

FAR WEST TEXAS WATER PLANNING GROUP MEETING

Thursday, March 22, 2007

1:00 P.M. (MST)

at:

Texas A&M University, El Paso Research Center

1380 A&M Circle, El Paso, Texas

915-859-9111

MINUTES

<u>MEMBERS PRESENT</u>	<u>NON-VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT</u>
Tom Beard, Attorney at Law/Rancher	Ari Michelsen, TAMU-AREC
Bill Hutchison, E. Archuleta alternate	Kathleen Ligon, TWDB
Elza Cushing, Public	
Loretta Akers, Office of Sen. Shapleigh	<u>OTHERS PRESENT</u>
Rebecca Brewster, Town of Van Horn	Bobby Creel, NMSU
Paige Waggoner, El Paso International Airport	John Jones, A. Miller alternate
Maralea Miller, J. Adams alternate	Zhuping Sheng, A. Michelsen alternate
Jerry Agan, Presidio County Judge	John Ashworth, LBG-Guyton Assoc.
Randy Barker, Hudspeth Co. UWCD #1	David Meesey, TWDB
Michael Davidson, Visit Big Bend Tourism Cncl	Jake Brisbin, RGCOG
David Etzold, Etzold & Co.	Barbara Kauffman, RGCOG
Carl Lieb, UTEP	Monica Rocha, RGCOG
Robert Stovell, R. Meriwether alternate	Frank Wood, Hacienda del Norte WSC
Albert Miller, Valentine WSC	Andrew Chastain-Howley, WPR Consulting
Jim Ed Miller, Hudspeth Co. Reclamation Dist.	Bonnie Moorhouse, Horizon Regional MUD
Judge Leo Smith, C. Stegall alternate	Girisha Ganjegunte, TAMU-AREC
Teresa Todd, Counties	Patricia Bell, Salt Flat
Teodora Trujillo, Public	Gorden Bell, Guadalupe Mtns. National Park
Luis Ito, J. Voorheis alternate	Peter Szilaggi, Fort Davis
<u>MEMBERS ABSENT</u>	
Jesse Acosta, El Paso County	
Janet Adams, Ft. Davis Water Supply Corp.	
Ed Archuleta, El Paso Water Utilities – PSB	
Sylvia Borunda Firth, City of El Paso	
Howard Goldberg, Supreme Laundry & Cleaners	
Ralph Meriwether, Double Diamond Develop.	
Chuy Reyes, EPCWID #1	
Charles Stegall, Terrell County	
Jim Voorheis, El Paso Electric Co.	

I. Roll Call and Determination of Quorum

Mr. Beard called the meeting to order, declared a quorum, and welcomed everyone.

II. Recognition of Guests and Designated Alternates

Mr. Beard requested that each member of the planning group as well as each person in attendance introduce themselves and state their affiliation for the record.

Consent Agenda

III. Approval of the Minutes of the WPG Meeting of August 24, 2006

IV. Certification of Allowable Administrative Expenses

Mr. Beard entertained a motion to approve the consent agenda. Mr. Barker moved to approve the consent agenda, Ms. Waggoner seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Regular Agenda

V. Discussion and Action on Appointing Representatives for the Following Expired Terms and Open Seats on the Planning Group:

- i. Public (1 seat; currently held by Teodora Trujillo)
- ii. Counties (2 seats: currently held by Charles Stegall and Jesse Acosta)
- iii. Municipalities (1 seat: currently held by Becky Brewster)
- iv. Electric Utilities (1 seat; currently held by Jim Voorheis)
- v. Water Utilities (1 seat; currently held by Janet Adams)
- vi. Groundwater Districts (2 seats; currently held by Albert Miller and Randy Barker)
- vii. Economic Development (1 seat; currently held by Paige Waggoner)
- viii. Other (2 seats; currently held by Jerry Agan and Loretta Akers)

Mr. Beard introduced the agenda item and reported on the recommendations of the executive committee, which had met earlier in the day. He stated that the committee recommends that all of the current members who have indicated that they wish to retain their seats be reappointed, with the following exceptions: Janet Adams (water utilities) and Albert Miller (groundwater districts) requested to switch interest groups, because Mr. Miller has stepped down from the Jeff Davis Co. UWCD Board upon his election to county commission, and both are eligible to represent either interest group. In addition, Mr. Norris, who is Mr. Stegall's alternate (counties), and Mr. Ito, who is Mr. Voorheis's alternate (electric utilities), applied for the primary member position. The executive committee recommends both of these current alternates be appointed as representatives of their respective interest groups.

Mr. Beard also suggested that agenda items VI and VII be considered at the same time. Both of the following agenda items deal with requests for members to trade places with their current designated alternates. The executive committee recommended that Ms. Firth be appointed to assume the position of municipalities representative, but did not recommend Mr. Stovell as the primary member representing small business, as the committee did not think he represents small business interests.

Mr. Hutchison reported that the executive committee suggested advertising for a new seat for agriculture because of the importance of agriculture to the region, and which Mr. Stovell is more qualified to represent, and then advertising the small business seat as well. Mr. Beard added that the executive committee also recommended advertising for an additional seat to represent the public, since that represents the largest interest group in the region, and could be better represented by an additional member.

Mr. Beard then summarized the committee's recommendations individually, by interest groups, as follows: Ms. Trujillo for public, and an additional public seat be advertised; Mr. Norris and Mr. Acosta for counties; Ms. Brewster for municipalities; Mr. Ito for electric utilities; Mr. Miller for water utilities; Ms. Adams and Mr. Barker for groundwater districts; Ms. Waggoner for economic development; and Judge Agan and Ms. Akers for other. For agenda items VI and VI, the executive committee recommends Ms. Firth for municipalities, advertise for another agriculture position and also advertise for a new small business representative.

Ms. Cushing moved to accept the recommendations of the Executive Committee as stated, and Ms. Todd seconded the motion. Mr. Beard opened the floor to discussion of the motion. Ms. Todd agreed with the recommendation to add more seats to the planning group, as it would be good to get new people and new ideas, without losing the experience of the current members of the group. Mr. Stovell stated that he would be pleased to switch to representing agriculture, although he does represent small business. Mr. Beard noted that Mr. Stovell couldn't switch seats now, because the new agriculture seat has not been advertised. He stated that it would have to be put on the next agenda for the group to increase the number of seats for agriculture and public, advertise for the new seats, and then act on the nominations. Since there's no action item on the agenda today for the group to add new seats, any action on that would have to be delayed. Mr. Hutchison suggested that Mr. Stovell assume the seat of the primary member for small business now, for continuity on the group. Mr. Beard disagreed, saying that Mr. Stovell can still serve as Mr. Meriwether's alternate until the small business seat is filled.

Mr. Beard then introduced the executive committee's discussion on changing the name of the "other" interest group. Since this interest group was originally created for two elected officials, Senator Shapleigh and Representative Gallego, and they currently serve as the designated alternates for the two positions, the committee discussed changing the name of the position to "legislative representatives" or "elected officials". Ms. Todd agreed that the name of those seats should be changed, since the name "other" gives the impression, when advertising for representatives, of being more broad-based and open than it is.

Mr. Beard suggested that the planning group take action on filling the open seats that were advertised, and advertising for the new or additional representatives for public and agriculture. He then clarified that the group would have to act on creating and advertising for the new seats at the next meeting. Ms. Cushing reiterated her motion to accept the recommendations of the executive committee in appointing representatives for the expired terms and open seats on the planning group. The vote was taken and passed unanimously.

Mr. Beard then asked for a motion to change the name of the seat for "other" to "legislative representative". Ms. Todd made the motion to change the name of the seat to legislative representative, Mr. Hutchison seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

VI. Discussion and Action on Appointing Sylvia Borunda Firth, Designated Alternate for Adrian Ocegueda, Representing Municipalities, to Assume the Position of Primary Member of the Planning Group

This item was discussed under agenda item V.

VII. Discussion and Action on Appointing Robert Stovell, Designated Alternate for Ralph Meriwether, Representing Small Business, to Assume the Position of Primary Member of the Planning Group

This item was discussed under agenda item V.

VIII. Election of Officers for 2007

Mr. Beard stated that the group's bylaws state that officers will be elected at the first meeting of every calendar year, and since the group has not met before in 2007, it needs to elect new officers today. Ms. Todd moved to reelect the current officers of the planning group, Ms. Waggoner seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. Elected officers for 2007 are: Mr. Beard, Chairman; Mr. Archuleta, Vice Chairman; Ms. Cushing, Secretary; Ms. Akers, member; Mr. Reyes, member; Ms. Brewster, alternate; and Ms. Waggoner, alternate.

ix. Discussion and Action on Appointing Bobby Creel to Represent New Mexico as a Non-Voting Member of the Planning Group

Mr. Beard introduced this agenda item by stating that Mary Helen Follingstad had resigned her seat as the New Mexico representative on the planning group when she left the Office of the State Engineer, and recommended Dr. Creel to take her place. He noted that having a New Mexico representative on the group was very critical, and invited Mr. Creel to introduce himself. Mr. Creel stated that he was involved in New Mexico's regional water planning process as a technical adviser to the Lower Rio Grande Water Users Organization (LRGWUO), which is a New Mexico regional water planning group similar to the FWTWPG. He noted that the members of their planning group were not elected, however. Key entities signed a joint powers agreement setting up the planning group in order to receive funds from the state to conduct regional water planning. He added that he is the Associate Director of the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute at New Mexico State University. Mr. Beard remarked that he seemed like a very good fit for the planning group. Dr. Michelsen noted that the El Paso Agricultural Research and Extension Center of Texas A&M University works closely with the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute on many projects, including the Rio Grande Basin Initiative, and a coordinated regional water resources database.

Judge Agan moved to appoint Dr. Creel as the non-voting New Mexico representative on the planning group, Ms. Brewster seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. Mr. Beard welcomed Dr. Creel to the group.

x. Discussion and Action on Appointing Liaisons to Adjacent Planning Regions F & J

Mr. Beard stated that Mr. Stovell is currently the liaison to Region F, and Mr. Stegall is the liaison to Region J. He noted that in the past, the planning group has tried to designate members from the eastern edge of the planning region as liaisons to the adjacent regions, to facilitate attendance at the other regions' meetings, although meeting attendance is not always necessary. Mr. Stovell noted that he had attended some Region F meetings. Mr. Beard asked Mr. Stovell if he was still interested in continuing to serve as liaison to Region F, and Mr. Stovell agreed that he was. Judge Smith stated that Mr. Norris would agree to act as liaison to Region J, and that he would serve as the alternate. The group reached consensus that Mr. Stovell and Mr. Norris would act as liaisons to adjacent regions F and J.

xi. WPG Member Updates on Local Projects & Issues of Importance to the Planning Process

Ms. Akers reported that the committee substitute for SB3 had passed out of committee and was placed on the intent calendar. Mr. Meesey added that the bill had been amended several times and that some objectionable parts had been removed or watered down. The bill retains the section on instream flows, but there is no language on adding fees or taxes which killed the instream flows bill in the last legislative session. Mr. Beard directed staff to distribute the bill analysis to the members through email.

Ms. Ligon passed out a table summarizing several important water infrastructure projects in the planning region that had been funded by the TWDB, and summarized those projects from the past 18 months. She noted that \$44 million in funding had been approved for El Paso County alone. Ms. Akers suggested that the WPG send out a press release every time an award was made in our region. Mr. Beard noted that the TWDB does send out a press release announcing the funding awards, and asked that they forward those press releases to the group's staff for re-release.

Dr. Michelsen reported that the Trans-Boundary Aquifers Assessment Act had passed in Congress and was awaiting signature by the President. Funds to implement it have not yet been appropriated. He also noted that a federal flood assessment conference had been held in El Paso and that the report resulting from that meeting was posted on the TAMU-AREC website. He also reported on several desalination, concentrate management and Rio Grande salinity workshops that were being held in the El Paso area. He also talked about his participation in the American Water Resources Association's (AWRA) Third National Water Resources Policy Dialogue in Washington, D.C., in February. Members of the group were given copies of the AWRA letter addressed to President Bush and members of Congress summarizing recommended actions that need to be taken to develop an effective national approach to dealing with water resources.

xiii. Update on the Status of the Interim Projects Approved for Funding by the TWDB

Mr. Beard asked John Ashworth to present an update on the status of the interim projects. Mr. Ashworth discussed the TWDB's recommendations for changes in funding and scopes of work for the four projects the group had prioritized at their last meeting and submitted in their application for interim projects. Three of the four projects were fully funded by the TWDB, but the group's first priority project, for groundwater data acquisition, was cut from our request of \$540,000 down to \$100,000. That will allow only a few well tests in regional aquifers for which we have very little data to use in regional planning. The three projects that were fully funded are: a conceptual evaluation of surface water storage in El Paso County (\$100,000); evaluation of irrigation efficiency strategies, where we have the greatest unmet needs in the region (\$40,000); and municipal water conservation education and training (\$10,000). The TWDB has authorized staff to negotiate contracts with the regional water planning groups' administrative entities, and contracts should be in place by late May or early June.

Ms. Waggoner questioned what information the TWDB needed to clarify the scope of work (SOW) for project #1, the aquifer well tests, as indicated by their remarks on the TWDB handout, and why the budget for the region's number one priority project was cut so dramatically. Ms. Ligon responded that the questions the TWDB had on the SOW had been clarified, and Mr. Meesey added that the regional budgets for their interim projects were not final, but that they simply ran out of money and could not fully fund all requested projects. Ms. Waggoner remarked that in terms of the percentage of requested funds, Region E was the 4th lowest funded region in the state, at 38% of request. Several WPG members remarked that they didn't understand the TWDB's priorities in allocating funding; it was understood that the regions were supposed to rank their priorities based on perceived regional needs. Mr. Beard asked if this was still a regional process. If so, why was our number one priority not funded? The members asked for the TWDB to explain how the regional requests were analyzed and what criteria were used to arrive at the funding decisions. Ms. Ligon replied that there was no regional allocation formula this planning cycle, although the final amounts awarded to each region were close to the original funding formula based on regional population. She stated that all of the regions competed against each other for the available funds.

Mr. Etzold remarked that our region is severely water-challenged; water limits our growth and development. Furthermore, the WPG was very careful in preparing our SOW and request for funds. He reiterated that it is critical that we quantify our available resources, and that the data that project #1 was designed to gather is the information the region needs most. He stated that Region E has the most unknowns of any planning region. Ms. Cushing recommended that the WPG go back to the TWDB to ask for accountability and request that the \$300,000 in unencumbered funds for the interim planning cycle be allocated to our project #1. There was general agreement among the planning group that this be done.

Mr. Meesey promised to bring the group information on the reasoning used by the TWDB to allocate funds to regional projects. He said that every region he had visited had argued their need for additional funds, but that there simply wasn't enough money available. He acknowledged that none of the regions is as water-short as the Far West Texas region. He again stated that the \$100,000 budget recommended for

project #1 was not final, and might be increased. Ms. Cushing requested that the legislative representatives follow up on our request at the state level.

XIII. Update on the Joint El Paso Water Utilities/Fort Bliss Desalination Plant

Mr. Hutchison gave a PowerPoint presentation on the status of the joint El Paso Water Utilities/Fort Bliss desalination plant, which is expected to be online by the summer. The opening ceremony is planned for August 9th, and the WPG will be invited to tour the facilities.

XIV. Discussion and Action on Preparing a Letter of Support for the Proposed Terrell County Underground Water District

Judge Leo Smith requested the planning group's support of Terrell County's efforts to create a groundwater conservation district. Mr. Beard had prepared a draft letter of support for the creation of the Terrell County Underground Water District which was reviewed by the WPG. Mr. A. Miller moved to approve the submission of a letter of support to the Terrell Co. commissioner's court, Judge Agan seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

xv. Administrative & Procedural Matters

Ms. Kauffman reminded the members to appoint designated alternates if they haven't done so already. She also noted that the non-voting members from the IBWC and Ciudad Juarez had not been active for several years. Mr. Hutchison volunteered to coordinate with Cd. Juarez, and Ms. Kauffman will contact the new IBWC commissioner about appointing a representative.

xvi. Adjourn

Mr. Beard adjourned the meeting.