

**TIJUANA RIVER NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE
ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Tuesday February 9, 2021 at 1pm
301 Caspian Way, Imperial Beach CA, 91932
Meeting held virtually via *GoToWebinar* platform

ADOPTED meeting minutes

Advisory Council Members

Present: at this meeting in **BOLD PRINT**

Gina Moran – California State Parks – District Superintendent

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Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – Reserve Manager

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Andy Yuen – USFWS – SD National Wildlife Refuge Complex Project Leader

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Brian Collins – USFWS – Refuge Manager

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Mike McCoy – SWIA Board President

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Anna Shepherd – US Naval Base Coronado – Community Plans and Liaison Officer

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Joyce Sisson – US Naval Base Coronado – Planning and Conservation Branch Head

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Chris Helmer – City of Imperial Beach – Environmental and Natural Resources Director

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Brianna Menke – City of San Diego – Transportation & Storm Water Division

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Doug Liden – USEPA – Environmental Engineer

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Amber Craig – USBP – Public Lands Liaison

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Vacant – USIBWC – Project Manager

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Mike Verderber – SD County Parks – Supervising Park Ranger

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Sam Jenniches – State Coastal Conservancy – Project Manager

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Michelle Jespersion – California Coastal Commission representative

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Melis Okter – NOAA's Office for Coastal Management – NERR Liaison

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Program Managers Present:

Lorena Warner-Lara – TRNERR – Assistant Reserve Manager (Stewardship)

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Kristen Goodrich – TRNERR – Coastal Training Program Coordinator

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Jeff Crooks – TRNERR – Research Coordinator

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Marya Ahmad – TRNERR – Education Specialist

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Members of the Public

Andrew Funk, City of San Diego

John Zarem, Public

Toni Ross, California Coastal Commission

Joe Ellis, Public

Emma Reese, TRVEA, Resident

Gabriela Torres, SD Surfrider

Viviane Marquez-Waller, Resident

Robin Echols-Booth, TRNERR

David Waller, Resident

Tracey Ekker, TRNERR

Karla Langham, Rep. Juan Vargas

Nancy Torres, TRNERR Research Fellow

A. 1:05 Meeting was called to order

B. AGENDA – Agenda was adopted with the addition of a project update from Nancy Torres, TRNERR Research Fellow in new business.

C. LAST MEETING MINUTES – Last meeting minutes were adopted.

D. Member Comments

Gina Moran – California State Parks – District Superintendent

- i. The Governor released a draft budget in January that proposes a 5% across the board budget reduction for California State Parks. Waiting to see if it is adopted.
- ii. Regarding Covid-19:
 1. The December regional stay at home order due to Coronavirus was lifted two weeks ago, so campgrounds are open again.
 2. Probable opening of indoor museums and visitor centers at 50% capacity depends on the County being in the orange tier. At the time of this meeting the County is in the purple tier.
 3. Currently, Border Field State Park is completely closed due to the cross-border flows the roads and trails, as well as the additional sanitation efforts required during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Andy Yuen – USFWS – SDNWRC Project Leader

- i. Refer to the Refuge Manager's report. It discusses various activities that are occurring on the Refuge.

- ii. From a staffing perspective there is still not a budget. There is an omnibus appropriation for the Service, but it has still not made its way out of D.C. offices yet. At this time, the Assistant Refuge Manager position remains unfilled. Also due to budget constraints, our two law enforcement officers dedicated to our refuge complex are now covering additional areas including the Salton Sea, Sunny Bono National Wildlife Refuge and the southern Nevada refuges, as well as Edwards Air Force Base. The availability of the two officers is dramatically reduced. There is planning in the works for prioritizing the law enforcement assistance at the Tijuana Slough and the San Diego Bay Refuge areas.

Sam Jenniches – State Coastal Conservancy – Project Manager

- i. The Conservancy, as part of the Tijuana Border Pollution Control Project funding, in late fall 2020 had five applications for funding, preproposals, and requested full proposals; they were received from two projects - one from the County of San Diego for improvements to Smuggler’s Gulch with respect to sediment and trash control, and one from a nonprofit, Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI). KDI may have been in touch with several municipalities and agencies and that project was for a trash boom in the main channel and associated infrastructure with that.

Joyce Sisson – US Naval Base Coronado – Planning and Conservation Branch Head

- i. The Navy is working on invasive species control and mapping to help with planning to establish target areas for riparian restoration. Working on least Bell’s vireo surveys, and cowbird management to help protect the least Bell’s vireo.
- ii. The Navy got their budget and are planning some more projects.
- iii. Upcoming beach cleanup of the Delta Beaches on the Silver Strand in the tern and plover areas. Look at their Facebook site for more cleanups.

Chris Helmer – City of Imperial Beach – Environmental and Natural Resources Director

- i. The City of Imperial Beach received a \$500,000 grant from the Coastal Conservancy to develop a Tijuana River Valley Sediment Management Work Plan and Monitoring Program. The planning work is underway and there should be a final plan prepared over the next nine months.
- ii. The City received an Ocean Protection Council Grant (sea level rise) for an infrastructure planning project. It will be awarded this month and it is for property on the Bayshore Bikeway.
- iii. Large storms and winds caused erosion on the beach area and some of the rocks near homes have caused hazards. Hazardous areas have been roped off. The City is working with researchers at Scripps to evaluate the rapid changes from storm events.

Brianna Menke – City of San Diego – Transportation & Storm Water Division

- i. Update on the phase 2 Hydrologic and Hydraulic Report has been finalized by the Army Corp of Engineers. Link to download report was sent out. Send comments and questions to Menke.

Doug Liden – USEPA – Environmental Engineer

- i. Developing a monitoring program through a grant with their Office of Research and Development. Hoping to partner with the IBWC. The EPA will also be working with San Diego State University. Monitoring will focus on the correlations between sediment concentrations and flow during storm events. The program will be looking at tryptophan as a surrogate for bacteria to get a better idea of how contaminated the river is when it is flowing across the border. Finally, some flow radars will be put in to improve understanding of the hydraulic connection between the border and further downstream. The installation of the meters should begin by the dry season.
- ii. The USMCA Feasibility Study is continuing. There are two meetings coming up:
 - 1. eligible public entities consultation group government only on February 25
 - 2. a public meeting on February 26
- iii. Continuing with the NEPA work and will be releasing a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in April with public scoping meetings in late April or early May.
- iv. Xochitl Aranda is the new temporary field representative for the IBWC in the area. In their absence, Liden gave a few updates.
 - a. The IBWC Commissioner Harkin stepped down on Friday, Daniel Avila is the acting commissioner.
 - b. Mexico has increased their intake capacity at PBCILA by 50% and the hope is it will result in fewer transboundary flows.
 - c. Liden saw a video showing that Mexico installed a trash fence on Matadero Canyon (Smuggler's Gulch) on the south side of the international highway in the area that was flooded last year. Trying to find out how effective it was and much trash was captured during the last storm.

Amber Craig – USBP – Public Lands Liaison

- i. All construction of the wall has halted.
- ii. Seeing an increase in people crossing.
- iii. Regarding Liden's question about trash, there was an absence of trash in the ditch leading into the infrastructure in Smuggler's Gulch. Didn't see an abundance in the trash booms.

Mike Verderber – SD County Parks Supervising Ranger

- i. San Diego County Parks is still working on constructing the new campground in the Tijuana River Valley. Hoping for an early spring opening. County Parks will be communicating with different agencies regarding their plan in the near future.

Mike McCoy – SWIA Board President

- i. Meeting with a group called "Cut the Green Tape." McCoy suggested that the organization might be helpful in dealing with regulations when doing restoration projects.
- ii. NOAA Marine Debris Program is upcoming.

Michelle Jespersen – California Coastal Commission representative

- i. The Commission approved an updated Strategic Plan in the fall that addresses the implementation of work in the areas of public access, marine debris, climate change, and sea level rise.

E. Program Manager Reports – refer to written Program Managers report

Brian Collins – USFWS – Refuge Manager

- i. Refer to written report.
- ii. The Refuge is working with a skeleton crew and is prioritizing public safety. There has been an increase in the impact of the homeless in the Refuge. They are getting tooled up to deal with large encampments.
- iii. Working with State Parks, SWIA and the Reserve Research team on getting telemetry up and running to monitor sand movement. This is especially important with the upcoming nesting season and the impact of sand movement on the nesting areas.

Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – All Program Reports

Reserve Manager Report

- i. Refer to written report.
- ii. From an oversight and implementation perspective of the Research Reserve; Peregrin has been serving on the Eligible Public Entities Coordinator Group with the USEPA in an effort to focus the use of the USMCA \$300 million responsibly in the river valley.
- iii. Peregrin has also taken on a role with the International Boundary and Water Commission. Through the Minute 320 effort, they are trying to establish a framework for managing the Tijuana River through a watershed perspective. There are three working groups each with a different focus - solid waste, water quality and sediment (Peregrin is the co-chair of this group). Each has a US and a Mexican representative. The workgroups' tasks are not entirely defined but generally they are to bring together stakeholders and to generate ideas to report out to an overarching group of individuals in the IBWC known as the "binational core group," which will take ideas and roll them into ultimately a funding request and into policy to improve the cross-border pollution.
- iv. Regarding annual flooding on Monument Road, CA State Parks has been working with the CA Coastal Commission and others for the last few years to identify a viable solution in the Tijuana River Valley. Flooding and pollution is a problem to public access in the Reserve and different proposals have been explored in an effort to repair Monument Road. The issue needs to be looked at in a more holistic approach and sustainable in context of sea level rise, and put into context of larger protection and restoration of resources.

Education Report

- i. Anne Marie Tipton, the Education Coordinator, has been assigned to do a critically important service as a contact tracer. She will be out for probably the next six months.
- ii. Marya Ahmad has stepped in to take on significant leadership during Tipton's absence and is doing a great job on our school and public virtual programs. Tune is Tuesdays since Lunchtime Live, since January there have been a total of 3,127 views.

- iii. Robin Echols-Booth is also helping out with the Lunchtime Live virtual programming.

Coastal Training Program Report

- i. A lot of focus on marine debris; CTP was invited to the [Scripps-Rady Ocean Plastic Pollution Challenge](#) as a moderator of one of the courses. The courses are to help increase engagement in innovative ideas to address plastics in ocean pollution.
- ii. Lorena Warner-Lara, Kristen Goodrich and Cristina Bingham of SWIA have worked really hard submitting a new proposal to NOAA's Marine Debris Program which would amplify our work with the program since 2014. The funding that D.Liden mentioned from USMCA is related, a portion of funding also went to NOAA to deal with cross-border trash and solid waste that also makes its way into the ocean. They held a competitive grant proposal program and TRNERR submitted a proposal to try to continue our binational work and improve our ability to reduce and capture solid waste before it gets into the estuary and the ocean.
- iii. The CTP is going to deliver a virtual workshop that brings into focus the relationship between marine debris and flooding in March.

Stewardship Report

- i. Focus on continuation of work at the Goat Canyon Sediment Basins. Last year's rainy season clean out is finished and this year's work has initiated. This fall the contractor, ERRG, excavated 20,000 cubic yards of material which was put on the processing pad. ERRG's contract was extended for two more years.
- ii. The Nelson Sloan Quarry Restoration and Beneficial Reuse of Sediment Project seeks to restore the abandoned quarry with sediment excavated from other projects. TRNERR is in the process of pulling together the Environmental Impact Report. At this time most of the technical reports are done and we are getting the in-house draft together for the stakeholders and other responsible agencies to review. The draft EIR for public review should be available later this summer. Partial funding comes from the State Coastal Conservancy.
- iii. There is continued work on the Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program II, Phase I which is being led by SWIA. The proposed project would restore approximately 80-acres of salt marsh in Border Field State Park and Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge. The process of developing the technical studies and analysis for the EIR/EIS for that project is underway.

Research Report

- i. The telemetry is down on the Oneonta Slough monitoring station, but we continue to collect water quality data. Working on repairs. It is critical infrastructure because it alerts to the closing of the river mouth.
- ii. There is a project, in partnership with Scripps and SDSU, to deploy biosentinel mussels that have computers attached to them which measure their heartbeat and the opening and closing of their shell in relation to environmental conditions. It is a unique way to get a sense of water quality in the estuary. We will hear more about this project from Dr. Crooks in the future.

- iii. There is a new Graduate Research Fellowship program at the NERRS. There was a similar program in the past, but it was suspended due to budget. Thanks to an advocacy effort in the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association, and in memory of Margaret A. Davidson, Congress has funded the program again. TRNERR's new research fellow is Nancy Torres, she will be at the Reserve for another year to a year and a half.

F. New Business

- a. Nancy Torres, TRNERR Margaret A. Davidson Research Fellow, gave an update on her project, *Assessing Ecosystem Health Through Status and Trends of Contaminants*. Nancy Torres is a second-year graduate student at the University of San Diego. My project with Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve under the guidance of Dr. Jeff Crooks is studying the area's ecotoxicology. It is being done by collecting water quality data, sediment samples, and collecting target species to assess the chemical contaminant concentrations of the estuary. She is doing this fieldwork on top of gathering past relevant data for the area to create a holistic picture of how the Tijuana Estuary's ecosystem health has been changing in the past recent decades and how it has been responding to past changes in input and management. Torres hopes to give progress updates; any stakeholder input is welcome so that it may applied to the project and assure that its results benefit as many groups as possible. She plans to start first round of fieldwork soon and hopes to have updates in the near future.

G. General Public Comment:

Gabriela Torres, Surfrider

Q: Chris, the three working groups that you mentioned, are those part of the USMCA process and different from those in Minute 320?

A: Chris Peregrin - The three working groups are different from the USMCA process, these are groups that are established under the IBWC Minute 320 process. A distinct but parallel and synergistic effort.

H. Future Agenda Considerations

Doug Liden suggested a presentation on the Results of the Tijuana River Valley Sediment Management Work Plan and Monitoring Program by Chris Helmer (maybe summer meeting).

Please email Chris Peregrin and Lorena Warner-Lara with any future agenda items (see emails at top of minutes).

I. Adjourned at 2:02 PM

TRNERR MEETINGS for Advisory Council – Virtually @1pm

Future TRNERR Advisory Council dates:

- May 4, 2021
- August 3, 2021
- November 2, 2021