

**Colorado River Citizens Forum
Via Microsoft Teams
May 17, 2023
Tentative Meeting Notes***

Board Members in Attendance:

Patrick O'Dowd
Meghan Scott
Elston Grubaugh
Trina Hamby
Lowell Perry
Tina Shields
P. Brian McNeece

USIBWC Staff in Attendance:

Leslie Grijalva, Acting Public Affairs Specialist
Frank Fisher, Public Affairs Chief
Anna Morales, Area Operations Manager
Albert Flores, Environmental Protection Specialist
Ramon Macias, Principal Engineer, Engineering Department
Isela Canava, Principal Engineer, Operations Department

Members of the Public in Attendance:

There were approximately 33 members of the public in attendance.

Welcoming and Introduction Remarks:

At 4:05 MST / PDT, Patrick O'Dowd, Co-Chair, convened the meeting and called the meeting to order.

Remarks from USIBWC Public Affairs Chief Frank Fisher:

The meeting commenced with an introduction by Frank Fisher, the newly appointed IBWC Public Affairs Chief based in El Paso. He expressed his enthusiasm for joining the agency and acknowledged the IBWC's active involvement with stakeholders in implementing Minute 323 and planning the future course for the Colorado River region.

At the outset, Fisher highlighted the significance of the Citizens Forum as a crucial element of their engagement strategy with the public. He conveyed his eagerness to collaborate with everyone present and anticipated the opportunity to meet them in person during the fall. Fisher also extended his gratitude to Dr. Francisco Zamora and Stephen Anderson, who were acknowledged as the presenters for the evening.

Furthermore, Fisher expressed his appreciation for Leslie Grijalva's diligent efforts in organizing the event, emphasizing the behind-the-scenes work involved. He then handed over the floor to Mr. O'Dowd to commence the program, which would commence with a discussion on Minute 323.

Presentation 1: [Restoration Efforts in the Colorado River Under Minute 323](#)

Presenter: Francisco Zamora, Ph.D. Senior Director of Programs at the Sonoran Institute

Dr. Francisco Zamora, the Senior Director of Programs at the Sonoran Institute, delivered a presentation on the restoration efforts of the Colorado River under Minute 323. Dr. Zamora expressed his gratitude for the invitation to participate in the meeting, emphasizing the importance of the forum as an opportunity to share information and collaborate.

He commenced his presentation by providing an overview of the organizations involved in the restoration efforts, particularly highlighting the Razor River Coalition, of which his institute is a part. Dr. Zamora shared images of the Colorado River and its historical significance, including the delta region and the abundant water flow into the Gulf of California. He then presented maps highlighting the progress made over the past 22 years in restoring the delta region, indicating the established restoration sites in green and the pending sites awaiting federal approval in orange or brown. Dr. Zamora underscored the collaborative efforts among government institutions, academia, and NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) in achieving these restoration milestones. Dr. Zamora proceeded to discuss each restoration site in detail, starting from the north and moving southward. He emphasized the focus on reforestation, with a particular emphasis on Cottonwood and Willow Forests. Throughout his presentation, Dr. Zamora shared photographs illustrating the progress achieved in each restoration site, highlighting the transformed landscapes, and thriving habitats.

In conclusion, Dr. Zamora reiterated the importance of collaboration, shared vision, and ongoing monitoring to evaluate the impact of the restoration efforts. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to the restoration of the Colorado Delta and invited all meeting attendees to be part of this crucial endeavor.

Questions/Answers:

Q: Brian McNeese – Brian McNeese inquired about the clearing process involved in restoring the sites and whether there were structures, vehicles, or garbage that needed to be removed. He also mentioned noticing concrete debris in one of the slides and asked Francisco to elaborate on the efforts undertaken to create this resource.

A: Francisco Zamora – Francisco explained that the main challenge during restoration was removing S cedar, which covered almost 100% of the sites. They also had to clear some trash and possibly a few cars. In specific areas like Laguna Grande, which used to be farmland, there were remnants of damaged irrigation canals. However, the focus was on removing vegetation. In response to Brian's second question about the water flow, Francisco clarified that there were no planned flows for the current year. In 2014, a pulse flow was conducted to direct water more efficiently into the restoration sites and main stem, reducing infiltration and losses. This approach allowed for a longer duration of flowing water, benefiting the river, and enhancing the existing restoration sites.

Q: Brian McNeese – Brian McNeese asked about the potential impact of the proposed reductions and cuts on agencies involved in the Colorado River, specifically in relation to Minute

323. He inquired if there were any stipulations in Minute 323 addressing these cuts and how they would affect Sonoran Institute's efforts.

A: Francisco Zamora – Minute 323, which was signed in 2017, contains provisions to manage shortages if they are established. While he did not have the specific details at that moment, he acknowledged that new information and conditions have emerged since then. However, he confirmed that there are stipulations within Minute 323 to address managing shortages.

Q: Patrick O'Dowd – Patrick O'Dowd asked about the connection between the instream flows and the restoration project. He inquired whether the instream flows were directly tied to the restoration project or if they were separate and independent.

A: Francisco Zamora – The instream flows are connected to the restoration project. As part of Minute 323, the environmental and conservation organizations commit to providing one-third of the total water dedicated to the project. This water is utilized to establish restoration sites. Additionally, the decision was made to deliver these instream flows specifically to the restoration sites to enhance their impact and allow water to reach the mainstream and flow along the channel. This approach increased efficiency in delivering water to the sites while benefiting the delta's overall ecology.

Q: Patrick O'Dowd – Patrick O'Dowd asked about the drought tolerance of the restoration sites once they are established.

A: Francisco Zamora – The Sonoran Institute is working towards making the restoration sites drought-tolerant. Initially, the focus was on establishing Cottonwood and Willow forests, which require more water. However, they have shifted their approach and are now planting more Mesquite trees. This change aims to reduce the water requirements of the sites, taking advantage of existing Cottonwood forests and promoting water conservation. The ideal situation is for the sites to progressively require less water over time. Some sites may eventually sustain themselves with groundwater, but occasional irrigation, perhaps once or twice a year, can help maintain the sites and enhance their overall quality and value.

Q: Patrick O'Dowd – Patrick O'Dowd asked about the achievable scale of future work given the current and anticipated hydrology and the accomplishments thus far.

A: Francisco Zamora – The Sonoran Institute is currently working on assessing the achievable scale of future efforts. They had set goals for the next 10-15 years, primarily driven by the conservation organizations involved in the project. However, they are in the process of reevaluating and adjusting those goals considering the changing hydrological conditions. They are also exploring ways to improve irrigation techniques, establish sites more effectively, and carefully select their locations. By utilizing this information, they aim to refine their goals and ensure the project's continued success.

Q: Brian McNeese – Is it possible to use tailwater from nearby farms to irrigate the wetlands and restoration areas?

A: Francisco Zamora – The Sonoran Institute has been collaborating with farmers in the Mexicali valley to explore water conservation opportunities. One option they are considering is using some of the conserved water for restoration purposes. However, using tailwater directly due to its salinity and location is not currently being explored. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the return flows from agricultural water, captured by drains throughout the delta, contribute

to maintaining important wetlands. For instance, the Hardy River receives 50% of its water from these return flows, while another drain supports vital wetlands in the region. While reduced water availability for agriculture may affect these sites, the return flows continue to play a role in sustaining them.

Presentation 2: Regional Drought Outlook and Planning

Presenters: Steven Anderson, Deputy Counsel Southern Nevada Water Authority

Steven Anderson from the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) delivered a presentation highlighting the unique aspects of the authority and their efforts in water conservation and management. He explained that SNWA was formed in the early 1990s, comprising seven local municipalities within Clark County, including Las Vegas. SNWA acts as a wholesaler, supplying Colorado River water to its member organizations, which primarily serve urban areas. Unlike other water users in the basin, SNWA does not have agricultural interests within its service area.

Anderson emphasized the arid nature of the region and the need to embrace water conservation measures, such as incentivizing smart landscaping and using drip irrigation. He discussed the challenges posed by the structural deficit in water allocation and the impact of prolonged drought on the Colorado River.

Anderson highlighted various conservation strategies implemented by SNWA, including infrastructure improvements, return flow credits, and water pricing incentives. He emphasized the importance of public outreach and collaboration in achieving successful conservation efforts. Additionally, he outlined future goals, such as reducing per capita water use to 86 gallons per day and expanding the use of temporary water resources.

Anderson concluded by emphasizing the need for a collective effort in adapting to the realities of living in a desert environment and ensuring the sustainability of both the environment and the growing population.

Questions/Answers:

Q: Brian McNeese – Mr. McNeese inquired about the utilization of a reverse osmosis system for wastewater treatment at the plant.

A: Steven Anderson – Specifics regarding the implementation of a reverse osmosis system fall within the purview of the Clark County Water Reclamation District, but his understanding is that the wastewater undergoes treatment processes that comply with the standards set forth by the Safe Drinking Water Act. Although reverse osmosis may not be employed, the treated water is subsequently channeled back into the Las Vegas wash before reintroduction to the Colorado River. This comprehensive treatment regimen ensures the delivery of water that meets stringent safety requirements.

Q: Brian McNeese – Mr. McNeese raised a question regarding the role of SNWA in water enforcement and monitoring, suggesting a “water policy” function and asked Steven to elaborate on SNWA’s responsibilities in those areas.

A: Steven Anderson – While SNWA does not directly handle retail water delivery, we collaborate closely with our member agencies and maintain a strong relationship. Elected officials from these agencies serve on both the SNWA board and the Clark County Commission, overseeing the retail purveyor. SNWA supports water enforcement efforts through subsidized initiatives and dedicated personnel. Our authority to implement requirements or initiatives is contingent upon voting processes among member agencies. This cooperative approach has fostered productive relationships and effective water management.

Public Comment

No comments from the public –

Board Discussion/Suggested Future Agenda Items:

Brian McNeese – Board Member Brian McNeese raised the topic of La Cienega de Santa Clara, emphasizing its importance on the Pacific flyway for birds. He inquired about the current health of La Cienega de Santa Clara and its connection to the Salton Sea, expressing concerns over reports of collapsing bird and fish populations at the Salton Sea. Brian suggested a joint presentation focusing on both the Salton Sea and La Cienega de Santa Clara to provide updates on restoration and mitigation efforts.

Patrick O’Dowd – Co-Chair Patrick O’Dowd suggested for the next meeting an update from the Bureau of Reclamation on the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on the Colorado River. Patrick suggested reviewing the outcomes of this statement and exploring the direction set by the commissioner and the Reclamation, as it would provide valuable insights on how it may impact relevant matters.

Board members should email suggested agenda items to leslie.grijalva@ibwc.gov.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 20, 2023.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm by Patrick O’Dowd, Citizens Forum Co-Chair

****Meeting notes are tentative and summarize in draft the contents and discussion of Citizens Forum meetings. While these notes are intended to provide a general overview of Citizens Forum meetings, they may not necessarily be accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions.**