

For immediate release
October 21, 2004

GROUNDWATER ISSUES, RIO GRANDE MANAGEMENT ON AGENDA FOR NOVEMBER 4 PUBLIC MEETING

Regional groundwater issues and alternatives for the future management of the Rio Grande will be discussed at an upcoming public meeting in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The Rio Grande Citizens' Forum of the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) will conduct the meeting November 4, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., at the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, 200 East Picacho in Las Cruces.

Bobby J. Creel, Associate Director of the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute, will provide a general description of the transboundary groundwater aquifers in the region. Additionally, Edward Nickerson, hydrologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, will share results from the Mesilla Basin monitoring program. Rio Grande streamflow is the primary source of recharge to the aquifer system in the Mesilla Valley. Over the past two years, allotments of Rio Grande water for irrigation were only one-third of a full supply. This reduction in surface water deliveries has resulted in a significant increase in shallow groundwater pumpage to meet irrigation demand. Monitoring data show groundwater level declines in the shallow water table. Aquifer drawdowns from pumpage may also affect water quality. What's more, the Rio Grande seepage investigation showed extensive dry river reaches during the 2004 non-irrigation season.

Also on the agenda, USIBWC Principal Engineer Bernardino Olague and Environmental Protection Specialist Doug Echlin will give an update on the Rio Grande Canalization Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The USIBWC's Rio Grande Canalization Project is a water delivery and flood control project from El Paso, Texas upstream 105 miles to Percha Dam, New Mexico. The Final EIS, which was released over the summer, reviewed four management alternatives for the project. The Integrated USIBWC Land Management Alternative was identified as the Preferred Alternative for providing the best balance of

flood control, water delivery, and habitat enhancement. A final decision on an alternative is on hold because of requests from elected officials and stakeholders to delay its issuance pending resolution of concerns over the selection of the Preferred Alternative.

The Rio Grande Citizens' Forum was established by the USIBWC in 1999 to facilitate the exchange of information regarding USIBWC activities on the Rio Grande between Percha Dam, New Mexico and Fort Quitman, Texas. It is designed to bring together community members, enabling the early and continued two-way flow of information, concerns, values, and needs between USIBWC and the general public, environmentalists, irrigation districts, municipalities, and others interested in the river. Members of the Rio Grande Citizens' Forum Board, who serve as unpaid volunteers, represent a variety of interests along the Rio Grande in west Texas and southern New Mexico.

The meeting agenda is attached. Members of the public can obtain more information from Public Affairs Officer Sally Spener, 915-832-4175, sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov or from the USIBWC web page at <http://www.ibwc.state.gov>.

For more information:

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RIO GRANDE CITIZENS' FORUM

Thursday, November 4, 2004

6:30 - 8:30 P.M.

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library
200 East Picacho
Las Cruces, NM 88001

Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions - Citizens' Forum Co-Chairs
- Transboundary Groundwater Aquifers in the Border Area - Bobby J. Creel, Associate Director, New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute
- Shallow Groundwater-Level Trends in the Mesilla Valley and Potential Impacts of Increased Groundwater Pumpage - Ed Nickerson, Hydrologist, U.S. Geological Survey
- Update on Rio Grande Canalization Project EIS - Bernardino Olague, Principal Engineer, and Doug Echlin, Environmental Protection Specialist, USIBWC
- Public Comment
- Board Discussion, Suggested Future Agenda Items

NOTE: The next meeting of the Rio Grande Citizens' Forum will be February 16 in El Paso, Texas.

If you have a disability that you wish to self-identify confidentially that requires accommodation, please advise us ahead of time. For more information, call 915-832-4175 or e-mail sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov