228

USDA-Forest Service
Content Analysis Enterprise Team
Attn: UFP
Building 2, Suite 295
5500 Amelia Earhart Drive
Salt Lake City, Utah 84116

Subject: Comments on the proposed Unified Federal Policy for Ensuring a Watershe Approach to Federal Land and Resource Management

Dear Sir or Madame:

Staff members from the United States Section, International Boundary and Water Commiss (USIBWC) have reviewed the proposed notice of a Unified Federal Policy for Ensuring a Watershed Approach to Federal Land and Resource Management published in the Federal Register on February 22, 2000. We are very interested in becoming a participating agency policy, and offer the following information and comments for your consideration.

As you may know, the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC) was created more than a century ago by the two governments to apply the provisions of various boundary and water treaties, and to settle differences arising from suc applications through a joint international commission located in El Paso, Texas and its Mex counterpart located in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The IBWC's jurisdiction extend along the United States-Mexico boundary, and inland into both countries where they may h international boundary and water projects. The IBWC is charged with operating and maint various boundary and flood control projects including, but not limited to, the Rio Grande Canalization Project, the Rio Grande Rectification Project, the Rio Grande Boundary Prese tion Project, the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project, and the Lower Colorado River Boundary and Capacity Preservation Project. A brief description of each of these projects i provided below.

The Rio Grande Canalization Project, which is entirely within the United States, extends fo about 106 miles along the Rio Grande from Percha Diversion Dam, located downstream fr Caballo Dam in Sierra County, New Mexico, through Doña Ana County, New Mexico to t vicinity of American Diversion Dam in El Paso County, Texas. The Canalization Project w constructed between 1938 and 1943 in compliance with the convention between the United States and Mexico concluded May 21, 1906, to provide for the equitable division of the wa the Rio Grande for use in the two countries. The project included acquisition of right of wa the river channel and adjoining floodways and improvement of the alignment and efficienc the river channel to convey deliveries to Mexico, as well as conveyance of deliveries to the United States Bureau of Reclamation Rio Grande Project in the Mesilla and Rincon Valley New Mexico and the El Paso Valley of Texas. The Canalization Project also controls flood

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this river reach. The project includes approximately 6,800 acres of floodway, the majority which are leased.

The Convention of February 1, 1933 provided for rectification of the Rio Grande through tl highly developed El Paso-Juárez Valley a distance of 86 miles. The Convention charged th International Boundary Commission (IBC) with its implementation. Its purpose was to stal the international river boundary between the United States and Mexico in this valley and to provide flood protection for its suburban and agricultural lands. The Rio Grande Rectificati Project was started in 1934 and completed in 1938. The project straightened the river and i process shortened its meander length from 155 miles to 86 miles between El Paso and Fort Quitman, Texas. The Joint Commission cut a new channel along the axis of the meanders o old river channel in such a way that the number of acres transferred from one country to the was equal, so that there was no loss or gain of territory by either country. Exactly 5,121.08 were exchanged in 175 parcels of land.

To implement Article IV of the 1970 Boundary Treaty, the two Governments approved in 1 an IBWC recommended joint project for works to restore and preserve the Rio Grande's character as the international boundary in a 199-mile reach from a point near Fort Quitman Haciendita, Texas about five miles upstream of Presidio, Texas-Ojinaga, Chihuahua. The U States portion of the Rio Grande Boundary Preservation Project was authorized by the Ame Mexican Treaty Act of October 25, 1972. The project works consist of restoration of the cl of the Rio Grande at locations where it is so clogged with silt and so overgrown with exotic cedar) vegetation that the location of the river channel and international boundary is difficu find.

The Governments of the United States and Mexico pursuant to an agreement reached in 19 developed through the IBWC (then IBC) a coordinated plan for an international project for protection of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the United States and Mexico against the rive floods. The project is located in the delta of the Rio Grande, situated in Hidalgo, Cameron a Willacy Counties in the State of Texas and in the State of Tamaulipas in Mexico. Emergen construction of works on the United States side was performed under the National Industria Recovery Act of June 13, 1933. The United States part of the international project was authorized by the Act of August 19, 1935, as amended. The works initially planned in the U States were completed in 1950. The Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project was improve after the floods of 1958 and 1967. As improved, the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Proj the United States side includes 102.1 miles of river levees and 119.9 miles of off-river impr floodways which are bordered by 167.5 miles of levees to carry to the Gulf of Mexico the U States half of the Rio Grande floodwaters. For the United States, the project has provided f protection against 13 Rio Grande floods since 1930 and protected most of the area from ser flooding from the river in 1967. As now improved, the part of the project in the United Stat provides a high degree of protection against Rio Grande floods for the Lower Rio Grande V of Texas which includes 730,000 acres of highly productive irrigated agricultural lands. Sin benefits accrue to the Mexican side of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Under the 1944 Water Treaty, the IBWC recommended and the two Governments approve joint project to maintain clear of vegetation the channel of the Colorado River and adjoinin floodplain through the approximately 20 mile boundary section of the river from Morelos Diversion Dam downstream to the point where the Arizona-Sonora boundary intersects the

and further downstream therefrom a distance of about 20 miles in Mexico. United States participation in the Lower Colorado River Flood Control Project was authorized by the Act Congress of August 10, 1964, as amended. The initial clearing was jointly performed in 19(and maintenance clearing is performed periodically, under the joint supervision of the IBW This project serves to maintain the flood-carrying capacity of the channel and floodway for by levees on the United States bank and on the Mexican bank in the boundary section of th(river, and downstream therefrom on both banks in Mexico, thereby guarding against floodi extensive irrigated agricultural lands in the United States and in Mexico. The effectiveness clearing was demonstrated during high discharges in 1980, when the project enabled the flc naturally scour and improve the river channel.

The following is a summary of activities undertaken by the USIBWC in the Texas portion (Rio Grande Basin which parallel many of the goals and objectives of the proposed Unified Federal Policy for Ensuring a Watershed Approach to Federal Land and Resource Manager In addition, one of our strategic goals is to improve our water resources management by evaluating the variety of activities performed in floodways, and the issuance of leases, licer and easements on our property.

In 1991, the Texas Legislature passed the Texas Clean Rivers Act in response to growing concerns that water resource issues were not being addressed in a holistic manner. This legislation requires that water quality assessments be conducted for each river basin in Tex using an approach that integrates water quality issues within a river basin or watershed. In accordance with the statute, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRC adopted guidelines for comprehensive regional water quality assessments which utilize a watershed management approach to identify and evaluate water quality issues, establish pri for corrective action, and outline strategies to implement those actions. The TNRCC imple the Clean Rivers Program (CRP) by contracting with 15 regional agencies, including river authorities, municipal water authorities, and councils of government, to conduct regional w quality assessments in the 23 river coastal basins of Texas. In each basin, the designated pa agency (the contractor) has primary responsibility for surface water quality assessment in it basin. The Rio Grande Basin poses a unique challenge in the fact that it has no governing r authority, and it forms the 1,254-mile international boundary between the United States anc Mexico. Due to the international nature of the Rio Grande, the USIBWC was contracted by TNRCC to administer the CRP for the Rio Grande Basin.

The CRP in the Rio Grande provides a vehicle for local, regional, and statewide interests to examine water quality issues on a watershed basis. Planning and management by watershe allows the examination of complex relationships between water resources and human activi The water quality assessments performed under the Rio Grande CRP focus on the cumulati effects of a variety of potential pollutant sources within the setting of watershed. By lookin the entire watershed and the total impacts on the water quality of that system, more informe decisions are possible when implementing management practices that protect water resourc

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binational rivers such as the Rio Grande and Lower Colorado River. In all cases, such prog are subject to existing treaties and agreements with Mexico concerning commitments for: delivery of water; flood control; allowing no obstructions to flow; maintenance of internatic boundary markers; etc. In addition, the sharing of some of the information gathered over th course of a watershed assessment may be subject to approval by Mexico. There will also b many opportunities to share information with our Mexican counterparts for their use and consideration in project development and maintenance.

The IBWC is also involved in coordinating other binational efforts such as the upcoming R Grande Symposium and proposed follow-up and the Lower Colorado River Delta - Fourth Group. The binational symposium will be held on June 14, 2000 in Cd. Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The fourth work group is comprised of technical representatives from both countr committed to developing restoration projects for the Lower Colorado River Delta.

We have begun to implement improvements in many areas and look forward to exploring o opportunities to protect water quality with the policy group. In our opinion, with some func assistance and through some possible partnering agreements, it would be very cost effective our agency to expand the CRP to include other projects and waterways within our jurisdicti Our experience in a binational setting may be of assistance to those participating agencies f with inter-and intra-state water quality protection constraints.

In closing, as the federal land management agency for the 2,000-mile long U.S.-Mexico bo we are very interested in being a participating agency in this effort. We are willing to furth explore our own land management activities to find ways to minimize water pollution.

Sincerely,

John M. Bernal
Commissioner
United States Section

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION
UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
UNITED STATES SECTION

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Sincerely,

for Rodney L. Adler

John M. Bernal
Commissioner
United States Section

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