

Beyond Border 2012: Improving Border Environmental Quality

Remarks by New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary David Martin and NMED Border Liaison Thomas Ruiz to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works / Subcommittee on Children's Health and Environmental Responsibility

**Wednesday, April 11, 2012, 10:00 a.m.
Las Cruces Council Chambers at City Hall
Las Cruces, NM**

NMED continues to value its participation in and contributions to the Border 2012 program:

- The Department has been deeply involved in various border environmental related activities over many years:
 - Environmental Education Taskforce & Rural Taskforce
 - Binational environmental health fairs conducted for hundreds of school-aged children within rural communities of Mexico and New Mexico
 - Focus on water quality/quantity issues
 - Air Quality
 - Recycling
 - Environmental Education applies to almost all of the proposed Guiding Principles within the draft Border 2020 document:
 - Reducing the highest public health risks
 - Continuing the “bottom-up” approach
 - Improving stakeholder participation
 - Fostering transparency, public dialogue
 - Strengthening capacity
- Some of NMED's highlights through Border Environmental funding:
 - Support of environmental education activities throughout the border area including:
 - “Permitting 101” sessions held in communities such as Mesquite and Chaparral aimed at giving residents education for their involvement in our permitting processes around air, groundwater and solid waste. We plan more of these, particularly within the area of solid waste.
 - Septic system maintenance workshops within communities of Doña Ana counties for the purpose of preventing groundwater and surface water contamination in shallow depth to water areas
 - Various educational efforts around the hazards of windblown dust, particularly with the City of Las Cruces
 - Air monitoring
 - Columbus NM/Palomas, MX

- Two communities that saw little to no monitoring in the past and ranked Air Quality as their highest environmental priority in 2004.
 - Mapping of unpaved roads in Columbus and Palomas to show likely sources of harmful coarse particulate matter (PM₁₀)
 - Emissions inventory around a cattle facility in Palomas, showing likely cause of elevated PM₁₀ in that vicinity
- Binational air quality study with the City of Juarez, El Paso and Sunland Park
 - Saturation monitoring network covering 13 monitoring sites for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5})
 - Assessed spatial extent of high PM_{2.5} during low wind episodes
 - Investigated possible source areas
- Partnership with the Water Resources Research Institute at NMSU on aquifer characterization
- Scrap tire cleanups near Deming and Columbus
- NMED recognizes ongoing border environmental issues:
 - Border air quality
 - Elevated concentrations of ozone and PM_{2.5} in Sunland Park, NM with stronger health based standards expected in the future.
 - Continued research and mitigation efforts to better understand natural and anthropogenic sources of windblown dust that cause exceedances of the PM₁₀ standard.
 - Ground water quality
 - Heavy agriculture and potential threats to groundwater in the form of nitrates

Looking ahead to the Border 2020 Program:

- Our Border Liaison, Thomas Ruiz, was part of the Drafting Committee for Border 2020.
 - His years of interaction with our Mexican partners in addressing and prioritizing environmental issues gives him the experience to help make the new border program stronger
 - Tom's years of working in communities on various issues including environmental justice make him well suited for this important role.
- What NMED sees as key in maintaining a strong border environmental program:
 - Adhering to the "bottom up" approach
 - Conducting biannual reviews of the program to ensure it is meeting the needs of the various regions within the border

- Making the needs to be filled within the requests for proposals in sync with the concerns within regions and communities
- Integrating Environmental Justice (EJ) more explicitly into the new Border Program as it is listed in the draft document as one of the Guiding Principles (“address disproportionate environmental impacts in border communities”)
 - It is important to provide fair treatment and meaningful involvement to all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, income and education level, in environmental decision-making
 - Also, EJ is implicit as a fundamental strategy of Border 2020 in providing focus on disadvantaged and underserved communities.

Assessment of Border Environmental Needs and Infrastructure

A 2009 Environmental Infrastructure Needs Assessment conducted by the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) found that, due to federal revisions of contaminant standards, several NM Border water systems would be driven into a non-compliant status for uranium, arsenic and fluoride, resulting in a significant need for drinking water treatment investment. The cost of compliance can be expensive; thus, many systems look at various alternatives including deactivating wells and/or blending water supplies from other sources.

Anthony, New Mexico

An US\$8.8 million water project sponsored by the Anthony, New Mexico Water and Sanitation District is receiving a US\$2.8 million Border Environmental Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) grant to improve water quality and ensure sufficient water supply in compliance with state and federal water standards. The project consists of the construction of two new water wells, new pumping equipment and a treatment system to reduce the arsenic content of drinking water. EPA recently lowered the drinking water standard for arsenic from 50 parts per billion (ppb) to 10 ppb, to protect the public against health problems associated with the long-term, chronic exposure to arsenic. The project will directly benefit the 8,388 residents of Anthony by ensuring a safe and sustainable water supply.

Lordsburg, New Mexico

The City of Lordsburg, New Mexico is improving its water treatment system to eliminate high levels of fluoride prior to distribution of water to the city’s residents by means of an activated alumina treatment system. The project falls under the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) priority areas of water treatment. The project sponsor is the City of Lordsburg, New Mexico. The \$2 million project is receiving 35% of its funding from NADB-BEIF assistance.

The results of a wastewater sector analysis completed by the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) in 2009, reflect a critical need to invest in environmental infrastructure projects to address coverage gaps and planning efforts to prepare for capacity expansion needs to provide adequate wastewater services for

existing and future populations in the NM border area. Areas such as Sunland Park, Santa Teresa and La Union are experiencing this and the issue needs to be addressed.

The Colonias Infrastructure Act in New Mexico was adopted in 2010 based on the legislative finding that colonias lack basic infrastructure for water and wastewater systems, solid waste disposal facilities, flood and drainage control, roads and housing. The purpose of the Act is to ensure adequate financial resources for infrastructure development for colonia recognized communities, provide for the planning and development of infrastructure in an efficient and cost-effective manner, and develop infrastructure projects to improve quality of life and encourage economic development. An important criterion for entities in applying for Colonias Infrastructure Funding is to be able to leverage funds for their environmental improvement projects. BECC/NADB funding provides the means to do this.

Within the 6 border counties of New Mexico, the primary gap in drinking water system coverage most likely exists in the rural setting where access to centralized systems may not be feasible to offer. There also continues to be some need for investment to expand coverage in the urbanized areas. Those un-served household units in the rural area should not be overlooked since increased risks for poor water quality and harmful human health effects may exist. Further analysis and determination of appropriate solutions to mitigate these risks may be required. In addition, Doña Ana County's water system coverage is over 93% which, in and of itself, does not raise concern; however, there are more than 70 water providers in the County, which signifies the need to consider a comprehensive effort to regionalize, at least, in terms of aligning critical water management perspectives especially related to protecting quality, assuring quantity and providing service efficiencies.

With significant shared demands, some signs of high water use tendencies and common periods of drought in an already arid region, the long-term availability and protection of the aquifer supply is of great concern to the Doña Ana County (NM), El Paso County (TX) and Chihuahua (MX) tri-regional area. The development of strategies to improve the management of New Mexico's groundwater resources is critical to this area and should consider a variety of options including but not limited to conservation practices, development of alternative water sources (surface water), and other tri-regional investment solutions.