

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

Tuesday, November 5, 2024, at 1pm
301 Caspian Way, Imperial Beach CA, 91932
Meeting held virtually via the *Zoom* platform.

***ADOPTED* meeting minutes**

Advisory Council Members

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

Lisa Adams – 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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***Justyn Stahl for 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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***Jillian Haynes for 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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Seah Ford – US Border Patrol – Public Lands Liaison
SEAN.A.FORD@cbp.dhs.gov

Bill Rogers – US 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
707-495-2623, gemma.waaland@noaa.gov

Program Managers Present:

Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – Reserve Manager

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

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Empress Holliday – TRNERR – Coastal Training Program

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Anne Marie Tipton – TRNERR – Education Coordinator

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Jeff Crooks – TRNERR – Research Coordinator

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Members of the Public

Audrey Kennar, County Health and Human Services Agency

Alyssa del Rosario, SD County Parks

Charles Gailband, SD County Parks

Dan Watman, Friends of Friendship Park

Jim Harry, City of San Diego

Joe Ellis, Public

John Zarem, TRNERR Volunteer

Marya Ahmad, CA State Parks

Ransses Lopez, TRNERR

Dr. Mark Beatty, County of San Diego

1. **1:06 pm Meeting was called to order.**
2. **AGENDA** – November 5, 2024, agenda was adopted.
3. **LAST MEETING MINUTES** – The May 7 and August 13, 2024 minutes were adopted.
4. **Member Comments**

Sam Jenniches – State Coastal Conservancy – Project Manager

- a. The Explore the Coast Grant for 2025 will be announced this month. For more information go to the grants tab at, <https://scc.ca.gov>. At this month's upcoming board meeting, a suite of coastal stories projects will be considered. One of the stories to be presented for consideration is the story of Friendship Park.

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

- a. The Parks and Recreation Director, Shannon Bullock is moving to a new job in a different city so Imperial Beach will be without someone in that position for a while. If anyone has any communication issues, go through Chris Helmer.
- b. Update on the Bayshore Bikeway Resiliency Project: Imperial Beach will release the public EIS in a month and will be doing public outreach on the project for the next several months.

- c. The City is finalizing the Imperial Beach Community Resiliency Plan and will be assessing what they should be doing regarding sea level rise planning not just on the bayside but also near the estuary and the beachfront. They will be talking about climate adaptation for the whole city.

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

- a. Nothing to report.

Jillian Haynes for Annica Ly – City of San Diego Stormwater Department

- a. The berm repair at Smuggler’s Gulch is substantially complete thanks to the IBWC and the County on their collaboration and coordination on the project.

Doug Liden – USEPA – Environmental Engineer

- a. Update on the Minute 328 projects: Mexico has secured and already invested \$54 million, and the U.S. is currently at \$400 million and counting as far as repairs to the water treatment plant, as well as projects in Mexico. Expected improvements:
 - i. San Antonio de los Buenos plant (to 18 mgd) - with most of the civil work done, the plant should go into operation in the spring and reduce untreated flows to the coast by about 30%.
 - ii. La Morita and Arturo Herrera plants (to 12 mgd) - another project working with Mexico that is getting a lot of traction is the reclamation/reuse project at the La Morita and Arturo Herrera plants. With help from the EPA, the first phase is to upgrade the plants and get the effluent discharged to the reservoir and out of the river to reduce the flows to the coast by another 20%. Status: not begun.
 - iii. Those projects combined with the expansion of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (to 50 mgd) could get a 95% reduction in wastewater flows to the coast, during dry weather.
 - iv. Pipe Collector Repairs - are needed to get wastewater directed to the treatment plant to get the effluent not treated at the plant to San Antonio de los Buenos. One of the projects, the International Collector, the largest wastewater collection pipe in Mexico, has just been replaced. It is currently ready to be connected, but that would result in 25 million gallons a day of untreated wastewater flowing into the river for two weeks while the work is done. The USEPA and IBWC are currently working with Mexico on solving that problem which will likely involve a bypass.

Ashley Reinemann – California Coastal Commission – Federal Programs Manager

- a. The Commission has a standing hearing item for the pollution issue. At the October hearing, the ecology and water quality staff presented information and data on the ecological and water quality impacts. They are building on the information that was presented and are coordinating with Reserve staff, CDFW, NOAA and others to build out a white paper that compiles all the existing studies and reports on the impacts. Also, at the October hearing the staff was directed to prepare and send a letter to the IBWC and the EPA regarding the consistency of ongoing sewage and

wastewater management operations with California's Coastal Management Program. The Commission also directed the staff to prepare and send a letter to President Biden calling for a state of emergency for the ongoing impacts. Anyone interested in reviewing the hearing from last month, it is item 7a on Thursday, October 10th.

<https://www.coastal.ca.gov/meetings/agenda/#/2024/10>

Charles Gailband – SD County Parks – Region Manager

- a. The County recently completed restoration work at the Brown property and are continuing work on improvements and planting more native plants in the Bird and Butterfly Garden.
- b. Update on the campground reopening plan: the berm repair work has been completed by the City of San Diego, so the County is taking the first steps toward potential remediation by removing invasive plants that were able to get established in the period since the storms.

Sean Ford – US Border Patrol – Public Lands Liaison

- a. The Tijuana River barrier, a.k.a. Tijuana channel bridge, is functional and Border Patrol have been using it when the construction crews are not working on it. It will be turned over fully to the Border Patrol in mid-December.

Morgan Rogers – US International Boundary & Water Commission – Area Operations Manager

- a. Updates on Smuggler's Gulch and Goat Canyon: there are no transboundary flows now. Thank you to the City and the County for working with the IBWC to get the needed repairs accomplished.
- b. Governor Newsom visited last week and met with the IBWC commissioner and the San Diego County Board of Supervisors Chair Nora Vargas. They were shown around and there was a launching ceremony for the expansion project.

Mike McCoy – SWIA – President

- a. M. McCoy stated concerns regarding the Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program (TETRP) II Phase I project completion date. Dr. Crooks followed up by pointing out that the project is moving along with the final design and will be starting the permitting process. Some funding for the project has been secured and more is needed for full implementation.

5. Program Manager Reports

Justyn Stahl for Sally Brown – USFWS – Refuge Manager Report

- a. For the 2025 budget, Biden Administration requested a 14.3% increase for the Refuge System, but the local allocation is not expected for some time. Last year the administration requested a 15.4% increase, but the local refuge complex received a cut of 14.6%. The Refuge System is struggling to keep up with its responsibilities in the area.

- b. Jill Terp, the Deputy Project Leader, is retiring November 16, 2024 and Chantel Jimenez, the Urban Program Coordinator is filling her position on November 17.
- c. The Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge and California State Parks are coapplying for a permit from the Army Corp of Engineers to dredge the mouth of the Tijuana River in the event of a closure.
- d. September was the end of the bird nesting season. There were 56 snowy plover nests and 208 least tern nests north of the river.
- e. Update on signs: signs were repaired and replaced at the 5th and Grove trail area. Interpretive signs for the North and South McCoy trails are paid for and are almost ready for submittal.
- f. Preliminary designs for the observation deck at the south end of Seacoast Drive have been proposed and would relocate the deck about 100 feet north of the original location. This would avoid tidal over wash and sand deposition. The project is on hold pending coordination with the City of Imperial Beach.
- g. The Friends of San Diego Wildlife Refuges organized an event, *Birds at Sunset*, which took place on Saturday October 19 and was well attended. Charles Gailband gave a live bird presentation.
- h. San Diego hosted the Western Field Ornithologists conference in mid-October and there were several field trips to the estuary.
- i. J.Zarem comments regarding the Refuge: He and S.Brown went to the end of Sunset to remap the trails that have been neglected for a good while and flagged the areas where they think the trail should be. S.Brown is going to get a fire crew to cut down the vegetation to get the trails reestablished.

Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – Reserve Manager Report

- a. The State budget is in a little bit of a crunch. Parks is undergoing an exercise to cut off 8% from the operating budget for this fiscal year and have not been given the operating budget yet for the districts of California State Parks (CSP). CSP is exploring alternatives to meet the shorter budget allocation.
- b. Goat Canyon update: the contractor has completed the excavation of the sediment basins for the year. Approximately 20 thousand cubic yards from the basins was placed on the processing pad. The analysis of the material for chemicals and contaminants is underway. Assessment will be completed in the next couple of weeks. The material will remain on-site until the lab releases the results.
- c. San Diego Urban Corps has been working on the removal of *Arundo donax* from the Goat Canyon basin. The project has been funded by a grant from the Ocean Protection Council and supports five corpsmembers in the Reserve for a year.
- d. The Reserve Manager thinks the February breach of Smuggler’s Gulch and the water staying in the habitat for an extended period could have contributed to the extensive growth of the invasive castor bean plant in areas of Border Field State Park. He wants other land managers to be aware and perhaps work together to address the issue.

Anne Marie Tipton – TRNERR – Education Report

- a. Not present.

Jeff Crooks – TRNERR – Research Report

- a. With the end of the bird nesting season in September, it has been an active monitoring season and a continuation of work at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon, the San Diego Bay, and the Tijuana Estuary.
- b. The Research Program is continuing to track the ecological impacts of the transboundary flows. One of the most pressing concerns is the development of hypoxic or anoxic conditions in the estuary. There has been some improvement in the ecosystem's responses since the transboundary flows have been lessened. The low oxygen conditions are still more than is hoped for but there is slight encouragement that the intervention has had a good effect.
- c. The program also continues to track the mouth closures with the data loggers. The data is available on the TRNERR website. In general, looks pretty good, during a recent neap tide the river mouth looked like it was getting shallower, but it has recovered.

Lorena Warner-Lara – TRNERR – Stewardship Report

- a. The San Diego Urban Corps will work down in BFSP until it becomes rainy then they will shift their efforts to the northern part of the reserve.
- b. Blackhawk Environmental bird survey in the sediment basin complex (BFSP), update: There were 14 California gnatcatcher territories, up from 9 over the previous year. There were 25 least Bell's vireo territories, 7 fewer than the previous year which is likely due to a reduced survey area because of the transboundary contamination safety concerns.
- c. The Nelson Sloan permit process update: TRNERR staff have met with the USFWS, Regional Water Quality Control Board and the City of San Diego, the permits are in and Dudek will be on contract until the end of the fiscal year for technical support.
- d. This was the 15th year of Tijuana River Action Month (TRAM) with over 30 different partners that put together events in Imperial Beach, the river valley, and Tijuana and Tecate. TRAM was scheduled from September 14th to October 20th but due to the air quality scare the events of the first weekend were canceled. To this date, of the 27 events the results of ten of the events have been recorded: 956 participants, 704 pounds of trash, 185 pounds of recyclables, and 87 tires. In addition to the stewardship events there were other events, at the Tijuana Estuary Visitor Center, the Friends of Friendship Park organized and hosted a photo exhibit commemorating twenty-five years of Friendship Park, there was a *Unite to Heal the Coast* event held at the Pier Plaza, and there were some bird walks around the estuary and river valley. The last event was at Wild Willow and the Community Garden on Hollister, they hosted a fall festival with over 400 people attending. Different groups were tabling at the event including Scripps' research and people talking about air and water quality issues.
- e. The Friday Stewardship Volunteer Program has continued as usual. The Wednesday volunteers have been able to continue with the marine debris clean up after being on hold for the nesting season. The Urban Corps crew helped with the larger amounts of debris that accumulated over the nesting season.

Empress Holliday – TRNERR – Coastal Training Program Report

- a. Updates on the ResiDUOS Project: This project which was funded by the NOAA Marine Debris Program is a multiyear project and the final component, the Binational Emergency Response Guide was completed and submitted to NOAA to be reviewed, and based on those reviews it will be edited and put out to participants of the workshop series in the U.S. and Mexico. The guide will be further refined based on that input.
- b. In partnership with Scripps Institute and the State Office of Historic Preservation, CTP has been working to develop a cultural heritage climate vulnerability assessment. The project is composed of a series of workshops and outreach efforts with tribal and non-tribal participants from the U.S. and Mexico that will look at cultural heritage as a method of understanding climate threats and climate vulnerability here at the reserve. The workshops will begin in January 2025. As a precursor to that effort, the CTP co-delivered a workshop with Scripps Institute, the State Historic Preservation Officer and the staff from the National Geographic Preserving Legacies team on cultural heritage literacy.
- c. The CTP team continues to participate in the National Geographic project Preserving Legacies as site custodians and were invited to present on the Cultural Heritage Climate Vulnerability Assessment to the Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy and are working to confirm tribal participants and their stipend needs.
- d. The CTP team helped co-develop two TRAM events. One with 4 Walls International, exploring opportunities for community science activities in the reserve and with various organizations and agencies in Mexico, and the other was a private event with an indigenous youth group, the Coastal Defenders that the Coastal Training Program facilitated and supported.
- e. As an offshoot to the Preserving Legacies Project, CTP was invited to participate in the Heritage Adapts to Climate Alliance project which was recently granted \$1.25 million from the Melon Foundation, in addition with support from the Preserving Legacies Project, CTP will be developing an effort that will encompass elements of the Global Goal on Adaptation from the Paris Climate Agreement along with various elements of the Preserving Legacies framework.

6. New Business

- a. Audrey Kennar (County of San Diego, Health and Human Services Agency) presented on the Assessment for Chemical Exposures (ACE) Survey to assess the impact of the Tijuana River Valley sewage contamination
The County has been working with the CDC to investigate the impacts of the Tijuana River Valley pollution crisis on both health and environmental concerns. The investigation process has necessitated the county working with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to conduct a health survey on an individual level. The ACE survey is for people who work, live or have visited the areas most impacted by the sewage in the south county area. The survey which is voluntary and confidential opened October 21 and continues through November 22, 2024. The survey has been open for over two weeks and just hit 1000 surveys submitted. They are hoping to at least double the amount before the survey closes.

- i. ACE website:
https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/south-region-health-concerns/ACE.html
- ii. ACE flyer:
https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/Epidemiology/south-region-gi-illness/South-Region_ACE-FAQs%20Eng.pdf

Dr. Mark Beatty, Assistant Medical Director with the Epidemiology and Immunization Services Branch, County of San Diego added that the county appreciates and is thankful for Parks allowing the county to post flyers with the QR codes to the survey, and with helping get the information out to the public. Chris commented that it was shared with the TRNERR newsletter.

- b. Morgan Rogers (International Boundary and Water Commission) gave a synopsis of updates from the IBWC Citizens Forum meeting on the Launch of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant rehabilitation and expansion
The IBWC has been focusing on four different areas: 1) the repairs and compliance of the plant, 2) the rehab and expansion of the plant, 3) the Minute 328 projects in Mexico and 4) transboundary flows.

Presentation link: <https://trnerr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/TRNERR-Presentation-11.5.24.pdf>

7. Public Comment

No additional comments were made.

8. Future Agenda Considerations

No future agenda items were given. Please email C.Peregrin and L.Warner-Lara with any future agenda items (*see emails at top of minutes*).

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

The following dates were adopted for the 2025 TRNERR Advisory Council meetings:

- Tuesday, February 4, 2025
- Tuesday, May 6, 2025
- Tuesday, August 5, 2025
- Tuesday, November 4, 2025

10. TRNERR Trails Committee meeting

- Tuesday, November 19, 2024, at 9:30am
- Suggestions included: Coastal Conservancy add markers for the Coastal Trail. Safety and resource management regarding E-bikes. Looking at a few of the multi-jurisdictional trails and evaluate the alignment of management. System wide trails assessment.

11. Adjourned at 2:29 PM

The meeting was adjourned.