



Safeguarding water resources is essential to the vitality and viability of a community. Protecting the quality of water resources is particularly important in the U.S.- Mexico border region where clean water supplies are scarce. Both countries, under the La Paz Agreement of 1983, have recognized the importance of a cooperative binational environmental effort to address this issue. The Water Workgroup is composed of a binational team of U.S. and Mexican representatives. This fact sheet presents information on the Border XXI Water Workgroup, interagency cooperation, and specific projects initiated by the Water Workgroup.

OBJECTIVES

In 1996, the Water Workgroup established the following 5-year objectives:

- ❑ Develop and rehabilitate infrastructure for drinking water, wastewater collection, and wastewater treatment
- ❑ Develop and implement pretreatment programs
- ❑ Establish binational watershed planning and management priorities and develop a program to systematically map and characterize key transboundary surface and groundwater basins
- ❑ Continue and expand programs for monitoring the quality of surface and ground waters and store the data using approved protocols
- ❑ Develop personnel training and development programs related to water management issues
- ❑ Develop consciousness about water and promote its efficient and rational use
- ❑ Encourage public participation in water infrastructure decision-making processes



The Border XXI Program

The Border XXI Program (Border XXI) is an innovative binational effort between the United States and Mexico to protect the natural resources and environment of the border region. The mission of Border XXI is to achieve a clean environment, protect public health and natural resources, and encourage sustainable development along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Border XXI is implemented through nine binational workgroups. The nine workgroups under the Border XXI Program are *1 water, 2 air, 3 hazardous and solid waste, 4 pollution prevention, 5 contingency planning and emergency response, 6 cooperative enforcement and compliance, 7 environmental information resources, 8 natural resources, and 9 environmental health.*

Water Workgroup Projects



Several environmental infrastructure development projects focused on establishing and upgrading wastewater collection, treatment, and distribution are underway. Similarly, projects are in progress in the following areas: pollution prevention, watershed planning and management, water quality monitoring, training and development, efficient water use, and public participation. These projects are listed in the Water Workgroup's Annual Implementation Plan.

Some of the projects discussed in the Annual Implementation Plan include (1) rehabilitation and upgrade of existing wastewater treatment facilities and an increase in water and sewage lines as components of the Mexicali, Mexico and Nogales/Nogales projects, (2) water supply expansion and sewage plant improvements as a part of the Naco, Mexico project, (3) water quality monitoring projects at the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez Transboundary Aquifer and several other project sites, and (4) a wastewater operator training program Mexicali, Baja California.

The South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant is an example of an environmental infrastructure development project. A cooperative binational effort among the EPA, the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), the State of California, City of San Diego, the State of Baja California, and the National Water Commission (CNA) in Mexico was initiated to plan, design, finance, and construct an international wastewater treatment plant near Tijuana, Mexico.

In the past, raw sewage was discharged into the Tijuana River, which eventually made its way into the Pacific Ocean. Treated and untreated wastewater was also directly discharged near shore into the Pacific Ocean from Tijuana. As a result, high levels of fecal coliform from insufficiently treated sewage have been measured along the coast. Beaches were often closed because of the threat to the health of people involved in recreational activities. Clean drinking water resources were also at risk of being contaminated by sewage discharges into the Tijuana River system. These risks were brought to the attention of both the U.S. and Mexican governments.

The Tijuana wastewater treatment facility was upgraded to meet the demands of increased population and industrialization. In the past, measures have been taken to minimize sewage discharge into the environment, but these efforts did not adequately address the contamination problems. U.S. and Mexican agencies, coordinated by the Water Workgroup, developed a comprehensive wastewater treatment infrastructure plan to increase wastewater treatment capacity. The proposed plan called for constructing an international wastewater treatment plant on the U.S. side of the border. Both countries approved the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant plans.



Aerial photograph of the 75 acre South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant project under construction on the U.S. side of the border. The treatment plant was completed in the Spring of 1997.



Interagency Cooperation

The Water Workgroup is co-chaired by EPA and CNA, and coordinates with BECC, NADBank, and IBWC on infrastructure projects. In addressing the objectives of the Water Workgroup, coordination with the other workgroups is important. For example, the Water Workgroup and the Natural Resources Workgroup interact on freshwater and marine resource issues on a continuing basis because of the overlap in issues and objectives.

In addition to other federal, state, local and private entities, the EPA, the Binational Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC), and the North American Development Bank (NADBank) play a significant role in developing, certifying, and financing environmental infrastructure projects. The BECC and NADBank are international organizations created under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) only for the border area and only for environmental infrastructure projects focused on drinking water, wastewater, and solid waste projects. The BECC certifies the technical feasibility and integrity of environmental infrastructure projects in the border region. NADBank reviews BECC-certified projects and either approves or declines financing. NADBank receives its funds from both the United States and Mexico, with capital shares at \$450 million. EPA works closely with the BECC and NADBank on environmental infrastructure projects to (1) assure quality of BECC-NADBank projects by its representation on both organizations' Boards of Directors, and (2) appropriate funds in the form of grants to BECC-NADBank projects, Border XXI workgroup projects, and other environmental projects.

The plant was designed to meet the current needs of the residents and industry within the region, with the ability to be upgraded. Construction of this advanced primary treatment plant has been completed. An ocean outfall for treated sewage will be completed by November 1998. Alternatives for a secondary treatment facility have been proposed and will be considered upon additional funding.



Map of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant project site. The South Bay ocean outfall that extends 3.5 miles offshore is scheduled for completion this Fall.



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