



## **BORDER LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE Policy Statement 2006-02**

Supporting Public Participation Guidelines for Binational Water and Sewer Projects  
Along the U.S. – Mexico Border Region

### **BACKGROUND**

Water is among the most limited resources along the U.S. – Mexico border region. Surface and groundwater resources are threatened by contamination, including agricultural runoff, industrial discharge, and untreated sewage. Increasing demand for water has led to the rapid depletion of aquifers. Inadequate water supply and inefficient use of water could limit future regional development.

The focus of many governmental organizations working along the U.S. - Mexico border region has been on protecting water quality and conserving and improving water supplies. However, the construction of projects is often delayed in communities that lack the financial resources for planning and construction of municipal drinking water systems or sewage treatment facilities. In addition, many rapidly growing cities that have these systems in place cannot keep pace with population growth, and pay for necessary expansion and maintenance costs.

The Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) has successfully helped plan, fund and develop dozens of water and sewage projects in all 10 border states. These projects have improved drinking water quality, and increased the amount of sewage that is collected and treated in border communities.

The BECC is a partner with the North American Development Bank (NADBank) which provides funding for the BECC via grants and loans. These moneys, along with funds from U.S. EPA's Border Environment Infrastructure Fund, have helped border communities plan and develop 105 projects worth more than \$2 billion primarily in the areas of water and sanitation infrastructure. The following is a breakdown of projects and funding per border state:

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Water/Sewage Projects

**United States:** A total of 69 projects worth \$997.34 million\*

California: 11 projects worth \$182.59 (in millions)

Arizona: 12 projects worth \$106.22

New Mexico: 7 projects worth \$52.65

Texas: 39 projects worth \$655.88

**Mexico:** A total of 36 projects worth \$1.18 billion\*

Baja California: 9 projects worth \$497.19 (in millions)

Sonora: 11 projects worth \$97.78

Chihuahua: 7 projects worth \$200.06

Coahuila: 3 projects worth \$154.80

Nuevo Leon: 1 project worth \$1.40

Tamaulipas: 5 projects worth \$232.00

Total Certified Projects to Date: 105 projects

Total Certified Investment: \$ 2.18 billion

Equally important is that these projects have followed public participation guidelines developed by the BECC. Under BECC project certification rules, public meetings, increased transparency, and community participation is required during the planning of major infrastructure projects.

The impact of the BECC's public participation program reaches beyond the project development process since it has become an important tool for communities to achieve transparency and valuable public input in the decision-making process. For some communities, this new framework for public participation has introduced important changes regarding the manner in which community development in general is envisioned and promoted.

The totality of funded projects that have been developed from the BECC's model of community-based, long-term planning have resulted in the improvement, upgrade and expansion of wastewater facilities, collection systems, and the construction of reclamation plants along the U.S. – Mexico border region that help conserve local water supplies and protect surface water in nearby rivers and canyons.

\* Source: North American Development Bank Website

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Given the importance of protecting and conserving water resources in the border region, and the related importance of increasing public involvement and participation in the planning process, the members of the Border Legislative Conference (BLC) adopt the following statement regarding public participation guidelines for binational water and sewage projects along the U.S. – Mexico border:

- The BLC recognizes the Border Environment Cooperation Commission and North American Development Bank for successfully developing a Public Participation Manual outlining planning guidelines for border communities and project sponsors;
- The BLC acknowledges that community-based infrastructure projects have enhanced the quality of life for border residents by improving water supply and protecting water quality in many communities in the border region;
- The BLC acknowledges that water and sewer infrastructure projects require considerable investment of public funding, which may contribute to increased service fees for residents of the border region, making the early involvement of the public in planning these projects essential for their long-term acceptance and success;
- The BLC encourages and supports projects in the border region that adopt Public Participation Guidelines similar to those developed by the BECC, with the goal of improving project success, and utilizing the financial and technical resources available from this agency; and
- The BLC promotes the development of binational watershed councils that develop, review and coordinate binational water management strategies and sustainable regional goals.
- The BLC encourages the federal governments of the U.S. and Mexico to continue supporting and funding the BECC and the NADBank, as well as the U.S. EPA's Border Environment Infrastructure Fund, which are critical to the development of infrastructure projects to address environmental needs along the border region.

Adopted at the Thirteenth Border Legislative Conference on May 13, 2006 by participating legislators from California, New Mexico, Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas. Legislators from Texas and Arizona were not present due to special legislative sessions.