

**Arroyo Colorado Wastewater Infrastructure Workgroup -
under the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership and
Steering Committee**

**Meeting Summary
April 25, 2005
Harlingen Public Library**

ATTENDING WORKGROUP MEMBERS:

First	Last	Organization/Interest
BRIAN E	MACMANUS	EAST RIO HONDO WATER SUPPLY CORP
CARLOS	RUBINSTEIN	TCEQ - REGION 15 REGIONAL DIRECTOR
CHRIS	CAUDLE	TCEQ - REGION 15
DARRELL	GUNN	CITY OF HARLINGEN
DAVID	SALINAS	OMI
EARLENE	LAMBETH	TCEQ
GILBERT	AGUILAR	CITY OF WESLACO
IRENE	CASANES	TCEQ - REGION 15
JUAN	FLORES	CITY OF WESLACO
LAURA	DE LA GARZA	ARROYO COLORADO WATERSHED COORD
LEO	VILLARREAL	CITY OF MERCEDES
MARCO	PEDRAZA	CITY OF MCALLEN
NEIL	HAMAN	TX WATER DEVELOPMENT BOARD
OSCAR J.	HINOJOSA	CITY OF MCALLEN
ROGER	MIRANDA	TCEQ
RON	THOMAS	HARLINGEN WATER WORKS
SUNNY	PHILIP	CITY OF LA FERIA

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS:

Earlene Lambeth with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) opened the first meeting of the Wastewater Infrastructure Workgroup formed under the Arroyo Colorado Partnership and Steering Committee with introductions. A special thank you was given to the City of McAllen Public Utilities for providing refreshments for the work group meeting.

After introductions Laura De La Garza, the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Coordinator welcomed the group and gave a brief overview of the various workgroups formed under the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Steering Committee. She said that the goal of the Steering Committee is to develop a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) for the Arroyo Colorado watershed and to have it in place by December 2005. The plan would reduce nutrient loadings and begin to restore the water quality in the Arroyo. This is to be a cooperative effort between the TCEQ, various agencies and the stakeholders (residents, municipalities, utility districts, etc.) in the watershed. Each work group is following requirements of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in order to be eligible for 319-federal funding allocated for non-point source controls. The group is hopeful that this could possibly assist the Wastewater Infrastructure Work Group through funding assistance for colonias and construction of polishing ponds.

Roger Miranda, the Project Manager representing the TCEQ introduced the keynote speaker for the meeting, Carlos Rubinstein. Mr. Rubinstein was once City Manager for the City of Brownsville, the TCEQ Rio Grande Water Master, and is now Regional Director of the TCEQ in the Harlingen office. Carlos knows and understands the economic challenges that the cities in the Valley are faced with.

Mr. Rubinstein spoke on various water issues facing the Valley – water quality and water quantity. He said that there had been such a demand and need in the past five years to concentrate on water shortages and availability, the Rio Grande, water uses, meeting demands and how unfortunate it was that Mexico had not complied...he was very happy to speak on the Arroyo Colorado. Carlos reminded the attendees that an important component for the future of the Valley and its' economic growth was not only water availability problems - but also water quality in the Valley including the Arroyo and the Laguna Madre.

Carlos said the agency and the state knew how important it was for the cities' to have a reliable water supply but it is also important that the cities act responsibly with respect to their discharge(s). Carlos said there was a time when there was a natural flow in the Arroyo – when the Arroyo was hydraulically connected to the Rio Grande. The reality is that the Arroyo we see today - the one we know and we have to live with - needs the cities and industries (39 permitted dischargers) to watch their treatment capacities, remain compliant, know their flow travel time, etc.

Carlos said that out of all the jobs he has had throughout his employment through the TCEQ, the most fun job was back in the 1980's when he would perform surface water quality monitoring. However, he said when the sampling results would come back from the lab, the staff would always know what the Arroyo sampling results were going to be. That as long as records had been kept...there had always been problems with the Arroyo having low dissolved oxygen results, not enough mixing, and poor results from all the parameters that were being monitored, "the Arroyo was just not a healthy stream".

He applauded the on-going efforts by the people in the Valley, various state agencies and others associated with the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership and Steering Committee that was developing a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) that will assist the Arroyo to become a better aquatic system and help it meet its' designated standards. Carlos said he understood that living in the Valley with its' explosive growth and economic challenges forces hard decisions for the cities and their budgets. He asked the cities to look at ways to build new plants, update plants, install polishing ponds and to look at ways to re-use water - all things that would reduce the loads to the Arroyo.

Carlos said that the time is now to begin to make a difference in the Arroyo through planning and taking the necessary steps being outlined in the WPP. He said there would be less algae blooms in the Laguna, more grasses in the Laguna, less fish kills in the Arroyo and an improvement in water quality and aquatic life and that he was excited to see steps being taken to protect and improve a very important natural resource in the Valley.

Roger Miranda gave an overview of "how we got to where we are today" in the Watershed Protection Plan. For an overview of this information please see the following web site and download the plan using your browser:

<ftp://ftp.tceq.state.tx.us/pub/WaterResourceManagement/WaterQuality/TMDL/ArroyoDO/ArroyoDOdraft1.pdf>

Roger had met with each and every municipality and utility before drafting a plan that would reduce the point sources in the Arroyo watershed. Even though the attendance at the days' meeting was far from what was expected, there had been a great response at each meeting held and everyone seemed to want to do the right thing. Roger distributed a draft document that was written after a great deal of research and study of the Arroyo Colorado and each individual permitted utility district (a total of 18 permits). The document was a draft wastewater load reduction plan for the entire Arroyo Colorado (tidal and non-tidal segments) with proposed measures to be revised every five years. Roger stressed to the municipalities and water utility representatives attending the meeting that the document being distributed to each discharger was a tailored *draft plan* that included proposed measures. The TCEQ would like comments back within a month of the days' meeting. This document will be a section of the Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) that is being written for the Arroyo Colorado. Some of the other sections of the WPP will include load reduction measures through agriculture load reductions, best management practices and habitat restoration to counteract physical modifications in the Arroyo. Other measures include plans for the construction of polishing ponds, riparian environment modifications and wetlands.

Roger said he would like the principal contributors, the municipalities and wastewater dischargers, who have been estimated to be responsible for 95% of the point source pollutant load to the Arroyo, to review the document and comment. He asked for a "wish list" from the utilities to be included for funding that would be needed to accomplish what was necessary to implement and achieve the desired goals of the work group. Some may need new plants, equipment, modifications to existing plants, etc. Even though there is no "superfund" money available through the water program, the TCEQ has committed to assist utilities in locating funding through various agencies and means to assist in bringing all utilities into compliance. There is a possibility of funding even from non-conventional sources such as Ducks Unlimited, etc.

The TCEQ is advocating a cooperative consensus-based effort and encourages the stakeholders to take a good look at what they can do and plan that would assist this effort that will begin to restore water quality through the proposed measures in the Arroyo Colorado and eventually bring it back into compliance with the water quality standards.

Roger said that the Habitat Work Group formed under the steering committee was available for assistance in designing polishing ponds for the individual dischargers. The Habitat Work Group was in the process of writing a Request for Proposal to develop a feasibility study that would include information that would assist the Wastewater Infrastructure Work Group with a model design that would include information such as the size of ponds needed for capacity, type of plants needed in pond, etc. Roger would also like each city to review their effluent discharge for re-use.

There will be an enforcement component in the Wastewater Infrastructure Section of the WPP. The TCEQ is now going through an agency policy enforcement policy review (includes air, water, and waste) and it has not been completed. Therefore, the section in the draft document Roger distributed to the municipalities and utility representatives was incomplete. However, once the TCEQ review has been completed, an enforcement component will be written into the Wastewater Infrastructure Section of the WPP for non-compliance actions.

Another component to be included in the WPP is associated with storm water management. There is a Storm Water Task Force in the Valley and, through their work and other studies being conducted, this will be written into the WPP. The Small Business Section of the TCEQ will also be conducting a demonstration project in McAllen using compost to assist in storm water runoff.

There is a possibility that “pollutant trading” could be considered. One of the factors that might prevent using this plan is the fact that there is no loading allocation associated with the WPP. There is definitely room for interaction and cooperation among the stakeholders and interaction among the various work groups formed under the Steering Committee.

The goal for completing the WPP is to have a draft completed by December 2005. It will probably be six to eight months before departmental review is completed and it gets approval by the TCEQ. There will be a two to four year Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study which is beginning this summer. There will be an additional two-year study of the effectiveness of the control measures implemented. Realistically, we are looking at 2012 before we can assess if the WPP is working.

Eventually, a plan will also be drafted to address other entities in the Arroyo watershed such as the Independent School Districts (ISDs) with treatment systems and other non-discharge permits and various industrial facilities. Un-incorporated communities such as Arroyo City will also be included.

Roger said that, at this point, everything in the plan being distributed is negotiable – but “buy in” and commitment is necessary from each and everyone involved. If there is an issue please let him know and he will assist in finding a resolution.

Goals and Expectations of the Wastewater Infrastructure Work Group -

Please review this section in the draft document being distributed and feel free to make suggestions or changes. This work group will be on going and your participation is important. Comments and input are encouraged from all stakeholders in the work group. The suggested draft work group goals included:

1. Improve compliance with existing permitted effluent limits
2. Improve the quality of treated effluent from as many facilities as is practicable
3. Focus Phase II Storm Water Management Programs on the pollutants of concern in the Arroyo
4. Increase wastewater and storm water infrastructure development for rural and low income communities in the Arroyo Colorado watershed (e.g. colonias)

The floor was then opened up for a roundtable discussion to discuss what had been done so far, what has happened in the Arroyo Colorado watershed and what initial efforts have taken place.

Roger reported that when all comments have been received from the 18 municipalities and utilities, the work group would reconvene. Funding information will also be available at the next meeting.

**A Meeting of the
Wastewater Infrastructure Workgroup of the Arroyo Colorado
Watershed Steering Committee**

Monday April 25, 2005 3:30 PM – 6:00 PM

Harlingen Public Library
410 '76 Drive
Harlingen, Texas 78550

3:30 OPENING (Roger Miranda / Laura De la Garza)

- Welcome
- General Housekeeping (facilities, refreshments, breaks, meeting format)
- Introductions

4:00 KEYNOTE ADDRESS (TCEQ)

4:30 BACKGROUND AND GOALS (Roger Miranda)

- Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Study 1998-2002
- Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) Development 2004-2006
- Watershed Steering Committee Structure
- Wastewater Infrastructure (WWI) Work Group Membership
 - Work Group Goals and Expectations
 - Incentives for Participation
 - Cooperation/Collaboration

5:00 BREAK

5:15 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION (EFFORTS AND ISSUES)

- Preliminary TCEQ Efforts
 - Changes in Effluent Limits (1998-Present)
 - System Reviews
 - Individual Meetings (Jan-March, 2005)
 - Draft Arroyo WWI Plan
 - Documentation of Local Efforts (1998-Present)
 - Opportunities for Additional Load Reduction Efforts (After 2005)
- Detailed Description of Actions and Measures
 - Structural
 - Institutional
- Estimating Technical and Financial Assistance Required
- Estimating Load Reductions
- Criteria for Verifying and Assessing Load Reductions
- Effluent Monitoring
- Storm Water

- Information and Education Component
- Identification and Tracking of Milestones
- Schedule

5:55 CLOSURE (Roger Miranda)

- Expected Outcomes for Next Meeting

6:00 END OF MEETING