Colorado River Citizens' Forum
September 12, 2012
Yuma, Arizona
*Meeting Notes

Board Members in attendance:
Elston Grubaugh, Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation District
Jim Cherry, Cherry Water Management
Roberta McDermott, US Natural Resources Conservation Service, Retired
Bill Plummer, Water Resources Consulting
Tom Davis, Yuma County Water Users Association
Kevin Eatherly, Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area
Bruce Cox for Stella Mendoza, Imperial Irrigation District

Board Members absent:
Karl Eanockson, Yuma AZ
Chuck Cullom, Central Arizona Project
Mark McBroom, Imperial County Farm Bureau

USIBWC Staff in attendance:
Anna Morales, Yuma
Diane Hinkle, Yuma Office

MXIBWC Staff in attendance:
Francisco Bernal

Members of the public in attendance:
Maria Gonzalez, Yuma County
Rolando Valdez, U.S. Border Patrol
Russ Engel, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Patrick Morgan, YMIDD
Glenn Freeman
Bruce Wilcox, Imperial Irrigation District
Erica Stewart, Bureau of Land Management
Chris McDanish, Yuma Sun
Charles Moody
Maria Gonzales, YCDS
Lynne Pancrazi, state representative
Juan Leal, Yuma County
Nancy Meister, YAS
Bill Knowles, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Jim Davey, James Davey and Associates
Doug Hendrix, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Ted Martinez
Debi Livesay, CVWD

Update on Management and Water Flow through Mittry Lake –

Russ Engel, Fish Program Supervisor, Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), commented that the Mittry Lake Wildlife area was established in 1951 when AZGFD, through the Fish and Wildlife Coordination

Act, leased the area from the Department of Interior. It encompasses approximately 3,500 acres of which 440 acres are open water. The area is managed primarily for benefit of fish and wildlife. Recreation is secondary and has to be compatible to the primary purpose.

The area is approximately 18 miles northeast of Yuma, on the east side of the Colorado River between Laguna and Imperial Dams. The waterway offers a variety of habitats from open lakes to cattail marshes and streamside woodlands.

Current operating agreement (MOU) is through 2031. It is managed jointly with Reclamation, which manages water flow, and BLM which manages recreation and resources in the area.

Water delivery comes from the forebay at the Gila gravity main canal, through a cement canal, then into a dirt channel, through the main part of Mittry Lake into weirs and flows over back to the Colorado River. It is a flow through system. The agreement calls for a 10 cubic feet per second (cfs) continuous flow, the purpose was to control the salinity level in the lake.

Discussions have occurred with Reclamation over the years regarding water quality. AZGFD feels the quality is marginal in relation to fish habitat in the late summer to early fall season. A year ago, AZGFD acquired reliable water sampling equipment. In late August and September, water quality measurements were conducted focusing on dissolved oxygen for fish and found the lake was okay at that time. This was only a one-time snap shot. We need to continue monitoring over the course of the year. Additional flow would certainly improve the aquatic environment but it does not look like fish are in danger. No major fish die off has been seen.

We will be testing the water in Mittry Lake in the coming months for dissolved oxygen, temperature, conductivity, pH, and total dissolved solids in order to get a snapshot on the overall health and quality of the ecosystem.

Tests will be conducted (as of yet no scheduled dates) prior to any fish surveys in the spring and fall months.

The importance of the Mittry Lake's ecosystem is for the water to be clean. Good water quality is important for the health of the fish and other organisms that live in the water or use the water.

During the fall, aquatic vegetation dies off and decays which affects the quality of the water, thus causing deterioration fairly fast.

Testing which was conducted in the fall of 2011 had acceptable levels of quality. The water quality at this time does not warrant any drastic measures to improve it. Should water quality become more toxic, there are no specific plans to clean out the area.

Possible courses of action to prevent toxicity would be increasing the water flow in and out of the lake.

We believe that a little more flow through the area would help ensure that we do not run into problems in the future and it could improve and expand the areas of riparian and marsh habitat. Flows would also keep the salt content down, which generally benefits desired vegetation.

Water rights are murky; we applied for water rights when the wildlife area was set up on original lease. A copy of the certificate called for 4,850 acre-feet for additional filling but did not specify anything else other than sufficient flow for maintenance, a volume was not specified. At this point, there are constraints in the inlet channel. Capacity is 12-13 cfs. The Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP) is proposing an improvement project in the old river channel; as part of the project we have requested a control structure so they can flow excess water through the project.

Public- What is the surface area of the lake?

Russ Engel- 440 acres

Public- Do you have measurements scheduled?

Russ Engel- No, we would like to focus on July thru September

Public- Are the channels holding up?

Russ Engel- Yes

Public- If water capacity was increased and tules cleared, would the temperature be below 90 degrees?
Russ Engel- I don't really know, but I'm guessing it would help it some.

Update on Multi-Species and Laguna Dam Conservation Programs (LCRMSCP)

John Swett, Lower Colorado River Multi Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, gave a presentation detailing this project.

Program Purpose: Multi-stake holder Federal and Non federal partnership responding to need to balance the use of lower Colorado River (LCR) water resources and the conservation of native species and their habitats in compliance with the Endangered Species Act which is the authorization to do this work. Bureau of Reclamation is the implementing agency but is not only a Federal program; it is both Federal and non federal. Planning area extends from the lower Grand Canyon to the Southerly International Boundary which includes the historic 100-year floodplain of the river in both mainstream reservoirs.

The three main goals are:

1. Conserve habitat and work toward recovery of threatened and endangered species as well as reduce the likelihood of additional species being listed. Have 6 endangered species in the Colorado River.
2. Accommodate present water diversions and power production and optimize opportunities for future water and power development
3. Provide the basis for incidental take Endangered Species Act (ESA) authorizations through the implementation of a Habitat Conservation Program (HCP).

Covered Species:
6 threatened or endangered species—Clapper rail and southwest willow flycatcher birds; the desert tortoise; and humpback chub, razorback and bonytail fish.) 20 other species, including 4 mammals, 10 birds, 2 reptile/amphibian, 1 fish, and 2 plants. As well as 5 evaluation species --3 mammals and 2 amphibians.

The program consists of: Fish Augmentation, Species Research, System-wide Monitoring, Existing Habitat Maintenance fund, Conservation Area Development & Management, and Adaptive Management.

The LCR MSCP anticipates development of: 5,940 acres of cottonwood-willow, 1,320 acres of honey mesquite, 512 acres of marsh and 360 acres of backwaters.

LCR MSCP Conservation Areas in the Yuma Area include Hunters Hole - 50 acres near Gadsden, Arizona, which is a small pocket of cottonwood-willow habitat near the international boundary. There are very few spots to do conservation in the limitrophe area, this area is an historical spot.

Laguna Divisions is a flow-through system located between Imperial and Laguna Dams made up of 1,200 acres in California and Arizona with 3 managed cells using water control structures. The water delivery system consists of 2,300 linear feet of 4' diameter pipe connected to a sluiceway near the forebay at the main canal which should be online in the summer of 2013. Clearing and contouring started October 2011 and will be completed by the end of 2013. Marsh planting will begin next year in cell 1. Yuma clapper rail, yellow-billed cuckoo, western red bat are present in the area.

The Imperial Ponds Conservation Area on Imperial National Wildlife Refuge has 80 acres total, with 6 ponds (sanctuary habitats) separated from mainstream of the river which are 8-12' deep. Razorback and bonytail fish are raised and stocked to reestablish the population. A marsh area was constructed for black rails and adjacent farmland is used for spoils deposit from the ponds constructed. Groundwater is high in the area. A portion of the deposit area will be used for cottonwood-willow habitat and for refuge purpose.

There are 57 entities in the steering committee. All information and reports can be found at www.lcrmscp.gov. MSCP is a $626 million program in the 2003 dollars index inflation, about $1.5 billion. 50% is funded by Reclamation; 50% non federal (25% California, 12.5% each Nevada and Arizona).

Public- I have heard that Metropolitan Water District (MWD) has been meeting with the State Land Commission about buying Yuma Island, is that true?

John Swett- The issues are defining the land ownership and water rights which have been ongoing for decades with MWD and Reclamation. As far as an MSCP project, it has to have clear title and water rights. Private land has to have steering committee approval. There is a document that describes the process to get a MSCP project approval.

Public- What happens after 50 years if those lands are not protected by California or Arizona Game and Fish?

John Swett- Every project we do has a land use agreement with landowners and a clause that MSCP will continue.

Public- How much land and water are on the wildlife refuges?

John Swett- Havasu has 100 acres, Cibola 265 acres of marsh, Cibola refuge on the California side (Sharks Tooth) has 500 acres, the mesquite site has not yet started. Imperial Ponds has 80 acres now but will be about 200 acres after completion.

Public- Who's going to manage these lands?

John Swett- A plan is written into the document.

Public- Will there be more water flow through Mittry Lake?

John Swett- Channel is only for maintenance activity for the site. We have the ability with the design to push more water through, not for Mittry's needs, but Laguna's. It has more to do with Reclamation Yuma River Operations as to how it is routed. Our projects cannot affect delivery operations.

Public- Does Mexico get 2,000 acre-feet per day?

John Swett- Mexico receives 1.5 million acre-feet yearly from the Treaty. Deliveries are managed by the Bureau of Reclamation's Yuma River Operations.

Suggested Future Agenda Items

1. Bard Irrigation District's project proposal for MSCP – Ron Derma
2. Constructed wetlands in Calipatria, Ca – Imperial Irrigation District Bruce Wilcox
3. Bi National Cooperative Process update – Sally Spener

If there are other issues/projects you would like to hear, please email the Yuma IBWC office at anna.morales@ibwc.gov or sally.spener@ibwc.gov

Next meeting scheduled for December 5, 2012 from 4-6 pm in Imperial County.

*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.