

# MINUTES

## RIO GRANDE REGIONAL WATER PLANNING GROUP (RGRWPG)

(REGION M) 9:30 AM WEDNESDAY, January 7, 2025

LRGVDC MAIN CAMPUS  
VIA GOTOMEETING VIDEO CONFERENCE & IN PERSON INITIATED  
AND CHAIRED AT 301 W. RAILROAD STREET, WESLACO, TX  
PRESIDING: NICK BENEVIDES, CHAIRMAN

### 1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mr. Manuel Cruz called the meeting to order at 9:32 am and confirmed that a quorum of the voting membership was present.

The following voting members were in attendance:

#### Board Members

Jim Darling  
Sonny Hinojosa  
Donald K. McGhee  
Nick Benavides  
Glen Jarvis  
Tomas Rodriguez  
Carlos Garza  
Judge Joe Rathmell  
Louie Pena  
Dale Murden  
Dr. Neal Wilkins  
Jorge Flores  
Tom McLemore  
Debbie Farmer  
Steven Sanchez  
Marilyn Gilbert

#### Category

River Authorities  
Water Districts  
Industries  
Small Business  
Other  
Public  
Small Business  
Counties  
Ground Water Management Area  
Agriculture  
Agriculture  
Municipalities  
Water Districts  
Ground Water Management Area  
Water Utilities  
Municipalities

The following voting members were **not in attendance**:

Frank Schuster  
Jaime Flores  
Comm. David Fuentes  
Robert Latham

Other  
Environmental  
Counties  
Electric Generating Utility

2. **Consideration and Action to Approve November 6, 2024, Meeting Minutes.** Jorge Flores made a comment that he was marked absent and that was a mistake due to him logging on online. Corrections were changed. ***Jorge Flores made a motion to approve meeting minutes, Steven Sanchez seconded the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***
3. No Public Comment – No public comment submitted for this meeting, but Jim Darling had news to share with all.

**Good News:** The construction of a composite cutoff wall at the Amistad International Dam is moving forward, which aims to reduce the risk of failure. We thank Commissioner Henaire for her hard work and dedication in making this possible. This project is critical, and it's expected to start soon. We look forward to receiving a report on its progress at the next meeting.

**Reservoir Status Update:** As of December 28, our reservoir levels have dropped to 20.65% of total storage capacity, with usable storage at 20.10% due to 18,000-19,000 acre-feet of non-usable storage. These levels are hovering near record lows.

**Historical Context:** The current situation is concerning, as it surpasses the previous record low in August 1998 (19.06%), with this year's lowest level recorded at 18.14% on June 8, 2024. Although levels have slightly improved, we are still operating near record lows, and the current usable storage stands at approximately 59,000 acre-feet above the record. This has been an ongoing issue for nearly six months.

**Water Supply Concerns:** A significant portion of our water supply (30-40%) comes from the Devil's and Pecos Rivers. However, water levels from these sources are also low. There's an ongoing challenge related to inter-state water conflicts and the potential mismanagement of water resources in these rivers. While there was some progress in understanding the use of the Pecos River watershed, it appears that the program to address these issues was politically halted.

4. Consideration and Action to Accept Resignation and Solicit Nomination in Environmental Category. Mr. Cruz starts off with, the board was informed that Mr. Jaime Flores has resigned from his position with the Agri-Life Extension, effective December 31st. This action item is to formally accept his resignation and begin the process of seeking a replacement in the environmental category. Marilyn Gilbert asked if this was just to accept his resignation. They answered her with a Yes. ***Marilyn Gilbert made a motion to approve Resignation and Solicit Nomination in Environmental Category, Tomas Rodriguez seconded the motion upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.***
5. Discussion and possible Action on Membership Attendance. This discussion became part of Action item #4. In this discussion Mr. Cruz asked if anyone had someone in mind to nominate for the Environmental Category. To solicit nominations for the replacement, we will advertise in the newspaper and accept nominations through that channel. These nominations will be presented at the next meeting, scheduled for February, which will be the second quarterly meeting of the region. There was a discussion regarding the environmental impact of using newspapers for publicity, and it was suggested that we consider transitioning to electronic methods in the future. Additionally, the possibility of amending the bylaws to reflect this change was raised. Nominations are now open and should be submitted accordingly. A question by Marilyn Gilbert was raised regarding the eligibility of nominees for the position, specifically whether individuals from the same environmental organization can be considered. There was also uncertainty about whether a potential nominee, if moving to another environmental firm, would still be eligible to serve. Clarification will be needed when reviewing nominations. Mr. Cruz then stated that Jaime Flores took a position with the Brownsville Public Utilities Board. Marilyn Gilbert asks Would it be a problem if he joins a similar environmental organization, resulting in two individuals from the same organization? The response to that question from Mr. Cruz would be, in my opinion, it would depend on the duties and responsibilities of the individual, as we already have a PUB representative. This can be worked out, but typically, we adhere to the bylaws and remain within the same category, which in this case is the environmental category. A question was raised about whether an individual working in the environmental

division within an organization would be classified under municipalities or environmental. Mr. Cruz responded that having two individuals from different agencies would not disqualify someone, as it is not explicitly addressed in the bylaws, and he is unsure if there would be any objection. Jim Darling then states that we will continue to solicit in stay in contact with everyone on the board.

Lastly, they moved on to the membership attendance. They decided to act in the next meeting. They were the following members: Commissioner Fuentes and Carlos Garza. Mr. Cruz mentioned that according to the bylaws, members who have unexcused absences from three consecutive meetings or hearings are automatically removed. Two individuals were identified as having missed three consecutive meetings based on an end-of-year assessment. To address this, moving forward, we will notify members after each missed meeting to reiterate the bylaws. It is important to ensure that any conflicts are addressed, and members can obtain an excused absence from the chairman or the board if necessary. The goal is to accommodate members' schedules, as securing participation in these positions can be challenging. Mr. Carlos Garza addressed the board, stating that he has only missed one meeting out of the last three and has attended remotely. He mentioned being slightly under the weather and currently participating from his office. He noted that he missed the call by a few minutes but emphasized that he has been attending the meetings. Mr. Cruz then stated It was noted that situations may arise where members arrive a few minutes after the roll call has been taken, which could lead to their absence being recorded even though they are present later in the meeting. A question was raised by Mr. Garza regarding the bylaws, asking for clarification on whether arriving after the call has been taken after the call has been taken would result in being considered absent, even if the member attends the entire meeting. The member mentioned being on another conference call that ran over, which caused the delay in joining. It was acknowledged that attendance can be challenging in Zoom meetings, as it can be difficult to track who is present despite the requirement to show a picture. A recommendation was made to table the issue and for Commissioner Fuentes to notify the board in advance if he misses a meeting, so that an excused absence can be granted.

No more questions and comments Jim darling then moved on to Item 6 Status Reports.

## 6. Status Reports

Jaime Burke, Black & Veatch Water Planning Leader, was recognized and reported on the following items.

### 6.A. Status on Current TWDB Contract Activities.

1. **Schedule and Progress Update:** The overall schedule for the planning cycle was presented, noting that the process is now in its final year. The initially prepared plan is due by March 3rd, with efforts focused on completing and finalizing it for submission. A public hearing will be held in the spring or early summer, followed by finalizing the plan for submission to the board in October. The anticipated schedule for 2025 was reviewed, with a meeting this month and another scheduled for February 5th to finalize edits to the draft chapters and, if possible, adopt the initially prepared plan. If adoption does not occur at that meeting, an additional meeting will be scheduled before March 3rd. Since the last meeting, draft chapters 1-5, 7, and 8 have been sent to members for review, with chapters 6, 9, and 10 expected to be sent soon. Members are asked to submit comments by January 26th to be incorporated into the February meeting's adoption of the plan. Chapter 9 includes an implementation survey regarding projects from the 2021 plan, and responses are being collected from project sponsors. Additionally, water management strategy data is being entered into the TWDB database. An update was provided on the Laguna Madre Water District's seawater desalination project, with changes to the yield and online date, which have been incorporated into Chapter 5.
2. **Summaries of draft chapters:** A summary of each chapter in the draft plan was provided to give members an overview of what to expect when reviewing the chapters.

**Chapter 1:** Describes the regional water planning area, offering a comprehensive look at the region.

**Chapter 2:** Focuses on population and water demand projections, including municipal and non-municipal demands and an introduction to major water providers.

**Chapter 3:** Covers water availability and supply analysis, including surface and groundwater availability, as well as water reuse and major water providers.

**Chapter 4:** Identifies water needs in the region, highlighting areas where supply falls short of demand, and discusses water management strategies to meet those needs.

**Chapter 5:** Evaluates and recommends water management strategies, organized into sections based on feasibility, recommendations, alternatives, and considered strategies. A new section on the implementation of strategies is included.

**Chapter 6:** Discusses the impacts of the regional water plan and its consistency with natural resource protection, including socioeconomic impacts and unmet needs.

**Chapter 7:** Focuses on drought response, including triggers, actions, and preparation for future droughts.

**Chapter 8:** Outlines policy recommendations and unique sites, with updates provided by the Executive Committee and a call for member feedback.

**Chapter 9:** Reviews the implementation of the 2021 regional water plan and compares it to the current plan, detailing changes in demands, water needs, and new strategies.

**Chapter 10:** Describes the public participation process, including rural outreach, public hearing documentation, and plan adoption details, to be finalized after the prepared plan is completed.

3. Consideration and ACTION regarding and RWPG member comments on draft chapters received by December 20, 2024. NO ACTION WAS NEEDED AT THIS TIME.

6.B Status of Joint Groundwater Area Planning in GMA's 13 & 16. Debbie Farmer gave the following:

In 2023, the TWDB adopted a new groundwater availability model for the southern portion of the Carrizo-Wilcox, Queen City, and Sparta aquifers (Panday and others, 2023). This model had several model limitations and known issues. To address those issues, the district representatives of groundwater management area 13 contracted with Dr. Bill Hutchison to recalibrate the model with new data and parameters. The recalibrated model addresses the following concerns:

- High transmissivity estimates in some areas
- High storability/specific yield estimates in some areas
- High pumping estimates in some areas during the calibration period

The recalibrated model incorporates new aquifer test data in the Sparta and Carrizo aquifers in Webb County in addition to new pumping estimates in Wintergarden Groundwater Conservation District, Gonzales County, and Bexar County.

The district representatives of groundwater management area 13 have submitted this recalibrated model to the TWDB for formal adoption intended to be used for the upcoming round of joint planning. As part of this submittal process, TWDB requires that the model and model report be sent to all interested stakeholders and that those stakeholders be provided the opportunity to review and provide comments to TWDB.

- Model files: [https://gw-models.s3.amazonaws.com/Download\\_GAMs/czwx\\_s/czwx\\_s\\_update\\_GMA13\\_ModelFiles.zip](https://gw-models.s3.amazonaws.com/Download_GAMs/czwx_s/czwx_s_update_GMA13_ModelFiles.zip)



· Model Report: [https://gw-models.s3.amazonaws.com/Download\\_GAMs/czwx\\_s/GAM%20Update%20for%20GMA%2013%20-%20Final.pdf](https://gw-models.s3.amazonaws.com/Download_GAMs/czwx_s/GAM%20Update%20for%20GMA%2013%20-%20Final.pdf)

Please email me at [daryn.hardwick@twdb.texas.gov](mailto:daryn.hardwick@twdb.texas.gov) or at [gam@twdb.texas.gov](mailto:gam@twdb.texas.gov) with any comments or concerns by end of day on February 20, 2025.

Our next meeting will be on April 11, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at the Evergreen Underground Water Conservation District in Pleasanton.

GMA 16 – Louie Pena just wanted to report that next meeting is January 28, in Falfurrias @ 1:00 PM address would be 732 west rice Street at the Brush Country Groundwater Conservation District Building.

C. Reports from other Regional Water Planning groups.

1. Reports from Liaisons with Region J, Region L and Region N. No reports currently.

D. Report on water Conservation Plans and Drought Management Plans. No reports currently.

E. Report on Notices of Applications for Funding and Grants. No application currently.

F. Report on Regional Water Resource Advisory Committee (RWRAC). Melisa reported that their Next meeting would be on March 12 @ 2PM

7. Reports from Federal and State Agencies.

A. TWDB.

1. 2025 SWIFT Timeline Kevin Smith gave an update and was provided on the SWIFT timeline. The abridged application period opened on December 17th and will close on February 3rd. Applications that pass the review process will receive invitations for full applications in April, with full applications due in May. Recommended projects will be presented to the board for commitment in July. Additionally, a financial assistance workshop is scheduled for Tuesday, January 21st, at the Pharr One Community Center in Pharr. The workshop will cover all financial programs listed on the slide.

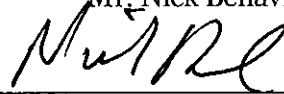
2. Financial Assistance Workshop The workshop is on Tuesday January 21st at 1:30 PM.

B. TCEQ Watermaster Georgina Bermea provided an update based on IBWC data, which is available on their public website. As of December 28th, 2024, the U.S. combined ownership at Amistad and Falcon reservoirs stands at 20.65% of normal conservation capacity, impounding 696,937 acre-feet. This is a decrease from the same time last year when the U.S. held 22.03% capacity, impounding 743,611 acre-feet. The combined usable storage at Amistad and Falcon is at 20.10% of normal capacity. Overall, the system is at 17.21% capacity, with Amistad at 20.80% and Falcon at 12.87%. Mexico holds 12.61% of normal capacity, impounding 317,340 acre-feet at both reservoirs. Regarding water master operations, releases are currently 15 cfs from Amistad, 2 cfs from Falcon, and 23.75 from Anzalduas. There is a request for 25 from San Juan. The monthly report to finalize the 2024 water year is in progress and is expected to be released by the 15th. Marilyn Gilbert raised a question regarding the operational status of the usable storage, seeking clarification on whether the U.S. Penstock being non-operational is the reason why usable storage is lower than available storage. This inquiry was made for a better understanding of the situation. Georgina answered with Correct, our debt storage increased to \$18,394. Ms. Gilbert then raised 1 more question regarding the timeline for replacing and repairing the U.S. Penstock, which is located below the Mexican Penstock and would provide access to additional water. It was requested that if the timeline is not available at the meeting, it be shared with the group later to provide clarity on the repair plans and the expected completion date. Georgina responded that it would be a IBWC question

8. Discussion, Consideration and Action on Date for Next Business Meeting. Next meeting would take place on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at 9:30 AM.

9. Adjourn

Mr. Nick Benavides, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Benavides", is written over a horizontal line.