

Chairman Gallegos, committee members, thank you for this opportunity to speak in regards to drainage in the Rio Grande Valley, most specifically in Cameron County. My name is Sonia Lambert. I am the General Manager for Cameron County Irrigation District #2 and Cameron County Drainage District #3 in San Benito, Texas.

Cameron County Drainage District #3 came into existence in 1912 and is governed by a board of three directors. It encompasses approximately 148 square miles within Cameron County and includes the City of San Benito, and portions of the communities of Los Indios and Rio Hondo. The Drainage District's purpose is to construct, improve and maintain the open drain networks, as well as to provide adequate drainage and drainage outfalls within its jurisdiction. Being the fourth-fastest growing metropolitan region in the State of Texas, the communities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley have undergone significant growth, transforming small, agricultural communities with acres of undeveloped land, into suburban communities. What this translates into is an increase in the amount of rainfall runoff, leading to the need for improvement of existing infrastructure and/or installation of new infrastructure.

Cameron County is considered to be a delta of the Rio Grande River and located in the Arroyo Colorado watershed. The unique topographic feature is that the land gently slopes downhill from the Rio Grande River to the northeast. On average, the fall is about one foot per mile. The Rio Grande River, which is generally the southerly boundary of the District, and the Arroyo Colorado, which is the northerly boundary of the District, are the only natural streams in the County. Due to the topography, storm water generally flows

downhill toward the Arroyo Colorado. The Arroyo Colorado is the primary tributary into which the District's drainage system discharges.

There are a total of four drainage districts in Cameron County that operate within their own jurisdiction. In addition to these drainage districts, there are two irrigation districts that own and maintain drainage ditches. These irrigation districts installed the majority of the drainage outfalls in their areas for the purpose of draining rainfall and agricultural runoff. Small communities were later developed in this land and utilized the existing agricultural ditches to drain their urban runoff. As urbanization continued, other entities installed and improved the major outfalls to better drain the water into the Laguna Madre. However, some development occurred without the proper drainage analysis to determine whether the sufficient drainage capabilities existed. This development generally occurred in low-lying areas that now experience tremendous flooding when water flows downhill and finds its level. These areas are usually the first to flood and the last to drain. To date, there are many areas still dependant upon the original agricultural drainage systems. In addition to the drainage districts and irrigation districts, the county also assists in areas where no entity claims jurisdiction.

With the continued urbanization and population growth in our area, there is an obvious need for major improvements to the existing drainage infrastructure within Cameron County. The most recent hurricanes and storm events were certainly a reminder. Through the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, the Rio Grande Valley was fortunate in procuring a \$3.5 million grant through EPA for the "Economic Adjustment

Plan for Building Disaster Resilient Communities”. This grant will provide a big picture of the overall drainage needs for Starr, Willacy, Hidalgo, and Cameron Counties as well as ensure economic growth and economic recovery following natural disasters. One of the tasks, under this grant, is the collection of and evaluation of existing drainage improvement plans and projects, and the prioritization of such projects. This grant also allows for the evaluation of future land use and improvements needed, as well as major outfalls and a comprehensive picture of the current and projected region-wide drainage systems.

A regional plan for the Rio Grande Valley is important to allow us to work with what the International Boundary and Water Commission does with the Arroyo Colorado and the Main Floodway. Although IBWC’s actions with those floodways affect all this region, our drainage systems within Cameron County and those of Hidalgo, Willacy and Starr Counties are difficult to integrate, since Cameron County drains into the Arroyo Colorado and the Rio Grande and Hidalgo, Willacy and the portion of Starr involved in this study, drain into the Main Floodway and eventually into the North Floodway. In other words, although this Floodway does traverse across Cameron County, its primary purpose is to drain Hidalgo, Willacy and a portion of Starr Counties. Importantly, waters controlled by Hidalgo County have little to no effect on Cameron County, and waters controlled by Cameron County have little to no effect on Hidalgo County.

The organization or use of a large special district to oversee the drainage needs in a particular county may work for any one given County. However, crossing county lines

allows for Counties to compete against each other for funding. As mentioned earlier, the task currently underway for regional planning using funds from EPA, is already setting the framework for the prioritization for funding of projects within the four counties. The possibility of priority being given to projects in one county is high, if all counties' projects are thrown into one basket. I respectfully ask that if the committee deems it necessary for such an entity to exist in Cameron County, that the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority, who has statutory responsibility for drainage and is governed by people who deal with water and drainage on a daily basis, be the organization to supervise any regional planning in our area. In addition, if the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority is designated to oversee drainage with charges that are not currently within our scope, a recommendation to include these powers will be solicited.

I understand all counties involved have properties that do not fall under any one entity's jurisdiction. Perhaps each county needs to seek funding within their own county region to resolve their localized flooding and expansion of their own drainage infrastructure and outfalls, before we consider the regional approach of drainage issues on a much larger scale.

I appreciate the time allotted to me to briefly discuss some of our drainage issues. Thank you for your time.

