

## Border 2012 Summary of Comments

BORDER 2012  
Brownsville Public Library.  
Brownsville, TX.  
November 12, 2002

Greetings

I would like to go over logistical items. Has every body signed in?

Do you have an Agenda and a copy of the Border 2012 draft document, a fact sheet and a public comment form? You can give us this form at the end of the meeting, by fax or by regular mail. You can get these to us and we look forward for your comments. Lets go over the program.

Explanation of Agenda. The first area of clarification in this agenda is specific for Border 2012.

Introductions:

Greg Cook EPA-Regional Administrator for Region 6 for the Environmental Protection Agency

Ralph Marquez- Commissioner for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Alfonso Martinez- Representing the State of Nuevo Leon.

Javier Omar – Director for the Northern Border Affairs from *SEMARNAT*.

Margarita Palafox-also from *SEMARNAT* from Mexico.

Mr. Greg Cook:

Thank you it is a pleasure to be back. We started working with the Mexican government and the State government; primary goal is to start a new process that can express state, regional and local concerns. I hope you all have a copy of this US. - Mexico Border document, I urge you to get one before you leave because in it I think it really articulates the structure the plan of operations, but also it talks about specific goals in pages 14 and 15 it talks about specific goals that we would like to discuss with the public and then later on page 21 it specifically talks about how to establish the workgroups will be established and the key thing here is the process that reflects community concern.

This is the first time that I know of where there is a binational work group on both sides of the border on a regional basis that will reflect concerns of that region, so this is a great opportunity for you to engage with federal, local and state officials and let them know what your problems are. It has been a real pleasure on my side of the Border to work with the State of Texas.

Ralph Marquez - Like Greg said, the Ten Border States started looking at programs from the Border. There was no planning per se in Border XXI, but it served its purpose. The

States came to SEMARNAT and EPA and said we need to have a voice in what goes on in the Border.

This new Program 2012 creates regional groups, before they had to be Binational, and there were very few groups that fit that category. The real premise of this program is that it divides the border in four regions and allows planning and helps to decide what regional and local priorities are. What it is applicable here, it is not necessarily applicable in El Paso, so we need your input, we want you to participate, we appreciate your being here tonight. Keep in mind that what you are saying is important for the structure of the Program. This has taken a lot of work, but the objectives are just ideas of things that we believe in based on past experience, but you have the final say of what is important in your community. I relay encourage to remain active and bring your friends. The program will not work with out you. Thank you.

Carlos Rivera - I would like to emphasize again that Border 2012 is a partnership on both sides of the Border.

Margarita Palafox- Thank you, basically we want to thank you on behalf of SEMARNAT. SEMARNAT is very concerned on what is going on, and that the actions related to the Program cause an impact. This can only be done if you help us identify what are your priorities and then incorporate possible solutions. We appreciate your presence here tonight, we think that public participation in this Program, not only gives it validity; it is the only way in which we can incorporate all of the problems related to the environment which you consider need immediate attention. Thank you very much.

Alfonso Martinez- Co-Chair from Mexico. What is interesting about this project is that that by the beginning of the year 2003 Binational work groups are going to be formed, that are going to deal with different programs that have to do with irrigation and natural resources in our border areas. The region covers practically, from Del Rio to Brownsville on the American side, and from Acuña to Matamoros on the Mexican side. This region has unique characteristics very different from other regions. We have to identify regional problems, but also people who would join the work groups to establish the criteria to attain investment for the environmental programs. We expect that this area of Brownsville and Matamoros, for it to have participation, not only in our public meetings but also in the workgroups because they are going to be in charge of expressing environmental policy along the Border. Than you.

Omar - Thank you very much for the invitation. We will be sharing some ideas on putting this Program together, SEMARNAT and US – EPA and the environmental authorities of the Border States of Mexico and the US. I will just like to emphasize tonight, the importance of having all of you here commenting and giving us input for this draft of the Border 2012 Program. What we want at the end is that ultimately, you have the last word in this Program in order to relate the priorities of this community on both sides of the Border.

Correlation between Mexico and the US regarding environmental issues goes back twenty years or more perhaps. Just recently we have realized that our economies are

intertwined and that we share common problems along the Border. So that is the importance of having this Program, to have better ideas to solve these problems that we share along the Border, so thank you, and we will take your comments to have a project that we can start with next year. Thank you again and I believe the Program will have a very significant impact on the Border.

## VIDEO

Thank you, Ralph Marquez is going to talk a bit more about implementation and the next steps for the regional work groups.

Ralph Marquez- You must be wondering by now, this is a beautiful program, but how is it going to happen and how can you participate?

First, the plan convenes, the regional work groups in early next year. We need to determine who will be involved, who can participate, and so it is important that you express your desire to participate. It is important that institutions are active and public officials involved.

Secondly, we will define which are the issues that are important to this particular region and we have. We will have to decide what is important to the different communities; identify what the issues are, setting up priorities, then establish task forces, they will make specific projects happen. They will develop projects, ideas; they will meet every couple of years to make a report, showing the progress. I expect for groups to be active. I do not want to leave out agencies that have been involved in a number of activities and we are partners, and let's mention a few: IBWC, NADBank, BECC, Regional Community Corporations, those are institutions that have played a role and will continue to play a role in this Program.

At the state level we have the Department of Health, many of these institutions are trying to improve the environmental area, so we need to have the Department of Health involved. We want to get a very inclusive group. You will have opportunities to ask questions because I am sure you must be confused. Let me talk about the goals and objectives this is the regional group of Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas and what we have done is tried to identify the issues from the input that we have received, what are the issues that might be high priority for you. This is not a pre selection or predetermination of how to go by.

Hazardous waste management and transportation.

We have five goals that have been presented to you; they are included in the booklet. When it comes to specific objectives and prioritizing it is your voice.

Carlos Rivera - At this time is an opportunity for clarification, regarding the video or any of the presentations by any of our guests. We will like to entertain your questions. Is there anybody who would like an explanation of any area at this point?

City of Brownsville- You mentioned stakeholders but did not mention private companies along the border. Their incorporation into the system, they have resources, they have some information that we can all use, and also institutions from higher learning from El Paso down to Brownsville there are some institutions that may be good resources to pursue.

Ralph Marquez – Definitely in this area there is a tremendous resource, and they will participate in the program. There are people here from institution of higher learning, I guess it shows the interest they have.

Greg Cook- Let me second that, the whole purpose of involving the public community is to see what they can come up with for the Program. The business communities as well as the groups that we have from the universities are critical. Do not let us make you think that the bigger goals will bypass smaller goals.

Regional Development Southmost College- We met this morning with Mr. Rivera, and we are in the process of developing a close working relationship with agencies. We have a very bilingual staff; we are citizens of the border; we are ready to serve both sides of the border

BREAK (10 minutes)

I would like to introduce some other partners. Some other EPA members from our Washington office:

Ann and Ellie from Headquarters office.

Gina Weber- Border Coordinator out of Dallas Region6.

Diana Borja- Border Coordinator for TCEQ.

Tony Franco- Regional Commissioner for Brownsville

#### PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ernesto de Leon- Resident of Brownsville, TX. - My concern has been for several years, the Fluor Chemical Corporation they have a plant right across the river. In the ground there is material that has been left over, they get rid of it by allowing to be picked up and send it via freight, these are materials for construction. I have noticed for the past years that my eyes, especially during the summer my eyes constantly burn due to the blowing of this material. My question is if that chemical company was allowed, why is that chemical left there, why was the material not disposed of on the other side of the border, do they have problems in disposing of this material?

Susan – I am a reporter I have two comments; one about calcium sulfate is it a carcinogen in its sulfate form? And also, I would be very interested to know if there is anybody who can provide information on compensation of farmers or people who have used this product?

Ma. Luisa Gonzalez- I am a Public Official- My concern has been since I was little. I have seen how sugar cane burning affects us significantly here in Rio Bravo. Rio Bravo is a city that has no international crossings, on the Mexican side there is farming, and mainly sugar cane. When the wind blows to Tamaulipas to Rio Bravo, the ashes all blow to Rio Bravo. I have some pictures to submit evidence of how it affects us. I would like to know if it is at all possible take some measures to deal with this problem. I know that job has to be done to process sugar cane, but I would like to know if there is any other process. Thank you very much.

Alfonso Martinez - Who burns the cane?

Ma. Luisa Gonzalez- I imagine it is the farmers on the American side.

Javier Omar Rodriguez–SEMARNAT - I am the representative of SEMARNAT in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Regarding Fluor Chemical, residues are used for paving rural roads, for the foundation of highways; we do not know the analysis of this sub product. There is also an area adjacent to Chemical Fluor, totally destroyed and one can also perceive an uncomfortable smell. That is all.

Nelly Lopez Vera- Ecology of the Municipality of Rio Bravo- we have this concern that is of great concern to the community. In this writing I made a document submitting the claims our Office receives from the community. This carbon causes respiratory disease. The households, people's clothes, if you walk down the street; it looks like a rain of ashes. Housewife protest asking why the United States takes advantage of the wind that blows from the north, that is when they start the burning the sugar cane. I do not think that any community here in this country would tolerate this, and allow it to keep happening. I ask you not to burn the sugar cane when the north wind blows. I would like information and an answer, so I could take it to the community.

Javier Omar Rodriguez –SEMARNAT- PROFEPA the burning of some sub products of crops are causing problems like the one you are mentioning. What has been done here are notification mechanisms to avoid health hazards. If you would like we will gladly explain to you how this works.

Unidentified Person-Cane burning is done to burn the leaf and get sugar out more easily. I am an America citizen, if things were the other way around, if the burning was being done in Mexico, we would have been sued by now. People are being extremely affected.

Mr. Garcia- Private Corporation

Susan-My first question is with regards to the Border 2012 Program; I would like to know what is being done to test the subsoil?

My other comment is regarding follow-up information for these meetings. Are people going to find this information in the newspaper?

Greg Cook-These meetings were in the structure of Border 2012 itself. The follow up will be the regional groups that are going to be created as a result of this. The comment you are making shows that we probably have not done a good job of explaining that this is the beginning of a process that will have the ability of interacting with groups.

Unidentified Person- if you think about decentralization, this is what this is all about. It is the same Program, and to coordinate it in an international, binational setting, it becomes quite different it is two countries two different systems. What we have here is a skeleton of a Program that is everybody's responsibility.

Francisco Bermer –Representing Parque Industrial Alianza-I want to take advantage that SEMARNAT here. We have problem with wastes, there are parks being built for industry and they require specialized services, for companies to pick-up their wastes to dispose of them. I know of a project, I think it is in Mendez and they cannot get a permit to get rid of the waste. Why does it take so long for these permits?

Unidentified Person - I do not know, is it in Mendez? Several companies participate, and municipalities participate also, they are having a lot of problems. They already had the permit from the city, but it backed down. Is it a landfill? As a matter of fact, they are buying a very large cattle ranch  
To provide these services.

Alfonso Martinez - Mexico needs infrastructure; we mentioned yesterday, you know there is only one landfill. It is in Nuevo Leon, we just recently authorized new construction, and we are generating new projects.

South Texas Tech University. Two questions on both the Mexican and American side how tightly is Border 2012 Program tied the into the existing regulatory structure?  
There are many researchers and scientists that work in the border area, and the number one problem is how to get data that crosses borders? How do we get decent information exchange from a Mexican agency to a US agency?

Ralph Marquez - I know Texas has developed strategic plans to work with border cities.

Greg Cook - There has been negotiations between EPA and SEMARNAT concerning the sharing of information across the border. The way we do it is dissimilar, so it makes data sharing difficult. I do not think our computer systems can allow us to do that yet. I do think that is something that we need to work on.

Javier Omar Rodriguez - I think Greg is right, you have to be aware of the complexity of this program, and we have different regulatory systems. In terms of data, we have different systems to count emissions for example. We are trying to have homogeneous systems to make similar regulatory systems but what we definitely will do is try to increase our communication in terms of sharing the same information. For example, the National Water Commission in Mexico will develop indicators in terms of water

availability. With regards to this matter what we will do is try to increase the sharing of information between the US and Mexico Border.

(Inaudible)

Claudia de Leon- University of Brownsville- I coordinate three EPA programs. I have a suggestion, I think this document is very important if we are going to impact our communities, we need to decide who is going to be in the workgroups we need time and we need to submit something in writing if we want something to happen. This is my suggestion.

Javier Omar Rodriguez-Regarding the Mendez, Tamaulipas issue for a landfill project, in fact there has been a great amount of time and money invested and we as authorities know it is healthy to build these landfills. But this is a problem of misinformation. We in the Mendez municipality do not generate these wastes, we do not generate hazardous wastes, how can we get rid of them? If developed countries have had severe problems like this, I do not envision a prompt solution, it is not a simple problem.

Omar Salazar - Pesticide Inspector - There is going to be training for thirty five thousand farmers. Is there any way aside from what we already have, to obtain more money for training in pesticides?

Unidentified Person- I know that in our budget we are trying to assign more for additional assistance for training in pesticides. (EPA helps)

Gina Weber- I think one of points is that with your assistance we would be able to know how to best combine ideas. Training is an important part of our pesticide program, but relating to specifics that is when you come in.

Salazar- does any border state has a list of what chemicals are going to be used?

Gina Weber-That is a great example border wide for policy and decisions; it is something that is not specific to any particular area.

Greg Cook- That would be a good example of an issue.

Enriqueta Rodriguez- Reporter - A request I have for all of you is to create an objective for they're to be a place in the Internet where everybody can get information about all of us. I have a hard time trying to find information that I need. It is important to promote work that is being done, and we as reporters have access to information; but some of us have one thing and the others have something else. What I am asking is, within this Border 2012 Program can a page be created for us to access information so we can participate? Sometimes we say things that are not true, we need better-organized sources. Thank you

Jesus Franco - Wild Life and Texas Parks - In this Border 2012 Program, I would like to know are wild life resources part of this Program or are they part of something else?

Greg Cook- Not right now, but they will be included.

Gina Weber-The Department of the Interior and other international institutions has other binational agreements in place. On a local level there will probably be an inclusion; SEMARNAT involves natural resources, but at a national level.

Javier Omar Rodriguez- Gina is right, we have an ongoing cooperation with the Department of the Interior on protected areas located in the border region, as well as with the US Department of Agriculture on forestry matters. For all these issues we have agreements at binational levels this is why it was not included.

Unidentified Person- Just a couple of items concerning pesticides, we do that kind of training in Brownsville for migrant workers through institutions such as Community Colleges. We are interested in developing a curriculum for training at a national level.

Lety – Environmental Education- We need to establish in a border fashion, community environmental information centers where everybody, farmers, reporters, etc., could have access to information. Researcher share information nationally and internationally, but people who inform the community or even the farmers most of the time do not know the degree of pollution, what impact they cause when pouring oils down the drain, when applying a pesticide. We have, draught first, now flooding and rain lagoons form with sewage water. At the same time we are doing a study of migrating birds. But people wonder, do migrant birds cause a problem regarding the Nile virus? People can misinterpret information; we need to support each other. Thank you.

Lorenza Salinas- Tecnológico de Matamoros-Creation of forums and conferences for scientific research. Currently we have Masters in Environmental Engineering and we come looking for support. We can support you with any existing project you might have, we will gladly help you we are in the Technological Institute.

Alfonso Martinez -Regarding research, the Department established a joint program in coordination with CONACID. Next year we will be able to allow you to apply for project funding. We need to establish information lines.

Environmental Reporter- I am interested on hearing all these comments please call me or send me stories or ideas, and also more information about agencies.

Javier Omar Rodriguez - Your presence demonstrates your interesting this Program. Sometimes people do not believe what agencies promise, but this is just the beginning of the Program and we need your participation and your involvement to make this happen, to make this real; because with all your comments and with your input we will give a definite shape to this program. Than you.

Alfonso Martinez-Thank you for your comments, I think that at a regional level we can start to identify programs that you have mentioned, and through the different work groups we would be able to strengthen this Program. Thank you for your information and valuable comments.

Margarita Palafox- I appreciate your comments, I consider them to be extremely valuable. I think that we can start to identify the problems that the local communities face. These comments will be helpful in the instrumentation of training, research, pollution, etc.

Commissioner - First of all I have a question for you. We have asked you to register so we can have your name address, but for the people who were not here, how can they get their name in the mailing list?

Carlos Rivera-We encourage you to share information with your friends and associates. The agenda includes address and telephone number for SEMARNAT, but I will ask Margarita to give us the e-mail address for SEMARNAT [www.semarnat.com.mx/frontera](http://www.semarnat.com.mx/frontera) 2012.

Greg Cook-This is the beginning of a process not the end. I want to make a promise that the agencies will be back again in the communities. There is a schedule for other public meetings across the border for next few weeks. By signing up tonight you will receive information on when those meetings will take place and one of the first meetings that will take place is to form the regional workgroups. We appreciate your coming and we look forward on seeing you all again in one of these regional meetings. Thank you.

CLOSING

Carlos Rivera -Thank you again. Gracias.