



**Good Neighbor Environmental Board
Hybrid Public Meeting
150 W. Broadway, San Diego, California,
and Microsoft Teams Virtual Platform
September 21, 2023; 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. PDT**

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome and Member Roll Call

Eugene Green, Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) Designated Federal Official, Federal Advisory Committee Management Division (FACMD), Office of Resources and Business Operations (ORBO), Office of Mission Support (OMS), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Robbie Young-Mackall, Director, FACMD, ORBO, OMS, EPA; Jeremy Bauer, Deputy Director, Tribal, Intergovernmental and Policy Division, Region 9, EPA; Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB; and Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB

Mr. Eugene Green welcomed the participants and conducted the roll call. A list of meeting participants is included as Appendix A. The meeting agenda is included as Appendix B. The official certification of the minutes by the Chair is included as Appendix C.

Ms. Robbie Young-Mackall, who joined FACMD during the pandemic, was grateful to finally meet her staff and the Board members in person. She explained that Federal Advisory Committees are important to build consensus and provide advice to the White House and EPA Administrator, allowing them to assist their stakeholders and partners. She thanked the GNEB members for their commitment to developing the report that will be transmitted to the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) by the end of 2023. She thanked FACMD staff, particularly Mr. Green and Mr. Nolan Pinckney, for their dedication in assisting the Board and Region 9 staff for hosting the meeting.

Mr. Jeremy Bauer welcomed the in-person participants to San Diego and Region 9. His division focuses on community-based efforts, including the region's U.S.–Mexico Border Program, Pacific Islands Program and Environmental Justice Program; the division also works with 147 tribes and implements the National Environmental Policy Act. Region 9 will be funding communities, tribes and other organizations to work cooperatively on climate solutions and is in the process of establishing [Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers](#) (TCTACs) at San Diego State University and Arizona State University. He appreciates that GNEB helps advance the conversation on climate adaptation, and it is gratifying to see the conversations turning into action.

Drs. Paul Ganster and Irasema Coronado welcomed the Board members to the meeting and thanked them for their work on the annual report.

Overview of Agenda and Meeting Goals/Objectives

Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB, and Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB

Dr. Ganster provided an overview of the agenda, which is focused on GNEB's annual report. The goal of the meeting is to obtain consensus on the language of the report. The Board will also discuss the timing and process for completing and transmitting the report. Dr. Coronado concurred with Dr. Ganster's overview.

Role and Activities of EPA Region 9 in Addressing Border Issues

Alhelí Baños-Keener, Acting Manager, Mexico Border Branch, Tribal, Intergovernmental and Policy Division, Region 9, EPA

Ms. Alhelí Baños-Keener explained that the Tribal, Intergovernmental and Policy Division aims to protect the environment and public health in the U.S.–Mexico border region, which encompasses two countries, 10 states, 15 sister-city pairs and 27 federally recognized tribes. Challenges in the border region include uncontrolled population growth and the resulting infrastructure challenges, as well as extreme climate events and their environmental health impacts. Border programs include the 1983 La Paz Agreement, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), U.S.–Mexico Border Water Infrastructure Program (BWIP), United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), and—most recently—the U.S.–Mexico Border Environmental Program: Border 2025, commonly referred to as Border 2025.

Ms. Baños-Keener described how the 1992 Integrated Environmental Plan for the Mexico–U.S. Border Area set the stage for Border XXI in 1995, as well as Border 2012 and Border 2020. Under Border 2020, 117 projects were funded through US\$5.7 million in grant funds and US\$3.9 million in matching funds.

Border 2025 has a 5-year horizon, includes four goals and has a revised structure in which regional coordinators replace the workgroups of Border 2012 and Border 2020. The four goals are related to (1) air, (2) water, (3) waste, and (4) emergency preparedness and response; regional task forces have been established for each goal. Border 2025's 12 guiding principles build capacity toward climate change resiliency, protect disadvantaged and underserved communities, promote environmental awareness, work to improve children's health, and strengthen communications and partnerships at all levels of government.

At EPA, environmental justice means the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of *all* people in the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. As such, Border 2025 includes federal and state agencies, 27 tribal governments, Mexican Indigenous communities, county and city governments, nongovernmental and academic organizations, and community members. Border 2025 grants are awarded in coordination with the North American Development Bank (NADBank) through a cooperative agreement to fund studies, pilot projects and capacity-building efforts. Ms. Baños-Keener described one example project for each of the four goals, including an air and health surveillance system in the Mexicali–Imperial Valley; wastewater pretreatment of heavy metals and reuse in Nogales, Sonora; community prevention of clandestine dumping at Cañon de los Laureles; and a borderwide effort to study and evaluate six sister-city joint contingency plans.

Ms. Baños-Keener invited the GNEB members to attend [upcoming meetings](#) of the Air Policy Workgroup, Water Policy Workgroup and Arizona–Sonora Regional Task Force. The national coordinators will meet in early 2024. She highlighted relevant resources, including the [Spanish-language border website](#), the [Border Listserv](#), TCTACs, and [Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants](#). She invited the Board to contact her or her staff members—Ms. Lorena Lopez-Powers, Ms. Marisol Anaya or Mr. Anthony Isham—with any questions or needs.

Dr. Ganster noted that the list of Border 2025 small grants is not publicly accessible on the website. Ms. Baños-Keener responded that she has discussed this with her staff and agreed that the information should be made available.

Dr. Ganster asked whether the current emergency response plan focuses on chemical spills and similar events rather than a broader response to natural disasters. Ms. Baños-Keener explained that the plan focuses on the role that EPA plays in emergency response and preparedness situations. EPA can assist during natural disasters, particularly in response to environmental hazards created by them (e.g., mold issues caused by flooding). Dr. Ganster asked about earthquake response. Mr. Bauer responded that the response must be coordinated with the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Embassy in Mexico, and Mexico's relevant agencies.

Dr. Ganster congratulated EPA on establishing the TCTACs. GNEB has consistently recommended better coordination of federal services for communities. This is particularly important because of the various types of new funding becoming available.

A participant asked how the Justice40 Initiative is being applied to the border environmental program. Ms. Baños-Keener explained that the program is working collaboratively to ensure that the objectives of the initiative are met. EPA's EJScreen screening tool includes a layer of the Justice40 Initiative, and integration is occurring through Region 9's Environmental Justice Division. Jessica Helgeson is the Region 9 environmental justice contact. The participant followed up with a question about community resiliency and surviving climate change along the border. Ms. Baños-Keener responded that this issue is discussed at the local task force level, and the program looks for opportunities to build capacity. The next iteration of the border environmental program is in the planning stages, and the Board is invited to identify issues for inclusion. Climate is a definite focus of the next iteration.

A participant asked whether EPA will help with the transition to electric vehicles along the border. Ms. Baños-Keener commented that the Agency is aware of the issue. The California–Mexico Border Relations Council is meeting in October and most likely will be discussing the issue also. Dr. Teresa Pohlman commented that the U.S. Department of Energy has a strategic plan related to electric vehicles and that the U.S. General Services Administration, which manages the federal fleet, is developing a plan to support the equipment necessary to charge vehicles. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has made a pledge for 50 percent of its fleet to be electric by 2030. A whole-of-government solution is being planned with comprehensive plans and strategies, and EPA is part of the discussion. Andrew Mayock, Federal Chief Sustainability Officer, is aware of the relevant developments regarding electrifying the federal fleet.

A participant noted that funding for the task forces to meet had been sparse under Border 2020 and asked whether the funding had been increased within Border 2025, particularly to rebuild relationships lost during the pandemic. Ms. Baños-Keener responded that the task force meetings are funded by the border environmental program.

A participant asked how the program is funded. Ms. Baños-Keener explained that EPA Headquarters funds projects. The border region is a priority for Region 9, so the region's divisions support projects that meet the goals of Border 2025, as well as assist disadvantaged communities. The region also leverages resources from EPA program offices (e.g., Office of Air and Radiation, Office of Land and Emergency Management). Dr. Coronado commented that she was working at EPA as an intern in the 1990s when the first border environmental program was being planned, and it is frustrating that there is significantly more to do despite numerous successes. Ms. Baños-Keener added that an interagency workgroup to address the needs of *colonias* is being organized. She also provided a link to NADBank's list of the current projects funded under Border 2025.

Dr. Pohlman explained that she is the DHS Environmental Justice Officer and serves on the White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council, which meets every other week. She can present any environmental justice issues identified by GNEB to the Council.

Dr. Ganster thanked Ms. Baños-Keener for her presentation and noted that the dynamic nature of the border is difficult to overcome. The border does not have a positive national image in the United States or Mexico, which discourages agencies to supply the needed funding. A participant noted that the U.S.–Mexico Border Environmental Program is recognized as a valuable resource by the U.S. Department of State and worldwide. Dr. Ganster added that the border environmental program plays an important role in supporting community groups on both sides of the border. Maintaining the continuity of community support is critical.

Review of GNEB Current Charge and Background

Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB, and Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB

GNEB is an independent Federal Advisory Committee Act board and, as such, identifies its topics of advice independently. For the last decade or so, the Board has begun to communicate with CEQ about areas of common interest. Sometimes the two groups have coordinated, but GNEB maintains its ability to select its own topics of interest.

The current Board focus is water and wastewater infrastructure in the U.S.–Mexico border region. GNEB submitted an advice letter to the President, Congress and CEQ in 2022. The focus in 2023 has been to expand the information in the advice letter to provide additional details and recommendations on water and wastewater infrastructure in the border region.

Review and Discuss the Latest Draft of GNEB’s 20th Report on Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB, and Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB

The Board members discussed each section of version 9 of the draft report.

Overview and Recommendations

Dr. Ganster outlined suggested changes to the report that he had received via email:

- Line 25 of page 3 will be changed from “The administration must continue to expand federal agency collaborative partnerships to make water and wastewater infrastructure funding accessible to marginalized and underserved border communities.” to “Continue to expand federal partnerships to make water and wastewater infrastructure funding accessible to marginalized and underserved border communities as a priority of the administration and federal agencies.”
- Line 33 of page 3 will be changed from “In particular, the administration should encourage marginalized and underserved border communities, including tribes, to take advantage of the resources provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), which includes major funding for water and wastewater projects.” to “Provide targeted technical assistance to aid and expedite underserved border communities, including tribal governments, to take advantage of the resources provided by federal investments, such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and other sources that include funding for water and wastewater projects.”

Mr. José Palacios thought that the statistic of 1 million underserved Americans living along the border, mentioned on line 4 of page 1, is an understatement. In Texas alone, 8 million Americans rely on border water sources. Dr. Ganster stressed that any statistic cited will need a reference. A participant noted that the 1 million figure refers to only underserved Americans, not everyone served in the border region. Mr. Palacios will find the appropriate references to support the statistics related to the number of Americans along the border who are underserved in terms of water and wastewater infrastructure and services.

The GNEB members agreed to change the word “Southwest” to “U.S.” in line 3 of page 5.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) made the following suggestions:

- Number the recommendations in the final report.
- Add “state environmental agencies” in line 37 of page 4. Mr. Rafael DeLeon noted that state environmental agencies are included earlier in the bullet, and the sentence in line 37 refers specifically to NADBank. The Board agreed to leave the sentence as written.
- Add “watershed protection planning” after “transborder wastewater flows” in line 10 of page 5.

Dr. Jeffrey Payne suggested adding a reference to the Inflation Reduction Act in addition to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law mentioned in line 32 of page 3. A number of advances have occurred since the report was written, with agencies releasing funding calls focused on resiliency under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. Dr. Payne will provide additional information on funding that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is providing to address resiliency. Mr. John McNeece welcomed additions related to resiliency, as the current focus of the funding discussions is on water and wastewater; he offered to work with Dr. Payne to expand the discussion on resiliency. Ms. Kathryn Becker added that the American Rescue Plan Act provides funding, so a more general reference to federal funding also should be added.

Dr. Payne thought that more information about stormwater should be added to line 17 of page 4.

Ms. Becker commented that the recommendations must be written so that they set the tone of the report. This is the most important section of the report, and in some cases may be the only portion of the report that is read. The recommendations are somewhat opaque, with many uses of “should” instead of more direct language. GNEB agreed to restructure the bullets and will discuss the specific language adjustments during the November virtual meeting. Ms. Becker will edit the recommendations to include more action verbs and direct language.

1. Border Socioeconomic Context

The callout box on environmental justice must be revised to reflect Executive Order 14096 of April 2023. Dr. Ganster highlighted the paragraph of the callout box that discusses the distinct policies of each U.S. border state.

Mr. Joaquin Marruffo provided language that he received the previous day from the Arizona governor’s office that defines the state policy on environmental justice: “Arizona’s current administration is in the final stage of defining the environmental justice statewide policy and strategy, which aims at the fair treatment and engagement of people regardless of race, color, origin or income.”

Ms. Becker will add the phrase “outreach and inclusion” to the description of New Mexico’s policy; she also mentioned the importance of the Justice40 Initiative. Dr. Pohlman noted that environmental justice efforts are not solely focused on the Justice40 Initiative. Environmental justice must be focused on business processes, missions and operations, in addition to funding. Because this report is not focused on environmental justice, this callout box should remain general. Mr. DeLeon agreed that environmental justice is about much more than the Justice40 Initiative. Dr. Ganster noted that the Justice40 Initiative is mentioned as an example within the callout box.

2. Institutional Framework Context for Binational Management of Shared Water Resources

Dr. Ganster received a suggestion that the recommendation about NADBank on line 28 of page 11 should not include the mention of expanding NADBank’s role. The Board members discussed NADBank funding sources and processes, which have changed throughout the years, and the differences between NADBank loans and grants. Dr. Ganster will contact NADBank to ensure that the wording about the technical assistance grants is accurate. Mr. Marruffo noted that NADBank manages the Community Assistance Program, which is funded by earnings and supports infrastructure projects up to US\$500,000.

Mr. DeLeon provided the following revision to lines 4–5 of page 13: “...the Water Policy Group, co-chaired by senior-level managers at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Mexico’s National Water Commission (Comisión Nacional del Agua; CONAGUA), an arm of the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales; SEMARNAT).”

Mr. Palacios thought that lines 26–28 of page 13 may be true but do not capture the reality of coordination and reactivity in the border region. The Border 2025 presentation highlighted that planning and cooperation exists at the border; however, it is not enough. Dr. Ganster noted that the report speaks to

the results of ad hoc government responses to predictable problems, the detriments of which were highlighted during the Board's tour of the International Wastewater Treatment Plant the previous day. He acknowledged that the U.S.–Mexico Border Environmental Program, in all of its iterations, has engaged in coordination and planning. Many border problems are predictable and have straightforward solutions, but the two federal governments have not figured out how to prioritize and manage these expected problems. A participant agreed that applying national rules, regulations and laws in a binational region is not effective. GNEB could explore a recommendation on how to enact cross-border laws and regulations that apply to the border region. Dr. Ganster noted that the report makes the point that residents of the U.S.–Mexico border region face challenges (e.g., cross-border contamination flows) that residents in other U.S. regions do not. Border 2025 has been successful in obtaining needed community input, and states have made some progress. He agreed to revise the language, but it must be clear that the recommendation addresses the lack of coordinated planning for predictable issues. No one agency is in charge of everything. Mr. Palacios thought that establishing a new agency for infrastructure planning along the border could be explored. Dr. Ganster agreed that this would be a great topic for a future report. A participant noted that the system is always two steps behind and wholly reactive. She commented that although executive orders address immigration, progress does not occur because the immigration crisis is tied to resiliency, climate change and environmental issues, which are not addressed in the executive orders.

Public Comment

Mr. Green called for public comments. Ms. Sarah Davidson commented that she works with the Clean Border Water Now program at the Surfrider Foundation, which supports the inclusion of US\$100 million in funding for the BWIP and any other specific support that can be provided to address the environmental justice crisis happening at the San Diego–Tijuana border. Addressing the state of disrepair of the International Wastewater Treatment Plant requires a substantial amount of additional funding over what was budgeted. Mr. McNeece understands that Hurricane Hilary caused significant problems, in addition to the accumulated deficit, and he asked whether Ms. Davidson had specific figures on cost. Ms. Davidson explained that she has a rough understanding of the numbers and could find more specific information. The original repair project was estimated to cost US\$600 million, with US\$350 million contributed from the USMCA and US\$140 million by Mexico, which still resulted in a funding gap. With the discovery of the actual state of disrepair, the project is now estimated to cost more than US\$900 million, making the funding gap very significant. Mr. McNeece has heard that monies committed to the original project now are being diverted to emergency funding. Ms. Davidson agreed that this is her understanding as well. She offered to send Mr. Green specific information to distribute to the Board members.

Review and Discuss the Latest Draft of GNEB's 20th Report on Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (Continued)

Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB, and Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB

Mr. Alejandro Barcenas noted that, in addition to institutions' not recognizing one another across the border, ground water is not governed, whereas surface water is governed, and wastewater is partially governed. The problem is that no agencies are assigned to address deficiencies and create solutions. Mr. Barcenas will enhance the discussion about additional governance for ground water.

3. Border Water Supply and Challenges

TCEQ submitted a change to lines 34–35 of page 15, which refers to poor households. A participant noted that the report uses many different terms, (e.g., underserved, overburdened, marginalized, disadvantaged) and wondered whether one consistent term should be used. The Board agreed on the following language change: "Poor, disadvantaged communities in the border region cannot afford the higher cost of pure

water produced by desalination, so public policies will be necessary to offset costs for these communities.”

A participant asked what “related technical issues” referred to in line 28 of page 15. Dr. Ganster explained that it referred to technical issues related to the challenges of desalination. The GNEB members agreed to the following revised language: “If sufficient investment is available and these challenges can be overcome, these solutions will greatly benefit the region.”

TCEQ suggested changing “apocalyptic” to “catastrophic” in line 22 on page 17.

The situation surrounding the Colorado River shortfalls is rapidly evolving, so the text will be reviewed just prior to publication to ensure that it is as accurate as possible at the time of publication. Mr. McNeece will update this section immediately prior to the release of the report.

The information about water deliveries mentioned on page 19 may not be accurate by the time the report is released. TCEQ will ensure that the language about the water deliveries is accurate. TCEQ will receive updated information in October and will provide the Board with the update during GNEB’s November meeting.

The Board discussed the accuracy of lines 28–29 on page 19 that read, “...although this would likely require a revision of Mexico’s national water law.” The GNEB members agreed to delete this language because Mexico’s recognition of the United States as a water user could be addressed through treaties.

Mr. Palacios suggested removing the language in line 37 of page 19 about the lack of definition of the term “drought” enabling the United States and Mexico to reach shortage solutions. TCEQ and the Rio Grande Watermaster Program believe that the lack of certainty has more disadvantages than benefits and that a stricter definition would benefit water users. Dr. Ganster noted that the reference is to the Colorado River and not the Rio Grande. The Board agreed to delete the information about the Colorado River and revise the language to read: “IBWC should define ‘extraordinary drought’ for the Rio Grande system. This would benefit users in Texas to have more predictable deliveries on an annual basis rather than the current 5-year cycles.”

Mr. Palacios noted that language about a full-time administrative liaison and the fact that the water protection plan has not been implemented had been removed from page 24. Dr. Ganster explained that the language was removed to provide a more balanced discussion about the entire border region because the report cannot explicitly focus on Texas. Mr. Palacios thought that the report could simply mention that the most important goal of the binational watershed agreement has not been met; he will develop the language.

4. Border Water and Wastewater

Dr. Ganster reported that NADBank had suggested adding the following sentences to line 4 of page 31: “NADBank signed a commitment agreement to take steps to expedite funding for a comprehensive wastewater collection and treatment project in the city of Nuevo Laredo. The agreement outlined the US\$81 million investment needed to expand and improve the wastewater system in Nuevo Laredo and was signed by the government of Tamaulipas, the Municipality of Nuevo Laredo, CONAGUA, IBWC and NADBank for the financing and implementation of infrastructure. The investment will replace old and deteriorated sanitary sewer and collection systems, rehabilitate or expand the wastewater treatment plants, and extend the sewer system to areas currently without service.”

Mr. Palacios highlighted the mention of technical assistance centers in lines 22–23 of page 32. The nearest technical assistance center that covers the Texas border is located in New Mexico. This center can provide assistance to the El Paso region but not to the eastern portion of the border beginning at Laredo because these communities are not connected to the El Paso region. TCEQ proposed the following language: “A technical assistance center for the Lower Rio Grande Valley would be convenient; the New

Mexico center can appropriately assist El Paso and neighboring counties but will not have the connections and presence needed further east.”

Ms. Melisa Gonzalez agreed that the Lower Rio Grande Valley needs a dedicated center. The Arizona and New Mexico TCTACs are being structured but are not yet functional. Ms. Becker will work with Mr. Palacios on appropriate language regarding the TCTACs. Mr. Marruffo noted that the Region 9 TCTACs are being structured so that Arizona and California can use each other’s centers interchangeably. Dr. Josiah Heyman noted that the technical assistance centers are not intended to serve only border communities. Two levels of centers exist; one supports various types of users in developing applications, and the other is a passthrough organization that awards grants to communities that would otherwise not be able to obtain them. Both levels are focused on providing assistance to smaller, disadvantaged communities.

Dr. Ganster discussed the callout box on Indigenous knowledges on page 36, noting that EPA had agreed that the term “Indigenous knowledge” is adequate, rather than the use of “Indigenous knowledges.” EPA requested that the last two bullets in the callout be removed, but they will remain because they provide the Indigenous perspective on Indigenous and Western knowledge. Dr. Ganster will work on the Indigenous knowledge Venn diagram with Mr. William Micklin and Ms. Becker.

Mr. Palacios noted that TCEQ is waiting for individuals external to the agency to provide additional language about border boundaries to the final two paragraphs on 39 and the first paragraph on page 40.

5. Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Services: Best Practices and Recommended Improvements for the Border Region

Dr. Ganster explained that a suggestion had been made to change line 11 on page 42 to read, “Investing in infrastructure that increases the security of the drinking water supply and equitable access to clean water should be the highest priority for the administration and Congress.” The Board agreed with the change.

6. Available Financing Programs for Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Planning, Design and Construction Projects and Local Capacity Building in the Border Region

Dr. Ganster explained that NADBank had provided input on line 29 of page 44. Rather than stating “between 1994 and 2019,” it should say “to date.” The number of water and wastewater infrastructure projects will be updated from 133 to 199. To address the correct time frame, the first line of the section can be revised to begin “NADBank is a binational bank created in 1994...” and rather than stating “to date,” that line will read “by mid-2023.”

In the same paragraph, NADBank suggested changing “U.S. congressional appropriations to EPA for the Border Environmental Infrastructure Fund are combined with NADBank loans to reduce the interest cost of infrastructure loans. The annual appropriation from Congress has declined, however, severely limiting low-cost loans for water and wastewater infrastructure.” to “U.S. congressional appropriations to EPA for the Border Environmental Infrastructure Fund have significantly declined. In addition to BWIP, NADBank also administers its own grant programs, including its Community Assistance Program (CAP) and Technical Assistance Program (TAP).”

NADBank also suggested adding the following sentence to line 7 of page 45: “Currently, Congress has appropriated \$3 million through the U.S. Department of State for the bank’s CAP and TAP. These funds are critical for border communities to fund the construction projects or advance their projects to construction. An increase in this funding would allow NADBank to not only continue these programs but fill the gap needed for border communities.”

Mr. McNeece proposed that a brief section on the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) be added as 6.ii. He also thought that a callout box on IBWC’s funding shortfalls would be helpful. He agreed to draft these items. Mr. Palacios suggested adding the following language: “GNEB

recommends urgently enabling IBWC, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other pertinent federal institutions with sufficient resources to promptly lead binational efforts to repair the Amistad Dam.” He noted that IBWC estimates an investment of US\$215 million, and Mr. McNeece reported that he had obtained the figure of US\$276 million from a fact sheet. Mr. Palacios thought that the fact sheet was a more recent estimate. Ms. Becker noted that IBWC has a duty and that this should be reflected in the language of the recommendation. It highlights which agency is in charge of which action, in addition to the various actions that agencies are taking.

Dr. Ganster provided an overview of the callout box on useful screening tools on page 47 and indicated that he had made minor edits suggested by EPA.

Mr. McNeece noted that the paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 48 discusses the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and its acknowledgment of the importance of technical assistance. The next paragraph (on page 49) discusses EPA’s Environmental Finance Centers. He asked whether a discussion of the TCTACs should be added. The Board has identified technical assistance as critical for disadvantaged communities, and the discussion must be accurate and robust. He volunteered to write this discussion. An EPA staff member noted that a [fact sheet about the TCTACs](#) is available online. Dr. Heyman noted that the TCTACS are very new; although activities were outlined in the request for proposals, the specific activities that will be undertaken are not yet known because not all aspects are in place. Border communities are competing with Native American and poor Black communities.

Dr. Ganster thought that it would be useful to add a map of colonias on page 51 to demonstrate how pervasive they are and how much area they occupy in some sections of the border. The Texas Office of the Attorney General publishes a publicly available GIS map of the colonias. Mr. Palacios agreed that the GIS map is a widely used tool and thought that it would be worthwhile to add a screenshot of an area dense with colonias. Ms. Becker agreed with the addition of the map if it is clear that it refers to Texas because New Mexico handles colonias differently. Dr. Coronado noted that years of research have been performed on how to address the challenges of colonias, but no political will or resources exist to address them.

TCEQ suggested changing line 1 of page 52 to “coming to terms with a changing climate” and changing “double-down” to “should redouble” in line 3 of that page.

Annex A

Mr. McNeece developed Annex A to provide local communities with an access point to the vast array of programs. Funding is available but distributed at the state and local levels, and this appendix can assist state governments and local communities in finding and distributing these funds. Mr. Carlos Suarez will provide additional information about funding available from USDA.

Recommendations

Dr. Ganster returned the discussion to the recommendations to determine whether any changes needed to be made following the Board’s discussion of the full report.

Mr. Palacios noted that the recommendation on line 23 of page 4 mentions that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides funding for dam repair, but TCEQ is unsure whether the Amistad Dam qualifies. He suggested clarifying this recommendation. Mr. McNeece noted that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law does not provide funding to IBWC, but many border projects are funded by IBWC. In the IBWC section that he will develop, Mr. McNeece will highlight that IBWC does not qualify for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding.

Additional Comments

Ms. Becker noted that she had developed a table with Mr. Marruffo and Dr. Carlos Rincón with a state-by-state comparison of institutions responsible for water management, which allowed for a list of relevant minutes, treaties and binational conventions. She asked why it was not included as an appendix.

Dr. Ganster responded that he had been told that the draft he received was not ready for inclusion; it can be added when it is ready. Ms. Becker will work with Mr. McNeece on the table so that it can be included as an appendix.

During GNEB's discussion about the report, at Dr. Ganster's invitation, Mr. Andy Carey, Chair of the National Advisory Committee and Executive Director of the U.S.–Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership (BPP), joined the meeting. BPP is a binational membership organization that promotes philanthropy between the two countries, and its mission is to support a network of organizations that build prosperity in the border region. BPP provides education and training, coaching, technical assistance, translations, and more.

Mr. Carey and Dr. Ganster are working on writing and publishing six border briefs designed to tell the robust story of the border region and contribute to the narrative that the border is a powerful and important region rather than focusing on the migrancy narrative. One brief will be an overview of the border region, and the remaining five will be focused on philanthropy, migration, environmental issues, public health and education. Mr. Carey stated that borderlanders need to reclaim the border narrative from those in Washington, D.C. and Mexico City. The briefs will be publicly available; BPP also publishes a newsletter every other week.

Dr. Ganster noted that GNEB consistently recommends federal cross-border coordination, and BPP has been successful in working with its partners across the border. EPA has long recognized the importance of community participation in its U.S.–Mexico Border Environmental Program, and BPP has the same mission and engages tens of thousands of people in recognizing opportunities instead of problems.

A participant asked whether more opportunities exist for federal agencies and nonprofit organizations to work cooperatively across the border. Mr. Carey noted that EPA plans to announce an innovative program this fall to support community organizations, partnering with NADBank to help support proposals for environmental initiatives. Many opportunities exist to move this dialogue forward.

Process and Timing for Completing the GNEB's 20th Report for Transmittal/Publication

Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB, and Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB

Dr. Ganster commented that the report needs appropriate illustrations to ensure that it is accessible to stakeholders. Additional photographs and illustrations are needed, and they should be in the public domain or able to be reproduced with credit and without additional permission.

Mr. Green highlighted the timeline for transmitting the report. All federal documents must be made compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act for posting on the internet. It would be advantageous to complete the report in time for the contractor to provide a Section 508–compliant document by December 1. If this is not possible, a noncompliant version will be delivered to CEQ on December 1, and the Section 508–compliant report will be delivered by December 15. Mr. Green suggested that the Board meet on November 2, 3 or 6 and asked the members to notify him of their availability on these dates.

Board members must submit their revised text to Dr. Ganster by October 5, along with photographs and illustrations. Dr. Ganster will collate all the material and send the revised report to the Board members no later than October 12. The Board reached a consensus on the revised language during this hybrid meeting.

Discuss Potential Topics for Next Advice Letter/Report

GNEB Members

Dr. Ganster reiterated that the Board determines the topics of its report. Some reports focus on a new topic, some provide a more in-depth discussion of the previous year's report, and others have revisited a past topic to assess progress (e.g., GNEB's 18th Report, *Environmental Quality and Security: A 10-Year Retrospective*, assessed progress since the release of the 10th Report, *Environmental Protection and*

Border Security on the U.S.–Mexico Border). A new Board will be in place before the preparation of the next report, so a clearer picture of the Board’s leadership will have emerged, as well as members’ expertise and capacity to research and write on different topics. The report must include federal-level recommendations.

In response to a question about the budget for meeting in person, Mr. Green explained that budgets have decreased and that each program office prioritizes budgets and travel dollars differently. OMS is the program office that manages GNEB. The timing of federal approval of the Board also affects its ability to meet. Generally, GNEB meets three times annually: once in February or March, again in May or June, and then in late fall to approve the annual advice letter/report.

Dr. Ganster stressed that holding face-to-face meetings in border communities is critical so that EPA and the Board members understand the realities of border communities. Although the practice has been discontinued, GNEB’s prior ability to meet with officials across the border provided valuable interactions. It also is beneficial for GNEB to meet in Washington, D.C., and interact with federal government officials, members of Congress and CEQ. EPA has resumed in-person meetings, and it is time for GNEB to meet in person at least two times a year. In-person meetings increase the efficiency of the Board.

Dr. Coronado suggested as a topic the impact of trade on the border environment, which would allow for a discussion of a variety of environmental impacts (e.g., traffic at the Nogales border crossings and its impact on air quality). Dr. Ganster added that a number of EPA-supported citizen science monitoring groups could provide interesting data sets on this topic. Ms. Becker noted that different states’ requirements for electric vehicles and how they will affect trade and the border environment could be considered within this topic. Dr. Kimberly Collins agreed that these requirements will create implications for the border economy and communities and that leadership on this issue is muddy. A Board member noted that none of the previous reports appear to focus on trade. Dr. Ganster noted that many NAFTA institutions were created because of the supposed effects of trade (e.g., population growth, increased infrastructure needs, increased emissions). The Board has not performed an economic analysis of trade and its environmental effects. Because 80 percent of cross-border is via land crossings, such an analysis is possible.

Mr. Marruffo noted that the next report could highlight the 40th anniversary of the La Paz Agreement, the accomplishments of this cooperation between the United States and Mexico, and the gaps that remain. A common narrative is that the same problems occur repeatedly with the same solutions applied, but an in-depth analysis has not been performed.

Ms. Gonzalez asked whether the Board could address coastal restoration or resiliency, which is a significant issue in Texas along the Laguna Madre coastline because of the deterioration of the coastal barrier. Dr. Ganster noted that during the Board’s field trip, the GNEB members had met with the Research Coordinator of the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve, who discussed the complexities of restoring saltwater marshes. Ms. Gonzalez noted that the South Texas Consortium and the Texas General Land Office work on coastal restoration. Dr. Ganster added that NOAA is heavily involved with coastal resilience and restoration.

Dr. Collins suggested the topic of community resiliency, including the changing conversation around climate resiliency that refocuses on community resiliency and how community resiliency works. Communities must prepare for a wide variety of threats in addition to climate change.

Mr. Barcenas suggested solid waste as a potential topic. Ms. Gonzalez agreed that this is a significant issue in Texas. She attended the recent Border 2025 Regional Coordinators Meeting, which included an interesting discussion on solid waste and its resulting pollutant issues in water. A GNEB member published a book in 2002 that discusses the problem of tire waste along the border. Dr. Ganster noted that the structural issues that cause the flow and accumulation of tires are related to the export of used tires from the United States that accumulate in Mexico. The state of California rejected legislation that would

provide Mexico with monies from taxes levied on new tires to help that country dispose of used tires. State politicians also opposed sending these funds to Mexico through NADBank. Dr. Ganster cited this as an example of an issue that has clear solutions but no political will.

Dr. Ganster suggested that the Board could analyze the efforts of the U.S.–Mexico Border Environmental Program to determine its achievements.

Mr. Palacios noted that TCEQ can provide a great deal of information on the effects of ports of entry on air quality. With new EPA standards for fine particulate matter, some ports of entry may enter a different attainment category. This may be a novel topic for the Board to explore. He also supports the idea of an analysis of the La Paz Agreement and U.S.–Mexico Border Environmental Program, which could be completed within a 1-year cycle.

Ms. Becker commented that much of the discussion has focused on dealing with border problems. The next report could highlight the border region and shift the focus to border growth and development, including why ports of entry are what they are and how and why growth has occurred in the way it has. The discussion could focus on seeing the border region for what it is instead of as a problem. The report could have an approach focused on the ports of entry that highlights successes and gaps. For example, one port of entry has instituted a number of positive features, including solar panels and pedestrian walkways. Mr. Mario Lopez agreed that it is helpful to highlight success stories because they do not always receive enough attention. Ms. Gonzalez liked an approach focusing on ports of entry.

Next Steps and Wrap-Up

Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB, and Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB

Dr. Ganster recapped the next steps discussed during the call.

Adjournment

Drs. Ganster and Coronado and Mr. Green thanked the Board members for their efforts. Dr. Ganster adjourned the meeting at 4:35 p.m. PDT.

Action Items

- All GNEB members will—
 - Submit their text revisions to Dr. Ganster no later than October 5, ensuring that all appropriate citations are included.
 - Submit photographs and illustrations that will enhance the report to Dr. Ganster no later than October 5.
 - Notify Mr. Green about their availability to attend a virtual meeting on November 2, 3 or 6.
- Dr. Ganster will—
 - Update the environmental justice callout box to reflect Executive Order 14096.
 - Contact NADBank to ensure that the wording about technical assistance grants is correct.
 - Revise the “always reactive” language in line 28 of page 13.
 - Work with Mr. Micklin and Ms. Becker on the Indigenous knowledge Venn diagram.
 - Add a GIS map of *colonias* in Texas and indicate that it applies to Texas only.
 - Collate all of the new and revised text and send the collated, revised report to the Board members no later than October 12.
- Mr. Barcenas will enhance the discussion about additional governance for ground water.

- Ms. Becker will—
 - Edit the recommendations to include more action verbs.
 - Add the phrase “outreach and inclusion” to the description of New Mexico’s environmental justice policy in the environmental justice callout box.
 - Work with Mr. Palacios on appropriate language regarding TCTACs.
 - Work with Dr. Ganster and Mr. Micklin on the Indigenous knowledge Venn diagram.
 - Work with Mr. McNeece on the table describing state-by-state water management to include as an appendix.
- Mr. McNeece will—
 - Work with Dr. Payne to expand the mention of resiliency in the funding discussions in the report.
 - Update the section on the Colorado River shortfalls immediately prior to the release of the report.
 - Develop Section 6.ii on IBWC, which will highlight the fact that IBWC does not qualify for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding.
 - Develop a callout box on IBWC funding shortfalls.
 - Develop a discussion about the TCTACs.
 - Work with Ms. Becker on the table describing state-by-state water management to include as an appendix.
- Mr. Micklin will work with Dr. Ganster and Ms. Becker on the Indigenous knowledge Venn diagram.
- Mr. Palacios will—
 - Find the appropriate references to support the statistics related to the number of Americans along the border who are underserved in terms of water and wastewater infrastructure and services.
 - Ensure that TCEQ provides an update about water deliveries at the November virtual meeting.
 - Develop language indicating that the most important goal of the binational watershed agreement has not been met.
 - Work with Ms. Becker on the appropriate language regarding the TCTACs.
- Dr. Payne will—
 - Provide additional information on NOAA funding to address resiliency.
 - Work with Mr. McNeece to expand the mention of resiliency in the funding discussions in the report.
- Mr. Suarez will provide additional information about USDA funding for Annex A.

Appendix A: Meeting Participants

Chair

Paul Ganster, Ph.D.

Director
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Vice Chair

Irasema Coronado, Ph.D.

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Erik Lee

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Mario Lopez

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Designated Federal Official

Eugene Green
Designated Federal Official
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Border Affairs Intern
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Austin, TX

José Luis Palacios

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Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
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Appendix B: Meeting Agenda



Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB)
Hybrid Meeting
150 W. Broadway, San Diego, California,
and Microsoft Teams
September 21, 2023, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. PDT

AGENDA

- 9:00–9:30 a.m.** Welcome and Member Roll Call
- Eugene Green, GNEB Designated Federal Officer, Federal Advisory Committee Management Division (FACMD)
 - Robbie Young-Mackall, Director, FACMD
Jeremy Bauer, EPA Region 9
 - Dr. Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB
 - Dr. Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB
- 9:30–9:40 a.m.** Overview of Agenda and Meeting Goals/Objectives
- Dr. Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB
 - Dr. Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB
- 9:40–10:00 a.m.** Role and Activities of EPA Region 9 in Addressing Border Issues
- Alhelí Baños-Keener, Acting Manager, Mexico Border Branch, Tribal, Intergovernmental and Policy Division, Office of the Regional Administrator, Region 9, EPA
- 10:00–10:20 a.m.** Review of GNEB Current Charge and Background
- Dr. Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB
 - Dr. Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB
- 10:20–10:30 a.m.** Break
- 10:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.** Review and Discuss Latest Draft of GNEB’s 20th Report on Water and Wastewater Infrastructure
- GNEB Members
- 12:00–1:00 p.m.** Lunch
- 1:00–1:15 p.m.** Public Comments
- 1:15–2:50 p.m.** Review and Discuss Latest Draft of GNEB’s 20th Report on Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (Continued)
- GNEB Members

AGENDA (continued)

- 2:50–3:00 p.m.** Break
- 3:00–4:00 p.m.** Review and Discuss Latest Draft of GNEB’s 20th Report on Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (Continued)
- GNEB Members
- 4:00–4:15 p.m.** Process and Timing for Completing GNEB’s 20th Report for Transmittal/Publication
- Dr. Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB
 - Dr. Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB
- 4:15–4:45 p.m.** Discuss Potential Topics for Next Advice Letter/Report
- GNEB Members
- 4:45–5:00 p.m.** Next Steps and Wrap-Up
- Dr. Paul Ganster, Chair, GNEB
 - Dr. Irasema Coronado, Vice Chair, GNEB
- 5:00 p.m.** Adjournment

Appendix C: Chair Certification of Minutes

I, Paul Ganster, Chair of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB), certify that this is the final version of the complete minutes for the hybrid meeting held on September 21, 2023, and that the minutes accurately reflect the discussions and decisions of the meeting.



October 21, 2023

Paul Ganster, GNEB Chair

Date