

Preface

The report that follows reflects the Good Neighbor Environmental Board's resolution, decided upon early in 2002, to make an even greater effort to hear directly from border-region residents whose daily lives, family health, and future are so profoundly affected by national policies that shape the region's environmental infrastructure.

Meeting sites during the past year were carefully chosen. For the first community meeting of the year, in February, the Board selected Calexico, California, opting to meet in the library of the downtown Calexico campus of San Diego State University. The second meeting took place in an historic hotel in downtown El Paso, Texas, close to public transportation to nearby neighborhoods including those in its sister city, Juárez, Chihuahua. And the final meeting of the year, thanks to the hospitality of local officials, was held in the Nogales, Arizona, Mayor and Council Chambers in October.

Public turnout at these meetings demonstrated the benefits of choosing accessible locations. People who attended ranged from the heads of major border institutions to concerned individuals from the local community to county officials and tribal representatives. In these community settings, during the Public Comment sessions, the Board heard what local residents thought about the water debt, new power plants, illegal immigrants on ranching and grazing land, and more. To complement this public input, the Board invited local experts to speak at each of its meetings on a specific environmental topic of broad interest. Speaker affiliations included local, state and regional governments; tribes; the private sector; academic institutions; and environmental and other non-profit groups on whatever theme they had chosen.

The result was an unprecedented level of information-sharing and constructive debate during 2002. The consensus the Board has reached in this report is shaped, more than ever, by what it heard. It also is shaped by the wide-ranging expertise of the Board members themselves. Many of the contributors are individuals who live with their families in one of the four U.S. border states, while others are senior officials in federal agencies who help to shape borderland environmental policies. Individually and collectively, Board members worked to put together recommendations this year that are both useful and timely.

The topics the Board has selected for its recommendations this year represent some of the most contentious issues the region and nation face: Water Resources, Power Plants, Human Health, and Natural Resources Conservation. The advice that follows reflects the Board's intent to decrease contention, to increase cooperation at all levels based on full participation, and to foster policies and actions that result in real improvements.

One final note: Under federal law, the Board is charged with advising the President and Congress on "the need for

implementation of environmental and infrastructure projects" in the four U.S. border states. The Board's view is that it can best serve that mission by broadly interpreting what is meant by the term "environmental and infrastructure projects." Thus, for the Water Resources section of this report, the debate underlying the recommendations encompassed not only supply delivery systems but also broad concepts that embody sustainability, such as watersheds and habitat. For Power Plants, it involved not only air emissions, but also alternative energy sources. In the case of the Human Health section, the connection to environmental and infrastructure projects includes the transportation infrastructure at border crossings, as well as data that suggests possible links between high levels of asthma in children living in border communities and the presence of brick kilns. And as for Natural Resources Conservation, which is featured for the first time in the Board's history in this report, the Board recognizes that managed lands are an integral part of the environment, that they include the plant and animal life that sustains ranching and grazing land, and that a love of open land and intergenerational land stewardship feature strongly in what might be called the area's rural "cultural infrastructure."

The Board welcomes feedback on this, its latest, set of recommendations.

