Meeting Summary
United States-Mexico Border Field Coordinating Committee
Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Texas
October 25-27, 2005

Participants

See attached attendance list.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Lloyd Woosley, FCC Chair, welcomed the attendees. Lloyd noted that this would be the last meeting for John Klein, the remaining FCC charter member, and Denny Buckler, a long-time member. They are both retiring from federal service. Jodi Stroklund, the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Manager, oriented the group to the South Texas Refuge Complex. The complex includes the Laguna Atascosa, Lower Rio Grande Valley, and Santa Ana NWRs. She noted that the refuge friends group provided food and refreshments during the day. Lloyd thanked the complex management and staff for hosting the meeting.

Development of the Lower Rio Grande Refuge Complex

Ken Merritt, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Project Leader for the South Texas Refuge Complex, provided a history and current status of the refuge complex. The refuge complex is spread out over four counties, traverses 290 miles of the Rio Grande River, and includes large parts of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the South Padre Island. The USFWS is legislatively authorized to expand the refuge complex to 300,000 acres. Considered the "jewel" of the national refuge system, Santa Ana NWR dates to 1943 and receives 150,000 visitors per year on its 2,088 acres. Ocelots are one of the signature species for Laguna Atascosa. The Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR encompasses 90,000 acres on 115 tracts of land. Ken stressed the goal of creating international corridors for wildlife.

Ken highlighted some of the programs in the refuge complex:

<u>Land Acquisition</u> - This is a dynamic and important management tool wherein USFWS uses an opportunistic approach of acquiring available parcels. The boundaries of the complex are being shaped by new acquisitions. This is occurring in an active real estate market. McAllen is the third fastest growing city in the nation, primarily due to international trade.

<u>Habitat Restoration</u> – Many of the acquired parcels have been farmed. To pay for restoring acquired lands to natural habitat, USFWS leases some of the parcels for continued cultivation. Ten thousand acres have been restored to-date. Sixty plant species have been planted to create native brush and grassland habitat. Invasive species are a problem. Buffel grass out competes native grasses. In present day South Texas native grasses comprise only 1% of the grass biomass, while introduced grasses make up 99%. The restoration process includes chemically treating invasive plants for three years. Tamarisk, which has only become a problem along this part of the Rio Grande River in recent years, is also being treated. Jim Stefanov suggested they

consider introducing the beetle that eats tamarisk which is showing promising results elsewhere. The Balvia Grande project will restore 10,000 acres of wetlands.

Law Enforcement – With six officers, the South Texas Refuge Complex has one of the larger law enforcement programs in USFWS. The officers patrol on the refuge as well as handle migratory bird violations off the refuge. They coordinate extensively with other agencies, such as the Border Patrol (BP).

Fire Management – The refuge complex's staff of 20 full-time firefighters is also relatively large in the USFWS system. Most fires in the region are caused by humans, as opposed to lightning strikes. This region has a year-round fire season with 240 fires during 2004. Local brush is not fire tolerant or adapted to fire, so fires can impact the plant community.

Oil and Gas Activities – On NWR lands in Texas, typically the U.S. does not own the mineral rights, which commonly were retained by a previous land owner. As a result, USFWS manages oil and gas exploration and development on these lands. They charge mitigation fees to fund restoration of any residual impacts. Legislation three years ago allowed the USFWS to charge mitigation fees, which is a big improvement for their management capability. The South Texas Refuge Complex manages 217 oil and gas wells, which is one of the highest numbers nationally in the refuge system. Exploration and development in this area has significantly expanded in the last four years.

Ecotourism – Ecotourism, primarily bird and butterfly enthusiasts, now rivals agriculture in the local economy. The South Texas Refuge Complex is in a highly diverse area where different ecosystems from the north, south, east and west converge. While agriculture is decreasing, ecotourism is increasing, estimated at $125 to $140 million per year. Some private ranchers offer ecotourism on their lands as well. There are great opportunities for expansion and enhancement of ecotourism. South Texas now hosts nine sites of the World Birding Center and are looking to add a 10th site in the mountains of northern Mexico. The area also includes the 100-acre North American Butterfly Association's International Butterfly Park.

Challenges - Ken summarized by listing the following challenges, and by stating that partnerships are key to their success.

- 95% of the native brush land has been cleared.
- 20 federally-listed endangered species live in the area.
- Rapid human population growth.
- Water delivery needs for the communities.
- Urban interface issues.

Kemp's Ridley Nesting Along the Texas Coast: Update

Donna Shaver of the National Park Service (NPS) gave an update on her work since her previous presentation to the FCC in January 2002. Of the five species of sea turtles found in this part of the Gulf of Mexico, the endangered Kemp's Ridley is by far the most frequent species detected

off the coast of Texas. Multiple partners in Mexico and the U.S. have collaborated to successfully protect and manage the turtles. Historically they nested near the village of Rancho Nueva, Mexico where in 1947, 40,000 turtles were documented during one day. Subsequently, their numbers reduced substantially and in 1968 it was feared they would become extinct. Padre Island National Seashore was designated as a supplemental nesting location. At 104 miles, it is one of the longest stretches of protected barrier islands in the nation.

Kemp's Ridley eggs were relocated from Mexico to Padre Island. The survival rate was 70%. The hatchings were released on the beach, re-collected after they walked into the surf, and head started in captivity for 9 to 11 months. After being tagged, these U.S. imprinted head start turtles were released off Padre Island and the Matagorda Peninsula. Since then many more hatchlings from Mexico have been released in Texas, referred to as Mexico imprinted head starts.

Nesting season for the Kemp's Ridley is April to mid-July. Turtles lay about 100 eggs at a time, and are only on the beach for 45 minutes for the nesting process. As a result, detection of the eggs by NPS patrols and by the public is vital to the recovery program. This information and data gathered from turtles marked with transmitters are used to predict 1) when and where turtles will nest and 2) turtle movements. They are found as far east as the west coast of Florida and south into Mexico. Eggs found are collected and incubated to increase the rate of survival, which is 80% for those nesting in Texas.

Important findings include:

- First confirmed return turtle to Padre Island was documented in 1996,
- Head started turtles are nesting in the wild,
- Individual turtle documented to nest both in the U.S. and Mexico,
- First Kemp's Ridley documented in 2002 on the upper Texas coast,
- Most Kemp's Ridleys still nest in Mexico,
- 55 per cent of those nesting in the U.S. do so on North Padre Island, and
- Kemp's Ridley nesting is increasing.

A concern is that some sea turtles become stranded in Texas. Though the numbers have generally decreased since 1996, 200 to 500 are found on the Texas coast each year with 80-90% found dead. This problem is decreasing as a result of reducing human threats, such as closing coastal waters to shrimp trawling during nesting season.

Donna's summarized by saying that wild and head started sea turtles are succeeding, nesting is increasing, and Kemp's Ridley conservation is an endangered species success story in the making.

GIS Applications for Studying the Battle of Palo Alto

Rolando Garza of the NPS discussed the role of GIS in resource management, in particular historical battlefields. Palo Alto, located north of Brownsville, Texas, was the site of the first battle of the U.S./Mexican War. In 1845-46, U.S. President Polk posted U.S. Army forces in

Corpus Christi as a show of force in negotiations with Mexico over the international boundary. After a series of battles (including Palo Alto) in 1846-47, in what is now the southwestern U.S., Polk declared war on Mexico. The war raised the global credibility of the U.S. Army. At the end of the war in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe not only established the international boundary, but also set the tone for future Mexico/U.S. relations.

The NPS is using GIS to help manage the recently created Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site. GIS applications include tracking land acquisitions, keeping tab of facilities, mapping vegetation types, and comparing them with historical vegetation types derived from 1934 aerial photos. The agency is trying to reconstruct the 1846 landscape. They have started an archaeological investigation and have collected and categorized over 500 artifacts. They are gaining a better understanding and analysis of the battle. For instance, they have learned that the Mexican army was not adequately armed and that it underestimated the ability of the U.S. Army.

Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project

Chris Anzaldua, of the International Boundary and Water Commission's (IBWC), gave an overview of this extensive project. Project components include:

- 270 miles of levees (rivers and interior),
- 30,000 acres of interior floodway,
- More than 550 irrigation and drainage structures,
- 2 international diversion dams, Anzalduas Dam and Retamal Dam, and
- 14 gaging stations (river and interior),

The project provides flood protection for Mexican and U.S. citizens on both sides of the border. Mexico manages the levies and reservoirs in their part of the system. A maximum of 105,000 cfs of flood waters are diverted into each country's off-river floodways. The maximum flow allowed in the Rio Grande is 20,000 cfs in the Valley.

Most floods events occur during the hurricane season starting in June. IBWC can go into 24-hour operations for the duration of such flood events. IBWC has not gone into this level of operations since 1988. They closely coordinate with their Mexican section of IBWC. Other aspects of flood control operations include:

- IBWC coordinates with federal, state and local emergency entities;
- Flood diversion flows are equally diverted to Mexico and the U.S.; and
- Both countries jointly operate Anzalduas and Retamal Dams to ensure proper flood operations.

Most of IBWC's day-to-day work involves maintenance activities, such as mowing inside floodways (for which they coordinate with USFWS to maintain wildlife corridors) and making sure mechanical systems are operating properly.

Corps/IBWC Integrated Assessment of Flood Control Levees in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Jim Stefanov of USGS described an assessment that has been conducted on the 270-mile levee system. The *Problem* is to determine what is inside the levees and how they were built. The *Objectives* are to perform a condition assessment of the system and develop a comprehensive geospatial database. The *General Approach* is to identify failure mechanisms, such as overtopping, slope failures, or sand boils under the levees; define the geology; and test different surveying methods. LIDAR surveys use an airborne laser survey instrument to look at potential slope stability areas. Geophysical surveys can investigate to depths of 100 feet. Indirect surveying results were ground-truthed. The accuracy of airborne and ground surveys compared reasonably well. Core samples were taken to detect and evaluate any anomalies.

The project also mapped old river channels. They determined that the Rio Grande has meandered widely. Criteria were developed, and used to score levees in each of the 164 reaches of the river.

Jim stressed that the assessment yielded several promising *Conclusions*. The methodology worked very well. Airborne surveys are a good technique for long, linear features. The techniques are good for inventory and modeling. Ground surveys correlated well with aerial surveys, borings, and geophysical and geological data. Low conductivity zones are potential problems areas for levee flooding. Use of a geographic information system (GIS) is critical for managing and interpreting such a large amount of geospatial data. This assessment method can be used elsewhere, including New Orleans.

Border Environmental Health Project: On-Line Demonstration

Denny Buckler of USGS provided an update of the Border Environmental Health Project. The border region is characterized by a very fragile, diverse, and important environment; extreme population growth; and an environment that is stressed. The *Objectives* of the project are to investigate the linkage between the condition of the physical environment and human health issues, and to develop a bi-national internet mapping service containing natural resource data to help planners, managers, and citizens make informed decisions. A second objective is to create a data portal to allow users to integrate data sets into their own GIS systems.

The *Project Scope* will eventually be border wide from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. The pilot area is the Lower River Grande Valley, which is already data rich. Denny emphasized it is important to create a bi-national data set. The project is creating static maps and dynamic maps using an internet mapping service (IMS), which allows data manipulation. Project designers wanted to investigate linkages through applications and then try it out. They adjusted Mexico and U.S. land cover data types to make them seamless. They looked at the relations between land use and potential sources of contaminants, and between geology and water flow paths. They searched areas with potential for mosquito breeding habitat.

Denny believes the pilot project has set up a process than can be applied to the entire border. Partnerships and collaboration have been essential for the project success. He likened GIS to a meeting place where a wide range of people and data come together.

Bi-National Ecosystem Team for the Border Segment in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Ernesto Reyes of USFWS Ecological Services described the Bi-national Ecosystem Team, which was established in 1994. He noted that:

- Since 1920, more than 95% of natural habitat in the area has been converted to agriculture and urban sprawl;
- More than 90% of the riparian areas have been depleted;
- Population growth rates from 1990-2000 in different parts of the Lower Rio Grande Valley have ranged from 23-86%;
- Approximately 11.8 million people live in Mexico and the U.S. in this region;
- Population of the Mexican municipalities doubles every nine years;,
- Over 35% of the Texas population along the border lives in poverty;
- There are 43 threatened and endangered species in the Texas border region, including 20 along in the Valley;
- The Valley has a rich diversity of species that includes 500 birds, 300 butterflies, and 1,600 plants;
- Nine international bridges are denuded of vegetation beneath them and thus represent a barrier to wildlife migration, such as like ocelots; and
- BP drag roads and lights also impact habitat.

In 2002, the Ecosystem Team set up a core group of Mexican and U.S. officials to write an ecosystem management plan for the border corridor, i.e. 60 miles north and south from the border. The plan was completed in six months. Ernesto is not aware of a comparable plan elsewhere along the border. Plan objectives are to 1) maintain and improve water quality, 2) manage and improve habitat, 3) identify key species, 4) conserve and restore focal habitats, 5) increase public awareness of the value of natural resources, and 6) promote outdoor recreation activities (ecotourism). The Binational Ecosystem Team also is working on establishing wildlife corridors and conservation agreements.

Recently, a 1.6 million acre, national protected area was designated in the Sierra Picachos of Mexico. Wildlife corridors will link it to the Rio Grande. There also is the 1.3 million acre Laguna Madre National Protected Area. People continue to live and farm within protected areas inside Mexico, but population growth is limited and non-compatible land uses are restricted.

The Ecosystem Team is working on restoration and provides advice to communities on conservation and ecotourism. It also provides basic fire training and environmental education to Mexican schools. Ernesto said that this is a very unique level of binational conservation. He then introduced two speakers from PRONATURA that attended the meeting at his invitation.

Proyectos Fronterizos of PRONATURA Noreste

PRONATURA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) addressing resource conservation issues in Mexico. Alfonso Bata, from their Matamoras office, described some of their current activities and projects within three regions (coastal plains, wetlands, and rainforest) covering three states of Mexico east of the Sierra Madres. Other PRONATURA regions are in the Chihuahuan Desert and the Sierra Madres.

- The Planeaccion Ecoregion (ecoregional planning), which will create a natural protected area in the Laguna Mountains. It involves restoration in the Laguna Madres and construction of a dike. It will provide an important waterbody for ducks. SEMARNAT and USFWS are partners in this effort, with funding from the USFWS. More information is available on The Nature Conservancy website.
- PRONATURA often enlists the support of communities, ranchers, and others as a bottom-up approach to establishing and managing national protected areas.
- The Matoral Espinoso Tamanlipeco Management Plan calls for restoration of 25,000 hectares impacted by cattle grazing. It will connect biological corridors with another 1 million acre restored area in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

PRONATURA also is:

- Working with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to survey three endangered plants in Mexico,
- Negotiating conservation agreements with ten ranches for a wildlife corridor along the Laguna Madres in partnership with the Nature Conservancy and Environmental Defense Fund,
- Buying land in Matamoras for enhancement of aquatic resources,
- Surveying distribution of Piping Plover in Laguna Madre,
- Seeking to purchase habitat for ocelots,
- Providing environmental education to children and their parents,
- Working with communities and seeking funding for them to help manage natural resources,
- Using fish product remains as feed for animals,
- Pursuing projects in waste and waste water disposal, and
- Has helped a community develop ecotourism and sport fishing to allow them to diversify their economic base.

Alfonso noted that more than half of these industries are run by women.

Alberto Contreras described the PRONATURA project to survey the distribution of Devils River Minnow in its historic range, particularly in Coahuila, Mexico. Until 2005, it was thought this fish was extirpated in several areas. The surveys have found them in six historic locations. The objective of the survey is to document the status of the minnow in historic and potentially new locations, and to better characterize its habitat. PRONATURA is preparing a Memorandum of Understanding with TPWD to conduct more surveys. Conditions of fish habitat have

deteriorated. The minnow requires a two to three meter wide stretches of clear water. Streams that could support the fish are currently low. Some are becoming salted or polluted. There are also threats from livestock and habitat fragmentation.

Ocelot Corridors in South Texas

Mitch Sternberg and Brady McGee from the South Texas National Wildlife Refuge Complex reported that ocelots were historically found from the Gulf Coast region north to San Antonio. Over the last 150 years, the cat has only been found in the South Texas. USFWS currently only knows of two breeding populations, with one on private land and one on the Laguna Atascosa Refuge. The two populations are not intermingling. A population viability assessment determined that there is a 65% chance the populations will disappear in 100 years if nothing is done. There are only 30-80 animals in the two populations that are threatened as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation, and increased development in the Valley. Forty-five per cent of ocelot mortality is from vehicle collisions.

Ocelot habitat is dense thorn scrub down to ground level. Larger culverts under roads can potentially allow safe crossing of highways. Building wildlife corridors is key, and the USFWS is entering into habitat conservation partnerships with private landowners, Environmental Defense Fund, Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and TPWD. Some of the tools available are a landowner conservation assistance program, a program through NRCS to plant and protect brush habitat, conservation easements, and land acquisition.

Impacts of Border Security and Illegal Immigration on the South Texas Ecosystem

Jeff Rupert of the USFWS presented a summary of the challenges of managing a wildlife refuge on the border.

- The McAllen BP sector is split into seven stations, each headed by a Patrol Agent in Charge, which presents significant communications and training challenges.
- Seizures of cocaine are much larger in this sector than elsewhere in the U.S. In 2003, over 50,000 pounds of marijuana as well as large quantities of heroin and cocaine were seized.
- Some people believe this sector has unique problems because these smuggled items are big dollar items and organized crime is more entrenched in this region.
- There are an unusually high number of apprehensions of undocumented immigrants from countries other than Mexico. Ninety per cent of the “other than Mexicans” (OTMs) apprehended in Texas are released on their own recognizance to appear later in court, which most do not.
- BP agents in the Valley have increased from 600 to 1,500 during the last 10 years.
- In the Valley, BP uses lights extensively as well as ATVs, horses, air reconnaissance operations, boats, and surveillance cameras.
- Smuggling used clothes from the U.S. into Mexico is becoming a big industry in the Valley as well as litter issue at border crossings.
- The hot catalytic converters on BP vehicles have started three grass fires during 2005.

These factors are causing several impacts along the border, including:

- Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation;
- Introduction of exotic species, such as from fires and mowing;
- Wildlife mortality and displacement;
- Modified wildlife behavior;
- Threatened and endangered species concerns; and
- Direct impacts to restoration and protection of restored areas, such as from fires within the first 5-6 years after restoration.

These impacts and risks associated with being on the border cause the USFWS to think strategically about how they manage the refuges. The Service is trying a variety of strategies to address these concerns.

- Coordinating with each of the seven BP stations. An example is one station is helping USFWS collect data, then sit down and agree on a network of roads needed, not needed, and needed to be dragged.
- Interagency coordination with BP, FBI, special task forces, and other law enforcement entities.
- Establishment of an USFWS special operations team to address border crimes and impacts.

Border factors affect agency practices and policies in a variety of way.

- Officer, staff, and visitor safety is vital. Resource staff must schedule work at night, such as to monitor wildlife, with pertinent law enforcement officials.
- Projects typically cost more and take longer.
- Special interest groups, such as environmentalists and minutemen, are a factor to consider when planning projects and conducting work along the border.
- There is a heightened need for coordination and communication.
- Border law enforcement organizations generally do not start with a conservation ethic and need to be educated.

Partly as a result of these pressures and lawsuits, BP has increased its use of technology, such as camera surveillance, in place of some of the on-the-ground BP presence.

Improving Irrigation Efficiency in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Mike Irbeck of the Bureau of Reclamation spoke about efforts to deal with water shortages in the Valley. Without actions like improving irrigation efficiency, current shortfalls would increase as demands increase. There are 28 water districts in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The districts range from 40-95% efficient in delivering water to farms and municipalities. Through improvements there is the potential savings of 226,000 ac-ft/yr by the farming industry and another 216,000 ac-ft/yr with the up-grading of the districts' water conveyance systems.

In 2000, Congress established a program in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to deal with the issue. The water districts have proposed numerous projects to increase efficiencies under this program. Estimated cost to-date is $87 million. Costs for the irrigation system renovation projects are shared equally by Federal government and the water districts. Grant funds from the North American Development Bank using interest that has accrued from the bi-national loan program have helped off-set district contributions. Benefits of the projects identified so far will save 70,000 ac-ft/yr, and $685,000 in annual operating costs. Currently, water district requests for funding greatly exceed the available Federal funding.

Mike concluded that the Federal-State collaborative approach has been very effective in lowering the costs of water and in energy savings.

FCC Dinner

At dinner on Tuesday, the FCC honored John Klein, the remaining FCC charter member, and Denny Buckler, a long-time member, for their support and service to the FCC. Both of them have put a lot of their hearts and time into the FCC, and have clearly left their marks.

Site Visit

Ken Merritt and associates from the South Texas National Wildlife Refuge Complex conducted a site visit on Wednesday in order for the FCC to get a first hand understanding of the issues they are facing and attempting to address along the border. Highlights included visiting the refuge's newly constructed native plant nursery, restoration plots at different stages of restoration, birding areas, the river corridor, and impacted habitats; driving by the World Birding and North American Butterfly Association Centers; and learning more about their outstanding volunteer program.

FCC Web Site: Update and Hit Report

Denny and Lynne Johnson gave a briefing on the FCC web site, which the USGS (Lynne and Chris Henke) developed and has been maintaining. FCC leadership decided earlier this year that it was time to review the web site, which has been in existence for several years, and look for ways to update and improve it. Chris pulled several statistics on the site use.

- Over 200,000 hits in the last two years, a high number
- Receives an average of 107 requests per day
- The FCC newsletter appears to be helping get the word out as web site hits have increased after each release of the newsletter
- People access the site from all over the world, from approximately 80 countries
- U.S. and Mexico are the most frequent visitors, followed by Japan, Australia, and several European countries.
- Universities use the site often
- Most common search terms are Mexico, border, map, Rio, and Texas

- It was suggested that a new page on USGS map products be added due to the popularity of geospatial products and data

The web site was originally set up to describe the FCC organizationally, which was appropriate at that time. Now it would be helpful to reorganize the web content around products, information, issues, and projects. Commonly accessed parts of the site are maps, resources, fact sheets, and activities. It was suggested the newsletter be posted on the front page of the web site to highlight it and make it easier to access. A subcommittee, comprised of Lynne, Chris, Diana Papoulias, Lloyd, Shela McFarlin, and Jean Parcher, was set up to oversee web site redesign,. Lynne summarized that it appears the primary purpose of the web site is providing products and information to external customers with DOI users being secondary.

Good Neighbor Environmental Board: Update

John has represented DOI on this Presidential Advisory Board on U.S.-Mexico border issues, which meets three times a year. The Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) is preparing its ninth annual report. This year's report highlights cultural resources, air quality, and transportation. John stressed that it is important for the FCC and GNEB to continue to provide information relevant to the development of transboundary aquifer characterization legislation. Jim Stefanov has been appointed to replace John as the DOI representative on GNEB. Jim reported that the GNEB met in October on the Tohono O'odham Reservation and were primarily briefed on Native American issues. The topic for the tenth annual report will be border security and its impact on the environment. Public presentations are an integral part of the GNEB meetings. There will be a GNEB meeting on October 24-26, 2006 in Alpine, Texas.

DOI Update

Kathy Washburn, DOI Director of International Affairs, called in to provide an update on the Department's international activities. The Secretary and her political appointees are supportive of international work, and there is an appreciation in the Department for the work of the FCC. Kathy commended the meeting minutes as informative to people unable to attend the meetings. The newsletters have also become an important forum for communication among the bureaus on activities along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The annual U.S.-Mexico Binational Commission (BNC) meeting was scheduled for the last week of October, but was postponed by the Mexican government so that Cabinet officials could handle the aftermath of Hurricane Wilma. The BNC meeting has been rescheduled for March 1-2, 2006, in Washington, DC. A major focus of the BNC will be to listen to Mexico's concerns about the lining of the All American Canal. SEMARNAT and other Mexican officials contend that Mexico depends on water seepage from the existing unlined canal. Other planned agenda items are invasive species and a sister parks agreement in which the Secretaries of the U.S. and Mexico will designate seven sister parks.

Kathy believes DOI travel requests to Mexico are being approved in a timely manner through the bureaus and within the Department. She emphasized that all DOI travelers to Mexico who stay

overnight or day-trip travelers going beyond 100-km of the border region need to file form DI-1175 and inform the U.S. Embassy in Mexico via country clearance procedures. DOI employees who travel frequently to Mexico on official duty are encouraged to apply for an annual DI-1175 to expedite their travel clearances. Note that even with an annual DI-1175, travelers must still obtain country clearance from the U.S. Embassy for each visit that involves an overnight stay or day-trips outside the 100-km border region. If you have any questions about DOI travel procedures for Mexico, please contact Karen Clark in the Department's International Affairs Office at karen_clark@ios.doi.gov.

FCC Operating Procedures

Lloyd handed out a revised version of the FCC Operating Procedures. The proposed procedures will be discussed at the next FCC meeting as part of a broader discussion on updating the FCC 5-Year Strategic Plan.

FCC Roundtable

U.S. Geological Survey

This will be the last meeting that John and Denny will attend as federal government employees as both are retiring in January. They talked about how strongly they believe in the FCC mission. They feel that their work in the FCC was a key part of their careers. Denny and John will be greatly missed, as they exemplify the value of FCC partnership.

Biological Resources - Diana said the last of the FCC archives have been transferred from Denny to her. She is looking forward to initiating more biology projects along the border.

Water Resources - Lloyd reported that the USGS circular on water availability in the western U.S. will be released in January. He mentioned that Greg had asked him and he had agreed to continue to be the editor for the FCC newsletter for the upcoming year.

Geography:

Border Mapping Update - Jim provided an up-date for Jean Parcher who was unable to attend the meeting. The USGS has released a vacancy announcement for the coordinator of the Geography Program along the U.S./Mexico border. The position also will provide support to the USGS International Program for meetings with officials in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Other duties will include developing programs and conducting applied geographic research, developing GIS projects, and generating geospatial products along the border. The position will be located in Austin, Texas.

Border GIS Conference and Workshop – The USGS is participating with the Southwest Consortium for Environmental Research and Policy (SCERP), San Diego State University, University of Texas, El Paso, Monterey Tech, and other organizations to convene a border GIS conference and workshop. The theme of the conference will be data availability, data gaps,

resource needs, and funding mechanisms to build a bi-national geospatial, natural-resource database for both sides of the border. The planning meeting is being held at the end of October and the tentative timeframe for the conference is spring 2006.

Digital Orthophoto Quadrangles for California - During spring and summer 2005, Farm Services Agency and other partners contracted out for new, 1-meter resolution, natural color, digital orthophoto quadrangles for California. USGS provided some extra funding for the contractor to collect two flight lines (approximately seven to ten miles) into Mexico. The Survey was able to fund the production of half of these orthophotos. To complete the work, an additional $25,000 is needed. The imagery has already been obtained. All of the data will be in the public domain.

Bureau of Reclamation – Lorenzo Arriaga has been busy representing Reclamation on IBWC's committee to organize the bi-national Rio Grande Summit. The summit is part of the strategy for the U.S. and Mexican governments to work together to identify measures of cooperation for sustainable management of the Rio Grande Basin. Other projects Lorenzo covered are 1) participating in salt cedar control efforts in the Forgotten Reach using biological controls, and 2) studying the sources of salts in the Rio Grande Basin. Lorenzo believes DOI has much of the best science and can play a role in transboundary issues like desalinization.

Bureau of Land Management - Greg highlighted several projects.
International Tecate Fire Successfully Suppressed - The 4,100 acre Border 50 wildfire was successfully suppressed through a cooperative effort of Mexican and U.S. agencies. Like several others this season, this fire started in Mexico and spread rapidly into the U.S., then continued to expand in Mexico. Mexican police escorted a strike team of 12 U.S. fire engines and 50 firefighters through the City of Tecate to stop the fire at the doorstep of city neighborhoods. Air tankers supplemented the on-the-ground force. A relieved Tecate fire chief told the crews 2,000 homes had been saved. "People were lining the streets, waving to us, giving us the thumbs up", said a San Diego fire chief. This collaborative venture was facilitated by the planning of the Border Area Fire Council, which is made up of 38 federal, state and local organizations from the U.S. and Mexico. The Council has strengthened the ability of U.S. fire crews to go one mile into Mexico to save lives and property. In addition, the Council has agreements in place to quickly allow the BP, BLM, the California Division of Forestry, and others to fight fires under a unified command.

Borderland Management Task Forces - The Departments of Interior and Homeland Security are leading forums of federal, state, tribal, and local governments to address issues of security, safety, and resources along the U.S.-Mexico border. These task forces have been established in several border regions and will be under the umbrella of a soon to be signed national MOU. They address coordinating the missions of different agencies and specific projects such as BP roads, fences, and other infrastructure needs. The participating agencies strive to work closely and quickly together to implement agency-specific missions while complying with environmental laws and prudent protection of natural resources.

Otay Mesa – Mesa de Otay Binational Corridor Strategic Plan - Representatives from the Tijuana/San Diego region have kicked off this bi-national planning process under the leadership

of the Instituto Municipal de Planeacion and the San Diego Association of Governments. The four key issues being addressed are economic development, transportation, housing, and the environment, in what is a rapidly developing and environmentally sensitive region of the border. Recent bilingual stakeholder workshops in San Diego and Tijuana have been key to completing the plan by early 2007.

All American Canal Lining - The Southern California water districts leading this project are finishing facility design and will go out for bid soon on a contract to construct the new lined canal. They are submitting a proposal to address mitigation, compensation, and endowment for affected species for consideration by the USFWS and the California Department of Fish and Game.. The Governors of North Baja and California recently discussed this project. It also is on the agenda of the upcoming U.S.-Mexico Bi-national Commission meeting in March 2006, in which the Secretary of Interior and the Secretary of SEMARNAT will meet. In July 2005, two NGOs filed suit against the U.S. to prevent lining of the canal. *Accordingly, any oral or written comments by a DOI employee expressed outside DOI regarding the lining of the All American Canal should be cleared by a political appointee within the employee's bureau and/or Bob Snow in the Solicitor's office. Please contact Kathryn Washburn or Karen Clark in the Department's International Affairs Office with any questions, at kwashburn@ios.doi.gov or karen_clark@ios.doi.gov.*

FCC Officers

Lloyd completed his tenure and handed Greg the reins as FCC Chairman for the next year. Diana was elected as Vice-Chairperson. Greg presented Lloyd a plaque from the FCC to acknowledge his leadership and thank him for his commitment.

Next Meeting

Following up on suggestions from the May 2005 meeting, Greg reported that he has started to organize the spring 2006 meeting for Calexico, California. Greg has recruited Julia Bendimez Patterson, Director of INAH (Instituto Nacional Antropologia e Historia) of North Baja, to participate in the meeting and co-host a field visit to Mexicali. INAH suggested agenda and site visit topics on energy projects, off-highway vehicle management, and possibly the Juan Bautista de Anza International Historic Trail. The FCC tentatively scheduled the meeting for April 4-6, 2006, however, after the meeting, a conflict with those dates was identified The next meeting will be rescheduled for sometime during the first two weeks in May. Members should hold those days open for the time being.