

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

Tuesday, May 7, 2024, at 1pm
301 Caspian Way, Imperial Beach CA, 91932
Meeting held virtually via the *Zoom* platform.
DRAFT meeting minutes

Advisory Council Members

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

Nicole Van Doren – California State Parks – Acting District Superintendent II

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Lisa Tomas – California State Parks – District Superintendent I

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Andy Yuen – US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – SDNWRC Project Leader

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Sally Brown – USFWS – Refuge Manager

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Mike McCoy – Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association (SWIA) – President

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Charles Bradshaw – US Naval Base Coronado – Community Plans and Liaison Officer

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Loni Beyer Wilson – US Naval Base Coronado – Natural Resources Manager

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

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Annica Ly – City of San Diego – Stormwater Department

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Doug Liden – US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) – Environmental Engineer

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Bill Rogers – US Border Patrol – Border Patrol, Special Operations Supervisor

WILLIAM.S.ROGERS@cbp.dhs.gov

Morgan Rogers – US International Boundary & Water Commission – Area Operations 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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Ashley Reineman – California Coastal Commission – Federal Programs Manager

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Chelsea Jander – California Coastal Commission – Coastal Program Analyst

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Gemma Waaland – NOAA's Office for Coastal Management – NERR Liaison

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Program Managers Present:

Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – Reserve Manager

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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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Anne Marie Tipton – TRNERR – Education Coordinator

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Members of the Public

Charles Gailband, SD County Parks

Ransses Lopez, TRNERR

Ana Eguiarte, TRNERR

Jill Terp, USFWS

Lynn Reizer-Heftmann, TRVEA

Gita Akbarpour, Rep. Jacobs, CA-51

Ron Fitch, Public

Jim Peugh, SD Audubon

619-***-*813, Public

Kiran Seibel, SD County Parks

Demmuel Eslava, TRNERR

Empress Holliday, TRNERR

Lou Ann Shannon, Public

Mary Powell, TRVEA

John Fanestil, Friends of Friendship Park

Joe Ellis, Public

John Zarem, Public

Robin Echols-Booth, TRNERR

1. **1:05 pm Meeting was called to order.**

2. **AGENDA** – May 7, 2024, agenda was adopted.

3. **LAST MEETING MINUTES** – February 6, 2024, minutes were adopted.

4. **Member Comments**

Lisa Tomas – California State Parks – District Superintendent I

- a. Update on California budget crisis, there are spending restrictions due to a spending freeze while the state evaluates what the revenue will be for the last tax year. Right now, there is no significant impact on Park operations. State Parks are waiting for the Governor’s May revised budget.
- b. Five hundred thousand dollars was made available through the Disaster Response-Emergency Operations Account (DREOA) to clear the sediment on Monument Road. The scope of work is being finalized and should be commencing work on the project by June 2nd at the latest. Future updates on the status of the project will be reported in the next meeting.

Sam Jenniches – State Coastal Conservancy – Project Manager

- a. Regarding the state budget crisis, the Coastal Conservancy's current projects are not affected but there may be delays in future projects.
- b. Regarding the Coastal Stories grant, the Coastal Conservancy is in the process of reviewing the pre-proposals and will be notifying people about full applications by the end of the month. Coastal Stories is not impacted by the State's budget crisis.

Sally Brown – USFWS – Refuge Manager

- a. Since the last meeting, Congress has passed a budget, but FWS has not yet received an allocation yet. They are expecting it to be less funded than last year.

Charles Bradshaw – US Naval Base Coronado – Community Plans and Liaison Officer

- a. Update on the REPI Challenge (Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration): the DOD posted the RFP with a June 10th deadline. The focus is on climate resilience.

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

- a. Imperial Beach continues its focus on the Community Resilience plan with upcoming workshops focusing on sea level rise, beach nourishment, and shoreline issues. They will be receiving an additional \$850,000 from the Ocean Protection Council to continue with design plans for using natural adaptation options for the shorelines, bayfront, and the estuary.
- b. There have been many calls regarding the smell in the river valley. Residents have indicated that they will be attending tomorrow's Water Board meeting (Wednesday, May 8th at 9am). Anyone who is a concerned member of a group, i.e. horses, or has interests in the river valley should attend to voice their concerns. The IBWC Commissioner will give an update on improvements at the plant and other issues related to the Tijuana River. The Port Commissioner and the EPA will also be in attendance.

Annica Ly – City of San Diego – Stormwater Department

- a. There are plans for repairing the berm failure that occurred at the Smuggler's Gulch channel during January, but the timeline is not yet available.

Doug Liden – USEPA – Environmental Engineer

- a. Update on the plant expansion project: In addition to the \$100 million allocated by congress for the design, the EPA has paperwork ready to transfer to the IBWC \$300 million in funds for the expansion of the plant.
- b. The EPA is finalizing the study with Camp Dresser and McKee for the reuse of up to 20 million gallons of wastewater from the La Morita and Arturo Herrera wastewater treatment plants in Tijuana. It will provide an increased water supply for Mexico while also reducing the amount of wastewater that enters the Tijuana River. Different alternatives are being considered and more funding will be needed.

- c. The EPA is pursuing a study with a North American Development Bank to try to get a better idea of the amount of raw sewage that is entering the river and to identify infrastructure repairs that are needed to get the flows into the pipes to the International Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- d. The IBWC is working on a portal that allows users to see updates on all the Mexico side projects.
- e. The EPA is planning to have another public meeting to discuss the project of USMCA funds, etc. etc.

Mike Verderber – SD County Parks – Supervising Park Ranger

- a. Campground updates are in the New Business agenda item below.

Mike McCoy – SWIA – President

- a. Dr. McCoy reported that he signed the agreement for the first \$30 million for the implementation of TETRP II Phase I.
Dr. McCoy and C.Peregrin discuss considerations for funding for TETRP as TETRP moves to the next phase. C.Peregrin replied that in addition to the funding coming from the Coastal Conservancy, there is an application that the Coastal Conservancy has put into NOAA for funding, that would fund the remainder of the balance of the project. C.Peregrin said he cannot speak to the security of that funding.
- b. SWIA is having a retreat in June with the goal of reviewing its relationship with the Reserve as it pertains to grants, administration, and its role with the advisory council.

Morgan Rogers – USBWC – Area Operations Manager

- a. On May 8th Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner is giving a presentation and an update on the plant. In the afternoon Commissioner Giner is meeting with the Mayor of San Diego to also give an update on what is going on.
- b. The Tijuana River flows currently vary from 50 to 80 million gallons per day (mgd). Once they are down to 45 mgd, PBCILA can get equipment and staff in to clean out the intakes. That should reduce the amount of wastewater in the river.
Question & Answer between C.Peregrin and Morgan regarding above:
C.Peregrin asked for a clarification of the variance of flow in the river and about the threshold at which CILA can open up PB1. M.Rogers reiterated that the amount of 45 mgd can allow the needed repairs and maintenance, and once the flow gets down to 35 mgd, the IBWC can turn the plant back on.
C.Peregrin asked where that flow goes once it is turned back on and Morgan said it goes to pump station PB1 and then to PBC and is then pumped down to the ocean discharge. He said there is a lot of work on the international collector that Mexico is doing and that some of those flows that would normally be in the international collector, are raw sewage and going into the river.
- c. The flow at the plant is averaging 22 mgd. For this year the average is below 25 mgd, so that looks pretty good but once PBCILA gets online the flow tends to go up so the IBWC will need to monitor that.

- d. Recently the first of five primary sedimentation treatment tanks was brought back online. That increased the amount of sludge being captured and improved the quality of the treatment of the wastewater.
- e. Goat Canyon and Smuggler's Gulch canyon collectors remain offline. The amount of sediment with the frequent rain events and the associated cost prompted a decision to keep them offline during the rainy season. Contractors will be starting to clean at the Goat Canyon collectors and the Hollister Pump Station. By the end of next week Goat Canyon should be back online and stop transboundary flows. The flows through Smuggler's Gulch are not just rainwater, it is from a pump station at Matadero Canyon in Mexico, PB3, and must be repaired. Too much sediment is going in and it must remain offline for now.

Question & Answer between C.Peregrin and M.Rogers: C.Peregrin asked if the sewage coming out through Smuggler's and Goat would normally go to the treatment plant or to San Antonio de los Buenos (SAB). M.Rogers replied that everything that comes across the border to the canyon collectors goes to the plant. If the Matadero pump station were operational, it would go down to SAB. C.Peregrin asked if the same is true with Los Laureles and Morgan said yes that there are two pump stations feeding Goat Canyon and Las Laureles 1 and 2 and that would go to SAB. Presently #1 is being worked on and that is the source of the flows now.

Questions in chat: M.Powell (TRVEA) asked if M.Rogers has an estimate of how many gallons per day are coming through Smuggler's Gulch and Goat Canyon and if it is known where it is going in the state parks. Is it pooling, being absorbed into the soil or is it running through the State Park? M.Rogers said the combined flows are between 1 and 2 mgd most of which is from Smuggler's. He knows it is going downstream toward the river and is aware that the City of San Diego is scoping out some work to clean out the channel and rebuild the berms. C.Peregrin has observed the Smuggler's flow going through the 88-acre private parcel and then going on through the campground and into the state park just north of Monument Road and at that point there is a confluence with the Goat Canyon flows that come through the sediment basins across Monument Road. He sees pooling water and flowing and seeping water going into the marsh.

- f. North Levy (the sod farm area) cleanup update: There will be another week of work, so far 500 tons of trash and debris have been collected, that equals 70, forty-cubic yard containers. Grading was done to build up the North Levy that had been topped in January. M.Rogers is trying to arrange a visit to the pump station to see what can be done.

5. Program Manager Reports

Sally Brown – USFWS – Refuge Manager

- a. There are plover nests and chicks on the beach. FWS is putting out the message to keep dogs on a leash and to walk on the hard pack below the rack line to lessen impact to the plovers.
- b. The FWS is continuing to work on interpretive signs for the North & South McCoy Trail.

- c. FWS is in the beginning stages of a project planning the replacement of the 45-year-old deck at the end of Seacoast Drive that has been damaged by tidal over wash and sand deposits. Designs were presented to the IB City Council and were met with approval, except for locating the deck 100 feet north to protect it from tidal over wash. There are plans for additional meetings with the city and the environmental review and permitting still need to be done. Funds for the project are not available this year.

Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – Reserve Manager Report

- a. TRNERR has a partnership starting with San Diego Urban Corps, funded with a grant from the California Ocean Protection Council. A five-person crew will be assigned for a year, to work daily at the Reserve starting late summer/early fall.
- b. Update on Goat Canyon: 20 thousand cubic yards were excavated out of the sediment basins this year which is about one third of the estimated total material in there, at a cost of the standard operating budget of \$2 million. The material was tested and hauled off to Terra Bella Nursery.
- c. Designs for the realignment of the 1.5-mile section of Monument Road in the State Park boundary (from the park entrance to the most southwest corner at Monument Mesa) are 60% complete. The Environmental Impact Report is under contract with ECORP Consulting, Inc. and is expected to be done in about a year.
- d. The project to clean up the seasonal impact to Monument Road is scheduled to start on June 2nd. Five hundred thousand dollars of emergency funding from the state was made available for the cleanup of the road. The work will take about two weeks and should be done by mid-June.
- e. The mosquitos that are being caught in the traps in the river valley by the vector control are at levels never seen before. The standing water caused by cross border flows are creating mosquito breeding conditions and County Vector Control is working to treat all the areas as thoroughly and quickly as possible.

Anne Marie Tipton – TRNERR – Education Report

- a. There were several school programs this year, especially in the month of April.
- b. For the first time in forty years, TRNERR has hired a permanent employee (Interpreter I) besides the Education Coordinator. The Education Program has gone through a lot of seasonal employees primarily due to the low wages offered.

Jeff Crooks – TRNERR – Research Report

- a. The Research Program is trying to keep track of transboundary flows in the data. The volumes of flow seen now coming into the dry season are unprecedented. Data is showing prolonged periods of low dissolved oxygen, especially during the neap tide series (period with lower tidal action). It indicates that there is not enough tidal circulation and input of oxygen-rich ocean water to counteract the eutrophication that is developing. The monitoring is shedding light on the biological (as well as physical and chemical) impacts of the transboundary flows on the system. For example, very few fish were caught in the annual monitoring. Given all the stresses

on the system, in general, Dr. Crooks is more impressed by the system's resilience than its fragility, but we are pushing it to the brink.

- b. Regarding the possibility of a river mouth closure; the mouth configuration is always changing and right now it is fairly constricted, even with the current spring tide series. If there is increased tidal flushing over the next few days it may reopen; it is something the Reserve watches for at this time of year, after waves have piled up material at the river mouth all winter long. This is a concerning situation, especially when combined with the transboundary flows. The Research Program is going to try to routinely map where the water is going possibly by using satellite or aerial imagery. Mostly, the Research Program uses dataloggers to know what is occurring. The clearest signal of transboundary flows is lower salinities at the datalogger stations which are in the Oneonta Slough, and in the Model Marsh area to the south.

Question from M.Powell: can the Navy give permission to fly a drone over the flow area? Dr. Crooks replied that it has been a topic of discussion and is being looked at. It is problematic because of the sensitivity needed to do that in the area and permissions from different agencies would be required. He added that other types imagery are being considered.

Lorena Warner-Lara – TRNERR – Stewardship Report

- a. The stewardship activities that are usually done at this time of the year in the river valley have been extremely limited because of the poor conditions. As a result, there has been more work done north of the river mouth and near the Visitor Center, like invasive species removal and the creation of a native plant garden in the amphitheater area behind the Visitor Center.
- b. Stewardship has an upcoming volunteer event with California State Parks Foundation and a Scout group to work in a trail area.
- c. Thanks to the Reserve's partnership with Border Patrol, there has been access to continue the CA least tern and Western snowy plover monitoring as well as the surveys for the CA gnatcatcher and least Bell's vireo in the river valley.
- d. Regarding the Nelson Sloan Quarry Restoration and Beneficial Reuse of Sediment Project, last year the environmental compliance was completed. Dudek is contracted to help with the regulatory process. Working with the County, because the quarry is on county land, and both have sediment to manage. They are working on necessary permits.

Kristen Goodrich – TRNERR – Coastal Training Program Report

- a. The Coastal Training Program (CTP) is at the point of finishing out a multiyear project that was funded by NOAA's Marine Debris Program, called the ResiDUOS Project. The last component is developing a Binational Emergency Response Guide in collaboration with U.S. and Mexican agencies to think about the relationship between flooding and debris. CTP just hosted a meeting with U.S. agencies that will inform the development of the guide. They are in the process of drafting it and will be sharing for input.

- b. In May, CTP was invited to present in a Congressional Briefing about this work and another project funded by NOAA's Marine Debris Program to help in thinking about infrastructure related to the sedimentation basins and technological advancements in the trash boom to help with the interception of the debris that comes into the river valley. It was very successful with great attendance.
- c. As part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association (NERRA), a number of people went to Washington D.C. for congressional visits and to meet as program managers from across the country. It provided an opportunity to communicate about the impact of the Reserves on local communities.
- d. CTP launched a new project with National Geographic called *Preserving Legacies*. The Reserve will be part of a cohort of over 10 sites around the world where people will be helping them think about aspects of cultural heritage as it relates to being a natural asset in a highly urbanized area.

5. New Business

- a. Charles Gailband (San Diego County Parks & Recreation) provided an update on the flooding in the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park Campground. The campground is closed due to the rain event on January 22, 2024, that caused contaminated water flowing through Smuggler's Gulch to erode a protective berm and then flow through private property and into the campground. The breach was discovered in February and the campground has been closed since then. The County has hired a contractor that is dredging portions of Smuggler's Gulch to restore flow to the desired pilot channel and potentially inhibit further flooding into the park. They will go as far as they can and then switch over to the south side of Monument Road. The City will be able to repair the berm once the desired flow is established. There is not a firm timeline for a reopening of the campground, and it will be based on whether it is safe to do so.

6. Public Comment

Mike McCoy, SWIA

Question: If the river mouth blocks, is permitting going to be a problem?

J.Terp answer: The USFWS is working on permitting to address the closure of the river mouth.

Mary Powell, TRVEA

Question: When will the berm be repaired that is south of the main channel, west of Hollister bridge? The trail's name is Vireo Trail. The berm was broken and repaired at a slightly different location in 2023.

C.Gailband answer: The damage is documented; repairs will be made as soon as equipment can get into the area.

7. Future Agenda Considerations & proposed change in August Meeting Date

There was an uncontested proposal to move the August meeting from the usual first Tuesday of the month to the second Tuesday of the month.

- M.McCoy suggested J.Crooks give more details on the eutrophication process in the estuary
- R.Echols-Booth suggested a report on the Wednesday Marine Debris beach cleanups
- D.Liden suggested the study for reuse of wastewater in Mexico (see his report above)
- D.Liden suggested a comparison of cleanup projects

8. TRNERR MEETINGS for Advisory Council – In-person and Virtual @1pm

Future TRNERR Advisory Council meetings:

- Tuesday, August 13, 2024
- Tuesday, November 5, 2024

9. TRNERR Trails Committee meeting

- Tuesday, May 21, 2024 at 9:30am

Until the meeting in January 2024, the Trails Committee meetings have not been held for at least two years. Bringing the meetings back has not been easy in terms of scheduling. Would like to set the focus of the Trails Committee Meeting at the AC meeting to have opportunity to discuss - does anyone have a particular trail alignment or topic they would like to discuss? None given. C.Peregrin would like to look at the trail up in Goat Canyon and possible habitat restoration adjacent to the trail.

Would like the Trails Committee meetings to be at least two weeks following the AC meeting.

10. Adjourned at 2:23PM

The meeting was adjourned.