

Upper Rio Grande Citizens forum 2-23-2023

Good News for Las Cruces

At a Zoom meeting on 22/23/2023 the **US International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) Upper Rio Grande Citizen's Forum** addressed multiple issues in a very positive way. The first speaker was Elizabeth Verdecchia, whose talk was "USIBC Update on Habitat Restoration Activities in the Rio Grande Canalization Flood Control Project." She announced that plans for the Las Cruces Water Effluent Riparian Rehabilitation Project would be complete and available by August of this year, with action on the ground to follow. Little more was said, but this is the first mention of the project in over 2 years and was therefore very exciting. She had a lot to report on how busy the USIBWC has been with other projects to fulfill its goals of water delivery and flood control. Habitat restoration has been completed in 22 sites since 2009. Monitoring to detect the multiple challenges to restoration has revealed significant trash dumping, vandalism, unauthorized hunting and unauthorized vehicle tracks at many sites. Projects include many different forms of aquatic habitat restoration, including salt cedar removal and willow transplantation, sediment removal and efforts to acquire surface water rights to meet commitments. It is no wonder that the Las Cruces water effluent project was put on hold. I can't wait for the August announcement.

Other speakers followed. Recently the USIBWC has been placing signage on property it controls to control public use. Permitted recreation uses include walking/jogging, bicycling, horseback riding, bird hunting in designated areas in certain seasons. Prohibited uses include motorized vehicles of any kind. Signs have worked significantly! However, vandalism has been responsible for much signage degradation and its replacement is costly. It is a work in progress.



The final talk during the Zoom meeting was a presentation by John Sproul about Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in El Paso. This area is one of El Paso's favorite birding areas and has quite a history. It was initially conceived of before the canalization of the El Paso stretch of the Rio Grande, before 1934. In steps deftly described and illustrated, development of this wetlands park came to life during his talk. In the setting of a maturing El Paso and a Rio Grande undergoing dramatic changes, much has been required. Water diversions, dams, accessing underground water via new wells, and much being requested of the El Paso City Government as well as the USIBWC so that now it has water 12 months a year. This area is open year-round, 7 days a week. It has 7 ½ miles of trails. The final slide was of a beaver in front of one of the 7 dams he built, probably working harder than any of us could imagine.

USIBWC webpage with full reports outlined above:

https://www.ibwc.gov/Citizens_Forum/CF_URG.html

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