

**MINUTES OF THE  
2,200<sup>th</sup> REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE  
MIDDLE RIO GRANDE CONSERVANCY DISTRICT**

**JUNE 12, 2023 - 3:00 PM**

Directors having been duly notified; Madam Chair Russo Baca called the regular meeting to order at 3:03 pm. The following Directors and Staff were present:

<b>DIRECTORS</b>		<b>STAFF</b>	
Stephanie Russo Baca, Madam Chair	Present	Jason Casuga	Chief Engineer/CEO
Karen Dunning, Vice Chair	Present	Lorna Wiggins	General Counsel
Barbara Baca, Director	Present	Dr. Charles DuMars	Chief Water Counsel
John Kelly, Director	Absent	Pamela Fanelli	Secretary-Treasurer/CFO
Joaquin Baca, Director	Absent	Eric Zamora	Chief Operating Officer
Glen Duggins, Director	Present	Anne Marken	Water Distribution Division Mgr.
Michael T. Sandoval, Director	Present	Matt Martinez	Water Operations Division Mgr.

The following names of individuals were interested viewers, callers and/or participants

John Taylor	Elias Martin	Ernie Marquez, AES
Eli Lovato, AES	Andrew Hautzinger, VSWCD	James Sanchez
Audilio Miranda	Judy McSweeney, MRGCD	Carol Benavidez
Christine Nardi, MRGCD	Mark Garcia	Martin Haynes
Rudy Perea	LeeAnn Corwin, MRGCD	Alicia Lopez, MRGCD
Rhett Sanders-Spencer, MRGCD	Yasmeen Najmi, MRGCD	Craig Hoover, BHI
Ryan Gronewold, USACE	Jared Minor, USACE	Stephanie McKenna, USACE
Bruce Jordan, USACE	Jerome Cordova	Don Simpson
Anthony Wagner	Gus Wagner	Samuel C de Baca
Doug Strech, MRGCD	Jessica Richardson	Troy Richardson
Mitch Vergeer	Jennifer Faler, BOR	Danielle Feygin, MRGCD
Ray Hartwell	Brittany Bade, MRGCD	Josh Hind, MRGCD
Tarah Jaramillo, MRGCD		

Before the meeting began, Vice Chair Dunning recognized Eugene Abeyta, a former board member as he had passed away last month. She sent her condolences to his family and expressed her appreciation for his 8 years of service on the board previously saying Mr. Abeyta was a kind, good person and represented the farmers especially the elderly.

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 1 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Carol Benavidez led the Pledge of Allegiance at today's meeting.

Madam Chair Russo Baca declared a quorum, and the hybrid meeting was publicly noticed.

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 2 – APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

There were no changes to the agenda.

Vice Chair Dunning made the **MOTION TO APPROVE THE MEETING AGENDA**.  
Seconded by Director Sandoval. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes.  
The **MOTION CARRIED**.

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Yes	Director Duggins	Yes
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 3 - CONSENT AGENDA**

- a. **Consideration/Approval of Payment Ratification - June 12, 2023**
- b. **Consideration/Approval of May 2023 Invoice for Wiggins, Williams & Wiggins**
- c. **Consideration/Approval of May 2023 Invoice for Law and Resource Planning Assoc.**
- d. **Consideration/Approval of the Minutes for the Regular Meeting Board Meeting - May 8, 2023**
- e. **Consideration/Approval of State of NM Audit Contract - Pamela Fanelli, CFO**
- f. **Memo on General Counsel’s April 2023 Invoice (For Informational Purposes Only)**
- g. **Memo on MRGCD Approved Licenses for May 2023 (For Informational Purposes Only)**
- h. **Notification of the Reclassification of Land to the MRGCD Official Plan and Appraisal Record (For Informational Purposes Only)**

Director Sandoval made the **MOTION TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA**.  
 Seconded by Vice Chair Dunning. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes.  
 The **MOTION CARRIED**.

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Yes	Director Duggins	Yes
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 4 - Consideration/Approval of 2023 MRGCD Election Formal Documents - Eli Lovato**

**Election Director and Election Committee and Report of the Election Committee Meeting, June 8, 2023 (Directors Joaquin Baca, Sandoval and Vice Chair Dunning)**

- a. **Discussion/Approval of Compensation Rates for Poll Workers**

Mr. Lovato recommended poll official compensation to be \$300 for poll judges, \$250 for the clerks with \$25 for school of instructions, and all early voting poll officials to be paid \$15 per hour.

Vice Chair mention the challenges the election director is facing is the overlap between the early voting for the municipal elections and our election as two of the four counties raised their poll rates for their election day workers. In order for the District to attract poll works, they recommended that we pay the equivalent of what the counties are paying.

Vice Chair Dunning made the **MOTION TO APPROVE THE RATES AS PRESENTED**. Seconded by Director Duggins. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes. The **MOTION CARRIED**.

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Yes	Director Duggins	Yes
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

**b. Consideration/Approval of 2023 MRGCD Election Supply Catalog**

Mr. Lovato apologized for the small print on the supply catalog sent in their packets but did provide a larger version.

Chair Russo Baca made the **MOTION TO APPROVE THE MRGCD ELECTION SUPPLY CATALOG**. Seconded by Vice Chair Dunning. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes. The **MOTION CARRIED**.

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Yes	Director Duggins	Yes
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

Vice Chair Dunning stated that the Election Committee, including herself and Directors Sandoval and Joaquin Baca, had a meeting and discussed polling places which will be approved at July’s meeting. She said they wanted to make sure the polling places were selected before candidacies were declared and that they felt that the sites are evenly distributed.

Chair Russo Baca made the **MOTION TO APPROVE THE ELECTION COMMITTEE REPORT**. Seconded by Director Sandoval. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes. The **MOTION CARRIED**.

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Yes	Director Duggins	Yes
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 5 - ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR (Comments are limited to six (6) minutes)**

**Mark Garcia**

Mr. Garcia, with the Farmers Association, stated due to the media and the newspapers, he wanted to set the record straight that their season did start late, along with other places in MRGCD. He said he had pictures from April showing that the San Juan Main Canal irrigation started late. He said he did appreciate the feedback they got back from MRGCD and looked forward to continuing the communication.

**Martin Haynes**

Mr. Haynes stated he was a rate payer in Valencia county, Bernalillo County and also an irrigator on the north end of Bernalillo county. He spoke about the communication problems and said he was happy to see the infrastructure was being addressed, but he felt it was too late. He stated there was a tax increase and they should use it to get things fixed. Mr. Haynes also spoke about the San Marcial area, stating he felt the District could meet their debt in 14 days. He asked why they were not getting water delivered at the Elephant Butte gage, stating it was due to lack of maintenance of the District and federal agencies.

**Rudy Perea**

Mr. Perea stated he had been happy with the water lately; however, he was upset to see in the paper that they were sending 22% of their water to Elephant Butte. He said he didn't understand the math behind that percentage. Mr. Perea asked what happened to the money received for the Conservancy that was supposed to be for the siphon in Corrales.

### **Glen Duggins**

Director Duggins thanked all the quality District workers and truck drivers that were out keeping everyone safe.

## **AGENDA ITEM NO. 6 - REPORT(S) FROM THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT - Christine L. Nardi, MBA**

### **a. Introduction of MRGCD New Hires**

Ms. Nardi stated they hired two new field maintenance techs with the Belen Division, a promotion to a supervisory role in Albuquerque Division, and hired two medium equipment operators in Socorro Division. She also mentioned the vacancy rate is currently around 10%.



## Memorandum

**To:** MRGCD Chair Russo Baca and Board of Directors  
**Through:** Jason M. Casuga, Chief Engineer/CEO  
**From:** Human Resources  
**Date:** June 12, 2023  
**Re:** Introduction of New Hires and Job/Title Changes

### **General Office**

ARCHIE	VIGIL	IRRIGATION SYSTEMS OPERATOR	05/30/2023
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### **Belen Division**

BRETT	TAFOYA	FIELD MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN	05/30/2023
TRISTIAN	ARAGON	FIELD MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN	06/12/2023
JOHNATHAN	MARQUEZ	EQUIPMENT OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR	06/12/2023 PROMOTION

### **Socorro Division**

HUNTER	O'BRIEN	MEDIUM EQUIPMENT OPERATOR	06/12/2023
CURTIS	GREENWOOD	MEDIUM EQUIPMENT OPERATOR	06/12/2013

## **AGENDA ITEM NO. 7 - CONSIDERATION/APPROVAL OF THE DESIGN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF ARMY AND MRGCD FOR DESIGN FOR THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE BERNALILLO TO BELEN, NM PROJECT - Jason M. Casuga, CE/CEO**

Mr. Casuga talked about the Bernalillo to Belen project agreement with the Corps, which he stated was in line with the mission that MRGCD has for river flood control. MRGCD maintained all levees within the middle valley along the Rio Grande and the design agreement covered phase one of Bernalillo to Belen to gets them into the design process. Phase one is called Mountain View which he explained goes from Rio Bravo to I-25 on the east side of the river. He added that the design agreement represented the change in the law that allowed the restoration of the 25% cost share.

Vice Chair Dunning asked if the project would take existing properties out of the floodplain when it was completed. Mr. Casuga stated the project was for the levees and the Corp (of Engineers) once completed would turn the levee over to MRGCD, and then MRGCD would submit the levee for certification to FEMA. Once the certification is complete, local municipalities, not the MRGCD, would be allowed to file their LOMR (letter of map revision) based on the certified levee that would then remove the floodplain, but not the risk of flooding.

Chair Russo Baca made the **MOTION TO APPROVE THE DESIGN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY AND THE MRGCD FOR DESIGN OF THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE BERNALILLO TO BELEN, NM PROJECT.** Seconded by Vice Chair Dunning. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes. The **MOTION CARRIED.**

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Yes	Director Duggins	Yes
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 8 - REPORT(S) FROM THE CHIEF PROCUREMENT OFFICER - Richard DeLoia, CPO**

**a. Consideration/Approval of the On-Call Professional Engineering Services RFP**

Mr. DeLoia stated MRGCD Evaluation Committee recommended award to Wilson & Company, Bohannan Huston, and HGR Inc., a one year contract with the option of three additional years.

**b. Consideration/Approval of the Infrastructure On-Call Contractors RFP**

Mr. DeLoia stated MRGCD Evaluation Committee recommended award to Lopez Precision, AUI Inc, and SCD Construction, one year contract with the option of three additional years.

**c. Consideration/Approval of the On-Call Federal Lobbyist Services RFP**

Mr. DeLoia stated MRGCD Evaluation Committee recommended award to Water Strategies, LLC, a one-year contract with the option of three additional years.

Vice Chair asked for the on-call services where there are three different companies how is it determined which company gets the contract. Mr. DeLoia replied that they will price shop them. Sometimes one or two of the companies are busy and cannot complete the job so the third comes into play.

Vice Chair Dunning made the **MOTION TO APPROVE ALL THREE SERVICES, AND CONTRACTORS RFPs**. Seconded by Chair Russo Baca. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes. The **MOTION CARRIED**.

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Yes	Director Duggins	Yes
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

## **AGENDA ITEM NO. 9 - REPORT(S) FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR -**

### **a. Bureau of Reclamation - Jennifer Faler, Area Manager**

Ms. Faler acknowledged MRGCD for their flood fighting efforts. She stated they were not able to get a satisfactory Clean Water Act permit, so they were not able to move forward with that project. She said they were meeting regularly with the Corps to try to find paths forward for those types of projects. She said they would be watching the Supreme Court litigation and ruling on wetlands on the Rio Grande.

Ms. Faler said she would be joining MRGCD and Elephant Butte Irrigation District for the tour when she was done with a meeting in Las Cruces. She stated Reclamation would start coordinating with the District and others on doing NEPA compliance that would tack onto the effort to store native water to update their water control plan.

Dr. DuMars asked Ms. Faler how she felt the meeting went they had about Ohkay Owingeh. Ms. Faler said she thought things were good to go, that the pueblo agreed to spill their water first, but there seemed to be a dispute in the state about who holds the storage permit for El Vado. Mr. Casuga said this item will be brought to the board later.

Director Duggins asked if he heard right that there was a project that would start to increase efficiency from the middle Rio Grande down to Elephant Butte. Ms. Faler said Reclamation had been in planning process on it with a couple of alternatives on the table.

Director Duggins then asked why a few drag lines on the Low Flow Conveyance Channel couldn't get it done now. He stated it takes the bureaucracy too long to move. Ms. Faler said it would be a significant taxpayer investment and had private lands involved, so they had to work through a process for that. She said they did have an interim project they were just about to finish construction on to help in the meantime.

Dr. DuMars added that New Mexico was in a double bind with having to fulfill their compact commitment and with Wild Earth Guardians and others to provide maximum amount of wetlands and protection.

Ms. Faler added there were three public meetings coming up, one in Albuquerque, one in Socorro, and one in Las Cruces.

### **b. Bureau of Indian Affairs - Roland Becenti, Acting Designated Engineer**

No one from the BIA attended today's meeting.

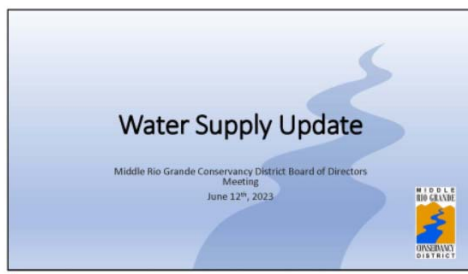
## **AGENDA ITEM NO. 10 - UPDATE ON THE 2023 IRRIGATION SEASON**

**a. Report on the Water Supply Conditions - Anne Marken, Water Ops Division Manager**

Ms. Marken stated it was the coolest spring in Albuquerque since 2010. She said with the cool temperatures and above average snowpack, the river was bank to bank and levee to levee in some places, but snow in the mountains had melted and flows were declining. The Embudo Gauge was at 3200 cubic feet per second (CFS), the La Puente Gauge was 964 CFS, and Otowi Gauge upstream of Cochiti Reservoir was 4400 CFS.

Ms. Marken stated Article VII restrictions were lifted that limits native Rio Grande storage in Rio Grande Reservoirs upstream of Elephant Butte constructed in 1929, but MRGCD could not store native water in El Vado due to construction of the dam. She stated this year MRGCD was expected to get a full San Juan Chama allocation and MRGCD intended to make releases of that water to meet demand. She stated total release from Cochiti was about 5000 cubic feet per second and flows above Abiquiu and Cochiti continued to decline. She said once Otowi dipped below 1500 cubic feet per second, the Corps would have to stop releasing water from storage and flows through the middle valley would decline. However, Ms. Marken said based on conditions and available San Juan Chama water, irrigators could expect enough water supply to meet irrigation demand through at least the middle of July and hopefully longer. She said New Mexico ended 2022 with a Compact debt of 93,000 acre feet but would be difficult to predict what the debt would be at the end of 2023.

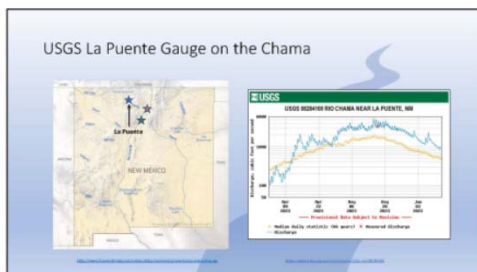
Ms. Marken shared that the National Weather Service's 8 to 14 day outlook showed near normal temperatures and near normal precipitation, and the three month outlook showed above average temperatures and below average precipitation through June, July, and August. She ended saying El Nino conditions are present which typically means cooler and wetter winters for the American southwest but its effect on summer monsoons is more difficult to predict.



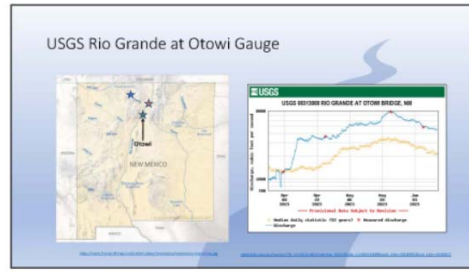
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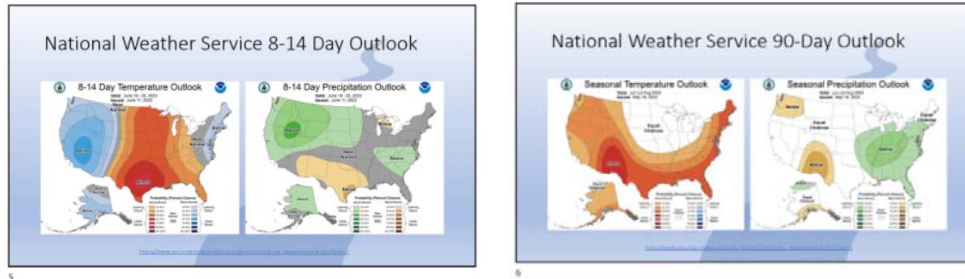
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**b. Status Report on Water Distribution - Matt Martinez, Water Distribution Division Manager**

Mr. Martinez stated due to the feedback from last months meeting, they are identifying improvement opportunities. Some items that they are working on already are the following: working to bring transparency to water distribution and delivery through technologies; two, working to implement a digital service order system to enhance the process in which ISOs request maintenance of facilities in their zones; three, developing a new three-week training program for new ISO hires and off-season workshops for all ISOs to continue their education, and four, assessing ISOs performances annually. ISOs exceeding expectations would receive a raise and corrections would be made to ISOs that needed improvement in the position. He said they would also be implementing retention tools to provide ISOs with incentive to further their career as an ISO and reward veteran ISOs who demonstrated proficiency.

Mr. Martinez said his biggest takeaway from last meeting was to enhance communication, so they would develop tools to ensure all ISOs were receiving the same information and communicating the same information to water users, ensure that each ISO had copies of irrigation season update, use various methods of communication to inform water users of operations and distribution strategies before and during the season, continue to engage water users and farmers associations to explain system constraints and decision-making processes and solicit feedback.

He stated that by the first week of May deliveries were provided according to a demand-based scheduling system. He said they had seen an uptick in canal breaks and overflows since they started running more water through the canals. He said check structures must be operated, monitored, and adjusted carefully and the policy stated they had to be checked by ISOs, but when a water user accepted operation of a check structure, they had to take responsibility and adjust it as specified by the ISO. He stated they currently had supply to continue meeting the demand but would likely have to revert back to rotational scheduling later in the season when the supply drops and will inform the irrigators at that time.

**c. Demonstration of the Irrigation System Operators Field Application**

Mr. Martinez thanked Danielle Feygin for developing the application and Brittany Bade for producing the video demonstration of the ISO logbook application which was played at today's meeting. He thanked the ISOs for their participation in the project as they have been instrumental in implementing and helping to refine it.

Mr. Casuga added that this project has been in development and the District is investing in technology. He said the next step in technology to help with water deliveries would be



testing a tool in approximately 2025 in Socorro Division that will companion alongside the field application, which is used by other irrigation districts, called TrueCanal. He said that it would help them know every field served by a check and a turnout, so that when we start bundling water deliveries we will know that the check on this ditch has so many acres fed off of this check, and we will know the land information fed by check and by turnout, that way, as scheduling's done, and the tool is used to show who's scheduled and who's not. He explained demand delivery is when we have plenty of water everywhere and farmers can call to schedule when they need. There's a different type of delivery that happens when we don't have enough water and have to rotate it. He said they will need to tell the community when the water's going to be there, how long and then get scheduled.

Ms. Wiggins stated she was glad they talked about the difference between rotational scheduling and demand scheduling because she had been asked numerous times if demand scheduling meant if they demanded it, they got it which is not the case. She added that there is still an obligation to schedule and communicate with the ISO.

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 11 - REPORT(S) FROM THE SECRETARY-TREASURER/CFO - Pamela Fanelli, CMA, CGFM**

**a. Consideration/Approval of Budget Adjustment Resolution BA-06-12-23-90 for the Levee Breach Operations 2023**

Ms. Fanelli said on May 17th, they posted a declaration of emergency purchase for asphalt millings, riprap, various gravel and dirt and transport hauling for levee breach operations, spending about \$500,000 on the levee breach operations. She presented a resolution for consideration and approval for a budget increase in FY23 for \$500,000.

Director Duggins said Socorro County had asphalt millings they could give the District for free. Mr. Casuga stated most of the expense was coming from the riprap or large rock.

Director Barbara Baca made the **MOTION TO APPROVE THE RESOLUTION AS PRESENTED**. Seconded by Vice Chair Dunning. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes. The **MOTION CARRIED**.

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Yes	Director Duggins	Yes
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 12 - REPORT(S) FROM THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER - Eric Zamora, PE**

**a. Presentation from MRGCD Safety Manager, LeeAnn Corwin**

Ms. Corwin gave a progress report on what the District is doing to keep everyone safe in the field since her arrival in September 2021. She stated they installed several defibrillators that were purchased in 2019 in all the offices, implemented a weekly safety meeting, installed large screens and laptops at the different MRGCD facilities to help with training and classes. She stated some of the trainings they had been focusing on were fall prevention training, OSHA 10, CPR and first aid, defensive driving, forklift

certifications, rigging and signaling, railroad safety, scissor lift certifications, and a women's self-defense class.

Ms. Corwin stated she has also done facility inspections at all locations and identified and fixed problems and safety issues. She said they did a job safety analysis and talked about how their insurance premiums have now improved since 2020 due to the changes. She said the frequency of the large claims also decreased with an accident reporting time at 100%. Ms. Corwin also announced their experience modification rate was below the baseline of 1. She said anything under a 1 is considered a safer company or anything above one is more risk and premiums increase. MRGCD is trending down to 0.96.

Vice Chair Dunning asked if the District was mandated to have a safety person. Mr. Casuga replied that for an organization this size and having a safety manager allows the District to keep private insurance. Vice Chair thanked her for the analysis and for the work she does.

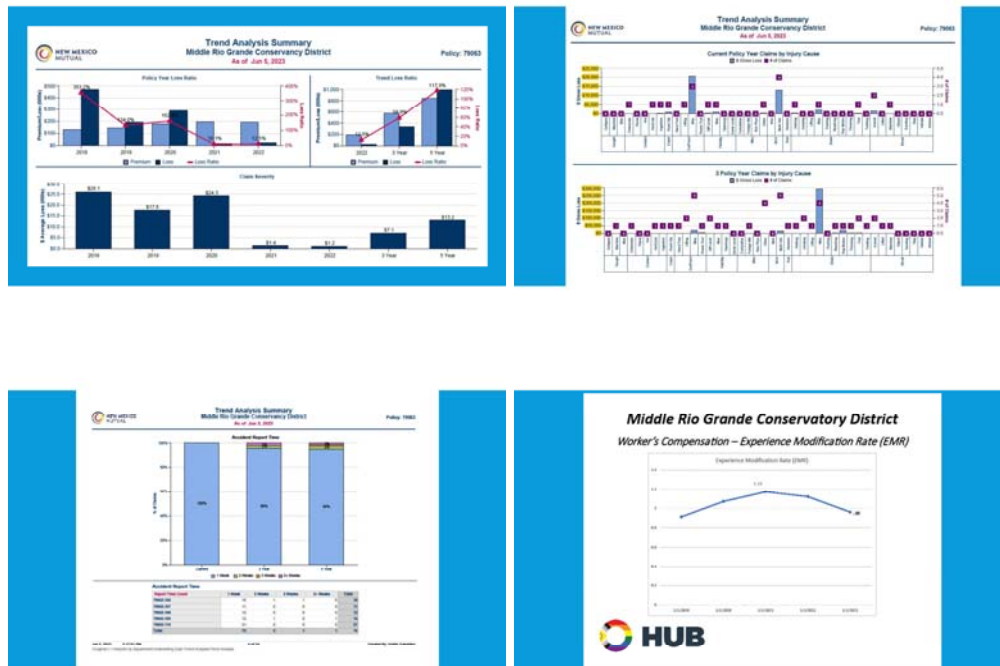
Mr. Casuga explained that Ms. Corwin can shut any project down if deemed unsafe or the project or the manner in which the project is happening, without the CEO or the COO present even if a division manager disagrees; it will get settled on the back end. He felt she is the right person for the position and that the District is seeing merits of investing in this category, not only for the safety of our employees, but for better management and use of District's money.

Ms. Corwin stated she lived close to the Corrales Siphon and helped checking on it. She said after the first runoff event in May, the pumps were safe, but it caused erosion below the siphon and the banks were going away. She stated they tried to cord off areas to keep people safe but still had to rescue some people.

Mr. Casuga added there's a sign that says, "Portage, Danger of Death". He stated the District has been working with the fire department as the bank has been receding, to proactively cut down the trees and remove them if they're going to lose it to the river anyway.

Eric Zamora also added that Ms. Corwin has helped in the development of standard operating procedures that will guide our field operations and establish methods with the intent of keeping people safe and reducing workers comp losses.





**b. Report on the Valencia County-Bernalillo County Flood Preparedness Planning, Eric Zamora, COO**

Mr. Zamora said the planning process began in late February and those discussions led into March where the Engineering Department began discussions and coordination with the US Army Corps of Engineers with regarding to monitoring, and in April they started the levee inspections and noticed the high levels of runoff and water against the levees. He said that led them to notify the communities surrounding the areas of concern. He said they then identified who should be within the flood response preparedness plan with the first meeting occurring May 5th and had been meeting every Friday morning since. He stated they provided weekly updates on levee repairs, operations, and coordination with Ms. Lopez and the engineering department as well as water updates from Ms. Marken. He said many people came together and were putting in efforts and time to keep the community safe.

Mr. Zamora said they also reached out to Tom Walmsley, the emergency manager for Bernalillo county and provided information and gave two presentations, as well as weekly updates on river conditions and areas of concern.

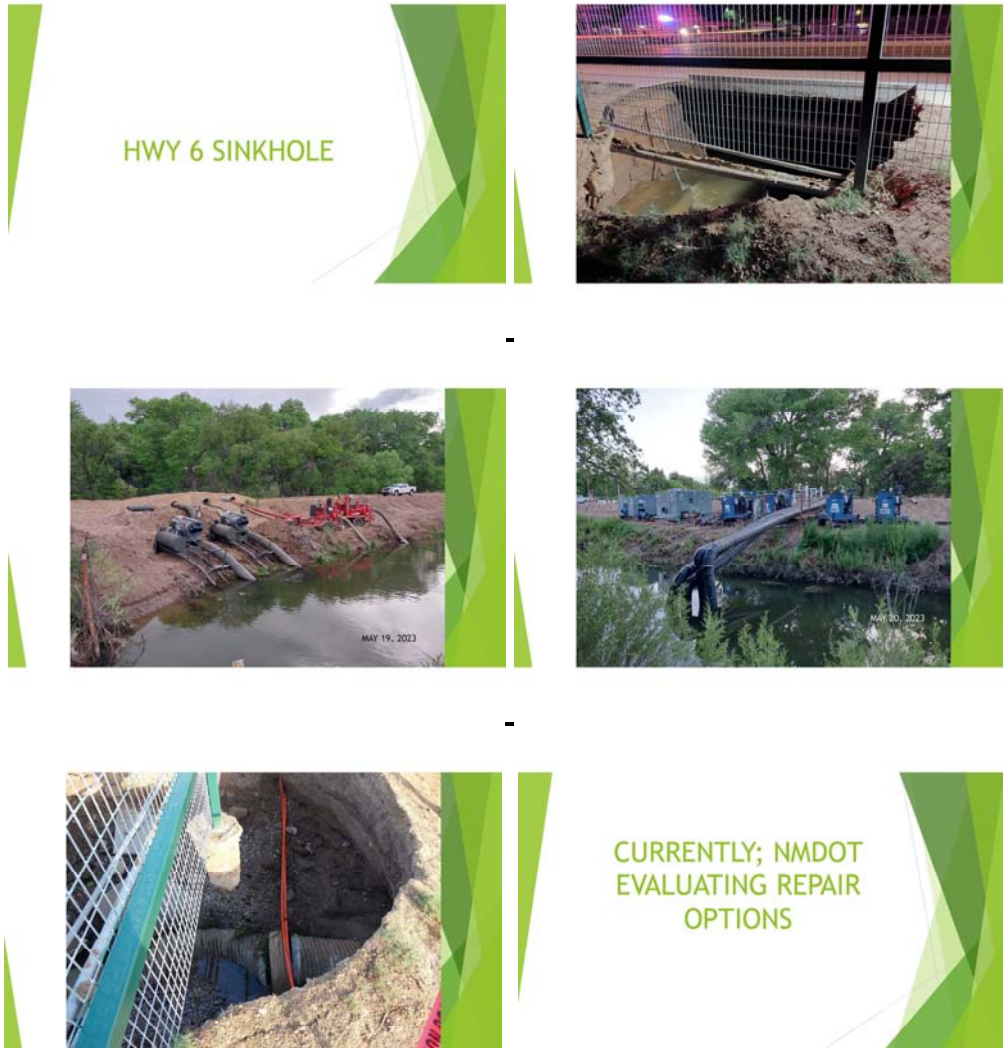
Mr. Zamora thanked Bruce Jordan with USACE for providing good input and insight on river operations and the ISC, Interstate Stream Commission, for providing funding.

**c. Report on the Los Lunas NM 6 Sinkhole Repair, May 25, 2023 - Eric Zamora, COO**

Mr. Zamora stated they received notice of a sinkhole over the riverside drain on Highway 6 in Los Lunas on May 13th. He said the crossing that failed over the riverside drain was licensed to NMDOT, and later in the week DOT coordinated with BOR to get pumps, but determined there was not enough capacity in the pumps to drain the facility. Mr. Zamora said MRGCD was on site to help. He said they were pumping about 40

CFS out of that location and installed a cofferdam. He mentioned that DOT completed a video inspection of the remaining pipe and were evaluating options.

Vice Chair Dunning asked about the people who fell in the sinkhole. Mr. Zamora stated he did not know. Ms. Wiggins stated they received a tort claims notice regarding the incident.



**d. Report on the Gate Grant Project - Rhett Sanders-Spencer, Right of Way Specialist**

Mr. Sanders-Spencer presented on the current status of the junior bill appropriation that MRGCD received for \$90,000 for materials to construct and install traffic control devices within Albuquerque to be completed by the end of FY23. He said all funds were available and the grant was obligated. He said the grant funding had been split between two digital messaging boards in use at Highway 6 area to notify the public of the risk of entering the bosque, and the procurement of material was also split between an installation of traffic gates and fencing intending to close off facilities to unauthorized motor vehicle traffic at different areas.

Vice Chair Dunning asked if all requirements were met under the gate policy, would MRGCD install it if they had capital funds or would they do their own gate installations. Mr. Casuga stated the public could request a gate and go through the process of purchasing materials and MRGCD would construct it there if met all requirements of the gate policy.

Vice Chair Dunning then asked if the old gates built before present day standards would be replaced or updated. Mr. Casuga said if the gates were still usable and the facility is working, they would stay in place; or if they needed to be fixed, they would be brought to current standards.

## **AGENDA ITEM NO. 13 - REPORT(S) FROM THE CHIEF ENGINEER - Jason M. Casuga, PE**

### **a. 2023 Spring Runoff Levee/Spoil Levee Maintenance - Alicia Lopez, PE**

Ms. Lopez gave an update on the levee maintenance efforts during the high runoff period. She said they collected field information through field maps that allowed them to collect and view areas of concerns and classified them into types of damages and whether or not river elevation was up against the levee at that point. She said the field crews put much effort into ensuring levee roads were accessible, including building ramps to get from the top road to the bottom road. She said most locations were focused mainly in Valencia County, but they had Socorro, Belen, and Albuquerque crews working to help.

Ms. Lopez said they rock lined about 5400 linear feet of the spoil bank levee. She said they would continue to monitor the levee sections, would be projecting and scheduling preventative maintenance to be completed after emergency areas were addressed, and conducting a close-out survey when high runoff subsided. She thanked their partners and landowners for their help.


Mr. Casuga added that he and Mr. Zamora toured the area with Rep. Brian Baca and the county commission chair to talk about the levee funding from a legislative standpoint. He said he didn't know how many Valencia County residents realized they were a bad day away from the river flooding large sections and Rep. Baca did not understand it until the tour.

Dr. DuMars asked what would happen if they had a microburst on the mesa. Mr. Casuga answered bad things if we don't have room; depending on the height of the water against the levee.



### Levee Monitoring

- Data is collected using FieldMaps
- Damage is prioritized by risk level
- Repair is coordinated with the Divisions




### Emergency Response to Date

- 5400 LF of Levee Repaired (Beginning 5/12/2023)
- 2000 LF of High-Risk Locations Remaining
- 19,000 Tons of Rip Rap Used and Stockpiled (\$620,000)



### Next Steps

- Monitor and Address Progressing Areas of High Risk
- Identify Locations for Preventative Maintenance
- Close Out and Share 2023 Data Collection



### THANK YOU

Valencia County  
Village of Los Lunas  
Bureau of Reclamation

Valencia County District 3 Fire Station  
Pueblo of Isleta  
Serenity Stone (Adam Edwards)  
R&K Investments (Kenny Trujillo)

Black Rock  
PG Enterprises  
Sanchez Demolition  
Montano Earthmoving Inc.



**b. Report on the Meeting with Lt. Col. Hansborough, USACE Albuquerque District, May 22, 2023 - Jason M. Casuga.**

Mr. Casuga talked about their meeting with Lt. Col. Hansborough related to the levees. He said they were their non-federal sponsor for the San Acacia Levee, for Bernalillo to

Belen project and would be part of a project that rehabilitates the Albuquerque levees in the future. He said MRGCD was also their local sponsor for Corrales levee. Mr. Casuga stated he thought the lieutenant colonel walked away understanding MRGCD concerns and constraints of the Corps. He said he requested and sent a letter to the Corps asking to reduce their releases down to 4000 CFS, and the Corps met them in releasing around 5000 CFS.

Bruce Jordan, Corps of Engineers, Deputy Chief of Engineering and Construction, stated they only had a temporary lead civilian position currently, but were looking to hire someone permanently. He stated the lead civilian that's at the District is supposed to be the consistency that travels through the lieutenant Colonels coming through the District.

**c. Report on the 2023 Monsoon Season Preparedness - Jason M. Casuga, CE/CEO**

Mr. Casuga discussed a letter draft that was collaborated by MRGCD staff and legal counsel to issue to the public about 2023 monsoon season preparedness. He said it was specifically targeted at Valencia County and Socorro County because they did not have local bodies to manage upland stormwater and his letter identifies the constraints that the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District has related to that. He also added that if someone lives in the benefited area of the District, it is highly recommended to have flood insurance.

Chair Russo Baca added it may be helpful to add a tool where people could find more information on maybe the National Weather Service, FEMA, or information on where to get flood insurance information.

Vice Chair Dunning requested adding to contact floodplain managers in their counties and list who they are with a contact number to the letter. Mr. Casuga stated he could do that.

*Note: Director Sandoval left the meeting at 5:34pm*

**d. Report on the NWRA Federal Water Issues Conference, Washington DC, April 17-20, 2023 - Jason M. Casuga, CE/CEO, Chair Russo Baca, Vice Chair Dunning and Director Duggins**

Mr. Casuga updated the board about the National Water Resources Association Conference which facilitated meetings with agency heads and said he learned about what he did not know. He realized staff and some of their senators and representatives were trying to understand who the middle valley was and how they could help represent them. Mr. Casuga stated he thought it was wise to invest in having a lobbyist and that is why they put the RFP out and awarded that, to help have the information flowing to them. Mr. Casuga said he also met with the deputy chief for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs and was able to talk about some of the difficulties with certain programs within NRCS and tried to bring change. New Mexico benefited more from the farm bill.

Chair Russo Baca felt that Jason Casuga did a great job, very professional in DC with a jam-packed schedule. She appreciated his efforts as the work didn't just end there answering follow up emails in a timely manner. She believed the board already had approved the report at the May meeting.

**e. Updates on the Big Hole Fire Planning and Restoration Efforts - Yasmeen Najmi, Planner**

Ms. Najmi gave an update on the Big Hole Fire recovery. She said they were able to pinpoint the location of the fire start but not the cause of the fire. She said with good river, surface water and groundwater connections, they were seeing good native habitat coming back in the area, but in other areas there was a huge amount of tree canopy killed and woody material to deal with. She said the Interstate Stream Commission had some interest to look at some sites for potential endangered species habitat but hadn't made a firm decision on it yet but were currently doing data collection on vegetation mapping and analysis of soils and noxious weeds. She said they installed some wells to calibrate a groundwater surface water model and did some evapotranspiration estimates. She talked about revegetation of climate friendly plant palettes that would be more resilient in changing conditions. Ms. Najmi stated they were getting ready to submit a request to the New Mexico Forestry Division for funding for phase one to start removing dead trees. She said they also had a contract in place to treat the non-native regrowth on 600 acres this fall. Also identifying areas to work with local fire departments and partners for community firewood.

Director Barbara Baca mentioned that Bernalillo County provides the opportunity for senior services to provide wood for seniors, who are in older homes that use wood burning stoves. She recommended to Ms. Najmi to pursue that as well. Ms. Najmi thought that a good idea although wasn't aware of those types of services in Valencia County.

Director Duggins said they talked about 50 years forward and 30% less water but were still planting trees when it would grow back on its own. He said he did not understand and thought the District should let nature run its course. He also added that the bosque should be thinned out. Mr. Casuga said no one disagrees with that aspect.

Mr. Casuga said the District needs to control what grew back and would be happy to talk to Director Duggins more about it offline. He added that it's an opportunity to show that this system is man-managed, and the District needs to manage it a certain way to get all the values out of that, one of those being efficient delivery of water, but then, two, the values of the bosque as well.

Ms. Najmi stated they would not have continuous linear bosque in the future like they did now and were looking to keep more areas open and have more grasslands with flood control. She said dirt would not help anybody and would be a breeding ground for something they did not want. She said they would not plant the entire bosque with trees and would let what come back and work around it.

Vice Chair Dunning thought if you plant trees it would help with pollution and would help with cooling in areas where there is black top and asphalt. She said there's some benefits to trees in urban areas that probably offset concerns about less water for farmers.

**f. Updates from the VSWCD a Year after the Big Hole Fire, Valencia Soil and Wildlife Conservation District Director, Andrew Hautzinger**

Mr. Hautzinger introduced himself and gave a background of the VSWCD and thanked MRGCD staff. He continued to speak about the updates after the Big Hole Fire. He



stated 105 acres of their preserve was burned and believed the only path forward was a resilient way of managing of their bosque. He said Whitfield Wildlife Conservation area was open to the public but their other two conservation areas would not be open until they got their fire management under control. He stated 75% of Whitfield burned and Stacy Unit burned for the second time in a couple years. Mr. Hautzinger stated all trees were not created equal and talked about one of the more famous owl trees that were in Valencia County that was burned in the fire. He stated he had been on many FEMA calls to try to get funding. He said they had a great workshop where subject matter experts attended to get their opinions and strategies to reduce severity in wildfires. He mentioned they had an agreement with USGS Fort Collins Science Center to engage in building a credentialed ecological science level of product to do plant matrix. Mr. Hautzinger added that they believe Rio Abajo Conservation area was a great opportunity to collaborate between their organizations. He said that he and Yasmeen (Najmi) were also talking about a potential point of collaboration later in 2023 on the north side of the project area adjacent to Burlington Northern Santa Fe bridge that they could clean up and do some thinning.

Director Barbara Baca thanked Yasmeen (Najmi) and Andrew (Hautzinger) and stated they were tackling the problem head on in the right direction. She said the bosque in the middle Rio Grande valley was human managed, so they needed to be hands on managing and working to keep it healthy.

*NOTE: Director Duggins left the meeting at 6:07pm.*

**g. Report on the Coalition Workgroup Meeting: MRGCD - Jason M. Casuga, CE/CEO**

Mr. Casuga stated he started a meeting with the Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblo Coalition workgroup to start talking about a charging plan that could scale to meet the Coalition's cultural needs at the beginning of the season and also treating their NRL (natural resource lands) on par with non-tribal land. He thought it was worthwhile mentioning, because it was a big commitment to the Coalition coming into the following of the startup plan.

**h. Report on the Elephant Butte Irrigation District Coordination, May 15 and May 31, 2023 - Jason M. Casuga, CE/CEO**

Mr. Casuga stated ahead of the tour, he went to Las Cruces and toured the facilities that EBID would be presenting as part of their joint tour. He felt it very educational and creative. He said they did more with less water that they could learn from. He said they then were able to show them the things MRGCD was talking about and showed them what was happening. He said as they consider projects they needed to consider how it would be going to O&M, operations and maintenance.

Dr. DuMars commented that the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, and their farmers, would be obligated to reduce to put water into the river to get it down to the counting point at the border with Texas, so they're highly motivated to work with the District to get the Low Flow Channel streamlined. He said for every foot of the channel that can be streamlined and move water down to Elephant Butte the less impact they will have on their own farmers.

Mr. Casuga said he was excited for the energy down there and to bring these other voices on because EBID does habitat building in their areas also.

**i. Report on the Valencia County Levee tour with Rep. Brian Baca and Commission Chairman Gerard Saiz, June 1, 2023 - Jason M. Casuga, CE/CEO**

Mr. Casuga stated he and Eric Zamora toured with Brian Baca and Gerard Saiz. He said he sent an email about trying to bring legislators together in Valencia County. He said the important thing he communicated to the Corps was to make sure the timing of when they get the state to give them money lined up with the Corps process on when they got congressional funding.

**j. Report on the El Vado Storage Agreement Discussion, June 2, 2023 - Jason M. Casuga, CE/CEO**

Mr. Casuga stated he and Dr. DuMars had been talking to Reclamation about what it would look like for Ohkay Owingeh to be able to store some of their water that came from their Indian water rights settlement. He stated water's precious and there was no reason not to support another tribal entity so long as it didn't hurt MRGCD's position.

Dr. DuMars stated the Department of Interior solicitor decided they needed special legislation to put Ohkay Owingeh water in El Vado but was working with a longtime solicitor to figure out how to minimize the effect of any federal legislation on the project. He questioned how the six middle Rio Grande pueblos feel about the storage of water in El Vado.

Mr. Casuga said this was presented to the Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos at the last coalition meeting with the intent that as development of any type of legislation and agreement actually took form and was reviewable, then the Coalition would get a chance. He informed the Coalition that MRGCD's strict position on any type of storage there would be that anybody who stores water there, i.e., Ohkay Owingeh, their water would spill first, and he thought they generally know, they want to see the agreements, but they were happy to hear that. He thought that they'd be able to help out another tribal entity, but they were protected, and their water would be senior for the storage facility.

**k. Upcoming Events**

**1. Joint Rio Grande Tour - MRGCD/Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) - June 27-29, 2023**

Jason reported that he, Eric Zamora and Casey Ish will be participating and there is plenty of room for any interested board members.

**2. Rio Grande Water Users Association Meeting - October 3-5, 2023**

Mr. Casuga said they changed the name due to how the acronym sounded; it was now called the Coalition of Rio Grande Water Users. He stated the meeting was something he was approached by EBID and Water Strategies LLC to try and create a venue for water users to come together and have a conversation without being organized by the Law of the Rio Grande conference.

Madam Chair Russo Baca felt if they were going to be a leader in it, then they needed to bring everyone together, including Mexico. She stated that bringing folks to the table was different than just inviting them and thought they could do a better job at bringing

more folks to the table. Mr. Casuga said he was happy to discuss more offline.

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 14 - REPORT(S) FROM THE MRGCD ATTORNEY(S) - Chief Water Counsel or General Counsel**

Ms. Wiggins reported that MRGCD was granted a temporary restraining order (TRO) to prevent a south valley resident, Adriana Villar, from continuing damage to the emergency ditch bank on the Rogers Lateral. She explained that has prevented the MRGCD from being able to deliver water to upstream and downstream irrigators entitled to water. She stated they were having a hearing the morning of June 14th on making the TRO into a preliminary injunction. She stated the presiding judge is Erin O'Connell.

Dr. DuMars stated they got an extension to continue to negotiate with respect to WEG, BOR, and Fish & Wildlife Service. He felt they had lost some momentum because they're always asking WEG to come forward with specific items and they don't come forward with much. He felt the latest they are doing is educating everyone.

**AGENDA ITEM NO. 15 - REPORT(S) FROM THE BOARD**

**a. Report on the Summer Conservation Camp Meeting, May 9, 2023 - Chair Russo Baca**

Madam Chair Russo Baca said MRGCD were one of the partners for the conservation camp at Whitfield and discussed having a farm tour, so the kids would be touring different farms, such as hers, and would be learning about livestock also.

**b. Report on the Conservation Advisory Committee Meeting, May 18, 2023 - Chair Russo Baca**

Madam Chair Russo Baca stated the meeting was virtual and in person and they talked about current hydrology and the Storey Wasteway update. She stated the project description was still going through compliance but still on schedule. She said they also had a discussion on the new Belen gate installation update scheduled to be installed by the first week of June with telemetry to follow. She stated two position descriptions for the department were provided to HR for review, a water resources specialist and an on-farm infrastructure specialist.

**c. Report on the Las Vegas Water Utility of the Gallinas Watershed Tour, May 23, 2023 - Chair Russo Baca**

Chair Russo Baca said the Las Vegas Water Utility of the Gallinas Watershed Tour was interesting to see what they were doing up north and she did not realize how many little reservoirs were up there not open to the public for recreation but to solely manage their watershed.

Director Barbara Baca made the **MOTION TO APPROVE THE BOARD REPORTS.** Seconded by Vice Chair Dunning. Rollcall vote was administered with all members voting yes. **The MOTION CARRIED.**

Director Barbara Baca	Yes	Vice Chair Dunning	Yes
Director Sandoval	Absent	Director Duggins	Absent
Chair Russo Baca	Yes		

There was no need for a closed session; with no further comments, questions, or concerns, Madam Chair Russo Baca adjourned the meeting at 6:52 pm.

Approved to be the correct Minutes of the Board of Directors of June 12, 2023

**ATTESTED:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pamela Fanelli, CMA, CGFM  
Secretary-Treasurer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephanie Russo Baca, Madam Chair  
MRGCD Board of Directors