

Border 2012 Summary of Comments

Border 2012: U.S.-Mexico Environmental Program Public Meeting

Del Rio, Texas

November 6, 2002 • 6:00 pm
Summary of Public Comments and Questions

1. Michael Morris, Wildlife Manager for Wilson Hodge Ranches: We have 100,000 acres on 3 ranches all within the 100 kilometer border zone. I have three questions. How will this be funded? What effect will this have on our brush management programs, as to possible air and water pollution? How does the endangered species act affect us in this 100 kilometer zone in relation to this program?

Bill Luthens: Funding will come from various sources. There are millions of dollars available for water infrastructure development through the EPA, that of course comes from tax revenues. There is private funding. There are loans available through the North American Development Bank and other things. We have a small amount of federal dollars for support services, such as interpreting and other logistical infrastructure for carrying out the necessary meetings, etc. Every problem is going to have to look for its own sources of funding. Some have ready streams of funding, some don't. The program seeks to encourage innovation. For example in the air quality program we're trying to work on market incentives to help pay for things.

Steve Neimeyer: The EPA has some funds set aside for the border program. Every year the Congress appropriates \$75 million for wastewater infrastructure along the border. The State of Texas has money available as well. There are many sources.

Regarding brush management programs: if you're talking about burning, we have open burning rules. I don't think the requirements will change. This program also isn't going to change the endangered species act.

Sergio Avilez, Instituto Coahuilense de Ecología [Coahuila Environmental Institute]: In the past eight years wildlife management has become very important in Mexico. There is a lack of international wildlife management programs or habitat rehabilitation programs. Perhaps one of the work groups could work on this issue.

2. [unidentified speaker]: One of the things we would like to see in this program is biodiversity taken into account as a user of water. Our treaties split the water between Mexico and the United States. We seem to agree we can't empty the river and we cannot really do that. For example in the upper Rio Grande we have the problem of the salt cedar that is an invasive species and we would like to see eradication of this species included in this program.
3. Clay Lindley, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: How are the tributaries going to effect the river? The extension service is now funding a salt cedar eradication program on the Pecos River. This started in New Mexico two or three years ago and is now down below Monahan's. I've been involved with the Rio Conchas near Presidio, which has a lot of chemicals in it. So how are these tributaries going to effect – will the program expand beyond the border? Will there be any regulation?

Bill Luthens: The 100 kilometers is designed to help us focus on the border, but to the extent that a problem is continuous outside the region, we would be able to form a group of people to work on that problem and follow that problem if that's what's needed for the solution.

Sergio Avilez: We can't work on salt cedar without thinking about where the seed comes from or where the species is coming from. In order to reduce salt cedar, for example, we will have to seek cooperation agreements with the upper basin of the river.

Steve Neimeyer: The Border Environment Cooperation Commission and the North American Development Bank have expanded to 300 kilometers on the Mexican side, so if we wanted to fund some projects outside of that for salt cedar eradication, we could well do it.

Carlos Rivera: I would like to add the International Boundary and Water Commission is also working on a salt cedar proposal.

4. Ramón Flores, longtime resident of Del Rio: Two questions. Are there going to be new regulations that apply to the border or are the regulations and the legal framework going to stay the same? Are there going to be incentives for pollution prevention to attract recycling to these areas? Or what type of incentives can be included?

Bill Luthens: I don't envision any new regulations. It's not part of the program. There may be times when binationally in order to solve a problem, changes are necessary. For example, in the air program I worked with in El Paso, at the municipal level, Juarez tightened up on their vehicle maintenance and inspection program because of the old vehicles and time spent idling on the bridge – a very local solution to a very local problem. We have some looming issues that the two countries will be working on together to see how their laws work together. Energy

growth and power plants along the border, for example, continues to be a concern for air quality and both governments are going to be looking at that. Regarding pollution prevention and recycling: one issue that is important for a lot of communities is waste tires. One of the ways to help make progress in that area is to find another market for those tires, such as rubberizing them and putting them in asphalt. It's expected that the concept of recycling and pollution prevention will be a part of the philosophy of all the work groups.

Sergio Avilez: This document defines goals for the year 2012. If some new regulation is needed in order to meet those goals, we will work with congress on that. On the Mexican side, we probably already have the necessary laws, it's a matter of seeking funding for those laws and implementing them.

Margarita Palafox, SEMARNAT: There will be a law enforcement group that will provide a mechanism for proposing and implementing regulatory changes in coordination with the authorities at the different levels. With regard to solid waste management, there will be a policy forum on land, solid waste and hazardous waste. One of the functions of this group will be to work on recycling initiatives together with the regional groups.

5. Clay Lindley: This sounds like it's going to be an urban type of clean up more so than it will be in the rural areas, basically because you have more pollution and more of all of these items in the urban settings. But in the State of Texas there are a lot of private lands. Big Bend is probably the only national publicly owned lands. How are you going to acquire access to private property if somebody doesn't want to do something. Say somebody doesn't want to eradicate the salt cedar. How will you go about getting everyone to join into specific projects?

Steve Neimeyer: The local stakeholders would have to identify salt cedar as an issue. Then they would have to set up a task force to deal with the problem. Then they develop a plan on how to eradicate salt cedar. Texas Parks and Wildlife has a very successful program where they work with private land owners. They're going to have to do it on an individual basis. We can't force ourselves onto people's lands. If they don't want us to work on their lands, we're not going to be able to do it. It's really up to the locals, and if they don't want to participate, there's not a whole lot we can do.

6. Randall Stitz, business professor Sol Ross State University. Two questions. To what extent do any of your agencies test the air quality here in Del Rio or Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras? Also the current testing of the water quality around Del Rio and Eagle Pass, specifically in the Rio Grande. Second, to what extent are the emissions at "Carbón Dos" monitored by the EPA or any other agency?

Bill Luthens: The U.S. and Mexico Big Bend Regional Air Study worked together on a project to try to assess the impact of carbon one and carbon two primarily on haze in the Big Bend area, but also power plants in East Texas, the Tennessee

Valley, further south in Mexico. That final report is going to come out in late December of this year. It focuses primarily on sulfate and nitrous oxide impacts on visibility. We have used that data in air modeling impact analysis to try to help develop strategies.

Sergio Avilez: The current administration in the State of Coahuila created the Instituto de Ecología (Environmental Institute) and the Institute this year began a program using mobile monitoring units. We are going to the main municipalities, Acuña, Piedras Negras, Monclova, and the area around the power plants to monitor and then produce an annual report. We hope to publish a border air quality report by the end of the year.

Steve Neimeyer: We don't do continuous air monitoring in Del Rio and Eagle Pass. When we've done some mobile monitoring, the air quality has been fine. Regarding water quality: our agency has a cooperative program with the International Boundary and Water Commission, the U.S. section and through the Texas clean rivers program. They monitor several sites up and down the river between El Paso and Brownsville for a variety of parameters including basic things such as BOD, total suspended solids, volatile organic carbon compounds, some heavy metals. They do periodic reports and we have some monitoring stations in this area. I'm happy to say the main problems have improved over the years because we're seeing better wastewater treatment in this area.

7. Frank Guevara, hazardous waste transportation service provider: This document talks about special task forces. You folks do not live on the border. The problems we were talking about yesterday in Acuña are the same problems that Del Rio has. But you are leaving today and how are those task forces going to work? I don't see anything concrete about how these projects are going to be followed through. I don't know if there is a way to create committees in the sister cities that would include federal and state authorities. People who are knowledgeable and who can follow up on all these problems.

Bill Luthens: Were you speaking about Del Rio or the whole border area?

Frank Guevara: It would be the four sister cities, Acuña, Del Rio, Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass. And Nuevo Laredo and Laredo too.

Bill Luthens: You raise a very valid concern. The idea is to set up a structure that allows continued work and continued focus on the problem by bringing in the local people that are in the best position to work on it and having us help out the best we can.

[unidentified panelist]: The new federal administration is operating under a principle: that big government should not do what local government can do. In this case that means providing the state and municipal governments with more resources and with greater authority and responsibility. We plan to use this

principle to strengthen the work group and involve municipal authorities. The point you bring up is critically important. We have taken it into account and, on the Mexican side, we are in contact with the local authorities and we are getting them involved.

Carlos Rivera: Although some of the state and federal officials cannot come down on a regular basis, through the El Paso office we will be in touch with you on a regular basis.

8. Doctor Emilio [inaudible] Serna. Municipal Environmental Director, Ciudad Acuña. The first thing we need for this program to work is to take the information to the schools, both primary and secondary. If you can give us a copy of the video, we will get it to all the students. Within a month all students at all levels in the city of Acuña will be informed about this program. We'll also distribute a questionnaire so they can give their opinion. We can do the same thing through governmental and non-governmental organizations. The second step is to inform the public about the legal aspects and make them aware of the importance of citizen participation. We have to let them know that their voices and their opinions count. This kind of information always comes late. You're giving us fifteen or twenty days to get this information out. The first thing to do is extend the deadline to give us time to get the information out to the citizens of both cities, to do a survey of the citizens of both cities, and then to channel that information back to the government.

Bill Luthens: Others are requesting an extension of the public comment period. You make good points about trying to make available the video.

Carlos Rivera: We can reproduce it and send it from the El Paso office.

Sergio Avilez: Dr., what comes to mind is that we can implement such a campaign in the schools, present the video and ask students to fill out questionnaires, and then channel that information to the work group. We can begin coordinating that right away.

9. [unidentified speaker]: I know a lot of these questions could be answered if someone from the International Boundary and Water Commission from El Paso would join the group, because they have already worked through a lot of these things. It would be a great idea to involve them. They have been working on salt cedar eradication, for example.

Bill Luthens: The IBWC is very a much a partner in Border 2012.

10. Frank Guevara: On page seventeen it talks about environmental education and training. What plans are there for environmental education in this program? It requires a different approach to talk to primary schools compared to universities, agronomists, business people, etc.

Sergio Avilez: The document you have in your hands is a draft. It is still being finalized. What the environmental program will look like will be decided on the basis of these meetings, your comments. I would like to hear your suggestions as to what kind of education is needed. We have two types of projects at the ICE. One is with the Secretariat of Public Education working with children. The other is working with community groups made up of adults, industry groups, etc. But the final shape of this document is in your hands.

Bill Luthens: Environmental education is a major priority for EPA. Many of our environmental education initiatives have been born out of some local need and then we try to figure out if we can transport that and share it with other people.

Margarita Palafox: SEMARNAT has several environmental education programs in the border region. Some of them are for children and some are for teachers. We are also starting several programs with different communities on the border. One of the reasons for having these meetings is to be able to identify the needs in the area of environmental education and how they should be tied to the goals of the program. You are the people who can tell us what the best approach is to environmental education at the local level.