https://webapps.usgs.gov/taap/.

  - The *Upper Rio Grande Focus Area Study* (URGFAS) is part of a series of nationwide projects that seek to improve understanding the volume, timing, manipulation, and consumption of water in areas where there is substantial competition over water resources. The URGFAS is a four year study involving a collaboration of USGS Water Science Centers with multiple publications in review. The Texas Water Science Center is involved in the groundwater and water use components of URGFAS. More information and project deliverables can be found at https://webapps.usgs.gov/watercensus/riogrande_fas/index.html.

  - The *National Water Quality Assessment* (NAWQA) is a program that started in 1991 to describe the status, assess trends, and develop an understanding of the nation's water quality. Rio Grande at El Paso is sampled by the New Mexico Water Science Center, and Jennifer stated that the data show rising trends in nitrate, suspended sediment, prometon, and atrazine; there are downward trends of sulfate, metolachlor, tebuthiuron, and dacthal.

Public supply wells were also sampled, and arsenic, fluoride, strontium, and uranium were detected. Water quality trends are also identified from reservoir sediment cores, Elephant Butte was cored in 1995 with results showing DDT at levels of concern. The NAWQA surface-water trends site can be found at https://nawqatrends.wim.usgs.gov/swtrends/. The fact sheet on groundwater quality for the Rio Grande aquifer system be found at https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/publication/fs20173047**.** The fact sheet for Elephant Butte sediment cores can be found at https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/publication/fs22196.

- *Seepage study of the Rio Grande from Leasburg Dam to El Paso* has been going on since 1988. Overall, it's a net seepage loss along the entire reach, although there are 4 gaining and 5 losing subreaches. The Scientific Investigations Report can be found at https://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2019/5140/sir20195140.pdf.

- *Mapping of Conservation Activities in the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo del Norte Basin* is an ongoing project in partnership with U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Rio Grande Joint Venture, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The goal is to improve natural resource management decisions and facilitate coordination of conservation efforts by providing a single resource to house geospatial data related to conservation activities. USGS will soon be distributing an online survey to federal agencies, the results of the survey will be consolidated into the database, then the database will be published to ScienceBase.

- *Fort Bliss Hydrogeologic Atlas* is a project being performed in partnership with the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery Center. This is a comprehensive characterization of hydrologic data for long-term stewardship of Fort Bliss lands. The Geographic scope includes watersheds and groundwater basins that contribute to Fort Bliss, White Sands Missile Range, McGregor Range, and Doña Ana Range. Publications are currently in review. Data types include soils, land cover, surficial geology, aquifers, streamflow gages, well locations and logs, water-level data, water-quality data, and geophysical data. Approximately 26,500 sites are in the atlas.

During discussion, Zhuping Sheng thanked USGS for the cooperative work with TAMU on TAAP, and then asked if USGS planned on adding more sites in the El Paso area. Jennifer stated that a funding agency is required to add new sites since USGS does not receive Federal funding for that effort. Connie Maxwell asked if the Ft. Bliss data will be available to the public, and whether people could get early access to it. Jennifer replied that the geodatabase is near final approval, and can put Connie in touch with the project manager.

5. Application for FY 2021 Clean Water Act 319(h) Grant – Crosley

Davena informed the group that the NMED Surface Water Quality website has more information on applying for the Federal Clean Water Act 319 grant for the Federal Fiscal Year 2021. The link for this site is: https://www.env.nm.gov/surface-water-quality/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2018/01/FY21-319-OTG-Notice-of-Solicitation-for-Applications.pdf

Proposals are due by March 12, and they are accepting areas with wetlands action plans as well as watershed plans. Since it is currently a solicitation period, Davena was limited on what she could answer.

Connie Maxwell stated that the Stormwater Coalition is interested in this grant and will ask PdNWC for a Letter of Support. Part of her project will be looking at monitoring E. coli and sediment transport; she will also be sending out an executive summary to the group and asking for input. TAMU will also be seeking funding under this grant, but will be working through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

6. **Reports by PdNWC Committee co-chairs**
   - **Technical Committee**
     The technical committee was not present.

   - **Environmental Committee**
     The environmental committee had no updates to present.

   - **Website Committee**
     The website committee had no updates to present.

   - **Financial Committee**
     The financial report shows there are currently no funded projects.

   - **PdNWC Executive Council and Committee Membership**
     It was determined that Jennifer Wilson would be added to the technical committee.

7. **Adjournment**
   The next meeting will be targeted for around August 2020.