

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

Tuesday, February 4, 2026, at 1:00-2:30 pm
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 II

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

Chantel Jimenez – US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Acting SDNWRC Project Leader

chantel_jimenez@fws.gov

Sally Brown – USFWS – Refuge Manager

619-964-1980, sally_brown@fws.gov

Mike McCoy – Tijuana Estuary Foundation, *formerly Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association (SWIA)* – President

619-423-0495, mccoy4ib@aol.com

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

619-545-4134, charles.p.bradshaw3.civ@us.navy.mil

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

619-628-1370, chelmer@imperialbeachca.gov

Annica Ly – City of San Diego – Stormwater Department

858-654-4272, AnLy@sandiego.gov

Tara Flint-Silva – US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) – Life Scientist & Project Officer

619-849-1036, FlintSilva.Tara@epa.gov

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

619-891-8089, emily.allen@ibwc.gov

Charles Gailband – SD County Parks – Region Manager

charles.gailband@sdcountyparks.ca.gov

Mike Verderber – SD County Parks – Supervising Park Ranger

619-428-2946, mike.verderber@sdcounty.ca.gov

Sam Jenniches – State Coastal Conservancy – Project Manager

760-832-7365, sjenniches@scc.ca.gov

Megan Hall – California Coastal Commission – Federal Programs Manager

megan.hall@coastal.ca.gov

Chelsea Jander – California Coastal Commission – Coastal Program Analyst

chelsea.jander@coastal.ca.gov

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

619-575-3615 ext. 303, chris.peregrin@parks.ca.gov

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

619-575-3615 ext. 312, lorena.warner-lara@parks.ca.gov

Kristen Goodrich – TRNERR – Coastal Training Program

619-575-3615 ext. 314, kgoodrich@trnerr.org

Haley Calhoun – California State Parks – Interpreter II (Education)

619-575-3613 ext.305, haley.calhoun@parks.ca.gov

Jeff Crooks – TRNERR – Research Coordinator

619-575-3615 ext. 333, jcrooks@trnerr.org

Additional Attendees

Dale Nookester, Public

Joe Ellis, Public

Randy Hawley, Public

Pete Evaristo, Public

Brian McNeece, Public

Andrea Gaspar, Ataaxum Pomkwaan

Kara Cooner, Climate Science Alliance

Daniel Watman, Friends of Friendship Park

Katrina Gates, Cal Climate Action Corps

Dennis Larson, Nexus Planning (Presenter)

Lynn Reizer-Heftmann, TRVEA

Mary J Powell, TRVEA

Todd Philips, City of IB

Ernesto Castañeda, Asm Álvarez

Marya Ahmad, CA State Parks

Elizabeth Wasserman, TRNERR

Molly Herring, TRNERR

Ransses Lopez, TRNERR

Shanasia Sylman, TRNERR

Myriam Valencia, TRNERR

John Zarem, TRNERR Volunteer

1. 1:08 pm Meeting was called to order.

2. AGENDA – The February 3, 2026, agenda was adopted.

3. LAST MEETING MINUTES – The August 5, 2025, and November 4, 2025, minutes were adopted.

4. Member Comments

Lisa Adams – California State Parks – District Superintendent II

a. Nothing to report.

Chantel Jimenez – US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – Acting SDNWRC Project Leader

b. Nothing to report.

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

a. Nothing to report.

Sam Jenniches – State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) – Project Manager

- b. Nothing to report.

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

- a. Todd Phillips was introduced as the new Community Development Director. He previously served 5 years as the Planning Manager for the City of Chula Vista.

Annica Ly – City of San Diego Stormwater Department

- b. Reported no significant updates on the Smuggler’s Gulch burn repair. The City’s Public Utilities Department has requested that the County include these repairs as part of their project, since the Disney Crossing culverts contributed to the berm damage; however, this has not yet been confirmed.
- c. Regarding the Saturn Project, the County has the most current information, and any questions should be directed at them.

Tara Flint-Silva – USEPA – Life Science & Project Officer

- a. EPA reported they continue to work with both sides of the border regarding the Tijuana River Valley. Mexico is in the final stages of meeting the conditions laid out in the MOU signed last summer, which would free up funding for projects directly impacting dry weather flow on the Tijuana side.
- b. Mexico is making advances on its side, like securing funding for upcoming projects.
- c. Reported working with the IBWC in the design process for the expansion of the plant.

Megan Hall – California Coastal Commission – Federal Programs Manager

- a. Reported on the December Commission hearing regarding the Tijuana River Valley pollution crisis. Suggestions, including the formation of an interagency coordination group, were discussed. A draft literature review addressing water quality, ecological issues, and potential knowledge gaps was presented. The hearing is available for viewing on the Commission’s website: <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/>

Charles Gailband – SD County Parks – Region Manager

Mike Verderber – SD County Parks – Supervising Park Ranger

- a. Reported that Olivewood Garden is now operating the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden, which includes 250 individual plot holders and quarter-acre farmers.
- b. Staff are finalizing plans with the Development Division to complete maintenance within their section of Smuggler’s Gulch. A contractor is currently removing trash at the Disney Crossing, with work anticipated to be completed in early February. The team is also addressing trail repairs resulting from the most recent storm. The San Diego County Parks Department is responsible for trash at the land bridge crossing, while areas before that location fall outside of their jurisdiction.

Sean Ford – US Border Patrol – Public Lands Liaison

- a. Not present.

Mike McCoy – Tijuana Estuary Foundation (*formerly SWIA*) – President

- a. Reported resubmitting a county grant.
- b. Raised questions about the industrial pretreatment monitoring on the Mexican side of the border, particularly in relation to the maquiladora industries. Asked whether the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) on both sides of the border is closely monitoring compliance and whether regulations governing industrial pretreatment are being upheld. There is concern about the potential introduction of heavy metals and other industrial byproducts into the waste stream.

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

- a. Not present.

Program Manager Reports

Sally Brown – USFWS – Refuge Manager

- a. The Refuges are approaching nesting season for threatened and endangered birds, and with the unseasonably warm weather, western snowy plovers are already beginning to make nesting scrapes on the Refuges.
- b. During the 2025 nesting season, there were 26 plover (WSP) nests and 77 tern (CLT) nests on the beach north of the river, a decrease from the 56 plover nests and 208 tern nests documented in 2024. (There were 99 CLT nests and 21 WSP nests at Border Field SP.) The reduction in numbers has been attributed to limited prey fish availability, predation by corvids, harriers, peregrines, and gull-billed terns, and an ongoing long-term trend of limited fledging success.
- c. The Refuges will be installing twine fencing around the beach nesting area in the next couple of weeks to protect Western snowy plover and California least tern nests. Their eggs are well camouflaged, and the chicks are small and unable to fly. The public is asked to help provide a safe refuge for them and improve nesting numbers this year by keeping dogs leashed and observing from a distance.
- d. Refuge staff continue to work as part of a consortium of scientists, NGOs, and resource agencies investigating possible reintroduction sites for the critically endangered Pacific pocket mouse. Refuge staff attended the Pacific pocket mouse working group meeting in January. Researchers conducted a habitat assessment on the Refuges in August, access routes were cleared during the winter months, and surveys are planned for spring.
- e. The Refuges are continuing work with Team Ridgway's Rail in a captive rearing effort between State and Federal wildlife agencies, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, SeaWorld San Diego, and the Living Coast Discovery Center. The propagation plan has been revised to address the genetics of the captive population, based on results from a genetic study conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey. In December and January, trapping was conducted to improve the genetics of the captive rearing population.
- f. Surveys for endangered salt marsh bird's-beak were conducted in the marsh this year as part of the Rare Plant Inspect and Manage Monitoring effort by the San Diego Management and Monitoring Program. To read about this management and monitoring effort, visit:

https://sdmmp.com/view_project.php?sdid=SDID_sarah.mccutcheon%40aecom.com_57cf0196dff76#data-files-tab

- g. Following winter rains, the presence of San Diego fairy shrimp was documented within a vernal pool on the Refuges for the first time since 2008.
- h. New McCoy interpretive signs have been installed along the North and South McCoy Trails and provide information on native species, habitats, and restoration efforts within the reserve.
- i. Post and cable fencing has been repaired at several locations along the McCoy Trails.
- j. Maintenance clearing was performed along the refuge trails at the west end of Sunset Avenue this winter. Trail users are asked to remain on designated paths due to the presence of sensitive habitat areas adjacent to the trails.
- k. D. Watman, Friends of Friendship Park asked how trash removal affects snowy plovers and other species during nesting season.
 - S. Brown asked visitors to stay on the hard-packed sand below the wrack line and not to approach the twine fencing. Plovers nest inside these fenced areas, and sometimes nests appear just outside the fence when it feels crowded. Monitors will adjust the fencing to include all nests. Approaching the fence can cause adult plovers to flee, leaving their chicks. When visitors see trash inside the fence, they should not pick it up. Plovers navigate by objects inside the fence, like driftwood or trash, to find their nests, so moving items can confuse them. Trash cleanup is safe below the wrack line, where plovers do not nest because nests would be washed away by the tide.
 - L. Warner-Lara explained that cleanup in nesting areas is challenging because it typically occurs after the nesting season and is also affected by flooding during the rainy season. The timing of rain is unpredictable, so the team tries to perform larger cleanup efforts when conditions allow. For example, this year, flooding two days before Coastal Cleanup Day prevented access to some areas. However, the Urban Corps crew was able to cleanup in other areas, including parts of Border Field.
 - C. Peregrin encouraged anyone interested in trash cleanup to contact E. Wasserman to join the volunteer program. Volunteers work with State Park staff and experienced long-term volunteers. After a brief pause, the program is now gradually resuming. To contact Elizabeth, email volunteer@trnerr.org

Chris Peregrin – TRNERR – Reserve Manager Report

- d. Introduced the new Volunteer Coordinator, Elizabeth Wasserman. She recently retired from the U.S. Geological Survey and previously worked with another research reserve in Alaska.
- e. Border Field State Park (BFSP) is closed due to flooded roads and damage from recent storms. California's Governor declared a state of emergency for the December 23 storm event, which deposited extensive debris on the roadway and trail system. TRNERR staff are working to secure emergency funding to remove debris and complete minor repairs to the roadway.
- f. The BFSP Resilience, Access, and Habitat Restoration project to realign the road and restore daily vehicular access to the park is progressing well. The draft Environmental Impact Report was published, and the public review period ended. Staff are evaluating options with the design team to determine the feasibility of maintaining public access during construction. Public comments and the final Environmental Impact Report will be

published in March. The estimated \$12 million project is expected to go out to bid between March and June.

- g. Reported on efforts to restore public access to Monument Mesa. The Monument Mesa Improvements Project is focused on interpretive development and is working with the design office to bring on a consultant, PlaceWorks, to support community engagement and incorporate public input. The project is budgeted at approximately \$5 million.
- h. Introduced, Haley Calhoun, who was recently promoted to Interpreter II for California State Parks. She was recognized statewide for interpretive excellence for her role in the development of the education programs at Old Town San Diego State Historic Park.

Haley Calhoun – California State Parks – Education Report

- a. Introduced herself. She has worked district-wide for State Parks, from Border Field in the south to Carlsbad State Beach in the north. Her work has focused on K–12 school access and educational programs.
- b. Reported that the schedule for public walks and bird walks has changed to every Saturday.
- c. Reported that the Salt Marsh Secrets virtual school program for 3rd–5th grade students is ongoing, although attendance has declined statewide.
- d. Reported that interpretive staff offers in-person programs to elementary schools, with plans to expand these programs to middle and high schools in the fall.
- e. Reported that field trip attendance has declined; however, with a full staff now in place, attendance is expected to increase in 2026.
- f. Provided updates on curriculum improvements, including the development of a new booking system for teachers, collaboration with the research team to create an ArcGIS StoryMap resource for self-guided programs, recruitment and training of new program volunteers.
- g. Reported collaboration with National Geographic’s Explorer program to plan a teacher training in May, where participants will learn about the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, the ecology of the Tijuana Estuary, and strategies for teaching about these systems in their classrooms.
- h. Reported on an accessibility project to create wayfinding and interpretive codes that guide blind visitors along the North McCoy Trail while teaching them about native plants.
- i. Reported on the “Love Your Wetlands Day” event at the UCSD Kendall-Frost Marsh Reserve this weekend, where scientists will share their findings. The event will include cultural activities and a guided marsh cleanup. Interpretive staff will lead activities for children, including a read-aloud session and artifact presentations.

Lorena Warner-Lara – TRNERR – Stewardship Report

- a. Reported preparations for nesting season, including engaging Urban Corps to focus on Arundo removal in Border Field, beach cleanup, and visitor center projects.
- b. Outside of nesting season, there will be a focus on invasive species removal.
- c. Reported on the Park Champions event through the California State Parks Foundation, where participants completed planting around the visitor center.
- d. Provided updates on the Nelson Sloan Quarry Restoration and Beneficial Reuse of Sediment project, which remains in the regulatory phase. Anticipate attending the Regional Water Board public meeting in May. Efforts are underway to work with the

County to update the ROE and obtain necessary documentation, including a geotechnical survey for the City of San Diego coastal and site development permits. The work order with Dudek has been extended to support advancing to project implementation. Additionally, contract updates are in progress to include language allowing material from the Goat Canyon sediment basin to be transported to the Nelson Sloan site.

- e. Reported that Program Manager reports will be delayed by three months due to shifting schedule as a result of funding delays from NOAA.

Jeff Crooks – TRNERR – Research Report

- a. Reported on monitoring programs, including three data loggers in the estuary that measure water depth, dissolved oxygen, salinity, and temperature. Mentioned improved oxygen conditions compared to a year ago, but still seeing periods of low dissolved oxygen.
- b. Reported collaboration with the USFWS and the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation to deploy data loggers in San Diego Bay as part of the Otay River restoration project.
- c. Discussed efforts to implement the TETRP (Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program) project and plans to hire a restoration scientist/project coordinator.

Kristen Goodrich – TRNERR – Training and Engagement Report (*formerly Coastal Training Program (CTP)*)

- a. Reported from the meeting at the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Florida, noting preparations to represent the nonprofit National Estuarine Research Reserve Association at the Executive Committee meeting in March. Also reported full funding for FY26, ongoing planning for FY27 strategy, and efforts to respond to administration priorities.
- b. Mentioned the Marine Debris Leadership Academy and ongoing collaboration with Sea Grant and a cohort of marine debris leaders to develop a coalition to address marine debris challenges.

5. New Business

Update on the City of Imperial Beach Community Resilience Plan, Chris Helmer (City of Imperial Beach) and Dennis Larson (Consultant)

Presentation link: https://tijuanaestuary.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/IBCRP_TRNERR_20260203.pdf

6. Public Comment

B.McNeece, Public

Responded to M. McCoy's member update: Brian had previously been a member of the IBWC Citizens Forum and had reviewed Minute 333. He observed that the document made no mention of industrial pretreatment projects for Tijuana. McNeece recalled an email exchange involving David Schlesinger and Sally Spener on the issue. Schlesinger, who worked for the San Diego Metro Wastewater Department, had secured grant funding to train Mexican technicians to identify problem areas and initiate treatment. According to McNeece, Spener indicated that the program had been effective, with industrial wastewater being pretreated and monitored. However, due to security concerns for U.S. trainers and the eventual depletion of grant funding, the pretreatment and monitoring

efforts in Tijuana were discontinued. He noted that these events occurred more than 20 years ago

E.Castañeda, Asm Álvarez

Public comment: Ernesto commented on Assembly Bill 35. He explained that in November 2024, California voters approved Proposition 4, which allocated \$10 billion for climate-resilient projects, including water infrastructure. However, the measure did not eliminate significant bureaucratic processes within state agencies. AB35 seeks to address this issue by creating exemptions under the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), thereby reducing the time required for funding to reach San Diego. The bill is sponsored by the County of San Diego and is currently pending in the Senate.

Public comment: The Office of Assemblymember David Alvarez is planning a Cali-Baja tour, with a theme of the Tijuana River Valley. The tour will include site visits to the International Wastewater Treatment (IBWC) plant and the San Antonio de los Buenos treatment plant. Participants will also have lunch on the Tijuana side, visit the trash boom located south of Las Americas, and stop at Saturn Boulevard. The date is yet to be determined. For enrollment, please contact:

Ernesto Castañeda
Field Representative
Office of Assemblymember David Alvarez, 80th Assembly District
276 Church Avenue, Suite D
Chula Vista, CA 91910
Phone: (619) 498-8580
Email: ernesto.castaneda@asm.ca.gov

B.McNeece, Public

Question: Do you know if JB1 is fully installed and operating at the ITP?

T. Flint's answer: That Junction Box 1 is designed to accept a high volume of flow from Mexico for treatment at the ITP. She explained that the project has been under construction for an extended period and that it was ultimately determined a new junction box would need to be built to replace the original. She added that the new structure is projected to be completed by the end of February 2026.

D.Watman, Friends of Friendship Park

Question: Many of the 30 comments were letters that represent larger numbers, probably 100s of people. Is there an idea of when RAHR will break ground?

C. Peregrin's answer: that RAHR stands for the Resilience, Access, and Habitat Restoration project, which involves realigning the access road in Border Field State Park. He stated that the project is anticipated to go out to bid in June, with groundbreaking expected in the fall.

Question: Where exactly was the breach in Smuggler Gulch?

C.Gailband answer: The breach was in the same area as in previous years, with flows moving toward Hollister Street.

7. Future Agenda Considerations

Please email C. Peregrin and L. Warner-Lara with any future agenda items (*see emails at top of minutes*).

8. TRNERR Trails Committee meeting

Monday, February 23rd, at 9:30 am, meet at the entrance to Border Field SP. The trails are flooded, so it is not yet determined which trail will be used.

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

- Tuesday, May 5, 2026
- Tuesday, August 4, 2026
- Tuesday, November 3, 2026

10. Adjourned at 2:37 PM

The meeting was adjourned.