

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

Tuesday, February 4, 2025, at 1pm
301 Caspian Way, Imperial Beach CA, 91932
Meeting held virtually via the *Zoom* platform.

DRAFT meeting minutes

Advisory Council Members

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

Lisa Adams – California State Parks – District Superintendent I

619-688-3230, lisa.adams@parks.ca.gov

Andy Yuen – US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – SDNWRC Project Leader

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Sally Brown – USFWS – Refuge Manager

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Mike McCoy – Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association (SWIA) – President

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

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Loni Beyer Wilson – US Naval Base Coronado – Natural Resources Manager

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

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Annica Ly – City of San Diego – Stormwater Department

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Doug Liden – US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) – Environmental Engineer

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Sean Ford – US Border Patrol – Public Lands Liaison

SEAN.A.FORD@cbp.dhs.gov

Bill Rogers – US Border Patrol – Special Operations Supervisor

WILLIAM.S.ROGERS@cbp.dhs.gov

Emily Allen – US International Boundary & Water Commission – Area Operations Manager

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Mike Verderber – SD County Parks – Supervising Park Ranger

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Sam Jenniches – State Coastal Conservancy – Project Manager

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Ashley Reineman – California Coastal Commission – Federal Programs Manager

805-585-1800, ashley.reineman@coastal.ca.gov

Chelsea Jander – California Coastal Commission – Coastal Program Analyst

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Gemma Waaland – NOAA's Office for Coastal Management – NERR Liaison

707-495-2623, gemma.waaland@noaa.gov

Program Managers Present:

Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – Reserve Manager

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

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Kristen Goodrich – TRNERR – Coastal Training Program

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Vacant – TRNERR – Education Coordinator

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Jeff Crooks – TRNERR – Research Coordinator

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Additional Attendees

Sally Spener, IBWC

Julio Leon, US Border Patrol

Charles Gailband, SD County Parks

Eddie Salinas, City of San Diego

Michaela Castagnola, Rep. Sara Jacobs

Joe Ellis, Public

Garce Adams, Public

John Zarem, TRNERR Volunteer

Marya Ahmad, CA State Parks

Demmuel Eslava, TRNERR

Stephany Garcia, TRNERR

Lynn Reizer-Heftmann, TRVEA

Ashleyann, Public

Scott McCreary, Public

Chantel Jimenez, USFWS

1. 1:04 pm Meeting was called to order.

2. AGENDA – the February 4, 2025, agenda was adopted with the addition of the New Business item: Bayside Community Resiliency: The Living Levee Project NOI/NOP, Andy Yuen (USFWS)

3. LAST MEETING MINUTES – The November 5, 2024, minutes were adopted.

4. Member Comments

Lisa Adams – California State Parks – District Superintendent I

- a. The District is still waiting for the final confirmation, from Sacramento, of the 2024-2025 budget, and is expecting the information in the next couple of weeks.

Andy Yuen – US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – SDNWRC Project Leader

- a. A.Yuen noted his upcoming retirement and spoke briefly regarding the collaborative work done by the USFWS and the other involved agencies and stakeholders in the shared management of the Tijuana River NERR.
- b. The USFWS still does not have a budget, is under a continuing resolution, and does not yet know what the future budget if any will look like in March.

- c. Work on the Otay River Estuary Restoration Project continues. The Otay River flood plain site has been breached and 34.5 acres are back to tidal circulation. In about a week the 91-acre Pond 15 site will be breached and brought back to tidal circulation. Overall, this will bring back over 125 acres of salt marsh/estuarine habitat at the south end of San Diego Bay.

Sam Jenniches – State Coastal Conservancy – Project Manager

- a. The Board is meeting next week to approve some projects but there are no updates for the San Diego region.

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

- a. The City of Imperial Beach is holding steady on all its various projects and there are no new updates.

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

- a. The Navy is expanding the number of partners who are part of the Encroachment Partner Agreement. Silver Strand State Beach (California State Parks) and Compatible Lands Foundations are the new partners.
- b. The Navy Region Southwest is reengaging in the Sentinel Landscape designation. Stakeholders who will be partners in the effort are the Port of San Diego, the Coastal Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Eddie Salinas for Annica Ly – City of San Diego Stormwater Department

- a. The City of San Diego has finished its repairs to the Smuggler's Gulch berm that was damaged during the storms of 2024 and worked with the County on some dredging in that area. There is potential for additional dredging that needs to be done.
- b. The work done at Saturn Blvd. to potentially reduce the aerosolization of hydrogen sulfide did not yield much relief.

Doug Liden – USEPA – Environmental Engineer

- a. The Tijuana River Valley Water and Odor Issues: An USEPA fact sheet outlines multi-agency efforts to address air and water quality issues in the Tijuana River Valley that are impacting San Diego area communities. It is being provided to help inform the public, press, and elected officials and to help direct inquiries to the appropriate agency.
<https://www.epa.gov/ca/tijuana-river-valley-water-and-odor-issues-government-roles-and-partnerships>
- b. The USEPA is following up with a fact sheet that addresses the plans and projects to eliminate transboundary flows into the Tijuana River. It is divided into three phases.

The first phase, one of its goals is to reduce flows, e.g., the Tijuana River Gates Project which is partly funded by the EPA, is design ready, and bidding for contractors for the project. Next, there is the effluent to remove, approximately 5 million gallons per day (MGD) of flow to the river, by replacing 11 km of

deteriorated pipes in Tijuana, which will reduce the amount of sewage going into the river. The USEPA is also working on a project with its local, state, and federal counterparts in Mexico to reduce and improve the quality of the flows going into the river by relocating the flows from the two treatment plants in Tijuana to the Rodriguez Dam. The cost to the USEPA is about \$40 million annually. Another project to reduce flows to the river is the International Collector Replacement Project, which is nearing completion. That project will prevent a catastrophic collapse of Tijuana's largest wastewater collector pipe which is 45 years old.

The second phase is to increase wastewater treatment capacity by the expanding the of International Wastewater treatment plant. As an example, the San Antonio de los Buenos treatment plant is an expansion project in which Mexico invested \$35 million, it is nearing completion and will hopefully be operational this spring. Additionally, the USEPA is working with Mexico to make sure the Tecolote-La Gloria treatment plant, which was abandoned about 10 years ago and is supposed to treat about 3 MGD of wastewater that goes to the ocean, will get rebuilt. Mexico is aiming for the end of the year for completion.

The third phase is to increase conveyance of sewage and river flows to San Antonio de los Buenos Wastewater treatment plant, by the rehabilitation of Pump Station 1. The cost is \$13 million and the USEPA is funding this through the NADBank. It is expected to be completed in 2027. There is also the coastal conveyance line repair in Mexico. This line carries wastewater to the coast and is a key area that needs to be fixed.

- c. In addition, the USEPA has recently funded SDSU to continue monitoring the Tijuana River to try to calculate the amount of sewage in the river at any given time. It will allow them to determine the efficacy of the different projects in Mexico over the long period but will also help keep the Scripps model that will allow for predicted indications of beach closure.

Ashley Reinemann – California Coastal Commission – Federal Programs Manager

- a. Nothing to report.

Charles Gailband – SD County Parks – Region Manager

- a. Update on the campground reopening plan: soil sampling for biological contaminants have found nothing alarming. The report for the soil sampling for metals and other pollutants is not yet available. When the County gets the reports that the samples are safe, they will take steps to prepare for opening in March 2025.

Sean Ford – US Border Patrol – Public Lands Liaison

- a. Work is almost complete on the Tijuana River barrier, a.k.a. Tijuana channel bridge, and might be finished in February.
- b. The U.S. Marines are putting concertina wire on the fence from San Ysidro to Otay Mountain and will be mostly working in the areas inside the fences.

- c. The Border Patrol is having weekly plant surveys done between the fences at Lichty Mesa.
- d. The process of closing the gap in the fencing at Smuggler's Gulch is supposed to begin sometime in 2025.

Sally Spener for Emily Allen – US International Boundary & Water Commission – Area Operations Manager

- a. Morgan Rogers the area operations manager retired three weeks ago and was replaced by Emily Allen who overlapped with him to allow for knowledge transfer.
- b. The South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant returned to compliance in November 2024 and continued in compliance in December 2024, this was due to the primary sediment containment tanks being rehabilitated and made operational.
- c. Typically, the plants are receiving 20 to 24 MGD flows daily. Sediment is a continuing concern as it impacts structures along the border. Mexico said it will be constructing some sediment basins and the IBWC will be following up on that.
- d. The IBWC will be constructing a gabion wall at the old Smuggler's Gulch collector, which is an area in between the walls, to control the sediment issues along the border.
- e. Regarding the progressive design-build for rehabilitation and expansion at the South Bay International Wastewater and Treatment Plant, the project is moving along. The design-build contract was awarded in August 2024 and in May 2025 the design will be 30% complete. One of the highlights of the design work that is underway in the headworks facility is combined fine and coarse grid screening and some pumping improvements. The IBWC is also ensuring that equipment with long lead times will be available when needed for the project.
- f. Regarding the International Collector Project, the IBWC has been working with Mexico for several weeks now and is working out a way to install the collector without the releasing sewage into the United States. The project is going to be done in phases. Phase one will start in two weeks, and there will be a bypass around the segment of the pipeline. Phase two starts on March 1; PB CILA will be shut down and all of the flows will be sent to Mexico, for 3 to 5 days only storm water will be in the river.
- g. For the 2023/2024 time period there was a 3 to 4 times increase in dry weather untreated flows over the previous 2022/2023 time period. Some initial studies suggest that the poor condition of Mexico's sewage collection system is contributing to the untreated flows in the river. There is data that supports the occurrence of the decreased flows into San Antonio de los Buenos is resulting in the increase of untreated flows in the Tijuana River. There will be a high-level meeting with Mexican officials in the next few days to discuss and get an update on the San Antonio de los Buenos plant, as well as other possible sources of transboundary flows.
- h. There was a spill at the Hollister St pump station in January because of a defective valve on the surge tank that was under warranty. It was fixed and operational three weeks later. There was also a spill at the Goat Canyon pump station due to excessive sediment and trash.

Mike McCoy – SWIA – President

- a. At the last board meeting the Southwest Interpretive Association updated its mission statement, changed its name and is rebranding the organization to the Tijuana Estuary Foundation. This was done for funding purposes.

5. Program Manager Reports - [Refer to written program manager reports](#)

Sally Brown – USFWS – Refuge Manager Report

- a. Repairs were made to damaged benches at 5th and Iris, and to the swing signs along the trail to the Grove footpath.
- b. Some staff members that do beach clean-up received UTV training.
- c. Update on the Refuge wildlife numbers. For 2024, there were 27-50 pairs of California least terns on the refuge beach north of the river mouth, 58 established nests and 13-15 chicks fledged. The Western snowy plovers had 28 nests, and 20-24 chicks fledged. The Ridgway's rails census for 20 coastal wetlands in California had 413 breeding pairs. For our Refuge there were 108 pairs.
- d. The propagation plan for the Ridgway's rail has been revised per review of genetics study, and the plan has been renewed for 2025.

Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – Reserve Manager Report

- a. This program is a federal and state partnership that is administered by NOAA. The federal government and the state government contributes some money and through that a system of research and monitoring is implemented. That data informs education and interpretation programs for the public, for decision-makers, and for land conservation. That is also done in partnership with the non-profit organization the Tijuana Estuary Foundation/SWIA. The Tijuana Estuary is dependent on federal funding and the pause last week temporarily impacted and interrupted the system to draws down funds for issuing paychecks to staff. It is an indication that there is need for being aware of the federal budget.
- b. Two new retirements, Anne Marie Tipton and Greg Abbott.

Vacant – TRNERR – Education Report

- a. [Refer to written program manager reports.](#)

Jeff Crooks – TRNERR – Research Report

- a. A relationship between dry weather flows and dissolved oxygen has been seen in the last few years and seems to be leading to a poor numbers of fish and invertebrates. Some recovery of the fish has been seen as repairs are made and there are fewer dry weather flows. When there are interventions in the system there is a pretty quick response.
- b. On Saturday, February 1, Love Your Wetlands Day was put on by UCSD and San Diego Bird Alliance at the Kendall Frost Marsh, TRNERR staff and volunteers helped table at the event.

Lorena Warner-Lara – TRNERR – Stewardship Report

- a. The San Diego Urban Corps have been doing work here during the rainy days and will work down in BFSP doing Arundo control and widening the trail to the beach.
- b. Next month on March 1 is the San Diego Festival of Science and Engineering, Science Expo which will be at Petco Park. It is free for children. TRNERR will showcase its research and monitoring through interactive activities.
- c. [Refer to written program manager reports](#) for additional updates.

Kristen Goodrich – TRNERR – Coastal Training Program Report

- a. CTP is excited to be one of the few sites around the world that is part of the National Geographic Preserving Legacies Project and through that, sharing lessons on preserving legacies and cultural heritage in the context of climate change. CTP will be continuing a series of workshops in partnership with the State Historic Preservation Office and Scripps.
- b. CTP published a report that was the product of a year's collaboration with the National Estuarine Research Reserve System addressing marine debris in estuaries.
- c. At the national meeting last fall, K. Goodrich was nominated for and accepted the position of president of NERRA, the non-profit partner of the NERR. K. Goodrich will be stepping into the position for the next two years and will be actively tracking the federal landscape for funding for national programs and the implications at this reserve specifically. It will be a busy year as it relates to congressional outreach and communications with elected officials.

6. New Business

- a. Andy Yuen (USFWS) gave a summary of the Bayside Community Resiliency: The Living Levee Project. It is a partnership between the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge and the City of Imperial Beach to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement and a Draft Environmental Impact Report to examine the environmental impacts of sea level rise on the Bayside neighborhood in north Imperial Beach and try a new approach to address sea level rise.

Public comments are due on the NOI/NOP by: February 24, 2025.

Project links:

<https://www.ibbayshorebikeway.com/>

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/10/2025-00337/bayside-community-resiliency-the-living-levee-project-intent-to-prepare-environmental-impact>

- b. Chris Peregrin (TRNERR) gave a brief presentation on the recent Castor Bean (*Ricinus communis*) concern in the Tijuana River Valley.

Presentation link:

<https://trnerr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Castor-Bean-TRNERR-AC2025.02.pdf>

7. Public Comment

No comments were made.

8. Future Agenda Considerations

D.Liden suggested an update on the trash boom in the main channel. Please email C.Peregrin and L.Warner-Lara with any future agenda items (*see emails at top of minutes*).

9. TRNERR Trails Committee meeting

C.Peregrin will put out a poll for the proposed date.

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

Future TRNERR Advisory Council meetings:

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

11. Adjourned at 2:33 PM

The meeting was adjourned.